

Is Materialism Resistible? And what does this mean for ME (Myself)?

(and should we perhaps listen
to Weber? or to Dawkins? or to Boethius?)

Patrick Dixon

Presentation to Pinner Philosophy Group

8th October 2025



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(and should we perhaps listen to Weber?, or to Dawkins?, or to Boethius?)

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Abstract

(1) This talk centres around the theme of how we might relate to the extraordinary fact that for each of us, I exist, and ME, or Myself, or my Self is (or seems to be) at the "absolute centre" of it all.

In the first half I describe a "package" of Materialism, Nominalism, Monism and Moral Subjectivism as a base case against which to examine this mind-blowing fact, and suggest that adding "Enchantment" and "Humanism" provide powerful ways to make the package appealing. In the second half I look briefly at Metaphysical (Panpsychism, Idealism, Dualism) and Religious (Non-theist and Theist) alternatives for those who find the base case package unappealing. In the talk I address, first, the "Materialists" (e.g. Atheists), then the "Disenchanted" (e.g. the Metaphysicians), then the "Committed" (e.g. the Spiritual and Religious).

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There is a certain feeling or state that for me motivates all of my philosophical or intellectual thought...

...often late at night, the feeling is of the
sheer absurdity of my existence.

In fact, of all existence,
the sheer, bonkers, unfathomable, preposterous fact that
I exist,
and I don't know why ...
Here I am, just existing ...
As they say: w.t.!

2

(2) "There is a certain feeling or state that for me [often late at night] motivates all of my philosophical or intellectual thought..."

The feeling is of the sheer absurdity of my existence.

In fact, of all existence, the sheer, bonkers, unfathomable, preposterous fact that
I exist,
and I don't know why ...
Here I am, just existing ...
As they say: w.t...."

PROLOGUE

Existential Vertigo:

There is a certain feeling or state that motivates all of my philosophical or intellectual thought...

...often late at night, the feeling is of the
sheer absurdity of my existence.

In fact, of all existence,

the sheer, bonkers, unfathomable, preposterous fact that

I exist,

and I don't know why ...

Here I am, just existing ...

As they say: w.t.!

Vertigo: a sensation of whirling and loss of balance....
[\(Oxford Dictionaries\).](#)

["The Self and Consciousness"](#) Shen

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(3) Can I ask you to pause and consider whether this is a feeling you can identify with?

Have you ever experienced that extraordinary feeling of “vertigo” or dizziness when you really allow yourself to think about what it means to actually exist?

Have you ever thought?

- You arrived here, in your body and your life – not someone else’s;
- Life itself seems to an extraordinary miracle.
- What is around you is unbelievable, extraordinary, beyond comprehension.
- And yet we try – we try and try to make some tiny limited sense of just some of it.
- And, somehow, “*we feel the ‘I’ or ‘me’ is always present [absolutely] in the centre of our existence*”. [Shen. 2025.]

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[Shen, Stephanie. The Self and Consciousness. *Medium*. 25 August 2025.

<https://medium.com/illumination/the-self-and-consciousness-6f6494973145>]

[An interesting Materialist description of the relationship between Consciousness and Self.
“I am, therefore I think.”]

[National Library of Medicine website, quoting the OED. Visited Sep 2025.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1801021/>

“...vertigo is defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of English* as ‘a sensation of whirling and loss of balance...’”]

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PROLOGUE

Existential Vertigo:

There is a certain feeling or state that for me motivates all of my philosophical or intellectual thought...

...often late at night, the feeling is of the
sheer absurdity of my existence.

In fact, of all existence,

the sheer, bonkers, unfathomable, preposterous fact that

I exist,

and I don't know why ...

Here I am, just existing ...

As they say: w.t.!

Vertigo: a sensation of whirling and loss of balance....
([Oxford Dictionaries](#)).

[Existential Vertigo is Revelation](#) Matt Whiteley. Substack.

[Against Egalitarianism](#) Benjie Hellie Analysis 2013 (link in PhilPapers)

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(4) The words I am quoting come from the article written by Matt Whiteley [1] that was circulated before this talk. This article really captivated me when I read it. **[See Appendix 2 in the Paper. Whiteley 2025].**

So much so that I decided to build my talk around it today.

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Footnote 1:

Whiteley writes about a range of philosophical questions on Substack and Medium. He told me that:

"I generally keep myself to myself in terms of biography... I'm not an academic by work, just writing about what I'm thinking about and what interests me. Glad you find some of it helpful!"

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[Whiteley, Matthew. Existential Vertigo is Revelation. *Substack*. 05 April 2025.

<https://substack.com/@thisisleisfullnofnoises/p-160621658>

Describes Matthew Whiteley's struggle with the current state of philosophy - especially consciousness, soul & self. Declares that consciousness cannot be explained by materialism.]

[Matt Whiteley – publishes principally on Substack, and also on Medium.

<https://medium.com/@doyouthinkihaveforgotten>

<https://substack.com/@thisisleisfullnofnoises>]

[“Against Egalitarianism”. Benj Hellie. 19 Feb 2012. *Analysis* 73. PhilSoc.

<https://philpapers.org/rec/HELCFC>

Hellie's paper is referenced in the “Vertiginous question” and the “Explanatory gap” articles on Wikipedia. The term “vertigo” probably arises from Benj Hellie's paper] =====

INTRODUCTION

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(5) This talk is borne of three things that happened to me in the past year.

The most recent was discovering Matt Whiteley's article, some of which I have just quoted.

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(Dis)Enchantment

Disenchantment:

Max Weber (German sociologist) (1917):

The world is disenchanted by Materialism.

Enchantment:

Ted Hodgson (2025)

“...another account of materialism which is ... delicately placed on the boundaries of physics and metaphysics.”

6

Hodgson, Ted. [Enchantment as a form of philosophical engagement](#). Gerrards Cross Philosophy Group. 26 March 2025

(6) And before that, I had encountered a talk given elsewhere by Ted Hodgson, previously a member of the Pinner Philosophy Group.

In part he based that talk on the ideas of Max Weber, a late 19th century philosopher, who lamented that the world is disenchanted by Materialism. Ted instead pointed to the possibility of "**Enchantment, ... another account of materialism which is ... delicately placed on the boundaries of physics and metaphysics**".

I found this a wonderful phrase. I feel that this is what many people who have a scientific (and perhaps overly logical bent) – might be yearning for.

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[Hodgson, Ted. Enchantment as a form of philosophical engagement. *Gerrards Cross Philosophy Group*. 26 March 2025.

<https://www.gxpg.co.uk/events/enchantment-as-a-form-of-philosophical-engagement/>

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“What do I think?”

(7) But the journey of this talk really began last year when Adrian and I shared a train home after a Pinner Philosophy Group talk. He turned to me and said, in the way that only Adrian can:

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“What do I think?”

Adrian Lepper (2024)

“You know, I am sometimes starting to wonder whether everyone else is right....., and I am wrong!”

8

(8) “You know, I am sometimes starting to wonder whether everyone else is right ..., and I am wrong!”

A wry joke, perhaps, ...

... but to Adrian’s bemusement I took him seriously. I thought about this; and realized that up until then I had consciously chosen NOT to have “point of view”.

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What do I think? My search for an “ism”.

I decided to:

- understand an “-ism”
- select a philosophical position that I would try to understand in a bit more depth
- that I could connect to, and
- that I could use as a "comparator" when new philosophical issues are discussed

This is a “comparator” – not a “belief”.

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(9) So I decided to move slightly away from my approach of “listen and learn”; to start to “think for myself”.

I decided I would select an “-ism”- one philosophical position that I would try to understand in more depth, that I could connect to, and that I could use as a comparator when I encounter new issues in philosophy.

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Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained (1)

REALITY

The core dualism: Mind or Matter
Which is more real?

10

Carreira , Jeff. [Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained](#).. “Philosophy is not a luxury” website. Jun 2010.

(10) To help me I went back to an article I found some years ago by Jeff Carreira entitled “Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained” [Carreira 2010].

He starts by describing everything in terms of **dualisms**.

And the first, core dualism concerns **REALITY**. The duality is between Mind and Matter – which is more real?

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[Carreira, Jeff. Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained. *Philosophy is not a luxury* website. 7 June 2010.

<https://philosophyisnotaluxury.com/2010/06/eight-confusing-philosophical-terms-explained/>]

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Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained (1)

REALITY

The core dualism: Mind or Matter
Which is more real?

Matter (obviously)

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Carreira , Jeff. [Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained](#).. "Philosophy is not a luxury" website..

(11) Well, given my scientific background, my first instinctive answer was – Matter is more real than Mind, obviously.

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[Carreira, Jeff. Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained. *Philosophy is not a luxury* website. 7 June 2010.

<https://philosophyisnotaluxury.com/2010/06/eight-confusing-philosophical-terms-explained/>

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Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained (3)

The core dualism: Mind or Matter

Which is more real?

Idealism vs **Materialism**

What is real? (Ontology)

Rationalism vs Empiricism

How do we know what is real?
(Epistemology)

Realism vs Nominalism

Are there real entities behind universal
ideas? ("Universals")

Dualism vs Monism

Are Mind and Brain the same thing?

Carreira , Jeff. [Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained..](#) "Philosophy is not a luxury" website..

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(12) Carreira then gave me four more choices. Here they are.

I'll come back to each of these; but after a bit of reading about each; falling heavily on my previous prejudices; and in line with my previous answer, I chose **Materialism** as my candidate "-ism"!

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- Idealism vs **Materialism** What is real? (Philosophers call this Ontology)
- Rationalism vs Empiricism How do we know what is real?
(Philosophers call this Epistemology)
- Realism vs Nominalism Are there real entities behind universal ideas? ("Universals")
- Dualism vs Monism Are Mind and Body the same thing?

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[Carreira, Jeff. Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained. *Philosophy is not a luxury* website. 7 June 2010.

<https://philosophyisnotaluxury.com/2010/06/eight-confusing-philosophical-terms-explained/>

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Structure of this talk:

INTRODUCTION

1. FOR THE MATERIALIST

Materialism; (Being) Conscious(ness);
Enchantment; Humanism

2. FOR THE DISENCHANTED

Panpsychism; Idealism; Dualism

3. FOR THE CONVINCED

Non-theist Religions; Theist Religions

CONCLUSION

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(13) So that sets the scene for my talk.

