

Philosophic Encyclopedia

Eastern and Western Spiritual Alternatives

Scientific Materialism

Present-day scientific materialism presents a great challenge to spiritual truth-seekers the world over. The purpose of this pamphlet is to discuss the major alternatives to materialism which are available to present-day spiritual aspirants.

Scientific materialism is based on the premise that nothing can be known except that which is observed through the five senses or measured by machines. Thus, materialism recognizes only the Physical World and its laws. It originates from the theories of Charles Darwin, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, among others.

These theories hold that man, as well as all life-forms that exist on our planet, are the result of chemical forces which interacted in a haphazard manner. Thus, man is an accidental end-result, without any real purpose for existence. Man's survival as a psychological organism requires balance between the inner forces, which surge from the unconscious, and the outer forces, which impinge from social and environmental sources. Although he must try to gratify his inner urges without provoking a threat from without, he has no direct control over either the inner or the outer forces.

The solution to the human dilemma, according to the logical implications of materialism, is to control the inner urges through such things as drugs and behavior modification and to control the outer forces through direct manipulation of political, social, and economic structures.

With this concept of man, there is no individual responsibility because, at any particular point in time, man is merely the result of factors over which he has no control. As an example, man's behavior often is blamed on "genetics" or "education" or "poverty." In this theory, man does not have an individual free will for which he can be held responsible; he simply reacts to the inner and outer stimuli which he perceives. If responsibility for man's destiny is placed on social institutions, rather than on man himself, the intrinsic worth of the individual also is denied.

As the materialistic view has grown stronger and stronger, especially in the Western World, there has been a corresponding increase in the number of people who reject it. They have grown disillusioned at the over-mechanized, over-intellectualized, de-humanized society which has resulted from materialistic thought.

These truth-seekers perceive an intrinsic worth and integrity in the individual human being — something of a transcendental nature. They feel that people possess an individual free will which is not merely a response to social or biological stimuli but an independent assertion of the identity of the individual. Also, they perceive that the Physical World is not all that exists — that beyond outer appearances lie inner realities which are the cause of what expresses itself outwardly.

Liberal and Conservative Churches

Where can the group of truth-seekers go to find confirmation for their beliefs? Many go to the churches in hopes of encountering a spiritual answer for their inquiries. Some find solace there, but some do not. Of those who leave the churches, many do so because they find in them the same materialistic philosophy which they are trying to avoid, even though it may be clothed with the appearance of spirituality.

In particular, there are two trends in churches today which are likely to exemplify materialistic thought. One such trend is "liberal." "Liberal" churches attempt to "accommodate" themselves to the times by embracing the scientific, materialistic view of man. To them, salvation is collective rather than individual and is achieved by establishing a "Heaven-on-Earth" through social, economic, or political reform. They seem to have forgotten Christ's statement, "My kingdom is not of this world." ([John 18:36](#))

The other major trend is "conservative." "Conservative" churches are likely to place a literal, historic, and anthropomorphic interpretation on what are really spiritual experiences and cosmic symbols. While insisting on the physical reality of things such as Jonah's whale, they fail to perceive the spiritual reality behind such accounts. Thus, they interpret the Bible in the same way that scientific materialism interprets the Physical World: through the five senses.

In addition, most churches limit their concept of man to one short life on Earth. The decisions he makes here will affect his existence for all eternity. Thus, one can understand why there are spiritual truth-seekers who feel impelled to search elsewhere.

Two Alternatives

In the world today, there are two major alternatives to materialism. One is through the wisdom of the East; the other is through the wisdom of the West, or esoteric Christianity.

It may surprise some that there really are Wisdom Teachings in the West. They may have thought that the popular, exoteric churches were all that Christianity had to offer. Yet all major world religions have had their deeper mystery teachings, and Christianity is no exception.

There are very basic differences in the Eastern and Western approaches to materialism. According to the Eastern approach, the aspirant strives for direct spiritual enlightenment through meditative exercises. The goal is to attain illumination in the shortest time possible. In order to lead a meditative life, it becomes necessary to withdraw from the material world, at least to a certain extent. Therefore, non-Eastern people who espouse Eastern ideals often join an ashram or form a community in which part of their time may be spent in experiencing an awareness of God in all things.

Western Wisdom teaches an altogether different approach to materialism. In the West, where materialism has reached its greatest strength, there has developed a rational approach to the world which has brought about great advances in understanding and using it. The advent of scientific thought in the West brought to an end the ignorance and superstition of the Middle Ages which caused untold misery and suffering. Therefore, Western Wisdom does not shy away from scientific discoveries and materiality. Rather, it would use them for spiritual purposes. In other words, whereas the Eastern approach advocates, explicitly or implicitly, the withdrawal from the material world, the Western Wisdom

advocates work in and with the material world for the purpose of spiritualizing it. Its motto is "Be ye in the world, but not of it."

