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**IDEALISM.** The term *idealism* in its broadest sense denotes the philosophical position that ideas (mental or spiritual entities) are primary and lie at the very foundation of reality, knowledge, and morality, while non-ideal entities (such as physical or material things) are secondary and perhaps even illusory. Strands of idealistic thought can be found in ancient and medieval philosophy, but modern idealism begins in the wake of René Descartes (1596–1650), whose method of doubt problematized the relation of the mind (or spirit or ideas) to the material world and thus raised questions about how ideas "inside" the mind can be known to interact with or correspond to any material, extended thing "outside" the mind.

### Early Modern Idealism: Leibniz and Berkeley

The idealism of Gottfried Wilhem Leibniz (1646–1716) arose largely in response to questions raised by Descartes about the relation between mental substances and physical substances. According to Leibniz, real substances do not and cannot interact, because to be a substance is to be independent of the influences of other substances (but no finite substance is altogether independent of God, who is the ground and cause of all finite substances, including ourselves). Furthermore, Leibniz argued that every genuine substance must be utterly non-composite or simple (i.e., not made of parts), because the ongoing unity and existence of any being made of parts depends on causes outside of the being itself (and such dependence contradicts the very definition of substance). Accordingly Leibniz held that no genuine substance can be material, because matter is essentially composite, which means that matter cannot be substantially or independently real. Leibniz thus concluded that substances must be percipient, or have perceptions, because the only way in which a substance can be utterly simple and yet reflect diversity within itself is through the undivided activity of perception. Leibniz's idealism can be summed up in the proposition that "to be is to be a substance, and to be a substance is to be percipient." For Leibniz, the real world is simply the totality of all such non-interacting ("windowless") and percipient substances (called "monads"), and our experience of the material world is to be explained idealistically: to be a substance is to be percipient, and the perceptions belonging to any one substance accurately reflect the states of all other substances, not because there is any real interaction among substances but because God has ordained a "pre-established harmony" among all finite substances and their perceptions.

If modern philosophy is divided into two main schools of thought—"rationalism" and "empiricism"—then Leibniz is a "rationalist" idealist, while George Berkeley (1685–1753) is an "empiricist" idealist. Berkeley began with John Locke's empiricist premise that the mind does not possess innate ideas but acquires ideas only through sensory experience. Like Locke, Berkeley also held that the mind has immediate or direct perception only of its own ideas. But unlike Locke, Berkeley denied that the mind's immediate perception of its own ideas can give it indirect knowledge of material things outside of it. Berkeley further insisted that "an idea can be like nothing but an idea" (*Principles*, part 1, section 8), and so we can never know whether the immaterial ideas in our minds resemble or accurately depict material things outside of our minds. Furthermore, Berkeley argued, there is something self-contradictory

in the proposition that objects of perception can exist without being perceived. In order to avoid skeptical or altogether absurd conclusions, Berkeley argued, one must abandon belief in the independent existence of material things and become an idealist or "immaterialist." For Berkeley, the ideas that we have of sensible things are not *caused* in us by independently existing material things; rather, these ideas simply *are* the sensible things themselves. But sensible things have continued existence—even when we finite minds are not perceiving them—because they continue to exist in the mind of God, whose perception of things not only causes the sensible things to exist but also from time to time causes them to be perceived by us. Thus for Berkeley, our perception of sensible things is nothing other than our perception of ideas in God, and sensible things have an orderly, predictable, and enduring existence because of the wisdom and goodness of God. For Berkeley, then, the immaterialist view of reality not only refutes skepticism but also provides indirect theoretical support for theism. Far from seeking to reduce the real world to the status of "mere" ideas, the real aim of Berkeley's immaterialism is to elevate "mere" ideas to the status of the real world.

## Kant's Transcendental Idealism

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) famously wrote that his "transcendental idealism" arose in response to the radical skepticism of David Hume (1711–1776; see *Prolegomena*, p. 260). Unlike Berkeley, Hume doubted not only the independent existence of material objects but even the objective validity of concepts that still remained central to Berkeley's immaterialist system, such as the concepts of causality and God. Kant recognized that these and other metaphysical concepts could be neither verified nor falsified by recourse to experience alone; however, Kant did not simply reject metaphysics (as Hume had done) but sought to determine the legitimacy and scope of metaphysics by asking the prior question of what reason might justifiably claim to know a priori (that is, independent of all experience).

