

Matter or spirit? Neuroscience answers.

Source: cuerpomente.com

Link: https://www.cuerpomente.com/psicologia/desarrollo-personal/fin-materialismo-bienestar-espiritual_1724

Date of the original article: 2020-05-06

Published on web-ur.com: 2024-03-15

Date of last update: 2024-03-15

Author/Publisher: Jordi Pigem / CUERPOMENTE

Translated by: JD Arimathea

CUERPOMENTE



Jordi Pigem

Philosopher and writer

Materialism has conditioned our way of understanding the world and shaping societies.
Science now shows that these beliefs were incorrect.



For centuries, **our society has believed that the basis of reality was matter**. But the **evolution of science and of personal and social experience** now leads us beyond materialism. A **new way of understanding reality** and life is emerging, in which mind and consciousness are the key. it is time to open ourselves to freedom and light.

Materialism does not work, neither as a worldview (believing that the basis of reality is matter) nor as an attitude towards life (believing that our satisfaction derives basically from what we consume and possess).

These two beliefs correspond to the two senses that dictionaries give to the word materialism. They belong to different spheres, but they are related. **We have created a society based on materialistic values because deep down we were guided by a materialistic worldview**: we believed that what we can touch and quantify (material things) is more important than what we live and feel within ourselves.

What attracts our attention shapes our world. If we believe in beauty, we will tend to immerse ourselves in art. If we believe in matter, we will crave to accumulate material things. And if we believe that everything can be measured, we will crave that which reduces everything to a simple quantifiable and objective parameter: money.

If the only reality is matter, our only horizon is to accumulate, consume and compete.

We believed that only what can be measured and represented objectively is truly real. Therefore, for centuries, we have tried to explain the immaterial from the material, the intangible from the tangible, and the conscious from the inert. **According to the materialistic view, everything we are and everything that surrounds us is basically the result of combinations of material elements** (electromagnetic waves, subatomic particles, molecules, neurotransmitters).

MATERIALISM LACKS HUMANITY

From this point of view, for example, love and our noblest values and ideas would be nothing more than illusions generated by the internal chemistry of the brain. **But what we really are cannot be reduced to a product of physical and chemical forces.**

Until recently, **most neuroscience has tended to view the brain** not as a living thing, vitally embedded in the body and the world, but **as a mere computer that produces what we do, feel and say**. But the more neuroscience advances, the further we are from being able to explain how a combination of chemicals can generate the immediacy of our experience in the here and now.

A brain without a body and without a world would be incapable of any mental activity. The brain is the most complex tangible structure we know, but mind and consciousness cannot be reduced to brain activity.

In the materialist view there is no place for the properly human and, if one embraces this view with realism, one ends up feeling like a mere accident in a meaningless world. At the beginning of the twentieth century, when science seemed to confirm the materialist worldview, the philosopher **Bertrand Russell** recognized, much to his regret, that **the world is meaningless**, that human beings are the product of forces that did not know where they were going, and that "their origin, their development, their hopes and fears, their loves and beliefs are only the result of the accidental positions of atoms."

In the century since then, science has begun to show that the Universe is much more than a complex mechanism based on material elements, but **our culture** (including the assumptions of most of the science practiced today) **remains attached to the materialistic paradigm.**

WHAT DOES SCIENTIFIC MATERIALISM BELIEVE?

Recent works that address this issue include *The End of Materialism*, by psychologist Charles Tart, and *The Science Mirage*, by eminent biologist **Rupert Sheldrake**. Sheldrake points out that the materialist worldview can be expressed in a series of **beliefs that are shared by most mainstream scientists**, even though each of these has been superseded by cutting-edge science:

- **Everything is mechanical.** A cat, a dog or even a human being would be nothing more than complex mechanisms, "wandering robots", according to Richard Dawkins' expression.
- Matter is always unconscious. **Human consciousness would be nothing more than an illusion** derived from the mechanical functioning of the brain.
- **The laws of nature are fixed** for all eternity.
- **Nature is purposeless.** Evolution is blind and meaningless.
- The beauty and meaning of **much of what we perceive in the world would be at bottom a mirage.**
- **Biological inheritance** is reduced exclusively to **material elements** such as DNA.
- **The mind would be nothing more than a by-product of the brain.** And what you see with your eyes would not be there in the world, but in your brain.
- **Phenomena that have no material explanation**, such as telepathy, would be **illusory.**
- The only **medicine** that works would be the one based on the **mechanistic view** of the body.