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Man, as a Spirit, has as his present field of activity the Physical World, and has as his instrument a physical body. These are not conditions to be shunned or avoided, for they are the results of the efforts of an all-wise Creator. They are to be used so that man, the Spirit, can learn to become a divine creative intelligence as is his Heavenly Father, able to create on all levels of existence.

Having mentioned briefly the basic way in which the Eastern and Western philosophies differ in regard to materialism, let us consider other differences in these philosophies.

Concept of Christ

The crucial way in which the two philosophies differ is in their concept of the Christ. Many Oriental teachings are silent on the subject. Some Eastern philosophies, especially those which are promulgated in the West, acknowledge Jesus as a great Teacher who attained Christ-consciousness, or enlightenment, similar to that attained by Krishna or Buddha. They teach that devotion to Jesus, to the exclusion of other great Teachers, unnecessarily limits an aspirant to truth. If truth is universal, then Teachers throughout history are equally worthy of study. In fact, the more widely one studies from different sources, the more likely one is to arrive at a fuller understanding of the truth.

The concept presented above indicates a lack of understanding regarding the spiritual evolution of our planet. It is quite possible to arrive at certain conclusions but, if one does not consider all the

factors involved, no matter how logical the conclusions may sound, they will be erroneous because relevant factors have been left out.

The factor left out in the Eastern philosophies is the Christ. Christ was not the man Jesus; He is not merely a lofty state of consciousness or an abstract concept. Christ is a divine, self-conscious Being, the highest Initiate of the archangelic life-wave. He is a representative of the Godhead: the "Word" which "was made flesh and dwelt among us." ([John 1:14](#)) His incarnation in the body of Jesus was totally unique in the history of the world. It enabled humanity to overcome the Physical World, transmute the physical body, and eventually conquer death itself.

Christ, Regent of the Earth

Christ's entrance into the Earth at the time of the Crucifixion made Him the Regent of the Earth. This event was the most important spiritual impulse in the evolution of our planet. Previous to the coming of Christ, the Regent of the Moon, Jehovah, had guided our planet from without. He took the spiritual solar forces and reflected them indirectly to Earth, because mankind was not yet able to withstand the direct spiritual rays from the Sun. He did so by giving mankind tribal, national, and race religions, which include Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, and all other Oriental religions. At the coming of the Christ, mankind was given the first direct spiritual impulse from the Sun. Ever since, the Christ Spirit incarnates into our planet at the Autumn Equinox each year, is "born" in the center of the Earth at Christmas, and "dies" and is "resurrected" into the higher worlds at Easter, bringing an increasingly stronger spiritual impulse from the Sun, the Source of all life and light in our solar system. Such all-important cosmic events are too important to be ignored by any philosophy which claims to lead men to God.

Only through the solar forces brought by the Christ can we hope to enter into the etherealized condition of the Epoch to come. Eastern people as well, after passing through a stage of materialism, eventually must take the next step in their spiritual development and respond to the higher spiritual vibrations of the Christ.

The concept of Oriental teachings concerning the Christ is deficient. It is to be expected that the Mystery Teaching of Christianity present a higher concept of the Christ than teachings from Eastern sources.

Not only is there a serious discrepancy between Eastern and Western approaches concerning the central impulse of human development, but also the methods of spiritual attainment are quite different.

The Wedding Garment

In the first place, the Western Teaching stresses physical action as a method of spiritualizing the higher bodies of the individual. Every action in harmony with the Christ impulse causes growth in the spiritual bodies. For the Westerner, it is only through orderly, systematic work for the Christ in the material world that he builds what Christ called "the Wedding Garment" in one of his parables (Matt. 22:11) or what Paul called "soma psuchicon" or "soul body." Meditation, dietary changes, and chanting may sensitize Western bodies to the spiritual worlds, but only work in materiality will cause the soul body to grow. It is essential that the soul body be built if we are to pass into the etherealized Epoch to come. Otherwise our future development will be retarded and we will become stragglers in evolution.

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Spiritual Exercises

In the second place, there are great differences in the type of exercises given for spiritual development. It is important that a distinction be made between the two approaches, because the brain organization is different in Eastern and Western bodies. The Eastern brain is especially adapted for metaphysical thought, because the ethers of the etheric body are as yet loosely interwoven with the physical body and are, therefore, passively receptive to spiritual impacts. However, the lack of tight organization causes difficulty for the individual Easterner in coping with and mastering the external world. On the other hand, the Westerner has a brain organization well-suited for work in the objective, material world. Because the ethers are closely interwoven in the Westerner's brain, the Eastern methods of development tend to derange the Westerner's faculties instead of spiritualizing them.

