

# George Berkeley (1685–1753) in One Page

## The Philosopher Who Said "To Be Is to Be Perceived"

George Berkeley (pronounced “Bark-ley”) was an Irish philosopher, clergyman, and one of the most strikingly original thinkers of the early modern period. Born in 1685 near Kilkenny, Ireland, he studied and taught at Trinity College, Dublin.

Berkeley became famous (and controversial) for his radical idea that the physical world doesn’t exist independently of our perception of it. His central phrase sums up his philosophy: “Esse est percipi” — To be is to be perceived.

Berkeley believed that everything we call “material” is actually made up of ideas in the mind. We never perceive matter itself—only sensations and perceptions. This view is called idealism, and Berkeley is its most famous early champion.

To explain how things continue to exist when no one is observing them, Berkeley turned to theology: God is always perceiving everything. So, even when humans aren’t watching, the world exists within the mind of God.

His key works include 'A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge' (1710) and 'Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous' (1713).

Later in life, Berkeley became a bishop and traveled to the Americas in an attempt to found a university in Bermuda. He died in 1753, leaving behind a philosophical legacy that continues to provoke and inspire.

Berkeley challenges us to ask: what is real? Can we trust our senses? And does the world vanish when we’re not looking? His philosophy remains a profound invitation to reflect on the nature of perception, reality, and knowledge.

