

IDEALISM

HZT4U1 - MR. A. WITTMANN - UNIT 5 – LECTURE 3



THE GREAT MAJORITY OF MANKIND IS SATISFIED WITH APPEARANCES, AS THOUGH THEY WERE REALITIES, AND ARE OFTEN MORE INFLUENCED BY THE THINGS THAT ARE SEEN THAN BY THOSE THAT ARE.

-NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI

IDEALISM: REALITY AS NON-MATTER

- **Idealism** is the belief that reality is essentially composed of mind / minds and their ideas rather than matter.
- Ordinary substances, properties, events, matter, space and time do not exist independently of minds, nor does any ultimate reality.
- Only the experience of, and the mind or soul itself, are real.
- In ordinary life, we consider the things that we perceive and use to be real, but this is all an illusion.
- All our experiences do not have any existence beyond the mind's perception of them.

IDEALISM: REALITY AS NON-MATTER

(CONTINUED)

- If experience occurs entirely in the mind, there may be no contact with external reality, thus we can know only our own thoughts.
- Our experience would be the same whether or not external reality exists
- Impossible to know whether external reality exists or not.
- Modern atomic theory has led some philosophers to claim that reality is not just matter.
- Idealists state if we push our investigation of nature far enough, we end up with only a mental world, a world of nonmaterial minds and ideas, not physical matter.

IDEALISM: REALITY AS NON-MATTER

(CONTINUED)

- Idealists hold that ideas and mind are concepts foreign to matter and materialism.
- They hold that a mental or spiritual force is needed to account for what they perceive in nature.
- But they go beyond this to conclude that everything must be mental: The universe is not matter, but mental / energy relationship.
- There could be a single mind, absolute mind or many minds.
- Mental or spiritual, not the material create or project reality.

EASTERN IDEALISM

- Indian philosopher **Vasubandhu** (c.300) held that all we perceive are sensations in our minds, which does not show that external objects exist.
- Thus, the apparent existence of an external world is an illusion as in a dream.
- Living an ethical life and meditation reveals that external world is an illusion.
- Thus, only the mind exists.

WESTERN IDEALISM

- **Plato** held that the individual entities we perceive around us are merely shadows of reality.
- Behind each entity in our experience is a perfect **form** or **ideal**.
- This absolutely real form or ideal is what accounts for the lesser and derivative reality of the objects we see around us.
- Individual entities around us come and go, but the ideal forms are everlasting and indestructible.
- Law of the conservation of energy

WESTERN IDEALISM

(CONTINUED)

- In *The City of God*, **Augustine** states the material world is temporary and the spiritual world of God is fully real (**divine idealism**).
- **Subjective idealism** (solipsism) says that reality consists of my mind (although other human minds may exist) and its ideas.
- **Objective idealism** says that reality includes a supreme mind that produces an objective world of ideas that does not solely depend on my own mind, but connects all minds.

GEORGE BERKELEY (1685-1753)



- Irish / English Anglican Bishop
- Father of modern idealism
- **Subjective Idealism**
- All external objects are bundles of perceptions; because perceptions can exist only in a mind, all objects exist only in the mind, and there is no independent material reality outside the mind

GEORGE BERKELEY

(CONTINUED)

- Berkeley also argued that because our orderly perceptions of the world are not controlled by our minds, they must be produced by God's divine mind (objective idealism).
- We may think that the external world of material objects cause these mental perceptions and sensations, but it is our perceptions of them that causes them to seem to exist.
- So, reality consists only of minds and their contents—their ideas, including perceptions and sensations.