Knowing you now just a little, as I do, I am feeling that there are at least three types of people in the audience today, and perhaps more.

- There are the Materialists – who are looking for a description of reality that seems logically sensible;
- There are the Disenchanted – who feel that even though Materialism may be a logical destination when a cold, harsh light is shone upon it, they hope that somehow there may be something more;
- And there are the Convinced – who, like many people I know and love, will draw real strength from their core religious or spiritual beliefs which transcend Materialism.

This is how Matthew Whiteley's article runs – he deals with Materialism, then Disenchantment and then Conviction. So, I have structured this talk in the same way - to cover each in order; and you can see here the topics I will cover in each section.

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AGENDA

DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

• MATERIALISM	10 MINS
• CONSCIOUSNESS	10 MINS
• ENCHANTMENT/ HUMANISM	10 MINS
BREAK 11:25 to 11:40	
• PANPSYCHISM/ IDEALISM/ DUALISM	5 MINS
• NON-THEIST AND THEIST RELIGIONS	10 MINS
CONCLUSION	10 MINS

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(14) My plan is to divide up our two hours together into one hour of presentation and 55 minutes of discussion – in 6 discussion sessions. And if we are to do justice to the last two sessions - which I really do not want to compress - we must take our break at 11:25, so please bear with me when I insist on this. Thanks.

So, let's start.

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Part 1 For the MATERIALISTS

*“Life is
what we [do with] the assumptions
we can make about REALITY,
not what we know about
what we are doing here.”*

(Whiteley)

[Existential Vertigo is Revelation](#) Matt Whiteley. Substack.

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(15) This first part is for the MATERIALISTS. Whiteley asserts that “Life is what we [do with] the assumptions we can make about REALITY...” [Whiteley. 2025]. Let’s look at some of those assumptions.

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[Whiteley, Matthew. Existential Vertigo is Revelation. *Substack*. 05 April 2025.
<https://substack.com/@thisisleisfullofnoises/p-160621658>]

What is Materialism/ Physicalism?

Materialism:

- Everything consists of matter, or depends on matter (including our innermost thought)
- There is nothing else (including no afterlife)

Physicalism:

- “Matter” includes all of Physics i.e. it includes: matter; energy; forces and fields; space, time and information; the laws of physics (and even perhaps the laws of mathematics).

Fu,A and Warje,K. [Materialism](#). The Decision Lab website. Viewed Sep 2025.
Stoljar, Daniel, ["Physicalism"](#), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)

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(16) Firstly, Materialism is the view that everything that exists is either made of matter or is dependent on matter for its existence. Everything - including even our innermost thought - either is, or comes from, matter. And that is all - there is nothing else. Which also implies that there is no afterlife.

Actually, nowadays it may well be better to talk about Physicalism [Fu & Warje 2025].

Physicalism takes into account the modern scientific understanding that the observable universe, what is in it and how it behaves includes not only matter, but also energy, and the forces and fields of physics, and space, time and information; and also the laws of physics (and perhaps even the laws of mathematics) [Stanford 2021].

In most contexts Materialism and Physicalism are taken to be synonyms, and I will use these terms interchangeably from now on. [2]

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Footnote 2: In many respects Naturalism is a synonym too.

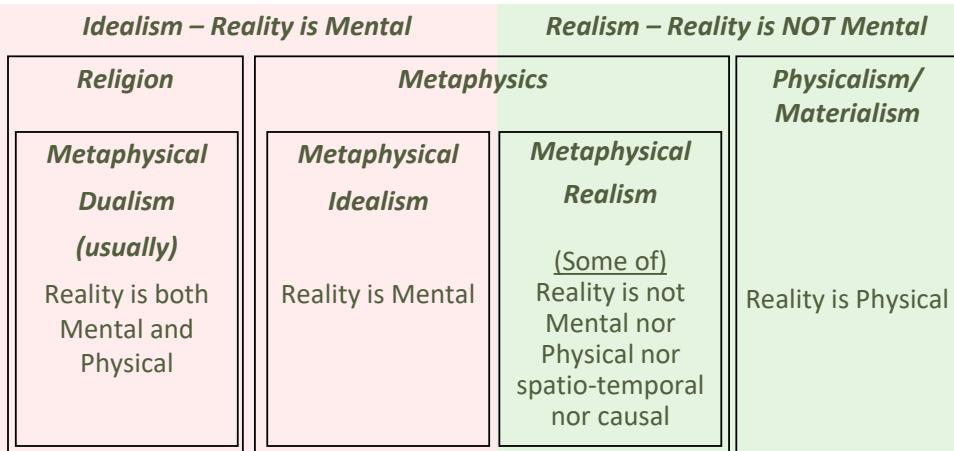
=====

[Fu, Adrienne and Warje, Kira. Materialism. *The Decision Lab* website. Viewed Sep 2025.
<https://thedecisionlab.com/reference-guide/philosophy/materialism>
Simple guide to Physicalism.]

[Stoljar, Daniel, "Physicalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/physicalism/>
Refers to “Numbers and Abstracta”. Discusses possible responses.]

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The Map of Reality



Pradhan, Ramesh Chandra. [Metaphysical Idealism, a Contemporary Perspective](#). Page x [sic]. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2024.
 A landscape of consciousness: Toward a taxonomy of explanations and implications Robert Lawrence Kuhn. Science Direct. August 2024 p110
 Khlebtzos, Drew, "Challenges to Metaphysical Realism"; Balaguer, Mark, "Platonism in Metaphysics" – both in [The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) (Fall 2025 Edition)

17

(17) So, in the right box of this diagram, Physicalism or Materialism says that Reality is Physical. But what are the alternatives? Here is a simplified map of some of the other main possibilities.

Idealism (the red area on the left) says that, ultimately, all of reality is mental [Pradahn 2024].

In opposition to that, Realism (the green area on the right) simply says NO, reality is NOT mental [Khlebtzos 2025].

On the far left, many Religions say that reality is both physical and mental.

And finally Metaphysical Realism [3], the third box – says that some of reality is neither physical nor mental, and does not exist in space and time, and has no “causal” effects. In which case, what is it? This is the box where Plato’s Universals, would sit – if they exist; as would the Abstract Concepts of Mathematics [Balaguer 2025]. [See Endnote 1].

I will return to all these concepts in more depth later.

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Footnote 3: The word Metaphysics is used here in the sense that metaphysics and science are distinct non-overlapping fields; rather than Metaphysics being an umbrella term which covers all of reality, including materialism and, of course, religion. [Routledge 2025].

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[Pradhan, Ramesh Chandra. Metaphysical Idealism, a Contemporary Perspective. Page x [sic]. *Cambridge Scholars Publishing*. 2024.

<https://cspcontents.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/master/samples/978-1-5275-5837-3-sample.pdf>

“The central philosophy of idealism, especially of metaphysical idealism, is that mind or reason has primacy over matter and that the world itself can be shown to be mental or rational in nature.”]

[Khentzos, Drew, "Challenges to Metaphysical Realism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2025 Edition).

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism-sem-challenge/>

“...the world is as it is independent of how humans or other inquiring agents take it to be.”]

[Kuhn, Robert. A landscape of consciousness: Toward a taxonomy of explanations and implications – ScienceDirect p110.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0079610723001128>

“This kind of “soul-centered dualism” is also the theory of consciousness most widely believed by the vast majority of the world's population, largely implicitly via acculturation to belief systems, whether organized religion or folk traditions. Dualism (substance dualism), certainly, is the default doctrine in the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.”]

[Balaguer, Mark, "Platonism in Metaphysics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2025/entries/platonism/>

“Platonism is the view that there exist such things as abstract objects—where (on one standard definition) an abstract object is an object that's non-spatial, non-temporal, non-physical, non-mental, and non-causal.”]

[Routledge. What is Metaphysics? Routledge web site. 2nd Jul 2025

<https://blog.routledge.com/humanities-and-media-arts/what-is-metaphysics/>

“... metaphysics and science are distinct fields...”

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A Possible “Package” driven by Materialism/ Physicalism

18

(18) As soon as I had chosen Materialism as my candidate “ism”, I realised that Materialism on its own does not cover enough of the sweep of the philosophical landscape to allow me to compare it to the wide range of philosophical issues I was encountering.

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Possible Materialism/ Physicalism “package”

The core dualism: Mind or Matter

Which is more real?

Idealism vs Materialism/ Physicalism	What is real? (Ontology) Only matter; energy; forces and fields; space, time; the laws of physics and maths
Rationalism vs Empiricism	How do we know what is real? (Epistemology)
Realism vs Nominalism	Are there real entities behind universal ideas? (“Universals”)
Dualism vs Monism	Are Mind and Brain the same thing?

Carreira , Jeff. [Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained.. “Philosophy is not a luxury” website.](#)

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(19) That is why Carreira talked about eight ideas - and four dualities. I realised that I needed to make a choice across all the options [Carreira. 2010].

However, within this list I chose not to address Rationalism versus Empiricism here, because it is not relevant for this package; though I do address it in my end notes to this talk. [See Endnote 2].

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[Carreira, Jeff. Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained. *Philosophy is not a luxury* website. 7 June 2010.

<https://philosophyisnotaluxury.com/2010/06/eight-confusing-philosophical-terms-explained/>

=====

Possible Materialism/ Physicalism “package”

The core dualism: Mind or Matter

Which is more real?

Idealism vs **Materialism/ Physicalism**

What is real? (Ontology)

Only matter; energy; forces and fields; space, time; the laws of physics and maths

Realism vs Nominalism

Are there real entities behind universal ideas? (“Universals”)

20

Carreira , Jeff. [Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained..](#) “Philosophy is not a luxury” website.

(20) Next, consider Realism versus Nominalism. This is a new distinction to me, and a really crucial one. The question Carreira poses is whether there are real “things”, or entities, “out there” behind the so-called “universals” that we use in language all the time. These would be in addition to the physical world that we see around us.

Realism says there are, Nominalism says there not.

Essentially Metaphysical Realism adopts Plato’s idea that there are real things which sit behind “universal ideas”. As an example, is JUSTICE an actual thing? That is, is there more than simply a concept that we call justice? Or are there just individual instances of justice which are real; which we then choose to group together under a category, or a “universal”, called Justice, for convenience in our communication with each other?