For Kant, the question of the legitimacy and scope of metaphysics is intimately linked to the question of the possibility of "synthetic *a priori* judgments." As synthetic, such judgments extend our knowledge beyond our mere concepts of things, and as a priori, they have necessary and universal validity. Prior to Kant, the empiricists had argued that all synthetic judgments must be a posteriori (that is, based on experience), while Leibniz and Leibnizians had argued that even seemingly synthetic judgments are not really synthetic, because all the predicates belonging to any particular thing can in principle be discovered through an analysis of the mere concept of the thing. The Leibnizian option was unacceptable to Kant, because it entailed that human sensibility is not essentially different from (but is simply a confused form of) human understanding, and thus that human knowing is different in degree, but not in kind, from divine knowing. The empiricist option was unacceptable because, for Kant, judgments based on experience (a posteriori judgments) could never yield knowledge about what is necessarily and universally the case. Against both sides, Kant argued that synthetic a priori knowledge is possible for us, because we possess a kind of sensibility (or intuition) that is not merely empirical (a posteriori) but a priori. More specifically, we possess the a priori forms of intuition—space and time—where space is the form of all outer sense, and time is the form of all inner sense. For Kant, no object can be given to us (and thus we can have no access to objects beyond our mere concepts), except through the a priori forms of space and time, which are the "subjective conditions" of our own mode of intuiting things. Kant also argued that we possess a priori concepts or "categories" of the understanding which—like the a priori forms of intuition—are not derived from experience but rather which make our experience of objects possible in the first place. Indeed, Kant argues, there would be no such thing as "objects" for us if we did not make judgments applying our own a priori concepts (or categories) to the sensible manifold that is intuited by us through our own a priori forms of space and time. Kant concludes that the "objects" we know through the a priori forms of intuition and categories of the understanding are not "things-in-themselves" (they are not things as they might exist apart from our own a priori conditions of knowing) but only appearances.

Kant's denial that we can have knowledge of "things-in-themselves" is not meant to imply that the empirical objects of ordinary experience (what Kant calls appearances) are "unreal" or merely illusory. For Kant, the objects of ordinary experience are certainly real, for "the real" is simply that which exercises some degree of influence on our sensibility (*Critique*, A 165; B 208). But while objects of ordinary experience are empirically real, Kant insists that they are "transcendentally ideal" (and not transcendentally real), which is to say that they are not to be identified with anything beyond—or anything that transcends—the bounds of possible experience or the a priori subjective conditions that make such experience possible in the first place. Simultaneously embracing both "transcendental idealism" and "empirical realism," Kant claims to have shown how we are justified in making synthetic a priori knowledge claims and in employing concepts that are neither derived from nor verified through experience. But just as Kant's transcendental idealism entails the distinction between things-in-themselves and appearances, it also entails a distinction between the legitimate and illegitimate employment of pure (a priori) reason. For Kant, we can legitimately pursue a limited "metaphysics of experience," and we can legitimately make synthetic a priori knowledge claims about objects of possible experience. For example, the concept of "causality" (even though "pure" and underived from experience) remains objectively valid when applied to things that can be intuited by us under the a priori conditions of space and time. But Kant also argues that we cannot legitimately pursue metaphysics or make synthetic a priori claims regarding objects that transcend all possible experience. Furthermore, he argues that the attempt to make knowledge claims about the non-sensible objects of traditional metaphysics (for example, God, the soul, and the world as a whole) inevitably leads reason into illusion and self-contradiction. But while we cannot obtain objectively valid theoretical knowledge of such non-sensible objects, our *ideas* regarding such objects (for example, our idea of God) may continue to play a legitimate role in guiding our search for complete knowledge in our theoretical pursuits and the complete good in our moral pursuits.

