Iamblichus See NEOPLATONISM.

Idealism In its philosophical use, the term 'idealism' is quite distinct from 'idealism' in the sense of high moral aims. While the term has sometimes been employed by philosophers to cover all views according to which the basis of the universe is ultimately spiritual, it has most commonly stood (in opposition to REALISM) for a theory according to which physical objects can have no existence apart from a mind which is conscious of them. (Thus it does not cover those who, while they believe in God, also ascribe a substantial existence to matter as quite conceivable independently of being experienced, although ultimately created by God.)

Idealism in this narrower sense originated in the eighteenth century with BERKELEY. He argued that physical objects were only 'ideas' (hence the term 'idealism'), or that their *esse* (existence) was *percipi* (to be perceived). His main argument was that we could not conceive the qualities we ascribe to them as existing in abstraction from our sense-experience. He also used the negative argument that we could not possibly know unexperienced physical objects. These two arguments in some form are common to most idealist thinkers. He then argued that ideas, being passive, cannot cause anything and that those which cannot be explained by human action must be due to the direct action of a non-human spirit, spirits being the only possible causal agents since they alone are 'active', that is possess volition. He explained the fact that physical things still seem to exist when no one is perceiving them by saying that they exist in God's mind, thus providing a new argument for God.

Berkeley made practically no converts in his lifetime, and the 'idealist' school only began to gain ground with KANT, who however approached the subject in a very different way. He contended that we can account for our a priori knowledge of things only by supposing that our mind has imposed on them a structure to which they must conform. But the human mind cannot impose on reality itself, but only on appearances, so Kant concluded that our knowledge must be limited to appearances. Appearances have to obey the conditions which our mind imposes, since they exist only as objects of actual or possible experience. This was the reason, Kant thought, why we are able to apply categories such as substance and cause to the physical world, but it also debars us from extending them beyond the realm of human experience and thus proceeding, with Berkeley, to metaphysics. This, Kant insisted, does not cast doubt on science; on the contrary it is the only way of saving it from scepticism. If we claimed that the function of science was to tell us the truth about reality, we should have to admit that it was wholly illusory; but not if it tells us only about appearances (phenomena). Kant consequently called himself both an 'empirical realist' and a 'transcendental idealist'. By this he meant approximately what some later thinkers expressed by saying that physical-object propositions have to be analysed in terms of 'SENSE-DATA'. He also argued that, if we hold that reality is in space and time, we will become involved in certain self-contradictions ('antinomies'). We will

have to hold either that the world in space and time is infinite or that it is finite, and either alternative, he maintained, leads to self-contradictory conclusions; hence the only solution is to say that reality is not in space or time at all.

Unlike Berkeley, Kant did not use idealism as the basis of an argument for God; he repudiated all theoretical arguments for theism, saying we can have no knowledge of 'things-in-themselves'. He did however think that the existence of God could be established – if not with certainty, at least sufficiently to justify belief – by means of an ethical argument. He was convinced that the moral law was objective and argued that it commanded us to strive for ideals which could only be realized if we were immortal and if the world was ordered in the interests of the moral law, which implied that it must have been created and governed by an omnipotent and perfectly good being. His denial of the reality of time led to the consequence that our own real self is timeless and therefore unknowable – a paradoxical conclusion which he nevertheless welcomed, because it enabled him to reconcile freedom with universal causality by saying that the real self is free, even though the apparent or phenomenal self is completely determined by the past.

The chief idealists in the first half of the nineteenth century – FICHTE, SCHELLING and HEGEL – were all much influenced by Kant, though they completely transformed his philosophy. The first element they rejected was the concept of unknowable things-in-themselves. It was argued that there could be no ground for asserting something quite unknowable, and no meaning in doing so, and that Kant's attempts to exclude metaphysics involved inconsistencies since he himself only excluded it by making metaphysical assumptions of his own. Now, if we reject things-in-themselves, we are left with minds and objects of experience, and we are back with what Kant called dogmatic idealism. The resultant philosophy ('absolute idealism' or 'absolutism') held that reality can be known to be ultimately spiritual, but that there must also be an objective material element since spirit would not be able to realise itself without it. Object implied subject, but subject also implied object, even if subject was ultimately prior. Reality as a whole was conceived not as dependent on a mind distinct from finite minds (God), but as itself a single all-embracing experience of which finite minds are differentiations (the Absolute). Such a view stressed the unity and rationality of the cosmos and even described it as perfect, since any evil in its parts could be seen as arising from the fact that they were only parts.

It is reasonable to class Hegel as an idealist, but it is disputable in what sense he was one. He undoubtedly thought that matter was the manifestation of spirit, but it is unclear how he saw the status of unperceived physical objects. His philosophy centred on a 'dialectic' by which he sought to show that, starting with the most abstract and empty of all concepts, mere being, we could pass by an a priori process of thought to the highest logical categories of the spiritual life. A leading characteristic of this mode of argument, which he also regarded as characteristic of reality itself, is that it proceeded in triads. An adequate concept was taken first, its inconsistencies led to its being replaced by the opposite extreme, but the latter displayed fundamentally the same defects, and the only cure was to combine the good points of the two in a third concept, solving the previous problems and taking us a stage nearer to the truth. But this concept would exhibit inconsistencies in its turn, generating a new thesis

and antithesis, whose antinomy would be solved by a new synthesis, and so on till we reached the fundamental category of the 'absolute idea' and proved the whole of reality to be the expression of spirit. Hegel traced such processes not only in logic but also in ethics and politics. In politics, for example, some seek liberty at the expense of order, others order at the expense of liberty, but both can turn into the same evil, the rule of the strongest regardless of others; political development consisted of successive syntheses of the two, preserving more and more of what was of value in order and liberty. Unfortunately Hegel sometimes gave the impression that the final syntheses had been achieved in the Prussian state of his day, so that his philosophy was used to bolster stubborn conservatism, and to foster the impression that the state, as the representative of the Absolute on earth, can do no wrong. (On the other hand the 'Hegelian left' developed the almost equally one-sided doctrine of Marxism.) It may be doubted whether Hegel believed in a personal God: he regarded philosophy as superior to religion, but called himself a Christian and attached great importance to Christian dogmas, at least as symbolic representations of the spiritual nature of reality.