To me, for this package, if reality consists only of physical materials, energy, forces and fields - and nothing else - then it seems odd to assume that there are real entities behind universal ideas.

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[Carreira, Jeff. Eight Confusing Philosophical Terms Explained. *Philosophy is not a luxury* website. 7 June 2010.

<https://philosophyisnotaluxury.com/2010/06/eight-confusing-philosophical-terms-explained/>

=====

Possible Materialism/ Physicalism “package”

The core dualism: Mind or Matter

Which is more real?

Idealism vs **Materialism/ Physicalism**

What is real? (Ontology)

Only matter; energy; forces and fields; space, time; the laws of physics and maths

Realism vs **Nominalism**

Are there real entities behind universal ideas? (“Universals”)

No. —————→

Which means that “redness” and “consciousness” are not real entities – they are just **collective nouns** for individual instances of **being red and being conscious**.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (2001) [1953]. *Philosophical Investigations*. Blackwell Publishing

21

(21) So I chose Nominalism - meaning that we create names for the “universals” for convenience of communication, not because they are real entities.

Which then means, for example, that “redness” and “consciousness” are not real entities – they are just conceptual collective or descriptive nouns for individual instances of being red and being conscious. In his later work Wittgenstein pointed out that we do this a lot – turning adjectives into nouns; and this can trap us into thinking that the nouns we create are real entities, instead of just being collective nouns. [Wittgenstein. 1953]. So, it may be better to use the adjective – “being conscious” – rather than the collective noun – “consciousness”.

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[Wittgenstein, Ludwig (2001) [1953]. *Philosophical Investigations*. Blackwell Publishing. Discussing “Family Resemblances”.]

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Possible Materialism/ Physicalism “package”

The core dualism: Mind or Matter

Which is more real?

Idealism vs **Materialism/ Physicalism**

What is real? (Ontology)

Only matter; energy; forces and fields; space, time; the laws of physics and maths

Realism vs **Nominalism**

Are there real entities behind universal ideas? (“Universals”)

No.

Dualism vs Monism

Are Mind and Brain the same thing?

22

Wikipedia - [Materialism](#).Viewed Sep 2025.

(22) And finally, Dualism or Monism?

Materialism or Physicalism is very much a Monist view. There is only the physical - and nothing else [Wikipedia – Materialism]. So, having chosen Materialism, it seems unavoidable that I should choose Monism.

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[Wikipedia - Materialism

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Materialism>

“Materialism is a form of philosophical monism in metaphysics... [It] belongs to the class of monist ontology.”

=====

Possible Materialism/ Physicalism “package”

The core dualism: Mind or Matter

Which is more real?

Idealism vs **Materialism/ Physicalism**

What is real? (Ontology)

Only matter; energy; forces and fields; space, time; the laws of physics and maths

Realism vs **Nominalism**

Are there real entities behind universal ideas? (“Universals”)

No.

Dualism vs **Monism**

Are Mind and Brain the same thing?

Yes.

23

McLeod, Saul. [Mind-Body Relationship In Psychology: Dualism vs Monism](#). Simply Psychology. 3 Mar 2025.

(23) Which means that for this package of ideas, the Mind and the Brain are the same thing [McLeod 2025].

BUT...this package contains one HUGE hole.

What about Morality? The eight “isms” in Carreira’s article do not address morality. This seems a large gap, as ethics and morality represent one of the most important highest-level key themes of philosophy.

So I decided to add this in as well.

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[McLeod, Saul. Mind-Body Relationship In Psychology: Dualism vs Monism. Simply Psychology. 3 Mar 2025.

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/mindbodydebate.html#What-is-Monism>

“Monism is the belief that, ultimately, the mind and the brain are the same thing.”]

Sources of Morality

Most people feel moral feelings deeply.

BUT

- does that mean that they exist objectively, rather than coming from biological evolution?
- And should we just “blindly” follow someone else’s moral diktats?

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(24) So what are our sources of morality?

The vast majority of people feel moral feelings deeply.

BUT...

...does that mean that morals exist objectively, rather than coming from biological evolution?

And what about the idea that Morality is TOO IMPORTANT to just say that moral truths simply exist and are “handed down” from somewhere else or someone else; and that we therefore need to accept them and blindly follow them?

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Moral Duality – Objectivism vs Relativism

Moral Objectivism

- moral truths are objective, meaning moral truths exist objectively, independently of human opinions, beliefs, or cultural practices.

versus

Moral Relativism

- moral statements are not objective truths, rather they reflect the subjective feelings and attitudes of individuals or groups.

Gowans, Chris, "[Moral Relativism](#)", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.),

25

(25) The key philosophical distinction around Morality seems to be between:

- On the one hand, **Moral Objectivism** (or Moral Universalism), which holds that moral truths exist objectively, independently of human opinions, beliefs, or cultural practices; [Gowans, Chris. 2021]
- On the other hand, **Moral Relativism**, where moral statements are not objective truths, rather they reflect the subjective feelings and attitudes of individuals or groups. [Gowans, Chris. 2021]

Materialism as a view would seem to be consistent with **Moral Relativism**, uncomfortable though that may seem. So, I added Moral Relativism to my package. [Endnote 3].

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[Gowans, Chris, "Moral Relativism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/moral-relativism/>

Exact wording is as follows:

Moral relativism maintains "that the truth or justification of moral judgments is not absolute, but relative to the moral standard of some person or group of persons"...

... "Moral objectivism maintains that moral judgments are ordinarily true or false in an absolute or universal sense."]

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My Candidate “Materialist Package” of “isms”

Materialism/ Physicalism: Reality consists of matter, energy, forces, and the laws of physics and laws of mathematics/logic ... and nothing else.

Nominalism: there are no real existing entities behind “universals” (and abstract concepts like numbers etc are part of Physicalism).

Monism: for this package, mind and body are the same thing.

Moral Relativism: moral statements are not objective truths but reflect the subjective feelings and attitudes of individuals or groups.

Source: Author.

26

(26) So, here is my candidate “package” of “isms” which – if I understand them a bit, might be usefully compared against whatever philosophy is being discussed – to give a reference point which makes thinking about new concepts more manageable.

To recap, the package consists of Materialism, Nominalism, Monism and Moral Relativism. This may or may not be a package that one likes – but does that make it any less credible as a view? I would suggest that the criterion for judging the package is not whether one finds it attractive, but whether one finds it coherent.

I want to emphasize that I was not choosing, and have not chosen, something that I “believe in”. I was simply looking for a comparator, an “illuminator”, through which I could better understand the philosophical topics I was encountering. So, these are not “my position”. But I have found that they provide a powerful template against which to compare other philosophical ideas.

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- **Materialism, or Physicalism** as it is now called - everything, including the thoughts in our brains, consists of, or arises from, physical reality. There is nothing else.
- **Nominalism** - there are no real entities behind the names we give to “universals” as concepts; (and abstract concepts like numbers etc are part of Physicalism).
- **Monism** - for this package, mind and body are the same thing.
- **Moral Relativism** - there are no objective moral principles; instead, morals arise in people.

=====

Reasons that Materialism seems to make sense

1. Empirical Success of Science

Materialism is the best fit with the most successful and predictive system we have: science.

2. Predictive and Explanatory Integration

Materialism provides a common explanatory foundation across all domains of knowledge.

3. Dependence of Mental States on Physical States

The mind is very closely tied to the brain - it therefore seems reasonable to infer that the mind is a physical phenomenon.

4. Continuity with Evolution

A physicalist explanation of the world, and especially of the mind, fits seamlessly with Darwinian evolution.

5. Causal Closure of the Physical

"Physical events have only physical causes". Mental events cause physical events. Therefore, Mental events must be physical.

6. Explanatory Power and Simplicity (Occam's Razor)

Compared to alternatives, Materialism wins by offering a leaner, more unified view of reality.

7. Incoherence or Vagueness of Alternatives

Materialism is more clearly articulated and better supported than its rivals.

Source: ChatGPT. See Appendix 1.

27

(27) Finally, why might this package - and Materialism in particular - make sense?

I did not feel that I could adequately summarise the very diverse arguments that I had encountered that address this question. So - as an experiment - I asked ChatGPT to summarise the arguments for me. I then amended the arguments, based on my research. Here is the resulting list of seven arguments in favour of materialism. [4]

=====

Footnote 4: The full ChatGPT dialogue is included as Appendix 1. This is very similar to the list from Google/ Gemini, and reads well alongside the variety of reasons encountered in research. This is not necessarily a robust nor reliable approach, but in this case it has helped summarise a complex set of issues.

=====

Reasons that Materialism seems to make sense

1. Empirical Success of Science

Materialism is the best fit with the most successful and predictive system we have: science plus logic.

2. Predictive and Explanatory Integration

Materialism provides a common explanatory foundation across all domains of knowledge.

Stoljar, Daniel, "[Physicalism](#)", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)
ChatGPT. P Dixon Dialogue. June 2025. See Appendix 1: "Physics explains chemistry; chemistry explains biology; biology explains neurophysiology; neurophysiology explains psychology."

28

(28) The first two arguments address the science:

- Firstly, Materialism is the best fit with the most successful and predictive system we have: science, combined with logic, [Stoljar 2024] and;
- Secondly, Materialism provides a common explanatory foundation across all domains of knowledge.

=====

Footnote 5:

Chat GPT dialogue. See Appendix 1.

"Physics explains chemistry; chemistry explains biology; biology explains neurophysiology; neurophysiology explains psychology."

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[Stoljar, Daniel, "Physicalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/physicalism/>

"... the metaphysical picture of the world that one is led to by the methods of natural science is physicalism."]

=====

Reasons that Materialism seems to make sense

3. The mind is very closely tied to the brain

This implies (but does not prove) that the mind is a physical phenomenon.

4. Fit with Evolution

Materialism fits seamlessly with Darwinian evolution.

5. Mental events cause physical events.

“Physical events have only physical causes”. Therefore, mental events must be physical events.

Vicente, A. (2006). ["On the Causal Completeness of Physics"](#) (PDF). *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*. 20 (2): 149–171
Yalowitz, Steven, ["Anomalous Monism"](#), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)

29

(29) The next three arguments address the mind - which we will discuss much more later when we cover Consciousness.