GEORGE BERKELEY

(CONTINUED)

- Many other philosophers have agreed with the kind of idealist metaphysics that Berkeley put forward.
- Idealism, in fact, was the dominant philosophy in the English-speaking world during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- Canadian philosopher **John Leslie** (1940), proposes a kind of objective idealism when he claims that all the things in our universe are but thoughts in the mind of God.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831)

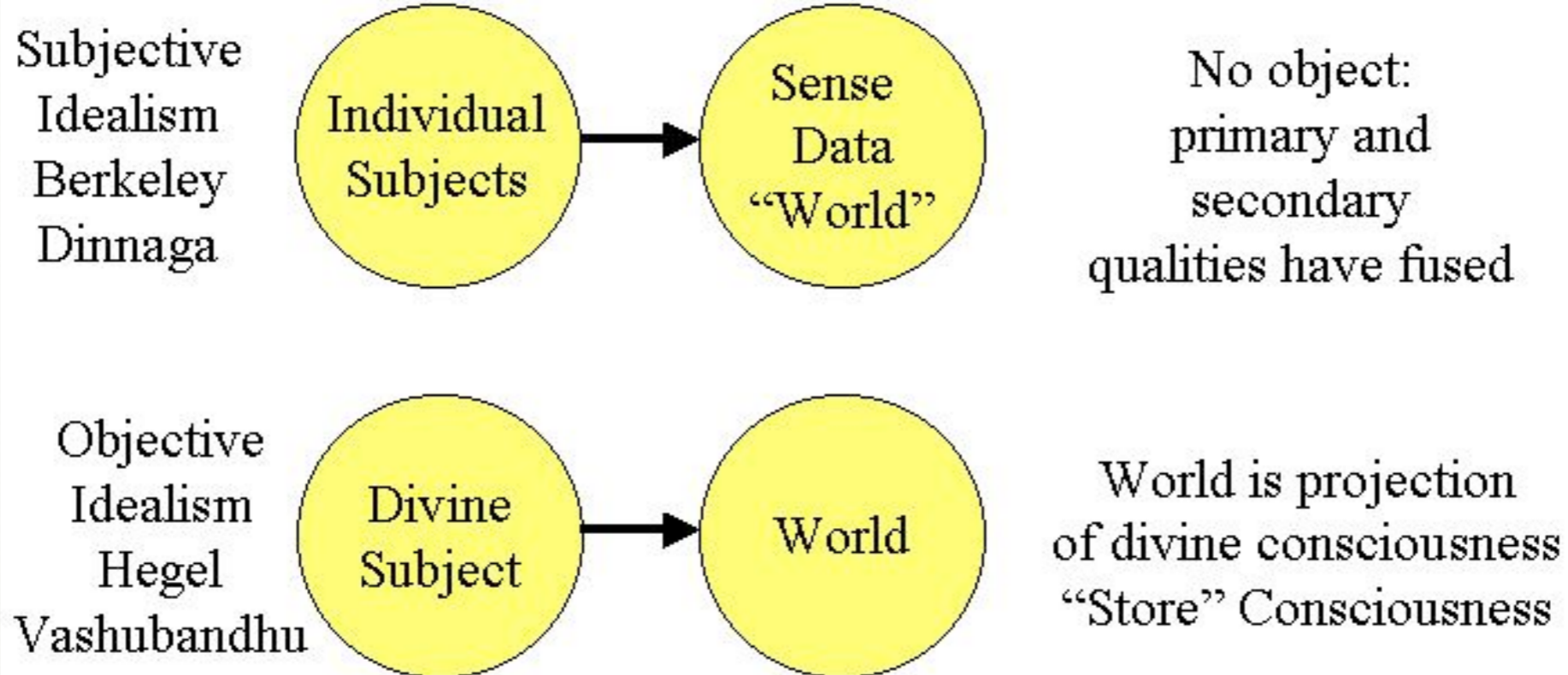
F. H. Bradley (1846–1924)

Thomas Hill Green (1836–1882)

Bernard Bosanquet (1848–1923)

IDEALISM REVIEW

Two forms of idealism



Berkeley: God is a separate perceiver of the world
Hegel: All of us are part of an evolving divine consciousness

OBJECTIONS TO IDEALISM

- Idealists wrongly project human-centric characteristics onto non-human parts of the universe
- Minds and ideas require the material hardware of the brain.
- Materialism, not God, provides the best explanation of the order and permanence of the world we perceive.
- If God exists, how can we know god's mind?
- **Dualism** holds that reality contains 2 different kinds of nature: immaterial and material, which complements the basic law of the conservation of energy.
- **Pragmatism, phenomenology & existentialism** which reject the materialism/idealism debate.

THE END