Idealism spread from Germany to Britain in the latter half of the nineteenth century and became dominant in Oxford and Scotland. T. H. GREEN, who exercised a great influence at Oxford, was specially concerned to bring idealism into connection with Christianity and with liberal political ideas. He used a more subtle form of Berkeley's argument to show that physical objects cannot be conceived except in relation to mind and therefore should be thought as dependent on a divine mind, but he discarded Berkeley's empiricism in theory of knowledge and insisted, like Kant and Hegel, on the place of thought in perception. His argument for God was based mainly on the view that relations imply mind and yet are independent of human minds. F. H. BRADLEY, also of Oxford, began his leading work *Appearance and Reality* with an attempt to show that all our ordinary concepts are self-contradictory. This argument however led him not to scepticism, but to the conclusion that we must suppose the existence of a perfect thought-transcending Absolute Whole in which all these contradictions are reconciled. Bradley developed the coherence theory of truth, according to which the definition and criterion of truth lie in the coherence of a system. Truth for him was a matter of degree, all our judgements being both partly false (corrigible in the light of a wider system) and partly true (inevitably embracing some elements of the real). He did not mean to deny that in a limited system for ordinary purposes judgements could be taken as absolutely true or false. The coherence theory was also expounded by BLANSHARD in America.

J. M. E. MCTAGGART, who taught at Cambridge, developed a form of idealism according to which reality consists of a number of spirits (including human beings) united in a supersensuous harmony. By way of an elaborate a priori argument he arrived at the conclusion that matter, time and almost all the unsatisfactory features of human experience are only apparent, and that in reality nothing exists except immortal spirits loving each other. Especially in the 1920s of the twentieth century, a great influence was exercised by the Italian idealists CROCE and GENTILE.

It will be seen from the above that the idealist case against independent matter leaves room for a number of different views. It may be combined with theism, as by Berkeley, or it may take the form of

absolutism, or of some kind of pluralism. It may even be maintained that physical objects are merely abstractions from human experience. Other idealists have taken the view that what we call inanimate matter is the appearance of very inferior minds (*panpsychism*). This view has been supported by the argument that the problem of the relation between the human body and mind can only be solved if we regard our body (or brain) as the appearance of our minds, which naturally led to the theory that everything physical is the appearance of something mental. It would be hard to find many philosophers who would call themselves idealists today. There are indeed many who would reject the view that physical objects should be regarded as entities existing independently of experience except in the hypothetical sense that under suitable conditions they would appear in experience; and some trends in modern science can be regarded as supporting this conclusion (see QUANTUM MECHANICS, RELATIVITY). But such views are usually referred to not as 'idealism' but as 'PHENOMENALISM'. (A.C.E.)

Ideas The term 'idea' has a double history in philosophy in English, only distantly related to its ordinary use. It is in the first place a transliteration of the Greek word for 'form', and hence occurs commonly in translations of PLATO, and in the development of aspects of Platonism by KANT, HEGEL, SCHOPENHAUER or HUSSERL. Second, it was extensively employed by LOCKE in the late seventeenth century, and remained in philosophical use for a hundred years. The expression *idée* had already been much employed by French writers, notably DESCARTES and MALEBRANCHE, and Locke's usage no doubt derived from that source.

The word was in fact the cause of a great deal of confusion in the philosophy of the eighteenth century. An early critic, Thomas REID, went so far as to suggest that all the major errors of Locke, BERKELEY and HUME could be traced to it, and that, but for unclarity at this key point, some of their tenets could scarcely have been stated. This contention, though extreme, was by no means baseless. The root of the trouble was that the meaning of 'idea' was either made undesirably wide, or left highly indeterminate. Locke, in introducing the expression, writes of it thus: 'it being that term which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by *phantasm, notion, species*, or whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking'. This remark is conspicuously unclear. In actual fact Locke used the word 'idea' in at least four ways. (1) He often uses it in the sense – itself not perspicuous – of the modern expression 'SENSE-DATUM', to refer to the 'immediate objects' of sense-experience. (2) He uses it also, occasionally, in the sense of an *image*, notably in his discussions of imagination and memory. (3) The term 'idea' sometimes designates the *meaning of a word* (or a *concept*): for instance to have the 'idea' of whiteness is to know what 'white' means. (4) Less clearly, Locke sometimes seems to mean by 'ideas' whatever it is that one has in mind when one *thinks* or *understands*.

The greatest danger in such a liberal use of terms is that it makes it easy to discuss very different things in identical language, obscuring how different they are. In the present case perhaps the most seriously harmful result was that, from Locke to Hume, no adequate distinctions were ever drawn between *perceiving, thinking, understanding, imagining* and even *believing*. Indeed there was a constant tendency to assimilate them all to