- Firstly, the mind is very closely tied to the brain - it therefore seems reasonable to infer that the mind is a physical phenomenon.
- Second, a physicalist explanation of the world, and especially of the mind, fits seamlessly with Darwinian evolution.
- And third, we have strong evidence to suggest that “... physical events have only physical causes”. [Vicente. 2006]. The implication is therefore that mental phenomena are physical. [Yalowitz 2025].

So far, these five reasons may create a rather “academic” list - without too much humanity to it. But it is a stronger list than it looks at first glance, and it has underpinned the adoption by many, many people of Materialism as their underlying worldview or mindset - even if they are not really aware of it.

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[Vicente, A. (2006). "On the Causal Completeness of Physics" (PDF). *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*. 20 (2): 149–171
<http://philpapers.org/archive/VICOTC.pdf>.] “...physical effects have only physical causes.”]

[Yalowitz, Steven, "Anomalous Monism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2025/entries/anomalous-monism/>

“... some physical events, such as one’s arm rising, are caused by certain mental events, such as deciding to scratch one’s head.”] =====

Reasons that Materialism seems to make sense

6. Explanatory Power and Simplicity (Occam's Razor)

Compared to alternatives, Materialism wins by offering a leaner, more unified view of reality.

7. Incoherence or Vagueness of Alternatives

Materialism is more clearly articulated and better supported than its rivals.

Source: ChatGPT

30

(30) And while to some the first five arguments may perhaps look like less than convincing proof, the last two arguments highlight that the alternatives are even more problematic. Such (it would seem) is the nature of metaphysics and philosophy.

These arguments say:

- Firstly, compared with the alternatives, Materialism wins by offering a leaner, more unified view of reality. This is the Occam's Razor argument. [6]
- And finally, Materialism is more clearly articulated and better supported than its rivals. We'll examine those rivals shortly.

That summarises the case FOR Materialism. What are the arguments AGAINST Materialism? Well – there are at least five.

=====

Footnote 6: Why should a simpler argument always be more logical? It will not. BUT Occam's razor performs a more human, sociological function. When human beings are struggling to construct convincing arguments, they often resort to making those arguments more intricate and complicated. This may provide an interesting "tell" that the proponents of an argument are having to work rather too hard to be convincing.

=====

Five reasons Materialism may not make sense (to you)

- No objective morality
- No enchantment with life, and with the universe in which we find ourselves (but why not?).
- No afterlife
- No God, no Soul

and:

- Materialism cannot explain consciousness

Hackett, Conrad, et. al. ["How the Global Religious Landscape Changed From 2010 to 2020."](#) Pew Research Center. 9 Jun 2025

31

(31) First, for most people, the search by human beings for objective moral values, given from somewhere else and beyond argument, seems deeply embedded in most people (though not all).

Also, Materialism seems brutal, reductionist, at odds with human empathy. To quote Weber, it is “disenchanting”!

And for three quarters of people in the world, an afterlife, a soul, and perhaps God, represent core beliefs. Should we not be taking that empirical evidence into account in some way? [Hackett 2025].

But, despite these huge issues, for philosophers the main argument against Materialism is the view that it does not, cannot and will not explain consciousness.

I will discuss all these objections to Materialism next, starting with consciousness,

=====

[Hackett, Conrad, et. al. ["How the Global Religious Landscape Changed From 2010 to 2020."](#) Pew Research Center. 9 Jun 2025.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/06/09/how-the-global-religious-landscape-changed-from-2010-to-2020/>

=====

Discussion 1 (10 minutes)

What do you think about Materialism so far?

32

(32) but first, let us discuss the package of “isms” I have presented so far.

=====

(Being) Conscious(ness)

To be conscious is to experience
being Me

No one else can experience being me
And one cannot experience being anyone else!

33

Source: Author.

(33) Let us turn now to consciousness.

To be conscious is to experience being ME. “Being Conscious” and “Being Myself” and “Being ME” all seem to be the same thing. No one else can experience “being me”, and one cannot experience “being anyone else”. [see Endnote 4]

=====

To be Conscious

**To be Conscious,
at its simplest, is to**

be aware

of a state

or

an object

**either internal to oneself or
in one's external environment.**

Merriam-Webster via [Wikipedia](#) (4/6/2012).

34

(34) Consider the adjective "conscious", as in "to be conscious": In 2012 the Miriam Webster Dictionary provided this definition:

To be Conscious, at its simplest, is to be aware of a state - or an object - either internal to oneself or in one's external environment.

=====

[Merriam-Webster Dictionary, via Wikipedia. 4th June 2012.
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consciousness>]

=====

Things we can be **aware** of include

- Pain
- Light, sound, smell, touch, taste
- Surroundings
- Feelings and emotions
- Communication
- Thoughts
- That I am thinking: Introspection

Simple

More

“Cerebral”



Source: Author

35

(35) When we are awake we are continuously aware of an enormously wide range of sensations, from the simplest to the most evolved and “cerebral”.

And at the most cerebral end of the scale is Introspection: for example, being aware that we are thinking, and even being aware that we are aware that we are thinking.

=====

The Hard Problem of (Being) Conscious(ness)

- Pain
- Light, sound, smell, touch, taste
- Surroundings
- Feelings and emotions
- Communication
- Thoughts

• That I am thinking: Introspection.

Explaining how this happens is David Chalmer's Hard Problem of Consciousness

David Chalmers. [Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness](#). *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2(3):200-19, 1995

36

(36) The general opinion of many neuroscientists who actively study this subject is that science probably will be able - one day - to explain how most of these levels of being aware work, the so-called “easy” problems of consciousness - “easy” not because they are simple to solve, but because the routes to solving them are conceptually clear. [Chalmers. 1995]

But perhaps not Introspection. This seems much more difficult. In 1995 David Chalmers named this “The Hard Problem of Consciousness”. [Chalmers. 1995]

=====

[David Chalmers. [Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness](#). *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2(3):200-19, 1995.

<https://consc.net/papers/facing.pdf>

=====

The Hard Problem may not be “not real”

Daniel Dennett

- argued that “mental states, including consciousness, are **entirely the result of physical processes in the brain**”.

Anil Seth

- “The hard problem **might not be solved** – it would instead be **dissolved**.”

Wikipedia [Daniel Dennett](#) Sep 2025
Sobrado, Tony. [ANIL SETH ON THE HARD PROBLEM OF CONSCIOUSNESS](#). Interview with Tony Sobrado. Montreal Review. July 2024.

37

(37) Despite Chalmer’s work, there are many scientists and philosophers who think that the “Hard Problem” too can, in principle, be, and one day probably will be, explained in scientific terms.

For example:

Daniel Dennett was a prominent proponent of materialism in the philosophy of mind. He argued that “mental states, including consciousness, are entirely the result of physical processes in the brain.” [Wikipedia. Daniel Dennett];

And Anil Seth, a prominent UK neuroscientist, has said:

“The hard problem might not be solved – it would instead be dissolved.” [Sobrado 2024].

=====

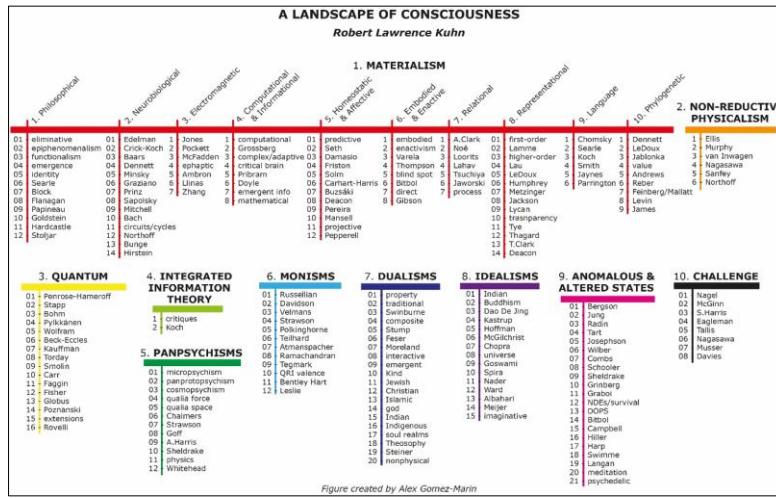
[Wikipedia Daniel Dennett. Viewed Sep 2025
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Dennett]

[Sobrado, Tony. *ANIL SETH ON THE HARD PROBLEM OF CONSCIOUSNESS*. Interview with Tony Sobrado. *Montreal Review*. July 2024.

https://www.themontrealreview.com/Articles/Anil_Seth_on_the_Hard_Problem_of_Consciousness.php]

=====

“A Landscape of Consciousness” Robert Kuhn



Upper layer
(mainly red)
shows theories
compatible
with
Materialism.

Lower layer in
other colours
shows theories
not
compatible
with
Materialism.

38

(38) Research into consciousness has grown enormously. Many scientific theories are emerging.

In 2024, Robert Lawrence Kuhn catalogued the current theories in a landmark paper called “A Landscape of Consciousness” and published this map. [Kuhn 2024] . It is an extraordinary paper – which I recommend highly. And I recommend his “Closer to Truth” television and video series even more highly. They are outstanding.

The theories attached to the red bar at the top of this slide are those that are ostensibly compatible with Materialism; and are therefore potentially able to explain away the Hard Problem. And the lower lists are those theories that assume Materialism is not correct.

These theories are still very high level, and are at present largely unprovable. All are contentious, and there is much disagreement about what is known. But it does seem quite credible that some of these “red bar” theories, or other future theories, might (not will, but might) resolve the problem one day.

However - there are many people who disagree. Matt Whiteley amongst them.

[Kuhn, Robert. A landscape of consciousness: Toward a taxonomy of explanations and implications – ScienceDirect. p40.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0079610723001128>

[Closer to Truth – Home Page.]

<https://closertotruth.com/l>

[Closer to Truth – YouTube Channel]

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCI9stMQ79LtEvIrskzioYbQ1> =====

“Existential Vertigo is Revelation” Text (Para 4, 5(i), 8)

*“...this thing consciousness is here...
no objective third-person description of the brain can
logically arrive at a subjective first-person state of being.”*

*Most popular science [assumes]... that
while we can't explain consciousness right now,
we may well be able to in the future.*

“Yet anyone who knows that truly existential feeling knows otherwise”.

“..we won't find an explanation for consciousness with [neuroscience]”

39

[Existential Vertigo is Revelation](#) Matt Whiteley. Substack.