## Idealism, from Kant to Fichte and Schelling

In the years following its public promulgation, Kant's transcendental idealist philosophy was the object of widespread excitement but also much critical scrutiny. Three interrelated problems (or perceived problems) would prove to be significant for the subsequent development of German idealism. First, critics argued that Kant failed to derive or "deduce" the forms of intuition and the categories of the understanding in a systematic and rigorous way, and as a result his critical system could claim only contingent or inductive (as opposed to universal and necessary) validity for itself. Second, critics claimed that Kant's inadequate derivation of the forms of intuition and categories of the understanding committed him to a series of unacceptable dualisms, all of them rooted (directly or indirectly) in the dualism between sensibility and understanding (for example, the dualisms between intuitions and concepts, activity and passivity, receptivity and spontaneity, the a priori and a posteriori, knowledge and belief, theoretical reason and practical reason). Third, critics argued, Kant's strict separation of sensibility and understanding made it impossible for him to account for the receptive character of human knowing except by reference to "things-in-themselves" that allegedly exist apart from the human knower and thus render the activity of human knowing finite, dependent, and passive; but this postulation of things-in-themselves contradicts the spirit of Kant's own transcendental idealism, according to which we cannot know anything about things-in-themselves, including what role—if any—they play in rendering human knowing finite, dependent, and passive.

In the midst of ongoing debates about Kant's transcendental idealism, the young Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) became convinced that the Kantian system was essentially correct but stood in need of a more systematic formulation and rigorous defense. First, Fichte argued that it was wrong to think of the "faculty of thinking" or the "mind" or the "self" as if these terms referred to a substrate that underlies our mental operations and persists even in the absence of actual cognitive activity. To think of the self in this way, he claimed, is to regard it as an unknown "thing in itself" that has existence even apart from its being known, and such a view is inimical to transcendental idealism. Fichte went on to argue that the self is nothing other than the free, uncoerced activity of "self-positing" or "self-awareness" and that this very activity can serve as the single, foundational principle from which one could rigorously derive all the other conditions of synthetic a priori knowing, including even the self's apparent dependence on things outside of it. More specifically, Fichte argued that the self would have no occasion to reflect back on itself, and thus it could never even *be* a self if it did not also take itself to be finite and partly determined by a "not-self" outside of it. In other words, Fichte held that even the apparent dependence of human knowing on supposedly independent, unknowable things-in-themselves could be explained on the basis of the necessary conditions of the self's own activity of self-positing. He went on to assert that the not-self, without which the self could not even *be* a self, must ultimately be understood as another free self, thereby arguing for the necessity of belief in other selves (or intersubjectivity) as a condition of the possibility of the self's own self-positing. In practical philosophy,

Fichte also took a step beyond Kant, arguing that the idea of God is necessary for our moral purposes but also that this idea in fact signified nothing other than the moral order of the world itself.

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854) was an early follower of Fichte but eventually distanced himself from the Fichtean claim that a properly critical philosophy can begin only with the activity of the self-positing self. By 1799 Schelling was arguing (along with Fichte) that one could derive the not-self (or "nature") from the self-positing activity of the self, but also (against Fichte) that one could equally derive the self-positing activity of the self from the not-self (or "nature"). In subsequent years Schelling departed even farther from Fichte, explicitly rejecting the Fichtean claim that the distinction between subject and object (self and not-self) is a distinction that can be made only by and within subjectivity itself. In effect Schelling argued that Fichte was right to relativize Kant's rigid distinction between subject and object (or correlatively, between understanding and sensibility, or concepts and intuitions) but wrong to achieve such relativization by locating the distinction within subjectivity alone. For Schelling, the distinction between subject and object is not merely subjective but arises only from within an "absolute identity" that is neither subject nor object but both at once. Furthermore, Schelling held, this absolute identity cannot be discursively demonstrated or conceptually articulated (because demonstration and conceptualization already presuppose a subject-object split) but can only be apprehended immediately in an intellectual intuition or (according to Schelling's later thought) an aesthetic intuition. According to Fichte, Schelling's appeal to immediate intuition and his claim that unconscious nature is continuous with and provides the conditions for the emergence of conscious subjectivity could only signal a return to pre-critical, pre-Kantian metaphysics. But Schelling insisted that his "identity philosophy" incorporated the truths of transcendental idealism, while also moving beyond Kant's and Fichte's "subjective idealisms" to a more comprehensive and satisfactory "absolute idealism." This absolute idealism, Schelling argued, did not uncritically presuppose any dualisms between subject and object, freedom and nature, or human agency and God, but rather explained all such dualisms as mere moments within the absolute's own process of internal self-differentiation.