AVANT-GARDE SCIENCE AND THE END OF SCIENTIFIC MATERIALISM

All of these beliefs are contrary to our deepest intuitions. They do not fit with the world we perceive at our best moments. The good news is that, moreover, in the new reality revealed to us by science, **all these beliefs are obsolete.**

As already pointed out by two 20th century Nobel Prize winners in Physics, **Schrödinger and Wigner, the basis of reality is not matter but consciousness.** Quantum physics shows that **the world is not made of objects but of relationships**, relationships that always include the human mind. The theories that consider human consciousness as something illusory only exist in human consciousness.

The world of the new science is not mechanical and impersonal, but holistic and participatory.

THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF MATERIALISM

Numerous recent studies show that **societies oriented towards materialism and consumerism tend to stimulate selfishness, undermine trust and social cohesion, and increase inequalities.** Materialism has led us to consider the economy as the almost exclusive key to society's well-being. On a planet with limited resources, materialistic consumption cannot grow forever. On the other hand, psychology and sociology show that materialistic consumption **does not satisfy real human needs.**

As economist Richard Easterlin states, "the triumph of economic growth is not a triumph of humanity over material needs; it is rather a triumph of material needs over humanity."

The yearning for an unlimited increase in material consumption creates psychological insecurity and is counterproductive to personal satisfaction. Undoubtedly, for those in a precarious situation, an increase in consumption is linked to an increase in well-being. But beyond a certain threshold of consumption of material goods, personal satisfaction does not increase and may even begin to decline, since **increased consumption is generally accompanied by an increase in stress** and a decrease in free time and contact with family, friends and nature.

From the World Values Survey data, it can be observed that:

- **Life satisfaction tends to increase as income per person per year rises until it reaches about \$15,000** (the level in countries such as Spain, Ireland and New Zealand at the beginning of the 21st century), but beyond this threshold, the correlation disappears.
- Citizens of the United States, Great Britain and Japan **are no happier than they were fifty years ago**, despite the fact that their material wealth has multiplied over the last half century.
- Real per capita incomes have tripled in the United States since 1950, but the **percentage of citizens** who say they are **"very happy" in surveys has declined** since the mid-1970s.
- In the United States, the **Genuine Progress indicator peaked in 1975**, when the country's Gross Domestic Product was about half of what it is today.

This paradox has been observed in practically all the countries that have seen their economies and consumption grow enormously over the last half century.

DOES MATERIAL WELL-BEING MAKE US UNHAPPY?

As the **Dalai Lama** has pointed out, the incidence of anxiety, stress, confusion, indecision and depression among those whose material needs are assured shows that **our true needs go far beyond consumerism and materialism**.

One of the keys to materialism is the belief that there is **a radical separation between the objective material world and the human psyche**. Therefore, our only effective way to act would be through the material dimension of the world. But we know that our lives are full of experiences in which the power of the mind overcomes the power of matter (through phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance or psychic healing, subjects that Charles Tart analyzes in his effort to unify science and spirituality).

All personal development practices lead to a world in which consciousness (mind and heart, attention and intention) plays a much more crucial role than space, time and matter.

The end of materialism is undoubtedly a key moment in human evolution. **It represents the end of a psychological ballast that prevented the evolution** of consciousness. It is the moment to open ourselves to freedom and light.

BEYOND MATERIALISM

- **The basis of reality is not matter but consciousness.** We are not passive spectators in a world of objects, but co-creators of a universe of relationships. **Nothing exists without our participation.**
- The world is not a sum of objects but a myriad of networks of relationships. **The relational is the most real.**
- **We are not material beings** having spiritual experiences, nor genetic machines with psychological sensations, **but consciousness wrapped in the veils of matter**, space, time and limitation.
- **The brain is a material support of the mind.** But the mind is not reduced to brain functioning. The death of the physical body does not imply the extinction of consciousness.
- **Our life is shaped** not so much by material things as by our attitudes, our intentions and what **we focus our attention on.**
- **The core of reality** does not speak the language of reason, laws, formulas and concepts. **It expresses itself in the language of the heart**, the imagination, creativity and intuition.

We are only manifesting a tiny part of our possibilities. We are not what we have. In reality, we have nothing more than what we are.