(39) He says: “this thing consciousness is here..... no objective third-person description of the brain can logically arrive at a subjective first-person state of being.”

“Most popular science [assumes].... that while we can't explain consciousness right now, we may well be able to in the future.”

“Yet anyone who knows that truly existential feeling knows otherwise” [Whiteley 2025].

“..we won't find an explanation for consciousness with [neuroscience]”

=====

[Whiteley, Matthew. Existential Vertigo is Revelation. *Substack*. 05 April 2025.

<https://substack.com/@thisisleisfullofnoises/p-160621658>]

=====

The “New Mysterians” agree

This loose grouping might include:

Colin McGinn, Thomas Nagel, Jerry Fodor, Noam Chomsky,
Martin Gardner, John Horgan, Steven Pinker,
Roger Penrose, Edward Witten, Sam Harris
and others.

Kuhn, Robert Lawrence. [A landscape of consciousness: Toward a taxonomy of explanations and implications](#). *Science Direct*. August 2024 p144.
McGinn, Colin. Dec 2014 [Mysterianism Revisited](#). Colin McGinn website. Viewed Sep 2025
Wikipedia. [New Mysterianism](#). Viewed Sep 2025.

40

(40) The “New Mysterians” agree. Named after a Michigan “garage” rock band from the sixties(!), this loose grouping might include a wide range of prominent 20th century scientists and thinkers. [7] [8] [Kuhn 2024 p144].

=====

Footnote 7: They might include Colin McGinn, Thomas Nagel, Jerry Fodor, Noam Chomsky, Martin Gardner, John Horgan, Steven Pinker, Roger Penrose, Edward Witten, Sam Harris and others. [Wikipedia. New Mysterianism]

Footnote 8: In 2014 McGinn wrote: “The idea is to flag the mysteries as ‘mysteries of nature’, not ‘mysteries of the supernatural’”. [McGinn 2014]

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[Kuhn, Robert. *A landscape of consciousness: Toward a taxonomy of explanations and implications* – ScienceDirect. P144.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0079610723001128>]

[McGinn, Colin. Dec 2014. Mysterianism Revisited. Colin McGinn website. Viewed Sep 2025.
<https://www.colinmcginn.net/mysterianism-revisited/>]

[Wikipedia. New Mysterianism
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_mysterianism
Lists “contemporary adherents”.]

=====

Barriers to Understanding Consciousness (1)

“...the hard problem of consciousness cannot be resolved by humans.”

1. Certain problems are **beyond human understanding** due to the limitations of our cognitive architecture.
2. Impossible to study **first person experiences** - any person's private perspective is completely inaccessible to others.

Neither reason invalidates Materialism

McGinn, Colin (1999). [The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World](#). Basic Books. Via New York Times on the Web website: Books. [Existential Vertigo is Revelation](#) Matt Whiteley. Substack.

41

(41) This group, and others, believe that Consciousness cannot and will not ever be understood, for one or more of three reasons:

1. Firstly, they believe humans do not have, and will never have, the mental capacity to understand consciousness. It is just too intellectually difficult [McGinn 1999].
2. Secondly, as Whiteley says, it is impossible to study first person experiences - any person's private perspective is completely inaccessible to others, making the Hard Problem impossible to solve [Whiteley 2025].

However, neither of these first two reasons mean that Materialism is wrong; they simply mean that we cannot yet prove that Materialism is correct.

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[McGinn, Colin (1999). *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World*. Basic Books. Via New York Times on the Web website: Books.

“... the bond between the mind and the brain is “an ultimate mystery, a mystery that human intelligence will never unravel”.

https://www.nytimes.com/books/first/m/mcginn-flame.html?_r=1&oref=slogin%20

=====

Barriers to Understanding Consciousness (2)

“...the hard problem of consciousness cannot be resolved by humans.”

1. Certain problems are **beyond human understanding** due to the limitations of our cognitive architecture.
2. Impossible to study **first person experiences** - any person's perspective is private and inaccessible to others.

Neither reason invalidates Materialism

3. There is an “**explanatory gap**” - between the physical brain processes and the subjective experience they produce.

Again – not a sufficient reason to invalidate Materialism?

Papineau, David, 2020b. [We must shed our metaphysical assumptions](#). Institute of Art Ideas website. Mar 2020. Viewed Sep 2025.
Harris, Sam, 2011. [The mystery of consciousness](#). Part I, October 11, 2011; Part II, October 19, 2011. Sam Harris website. Viewed Sep 2025.

42

(42) Nevertheless:

3. Thirdly, and in the same vein, there is an “explanatory gap” - between the physical brain processes and the subjective experience they produce. Materialists do not see this as a problem – David Papineau for example says that “consciousness... refers to brain processes that feel like something. What's so hard about that?” [Papineau 2020a] [9]. But their opponents feel that the existence of this gap is sufficient reason to reject Materialism without further evidence, though their reasons are not well explained. For example, Sam Harris asserts: “... it is difficult to imagine what experimental findings could render the emergence of consciousness comprehensible” [Harris 2011 Part 2].

Again, this does not seem sufficient reason to invalidate Materialism. [Endnote 5]

Overall, when one looks at them like this, this seems a much less convincing package of objections to Materialism than its opponents might feel that it is. For all the conviction and force of argument of its proponents, the view that a current inability to explain consciousness must mean that Materialism is incorrect seems a lot less well-founded than first appears.

=====

Footnote 9: Papineau also says: “The supposed ‘explanatory gap’ between brain and mind is nothing but a corollary of dualist intuitions.” [Papineau. 2020b].

=====

[Papineau, David, 2020a. We must shed our metaphysical assumptions. *Instit. Art Ideas.*

<https://iai.tv/articles/we-must-shed-our-metaphysical-assumptions-auid-1367>]

[Papineau, David, 2020b. The problem of consciousness. In: Kriegel, Uriah (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Consciousness*. Oxford University Press. chrome-

https://www.davidpapineau.co.uk/uploads/1/8/5/5/18551740/problem_consciousness.pdf]

[Harris, Sam, 2011. The mystery of consciousness. Part I, October 11, 2011; Part II, October 19, 2011. Sam Harris website. Viewed Sep 2025. (From Kuhn 2024 p144-5.)

<https://www.samharris.org/blog/the-mystery-of-consciousness>

May need to provide an email address to access the content.]

=====

Escaping the Hard Problem - Metaphysics

Step across the boundary from physics into the **metaphysical**, or into the **religious**;

where the Hard Problem of Consciousness does not arise;

and in which Morality, Enchantment and the Afterlife might find their place.

43

(43) Nevertheless, for some these are strong views, firmly held.

For them, another route out of the Hard Problem beckons - to step across the boundary from physics into the metaphysical, or into the religious; where the Hard Problem of Consciousness does not arise, and in which Morality, Enchantment and the Afterlife might find their place.

=====

Discussion 2 (10 minutes)

What do you think about (being) Conscious(ness)
and the Hard Problem?

44

(44) That is where we go next, but first let's discuss consciousness – including being aware, being conscious, consciousness itself, and the Hard Problem.

=====

Materialism: Do we Enhance it? Or Replace it?

Problems with Materialism

- No enchantment with life, and with the universe in which we find ourselves
- No absolute morality
- No afterlife
- No God, no Soul

and

- Materialism cannot explain consciousness



- ENCHANTMENT
- HUMANISM
- PANPSYCHISM
- IDEALISM
- DUALISM
- NON-THEIST RELIGIONS
- THEIST RELIGIONS

45

(45) So – where next?

The remainder of this talk will discuss seven ideas which might complement and enhance Materialism or, alternatively, replace it. First, we will see whether either Enchantment or Humanism might overcome the difficulties of Materialism. Then we will consider three alternative views from the Metaphysical realm - Panpsychism, Idealism, Dualism – that may appeal to those who are still Disenchanted. And finally, we'll turn to two types of religious views - Non-theist religions and Theist religions - which may appeal to the Committed.

Part 2 For the DISENCHANTED

46

(46) It is now time to turn to a second group in the audience today – those who find Materialism “Disenchanting”.

Disenchantment - Keats

*“Philosophy un-weaves the rainbow,
.....and clips an angel’s wings”*

Keats: “Lamia” 1820

Keats, John. [Lamia – Extracts](#) by Stephen Hicks. *Stephen Hicks website*. Sept 2025. [Lamia \(poem\)](#). Wikipedia

47

(47) “Philosophy un-weaves the rainbow,and clips an angel’s wings”

So wrote Keats in his famous poem “Lamia”, published in 1820, lamenting that Newton's Optics "had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to the prismatic colours."

The concern with Disenchantment clearly goes back a long way.

=====

[Keats, John. Lamia – Extracts by Stephen Hicks. *Stephen Hicks website*. Sept 2025. <http://www.stephenhicks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/KeatsJ-Lamia.pdf>]

[Lamia (poem). Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamia_\(poem\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamia_(poem))]

=====

Disenchantment - Weber

“...the world is disenchanted by Materialism”

Weber. 1917

Weber, Max. [Science as vocation](#). (1917). From *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. p7. Downloaded from University of Pennsylvania website.
Hodgson, Ted. [Enchantment as a form of philosophical engagement](#). Gerrards Cross Philosophy Group. 26 March 2025

48

(48) But Disenchantment was perhaps codified in 1917 when Max Weber, echoing Keats' sentiment, wrote:

“...the world is disenchanted [by Materialism]” [Weber. 1917]. [See Endnote 6 for the full quote].

Ted Hodgson summarised Weber's views thus: “...the advance of science has ushered in a disenchanted world; the material world has been flattened, pronounced subject to universal physical laws. And so emptied of magic and mystery”. [Hodgson. 2025].

=====

[Weber, Max. *Science as vocation*. (1917).

From H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Translated and edited), From *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, pp. 129-156, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946.

<https://sociology.sas.upenn.edu/sites/default/files/Weber-Science-as-a-Vocation.pdf>

[Hodgson, Ted. *Enchantment as a form of philosophical engagement*. *Gerrards Cross Philosophy Group*. 26 March 2025.

<https://www.gxpg.co.uk/events/enchantment-as-a-form-of-philosophical-engagement/>

=====

“Entzauberung” – “Magic”: Delusion or Delight

Enchantment translates as “Magic” – it can mean:

Delight OR Delusion

Disenchantment can mean:

- “loss of delight” (negative)

OR

- “shedding the delusion of the metaphysical world” (positive)

Saler, Michael. [Modernity, enchantment, and Fictionalism](#). *The Immanent Frame*. 20 Dec 2013.
Huenemann, CV. [Philosophy as Enchantment](#). Huenemaniac website. 19 Oct 2017.

