

Modern Metaphysics

Ancient metaphysics, represented by Plato and Aristotle, dealt with the question of reality in terms of ultimate eternal “Forms” (Plato) versus individual and primary “substances” (Aristotle).

By the 17th Century and the “Enlightenment”, a “corpuscular philosophy” about metaphysics was widely held:

- Reality is ultimately made up of matter, in terms of arranged bits or corpuscles or particles

John Locke argued that reality consisted of three main things:

- Matter, Minds, and Ideas
 - For Locke, an idea is anything the mind thinks, perceives, processes
 - His impulse theory said that matter somehow stimulates the senses to create ideas in the mind
 - A “quality” of matter is any power it has to produce an idea in the mind...

PRIMARY QUALITIES of matter are those that relate to something IN matter itself... inseparable from matter... “objective”... our ideas of these qualities directly represent something like them in the matter itself; independent of our senses

- Bulk, figure, extension, number, motion/rest, solidity

SECONDARY QUALITIES of matter are those that we experience because of our senses; these are no really “in” matter... our ideas of secondary qualities do not directly represent something like them in matter

- Colors/sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touchy-feelies

George Berkeley (1685-1753)

An empiricist, and yet he differs radically from the materialist philosophers around him...

IMMATERIALISM (there is no such thing as matter)... Idealism (reality is ideas)

How should we define reality... or “existence”?

Existence is perceivability

Esse is percipi

What about matter? The primary qualities and secondary qualities that Locke referenced...

Primary qualities, by definition, cannot be perceived. They are “thought” or “intuited” but not perceived. Secondary qualities are what we directly perceive.

But if there are no conditions under which you can perceive primary qualities, then you shouldn’t think they exist

And if Primary Qualities don’t exist, then neither does matter!

There are only two things in reality that we know via perception and experience... MINDS and IDEAS

And yet, if there is no matter, how can we explain where all our sensory perceptions are coming from?! It doesn’t seem like MY mind is responsible for their reality...

There must be a powerful mind... GOD... supplying our minds with the ideas and experiences we have

Matter is unthinking, unperceiving, inanimate... how could it create ideas?

Better to posit a MIND that creates all the ideas we experience. Chairs and rocks and our bodies and the world are all real... but they are not

material. They are sensory ideas given to us by God. You can still do science, still theorize about the world and study it... but you are not studying “matter” - you are studying the ideas God is projecting from His mind to your mind.

This immaterialism combats “deism” - the idea that while God created things, he simply wound up a material world like a machine and is no longer involved

Instead, for Berkeley, God is the one “in whom we live, and move and have our being.” (Acts17:28)