Bodily positions which cause etheric currents to course in specific directions may be detrimental to a Westerner, but the most harmful discipline for a Westerner to undertake is breathing exercises. Breathing exercises can cause severe reactions: from susceptibility to infectious diseases in some, to insanity and even death in others. Attempts to raise the spiritual spinal fire and open the sense centers, or chakras, are difficult for Westerners and would have severely deleterious results should they be accomplished without adequate development of the spiritual bodies. The safest exercises for Westerners are those given by the Mystery School relative to the Christian religion.

Rebirth

Another major difference is the Western and Eastern views of reincarnation, or rebirth. The Western students of the Mysteries agree with their Eastern counterparts that human beings are reborn from age to age in different bodies under varying circumstances. The point of difference seems to be the purpose behind the fact of rebirth. The goal in the East is to escape from the wheel of reincarnation by reaching a state of Nirvana, or enlightenment. This state is attained by withdrawal from the material world and dedication to the elimination of desires and actions. The idea is that by refraining from every new cause, there eventually will be no more future karma to pay off and, therefore, no reason to return to physical existence. It is for this reason that the Eastern aspirant adapts a passive and disinterested attitude toward life.

The Western aspirant, in contrast, sees material life as a school of experience which must be mastered if he is to become a creator like his Heavenly Father. Christ said, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do.." ([John 14:12](#)). Rather than trying to be liberated from the cycle of rebirth, the Western aspirant uses his sojourn in the material world to the greatest spiritual advantage possible. Thus, he builds the soul body and, in time, after having learned all the lessons the material world has to offer, he becomes an Adept and rises above the Law of Rebirth. However, even in that exalted state, he does not shirk his duty to his younger brothers, but assumes a physical body with which to serve them. Even the Christ "took upon himself the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men." ([Phil. 2:7](#)) Service in our present environment is the shortest, safest, and most joyful road to God.

Law of Cause and Effect

The Eastern philosophies emphasize the fact of karma, that is, the Law of Cause and Effect. Each act we perform generates causes which later come back to us. If we have committed evil in past lives, we must “pay off” this evil in a later life by experiencing evil ourselves. This is why Easterners lead lives of asceticism.

The Bible acknowledges this Law. “Whatsoever a man soweth, so also shall he reap.” ([Gal. 6:7](#)) The Christ, however, fulfilled and superseded this Law with a new one: the Law of Grace. The Law of Grace affirms that we do not have to suffer the consequences of our former acts if we so repent of them that we would never commit them again. We then come under grace through repentance and are “forgiven for our sins.” The forgiveness of sins, rather than the painful and laborious expiation of them, is unique to Western Teachings.

Master or Friend

Another great difference in the two approaches is that the Mystery School for the Christian religion does not have masters or gurus. The Western pupils have no master. The Christ said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” ([John 15:13,15](#)) There is a tremendous difference between the position of a servant and that of a friend. The servant without any question obeys the commands of his master, as the Oriental pupil obeys the commands of his guru. However, the word “friend” implies equality.

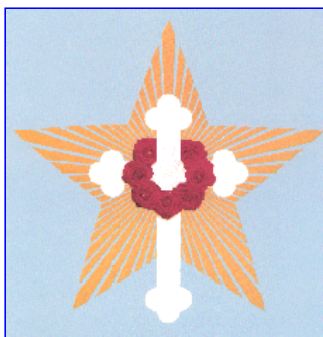
Developing Self-reliance

Rather than remain dependent on outside sources, Western pupils must stand alone and rely on their own inner forces. As a result, they develop self-reliance, independence, and self-determination. If we are to become creators in our own right, we cannot afford to lean on others. We must develop our own will-power, so that we can apply it to help and heal others. Only someone who is strong himself can hope to help others.

Both Eastern and Western spiritual aspirants must confront the widespread growth of materialism, but the Christian Mystery School teaches that Western methods are best for Western people. Furthermore, it teaches that the Western approach eventually must be embraced by the Easterner. In the book, [The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception](#), Max Heindel states that esoteric Christianity is destined to be the world-religion:

“Buddha, great, grand, and sublime, may be the Light of Asia, but Christ will yet be acknowledged the Light of the World. As the Sun outshines the brightest star in the heavens, dispels every vestige of darkness and gives life and light to all beings, so, in a not too distant future, will the true religion of Christ supersede and obliterate all other religions to the eternal benefit of mankind.”

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