49

(49) In German the word for Disenchantment is “Entzauberung”. This translates as “Magic”, which can be interpreted both as “delight”, or as “delusion” [Saler. 2013.] Philosophically, Disenchantment can also be, and is, interpreted in both ways. In one sense Disenchantment is seen as a negative - a loss - a loss of delight wrought by science, a loss of the mystery and magic in a less mysterious world. But in another sense, it describes an enlightenment - shedding the delusion of the metaphysical world.

Weber embraced both meanings. Pursuing scientific advance means shedding the illusions of the metaphysical world; but he also regretted losing the apparent magic of the mystical world.

=====

[Saler, Michael. *Modernity, enchantment, and Fictionalism*. *The Immanent Frame*. 20 Dec 2013.

<https://tif.ssrc.org/2013/12/20/modernity-enchantment-and-fictionalism/>]

[Huenemann, CV. *Philosophy as Enchantment*. Huenemaniac website. 19 Oct 2017.
<https://huenemaniac.com/2017/10/19/philosophy-as-enchantment/>]

=====

“Enchantment – a form of Philosophical engagement”

Enchantment: delight in the extraordinary world we live in, even while accepting a Materialist worldview.

Source: Author

*“... another account of materialism which is ... **delicately placed on the boundaries of physics and metaphysics.**”*

Ted Hodgson (2025)

Beaman, Lori G. [Reclaiming Enchantment: The Transformational Possibilities of Immanence](#). Secularism and Nonreligion. 9 Aug 2021.
Hodgson, Ted. [Enchantment as a form of philosophical engagement](#). Gerrards Cross Philosophy Group. 26 March 2025

50

(50) Weber's ideas have since triggered a philosophical discussion of **Enchantment**, or **Re-Enchantment**. [Beaman. 2021]. Here, Enchantment might be seen as **delight** in our extraordinary world and universe, even while accepting a Materialist worldview.

As I mentioned earlier, in this vein, Ted Hodgson has pointed to the possibility of "Enchantment as a form of philosophical engagement", representing "... **another account of materialism which is ... delicately placed on the boundaries of physics and metaphysics.**" [Hodgson 2025]

Ted Hodgson's suggestion is that the first place to look for enchantment is in the world around us - the world of nature, the world created by humanity in the arts and science and socially between people throughout the world. It is extraordinary - there is so much to take from it and be enchanted about; and indeed, to give to the world - natural, artistic, scientific and human.

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[Beaman, Lori G. Reclaiming Enchantment: The Transformational Possibilities of Immanence. *Secularism and Nonreligion*. 9 Aug 2021.

<https://secularismandnonreligion.org/articles/10.5334/snr.149>]

[Hodgson, Ted. Enchantment as a form of philosophical engagement. *Gerrards Cross Philosophy Group*. 26 March 2025.

<https://www.gxpg.co.uk/events/enchantment-as-a-form-of-philosophical-engagement/>]

=====

“Unweaving the Rainbow” – Richard Dawkins

“The feeling of awed wonder that science can give us is one of the highest experiences of which the human psyche is capable, [ranking with] the finest that music and poetry can deliver.”

Dawkins (1998)

Dawkins, Richard. *Unweaving the Rainbow*. Houghton Mifflin. 1998. (via [Goodreads](#) – Viewed Sep 2025)
[Stephen Grellet](#) > Quotes > Quotable Quote: Goodreads website. Viewed Sep 2025

51

(51) In this view, Materialism need not be seen as reductive – “reductive” implying that Materialism limits our experiences because it excludes the metaphysical.

Richard Dawkins, for example, disagreed strongly with Keats. In “Unweaving the Rainbow” he wrote “The feeling of awed wonder that science can give us is one of the highest experiences of which the human psyche is capable, [ranking with] the finest that music and poetry can deliver.” [Dawkins. 1998.] [See also Endnote 7]

Seen in this way Enchantment - overlaid on top of Materialism, offers perhaps a way of overcoming the cold, brutal, negative appearance of Materialism; allowing us to embrace and delight in the extraordinary opportunity that is, to adapt the saying of the Quaker missionary Etienne de Grellet, granted to us as we “pass through this world but once”.

=====

[Dawkins, Richard. *Unweaving the Rainbow*. Houghton Mifflin. 1998.
<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/114396-the-feeling-of-awed-wonder-that-science-can-give-us> (via goodreads)]

[Grellet, Etienne. > Quotes > Quotable Quote: Goodreads website. Viewed Sep 2025
<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/115442-i-expect-to-pass-through-this-world-but-once-any>

“I expect to pass through this world but once...”]

=====

Enchantment and Distress

“... everyone has known moments when they just wish for someone to rescue them from their despair.”

Source: Author

52

(52) Enchantment does face a significant challenge however. It lifts those fortunate enough to be able to see the positive. But does it help those for whom life is difficult? One would like to think yes - if we have the strength just to lift our heads even slightly, hopefully this is true.

But everyone has known moments when they just wish for someone or something to rescue them from their despair.

=====

Enchantment and Distress

“... everyone has known moments when they just wish for someone to rescue them from their despair.”

“Perhaps that someone is us.”

Source: Author

53

(53) And for them, if it is not their God, then perhaps that someone is us - we all surely have a role to help others in their hour of need.

Which brings us on to the second way that Materialism can perhaps be enhanced to feel satisfying.

=====

Humanism

54

(54) The second concern with Materialism is that it contains no moral aspect. The package I chose embraces Moral Relativism, meaning that moral values are not objective or fixed - moral values are not “handed down as a given”, nor do they exist in some objective way external to our humanity.

Humanism addresses this directly.

=====

Humanism – core ideas

- Trust to the **scientific method** - **reject the supernatural** (so, atheist or agnostic)
- **No afterlife, no discernible purpose to the universe**
- **Ethical decisions** – based on **reason, empathy, concern for humans and sentient animals**
- Achieve **meaning** through:
 - **seeking happiness in this life**
 - **helping others to do the same**

[Humanists UK](#) website Viewed Sep 2025

55

(55) According to Humanists UK, roughly speaking the word humanist has come to mean someone who embraces these core ideas.

- trusts the scientific method and rejects the supernatural, and is therefore either an atheist or agnostic;
- believes that there is no afterlife nor any discernible purpose to the universe;
- makes their ethical decisions based on reason, empathy, and a concern for human beings and other sentient animals;
- believes human beings can act to give their own lives meaning by seeking happiness in this life and helping others to do the same.

This list is compatible with the “package” of “isms” I have chosen.

=====

[Humanists UK website. Viewed Sep 2025.

<https://humanists.uk/humanism/>]

=====

Morality

Does a lack of 'moral mandates, handed, down', mean that
one can and will behave immorally?

No. (Of course not!)

Do the **objective moral codes of other systems** mean that
within those systems

people cannot and will not behave immorally?

Again – No. (And again, of course not!)

56

(56) Humanism asks: does the Moral Subjectivism that fits alongside Materialism, that is the lack of 'moral mandates, handed, down', mean that one can and will behave immorally?

No. (Of course not!)

Conversely, one could of course also ask: do the objective moral codes of other systems mean that, within those systems, people cannot and will not behave immorally?

Again – No. (And again, of course not!)

=====

Humanism and Morality

All members of humanity should:

“make their ethical decisions based on reason, empathy, and a concern for human beings and other sentient animals, without requiring a framework for morality that is provided from elsewhere.”

Humanists UK

57

[Humanists UK](#) website Viewed Sep 2025

(57) There are many versions of Humanism, and many other philosophical strands that share very similar ideas – in particular, that (to repeat) all members of humanity should:

- **make their ethical decisions based on reason, empathy, and a concern for human beings and other sentient animals**, without requiring a framework for morality that is provided from elsewhere.

Humanists and others believe – yes, it is a faith-based position – that our moral impulses have been developed through evolutionary processes, (or put another way, are biological). And they also believe that whilst morality really is subjective rather than objective, it is still possible, sensible and indeed ethical to live our own lives, and to expect others to live their lives, according to a moral code which is based on reason, empathy and concern for other human beings and natural life.

Humanism asserts that the apparent absence of an objective moral framework is NOT a license to nihilism – it is not a reason to behave immorally. We do not need an objective moral code to force us to behave morally, And nor is there any objective code available that would guarantee that we will behave morally.

For Humanists at least, this is sufficient to allow them to accept Materialism as valid.

=====

[Humanists UK website. September 2025.
<https://humanists.uk/humanism/>]

=====

Discussion 3 (10 minutes)

Do Enchantment and Humanism complement
Materialism sufficiently to overcome your
resistance to a package of Materialism,
Enchantment and Humanism?

58

(58) To sum up, Materialism does not provide enchantment, nor does it provide a moral code. But , critically, neither does it exclude either of these things.

We can choose to live enchanted lives; and we can choose to live according to a moral code we adopt for ourselves.

Let's now discuss whether Enchantment and Humanism complement Materialism sufficiently to overcome any resistance you may have to a package of Materialism, Enchantment and Humanism.

=====

BREAK

11:25 – 11:40

59

(59) We'll take a break now, and after the break we will look at alternatives to Materialism.

The Metaphysical Realm

Crossing the Border

60

(60) As we discussed before the break, Enchantment and Humanism can enhance and complement Materialism. Those embracing them deal with disenchantment, and with the absence of morality, the afterlife, the soul and God, by accepting the Materialistic claim; and then adding to it – actively choosing an outlook and a mindset that gives meaning to life.

But some of those – whether from the Classical, Enlightenment or Modern Scientific ages – who still reject Materialism in general, and who are restless about the absence of an explanation of consciousness in particular, look across the border away from physics and into metaphysics. And if they also reject religion, their search is often into the three lands of Panpsychism (where everything has Consciousness), Metaphysical Idealism (where there is one “Mega-Meta-Mind”) and Dualism (which combines Materialism and Idealism).

Let's visit each - one at a time.

=====

Panpsychism

"Panpsychism is the view that consciousness is a fundamental and ubiquitous feature of physical reality..."