## Hegelian Idealism and Its Aftermath

In 1801 the virtually unknown Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) published a short book entitled *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, in which he argued that Schelling had rightly criticized Fichte's "subjective idealism." But by 1807, with the publication of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel had begun to criticize Schelling for reasons that were to become determinative for the development of his own version of absolute idealism. First of all, Hegel argued against Schelling that the pathway to a truly "scientific" absolute idealism could not be based merely on an immediate intuition (whether intellectual or aesthetic) but instead had to be conceptually articulated and discursively mediated. Indeed Hegel referred to his own *Phenomenology* as the "ladder" by means of which readers could be led discursively from

the standpoint of ordinary consciousness to that scientific consciousness or "absolute knowing" (see *Phenomenology,* p. 14). Second, and contrary to what might be implied by Schelling's insistence on immediate intuition, Hegel argued that the discursive pathway to absolute idealism is not external to, but constitutes an integral part of, the very truth of absolute idealism. For Hegel, then, Schelling was correct to claim that previous expressions of the subject-object identity within the absolute (for example, in nature and in earlier forms of philosophy) contained the conditions of the emergence of the subjectivity that eventually grasps the truth of absolute idealism; however, Schelling was wrong to hold that his being correct about this could be ascertained through an immediate intuition. For Hegel, quite simply, one could not know that absolute idealism is true if one did not conceptually recollect the previous forms of thought leading up to it. Because of this, Hegel also held that previous forms of thought do not lead just accidentally or haphazardly to his own thought but rather find their necessary consummation only within his absolute idealism. Third, Hegel agreed with Schelling that a true idealism must not simply presuppose the traditional dualisms of subject and object, freedom and nature, or human agency and God (thus Hegel held that our own coming-to-be conscious of the truth of absolute idealism is not essentially separable from God's own coming-to-be God). But because of his commitment to conceptual rigor and discursive articulation, Hegel went on to argue that the denial of these traditional dualisms required the development of a new and "dialectical" logic, one that would demonstrate how all finite things reflect within themselves the fundamental yet contradictory identity-indifference of Being and Nothing (*Logic,* p. 85). All things are in themselves contradictory, Hegel argued, and so Kant was wrong to try to eliminate or contain such contradiction by introducing his distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves (*Logic,* p. 237).

Hegel's idealism represents the most systematic and comprehensive version of post-Kantian idealism, for it contained within itself not only a new dialectical logic but also very detailed philosophies of nature, history, art, law, and religion. Not long after Hegel's death, however, his idealistic philosophy became the object of a sustained materialist critique and transformation, primarily at the hands of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), Karl Marx (1818–1883), and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895). Most famously, Marx and Engels sought to transform Hegel's dialectical idealism into a form of "dialectical materialism." They agreed with Hegel that existing reality is fundamentally dialectical and in contradiction with itself, but against Hegel they argued that reality's basic contradictions are rooted not in merely conceptual determinations (such as the identity-in-difference of Being and Nothing) but rather in the material conditions underlying all forms of precommunist social and economic organization. They went on to assert that systems such as Hegel's tended to perpetuate the destructive contradictions at work in precommunist society insofar as these systems tended to regard such contradictions as merely ideal and—worse still—as necessary to the proper unfolding of the history of thought. But just as Hegel had argued that a recollective conceptual journey through incomplete forms of thought is necessary to the very truth of absolute idealism, so

too Marx and Engels argued that an actual material journey through incomplete forms of social organization (feudalism, mercantilism, and capitalism) is necessary to emergence of the truly just communist society that is yet to be. In spite of this materialist critique, Hegelian idealism enjoyed an energetic revival in Anglo-American philosophy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The three most important post-Hegelian British idealists were Thomas Hill Green (1836–1882), Francis Herbert Bradley (1846–1924), and Bernard Bosanquet (1848–1923), while their most important American counterpart was Josiah Royce (1855–1916).