Philip Goff (2019)

61

Goff, Philip. [Galileo's Error: Foundations for a New Science of Consciousness](#). *Vintage*. 5th November 2019

(61) "Panpsychism is the philosophical view that consciousness is a fundamental aspect of reality, present not only in humans and animals, but in everything in the universe, including inanimate objects and even subatomic particles." [Goff 2019].

=====

[Goff, Philip. *Galileo's Error: Foundations for a New Science of Consciousness*. *Vintage*. 5th November 2019.

https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/392400.Philip_Goff

=====

Panpsychism – modern form

All subatomic particles contain the **key ingredient of consciousness**

“similar to the fundamental fields and particles in physics”.

(Kuhn 2024)

when particles aggregate into a sentient being **this ingredient builds up to create consciousness** as we know it.

Kuhn, Robert Lawrence. [“A landscape of consciousness: Toward a taxonomy of explanations and implications.”](#) Section 13, p100. *Science Direct*. August 2024
Cook, Gareth. [Does Consciousness Pervade the Universe? Philosopher Philip Goff answers questions about “panpsychism”](#). *Scientific American*. 14 January 2020

62

(62) In its most common, modern form panpsychism suggests that all subatomic particles, although they do not possess a “mind”, do contain the key ingredient of consciousness, “similar to the fundamental fields and particles in physics” [Kuhn. 2024. p100.]; and that when these particles are aggregated into a sentient being this ingredient builds up to create consciousness as we know it in humans and sentient animals [Cook 2020].

=====

Kuhn, Robert Lawrence. “A landscape of consciousness: Toward a taxonomy of explanations and implications.” Section 13, p100. *Science Direct*. August 2024

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0079610723001128#sec21>

“panpsychism suggests that all subatomic particles, although they do not possess a “mind”, do contain the key ingredient of consciousness, ‘similar to the fundamental fields and particles in physics’ ”]

[Cook, Gareth. Does Consciousness Pervade the Universe? Philosopher Philip Goff answers questions about “panpsychism”. *Scientific American*. 14 January 2020.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/does-consciousness-pervade-the-universe/>

“The basic commitment is that the fundamental constituents of reality—perhaps electrons and quarks—have incredibly simple forms of experience, and the very complex experience of the human or animal brain is somehow derived from the experience of the brain’s most basic parts.”]

=====

Panpsychism – history, many, many varieties

- One of the oldest philosophical theories
 - Thales, Plato,
- 19th century - default philosophy of mind in Western thought
 - Spinoza, Leibniz, Schopenhauer, William James,
- Mid-20th century – decline with the rise of logical positivism.
 - after Alfred North Whitehead, Bertrand Russell
- Renewed interest in the 21st century - because it addresses the “Hard Problem of Consciousness” directly.
 - Galen Strawson, David Chalmers, Philip Goff

[Panpsychism](#) – Wikipedia. Viewed Sep 2025
Seager, William (Ed.). [The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism](#), Routledge (2020)

63

(63) Panpsychism is one of the oldest philosophical theories, and in the 19th century, panpsychism was the default “philosophy of mind” in Western thought. It saw a decline in the mid-20th century with the rise of logical positivism, but interest in panpsychism has reappeared in the 21st century - because it addresses directly the “Hard Problem of Consciousness”. [Panpsychism – Wikipedia] [Seager 2020]

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[Wikipedia. Panpsychism. Viewed Sep 2025
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panpsychism>]

[Seager, William (Ed.). The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism, Routledge (2020)

<https://www.panpsychism.com/handbook-panpsychism.pdf>

=====

Panpsychism – issues

Panpsychism:

- remains purely conjectural;
- cannot be empirically tested; no predictive power;
- is unfalsifiable because "It does not [even] get up to the level of being false" (John Searle);
- is counter-intuitive (Goff accepts this).

Goff, Philip. [Can Panpsychism be Tested and Does It Matter?](#) *Conscience and Consciousness*. 26 Jul 2019
Searle, John. [Can Information Theory Explain Consciousness?](#) *The New York Review*. 10 January 2013

64

(64) Panpsychists reject Physicalism because it has, so far, failed to explain consciousness. One feels that they do so with regret. If, for example, the theory that consciousness is in fact embedded in all sub-atomic particles is proved correct through neuro-science, they would see that as a victory for both sides. [10]

But currently Panpsychism remains purely conjectural - there is no empirical evidence to support its existence [Goff 2018], and the theories underpinning it have no predictive power [Goff 2019]. John Searle says it is unfalsifiable because "It does not [even] get up to the level of being false". [Searle 2013]. At present, it feels to be a niche, speculative idea with little to draw one in.

=====

Footnote 10: Podgorski describes Panpsychism as a "...model of consciousness which I see as having significant overlap with physicalism." [Podgorski. 2019.]

[Podgorski, Daniel. A Scientific Défense of Panpsychism. The Gemsbok. 8 March 2019.

<https://thegemsbok.com/art-reviews-and-articles/friday-phil-panpsychism-consciousness-science-evolution-electricity/>

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[Goff, Philip. The Problem with Materialism and the Explanatory Power of Panpsychism: A more considered response to Seth and Mitchell. *Conscience and Consciousness*. 5 Feb 2018.

<https://conscienceandconsciousness.com/2018/02/05/the-problem-with-materialism-and-the-explanatory-power-of-panpsychism-a-more-considered-response-to-seth-and-mitchell/>

“I agree that panpsychism can’t be directly tested, simply because consciousness itself cannot be directly observed.”]

[Goff, Philip. Can Panpsychism be Tested and Does It Matter? *Conscience and Consciousness*. 26 Jul 2019.

<https://conscienceandconsciousness.com/2019/07/26/can-panpsychism-be-tested-and-does-it-matter/>

The full quote reads:

“The case for panpsychism is built not on the basis that it provides a good explanation of observational data, but on the basis that it provides the best explanation of how observational data and consciousness data *fit together* in a single, unified worldview. A large part of that case involves arguing that rival accounts of materialism and dualism face serious problems (some empirical, some conceptual) that panpsychism avoids.”]

[Searle, John. Can Information Theory Explain Consciousness? *The New York Review*. 10 January 2013.

<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/01/10/can-information-theory-explain-consciousness/>. Behind a paywall.]

=====

Idealism

65

Ward, Keith. Keith Ward – [Metaphysics vs Materialism? \(Part 1\)](#). Interviewed by Robert Kuhn on *Closer to Truth*. 11 Feb 2020. From 0:40 seconds onwards.

Ward, Keith. [What is Consciousness?](#) Interviewed by Robert Kuhn on *Closer to Truth*. 7 Dec 2022 From 4:54 onwards, esp 6:30.

(65) Let us move on to Idealism – an even more difficult concept. [See also Endnote 8]. Unlike Panpsychism, Idealism rejects Materialism immediately and completely. But, again, it has no evidential base to support it.

That said, Robert Lawrence Kuhn, and many of the “New Mysterian” big thinkers listed earlier have been attracted to Idealism.

But, unless, like the English philosopher and theologian Keith Ward one takes a religious view [Ward 2020, 2022], Idealism is difficult to understand, difficult to make sense of, and difficult for most people to take seriously.

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[Ward, Keith. Keith Ward – Metaphysics vs Materialism? (Part 1). Interviewed by Robert Kuhn on *Closer to Truth*. 11 Feb 2020. From 0:40 seconds onwards.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6Ljaf5jc3M&t=160s>]

[Ward, Keith. What is Consciousness? Interviewed by Robert Kuhn on *Closer to Truth*. 7 Dec 2022. From 4:54 onwards , esp 6:30

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFk6dJ0RHm0>]

=====

Idealism variously asserts that:

- “most fundamentally, reality is equivalent to mind, spirit, or consciousness; or
- that reality is entirely a mental construct; or
- that ideas are the highest type of reality or have the greatest claim to being considered ‘real’.”

66

[Idealism](#). Wikipedia Viewed Sep 2025

(66) There are many different Idealisms, it has proved difficult for thinkers to define the term uniformly.

For example, the various authors at Wikipedia have toiled hard, only to come up with this:

Idealism asserts, variously, that

1. “most fundamentally, reality is equivalent to mind, spirit, or consciousness, or that;
2. reality is entirely a mental construct; or that
3. ideas are the highest type of reality or have the greatest claim to being considered ‘real’”.

But what can any of this possibly mean? And whose mind? Mine, or all of ours, or who else? And how might that work?

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[Idealism. Wikipedia
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idealism>]

=====

Idealism – HOW does it work?

... the only reality that's "really real" is consciousness – everything else, from physical laws to physical brains, is the generative product of

an all-pervading and all-encompassing

"cosmic consciousness." Robert Kuhn (2024)

or

"Mega-Meta-Mind" (P Dixon 2025)

Kuhn, Robert Lawrence. "[A landscape of consciousness: Toward a taxonomy of explanations and implications](#)." Section 16, p121. *Science Direct*. August 2024

67

(67) Fortunately, Robert Kuhn, the presenter of "Closer to Truth", after repeating these thoughts, then tells us what he thinks Idealism really means. He tries to help make sense of the idea by identifying how the mental turns into the physical. It does so through the work of an all-pervading and all-encompassing "**cosmic consciousness**" [Kuhn 2024]. [11] This would seem to be the central concept of Idealism – that there is what I am thinking of, in my words, as a "Mega-Meta-Mind".

Could this idea of a 'cosmic consciousness' mean that something metaphysical but not religious; or perhaps a spiritual presence; or even a God, creates the reality that people then perceive?

=====

Footnote 11:

In full, Kuhn says: ... the only reality that's "really real" is consciousness - everything else, from physical laws to physical brains, is the generative product of an **all-pervading and all-encompassing "cosmic consciousness"** [Kuhn 2024].

Kuhn, Robert Lawrence. "A landscape of consciousness: Toward a taxonomy of explanations and implications." Section 16, p121. *Science Direct*. August 2024

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0079610723001128#sec21>

=====

Modern Idealism – two bookends

- Bishop Berkeley - enlightenment period idealist - “father of idealism”
- Various German, British, American idealist schools
 - continued strongly until the early 20th century
- Now a minority view, but still some prominent proponents:
 - Keith Ward defends it in a Closer to Truth interview.
 - Bernard Kastrup espouses “Analytic Idealism”
 - a non-religious Idealism – in which a Universal Consciousness containing a Mind-at-Large brings into existence both material objects and our consciousness.