*See also* **Empiricism; Epistemology; Hegelianism; Marxism; Rationalism.**

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**IDEAS, HISTORY OF.** The "history of ideas," phrase and concept, goes back almost three centuries to the work of J. J. Brucker (1696–1770) and Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) in the early eighteenth century, followed in the nineteenth century by Victor Cousin (1792–1867) and his eclectic and "spiritualist" philosophy. The story begins with Brucker's *Historia doctrina de ideis* (1723), which surveyed the Platonic doctrine, and Vico's criticism, which rejected the idea of a Greek monopoly on ideas. For Vico philosophy was joined to religion in a larger and older tradition of wisdom and theology, "queen of the sciences," which, he wrote, "took its start not when the philosophers began to reflect [*riflettere*] on human ideas" (as, he added, in the "erudite and scholarly little book" recently published by Brucker) "but rather when the first men began to think humanly." Thus the history of ideas began not with Plato but with myth and poetry, and this poetic wisdom was the basis not only for Plato's theory of ideas but also for Vico's "history of ideas," which was one face of his "New Science." Victor Cousin and his followers also took a broad view of the history of ideas, from antiquity down to modern times.

The history of ideas was given new life in the twentieth century, especially under the guidance of Arthur O. Lovejoy (1873–1962), one of the leading American philosophers of this time. Even before Lovejoy the phrase had been applied to a series of volumes published by the philosophy department of Columbia University between 1918 and 1935, which were devoted to "a field . . . in which it appears that ideas have a history and that their history is influenced by contact with lines of experience not commonly called philosophical." Lovejoy was more deliberate in applying the phrase to what he regarded as a new discipline distinct from the history of philosophy and the "new history," championed by James Harvey Robinson

(1863–1936) and his followers. The History of Ideas Club at the Johns Hopkins University (where Lovejoy taught), which began meeting from 1923, was the scene of papers given by many distinguished scholars. The classic work in the field that since 1919 Lovejoy had been calling the "history of ideas" was his William James lectures in Harvard, which were published in 1936 as *The Great Chain of Being.*

In the history of philosophy, according to Lovejoy, "is to be found the common seed-plot, the locus of initial manifestation in writing, of the greater number of the more fundamental and pervasive ideas, and especially of the ruling preconceptions, which manifest themselves in other regions of intellectual history" (p. 8). Yet Lovejoy also aspired to make the history of ideas an interdisciplinary enterprise, accommodating also literature, the arts, and the natural and social sciences. Nor were Lovejoy's "unit-ideas" limited to formal concepts, for he also wanted to accommodate "implicit or incompletely explicit assumptions or more or less unconscious mental *habits,* operating in the thought of an individual or a generation"; "dialectical motives," or methodological assumptions (nominalist or "organismic," for example) also inexpressible in propositions; metaphysical pathos (which awakened particular moods, for example); and ideas associated with particular sacred words and phrases intelligible through semantic analysis. All of these "ideas," which were regarded as the expression of whole groups and ages, were interpreted mainly by literary texts, especially poetry, from several national traditions, in keeping with the international and interdisciplinary thrust of Lovejoy's agenda.

In Lovejoy's program the history of ideas extended its sway over no fewer than twelve fields of study, beginning with the history of philosophy and including the history of science, religion, the arts, language, literature, comparative literature, folklore, economic, political, and social history, and the sociology of knowledge. These fields were all disciplinary traditions in themselves; the novelty was treating them in an interdisciplinary and synthetic way for larger purposes. For Lovejoy (writing in the dark year 1940) the final task of the history of ideas was "the gravest and most fundamental of our questions, 'What's the matter with man?'"

Lovejoy's colleague George Boas (1891–1980) expanded on the idealist implications of his methods. For Boas ideas are basic meanings that lie behind—and that evolve independently of—words. "The history of ideas is not confined to historical semantics," he wrote and "a dictionary aims only to give the meaning of words, not of ideas, and sometimes a single idea may have two names" (1969, p. 11). Yet these are assumptions that cannot be expressed or communicated except through words and historical semantics—a paradox that neither Lovejoy nor Boas resolved, or chose to confront. As they acknowledged, "The history of any idea, or complex of ideas, is best presented through the citation of the *ipsissima verba* of the writers who have expressed it."

Lovejoy's agenda found an institutional basis when the *Journal of the History of Ideas* (*JHI*) was founded in 1940, the first issue being prefaced by his "reflections," which suggested the orientation of this periodical more or less down to the present, especially in terms of "influences"—classical on modern