Ward, Keith. Keith Ward – [Metaphysics vs Materialism? \(Part 1\)](#). Interviewed by Robert Kuhn on *Closer to Truth*. 11 Feb 2020. From 0:40 seconds onwards.
Giles, Amir. [Mind at Large vs Universal Consciousness](#). *Bernard Kastrup: With Reality in Mind*. 3 Feb 2025

68

(68) Bishop George Berkeley, named by Schopenhauer as the “father of Idealism”, was a powerful enlightenment proponent of what is now called “subjective idealism”. He argued that what we perceive as material objects are actually collections of ideas or sensations in our minds. And it is God that maintains the ideas of things, even when humans are not directly perceiving them, for example when a tree falls unobserved in a forest. [See Endnote 9].

Berkeley’s very literal views fell out of favour even in his lifetime, but various subsequent traditions of German, and then British and American idealist schools continued strongly until the early 20th century.

A number of proponents of idealism remain, mainly as part of a religious philosophy [Ward, 2022], and especially within eastern religions. And various new, non-religious versions of Idealism have emerged recently in response to recent advances in neuroscience.

One example is that of Bernard Kastrup, a current prominent proponent and populariser of non-religious Idealism, whose Analytic Idealism posits the existence of a Universal Consciousness. And within that Universal Consciousness, there is a “Mind-At-Large” which brings material objects into existence. [Giles. 2025]

Overall, however, Idealism now remains a minority view (or even less), and like Panpsychism, non-religious Idealism also feels to be a niche, speculative idea with little to draw one in.

So, given my lack of real understanding of the subject (even after very considerable effort) I will leave it there.

=====

[Giles, Amir. Mind at Large vs Universal Consciousness. Bernard Kastrup: With Reality in Mind website. 3 Feb 2025.

<https://www.withrealityinmind.com/tues-11th-feb-mind-at-large/>]

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Dualism

69

(69) The final core metaphysical idea in this trio describing the nature of reality is Dualism.

Dualism (a.k.a. Mind-Body Dualism)

Substance Dualism (the usual meaning of “dualism”)

- the **mind and body are entirely separate substances**.

There is a mind-body (or soul-body) distinction.

Property Dualism:

- the world is composed of one kind of substance (physical)
- BUT there are **two distinct types of properties**:

physical properties (like brain states) and **mental properties** (like consciousness).

Robinson, Howard, "[Dualism](#)" - Introduction. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.) 11 Sep 2020
Calef, Scott. [Dualism and Mind](#). *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (IEP)*. Read Sep 2025.

Kuhn, Robert Lawrence. "[A landscape of consciousness: Toward a taxonomy of explanations and implications](#)." Section 15, p110. *Science Direct*. August 2024

70

(70) Dualism stands in contrast to both **materialism** and **idealism**. Where materialism says everything is physical, and idealism says everything is mental, **dualism says that reality consists of both**.

Dualists assert that the mind is not the same thing as the brain. The brain is physical. But mental states (like pain, belief, desire) are not reducible to physical states; and consciousness and subjective experience are fundamentally different from material objects [Robinson 2023].

Descartes was the most famous enlightenment proponent of the concept, claiming that the mind and the brain are entirely separate substances – a position known as “substance dualism”. On the other hand, “property dualism” holds that only physical substances exists, but they have both physical and non-physical properties. [Calef, in IEP.] [12]

Dualism is a core concept underpinning most religions. The soul and the body are separate things. Many current dualists subscribe to a religious philosophy. We will discuss this later. But a small number of current modern metaphysicians who do not hold religious views also still appeal to the existence of a non-physical realm alongside the physical world that we can see. [Kuhn. 2024]

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Footnote 12: In general usage, “dualism” means Substance Dualism as opposed to Property Dualism [Kuhn 2024].

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[Robinson, Howard, "Dualism" - Introduction, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.) 11 Sep 2023.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/dualism/>

"In the philosophy of mind, dualism is the theory that the mental and the physical – or mind and body or mind and brain – are, in some sense, radically different kinds of things.... Discussion about dualism, therefore, tends to start from the assumption of the reality of the physical world, and then to consider arguments for why the mind cannot be treated as simply part of that world."]

[Calef, Scott. Dualism and Mind. Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. Read Sep 2025.

[https://iep.utm.edu/dualism-and-mind/#H3\]](https://iep.utm.edu/dualism-and-mind/#H3)

[Kuhn, Robert Lawrence. "A landscape of consciousness: Toward a taxonomy of explanations and implications." Section 15, p110. Science Direct. August 2024

[https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0079610723001128#sec21\]](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0079610723001128#sec21)

=====

Arguments for and against Dualism (simplified!)

Pro:

- Physicalism cannot explain consciousness

Cons:

Materialists ask:

- How can a non-physical mind interact with a material brain?
- How should we account for the correlation between mind and brain?

Idealists ask:

- Why do you need separate mind and brain? Idealism does not.

Calef, Scott. [Dualism and Mind](#). Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (IEP). Read Sep 2025

71

(71) The arguments for Dualism are very similar to those of Idealism – that science cannot explain consciousness!

Dualism, however, faces many significant criticisms, especially from materialist philosophers and scientists.

As a small selection, the Materialists ask how a non-physical mind can interact with a physical brain? [Calef, in IEP.] And how can one ignore the evidence of the strong correlations between mental events and neural events. [Calef, in IEP.] The Idealists perhaps ask why a separate mind and brain are needed when Idealism does not require it.

In conclusion, unlike Panpsychism and Idealism, Dualism does present a simple, compelling philosophical idea. But, like Panpsychism and Idealism, it lacks an evidential base. It requires a step away from evidence into intuition for it to be appealing.

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[Calef, Scott. Dualism and Mind. Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. Read Sep 2025.
<https://iep.utm.edu/dualism-and-mind/#H3>]

=====

Metaphysics – the “height of the bar”

Metaphysical arguments work through **faith – not physics**.

A high bar for Materialism:

- Consciousness cannot **YET** be explained by science and logic;
- So – we must assume Materialism is proven wrong;
- (Surely it is just not proven right.)

A low bar for Metaphysics:

- Metaphysics works through faith, assertion and Occam's Razor;
- Without needing to invoke evidence or logic.

72

(72) One final question is worth asking and discussing, of all three of these metaphysical ideas. They are metaphysical in the sense that there is no evidence for them (though many panpsychists hope this might change). They work through faith and assumption, but not evidence.

So, it does feel somewhat incongruous that, on the one hand, those advocating for these ideas dismiss materialism on a narrow and highly objective basis of logic, which is that we cannot explain consciousness now through science, so we must assume that materialism is wrong, rather than not proven right. Then on the other hand they go on to invoke metaphysical alternatives on grounds of faith or assertion only, without needing to invoke logic or evidence at all?

=====

Discussion 4 **(5 minutes)**

What do you think about Panpsychism,
Idealism and Dualism?

73

(73) So, having crossed the boundary from physics into metaphysics, can I ask for some very brief reaction - in 5 minutes – to this trio of metaphysical ideas - Panpsychism, Idealism and Dualism..

=====

Part 3 For the CONVINCED

74

(74) And so we move to a third group in the audience today - the Convinced - those who are convinced by the articles of their faith, and who will draw real strength from their core spiritual or religious beliefs which for them transcend Materialism.

“... the question of being” ME

*To realise the absurd,
inexplicable fact of existence,
.... is precisely **to be without an answer to**
the question of being,
to feel that some key fact is absent.*

*Life becomes for many a quest to either
satiate or assuage that existential appetite.*

(Whiteley 2025)

[Existential Vertigo is Revelation](#) Matt Whiteley. Substack.

75

(75) For them Whiteley asks again – what does it mean to be ME?

If Materialism itself is not convincing; and if the metaphysical ideas we have just discussed are too esoteric to resonate; then how can we address the “absurd, inexplicable fact of our existence”? Are we still to be “without an answer to **the questions of being**, to feel that some key fact is absent.”?

To Whiteley, “Life becomes for many a quest to either satiate or assuage that existential appetite.”

=====

[Whiteley, Matthew. Existential Vertigo is Revelation. *Substack*. 05 April 2025.
<https://substack.com/@thisisleisfullofnoises/p-160621658>]

=====

“... a quest for remembering ... what we have forgotten”

*Strangely our
quest for understanding
is something like
a quest for remembering,
for the acquisition of
something we have ‘forgotten’”.*

(Whiteley 2025)

[Existential Vertigo is Revelation](#) Matt Whiteley. Substack

76

(76) So where, instead of Metaphysics, or instead of Enchantment and Humanism combined with Materialism, does Whiteley want to take us?

To the place inhabited by billions of people for tens of thousands of years.

Whiteley point us to the seemingly obvious; to the human response since before remembered time, to something that we amongst many in the modern world may choose to forget. He points to us “to a quest for remembering” what we have “forgotten”.

=====

[Whiteley, Matthew. Existential Vertigo is Revelation. *Substack*. 05 April 2025.
<https://substack.com/@thisisleisfullofnoises/p-160621658>]

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The Mysteries of faith

77

(77) This year at Easter, as a lapsed Anglican, I attended church with my family, as I do two or three times a year.

Unusually this year, the Easter sermon focussed on the “mysteries” of Easter, and the struggles of Christian believers in that mystery, rather than on the traditional message addressing the “good news” of the story of Easter.

=====

The Mysteries of Faith

“A religion without mystery is just a philosophy”

(Unknown)

Source: Unknown

78

(78) And the priest used the phrase “a religion without mystery is just a philosophy”. I don’t know whether I have heard this before, but it seems to fit both Non-theist and Theist religions.

Embracing the mysteries of faith are core to religion – and is perhaps what elevates it above the “Material”. It is perhaps the religious equivalent of Enchantment. Unlike the New Mysterians who flag the “mysteries of nature”, religions flag the “mysteries of the supernatural”.

And so – to answer the question - Whiteley points us to spirituality, to religion – and back to Weber’s love of mystery: Weber, remember, who shuns mystery for progress, and yet laments the loss he then feels.

=====

Non-theist Religions

Deep Beliefs Without Gods

79

Amanda Penn. [Non-Theistic Religion: Deep Beliefs Without Gods](#). Nov 2019. Shortform website (mostly behind paywall). Viewed Oct 2025.

(79) Consider first the Non-theist religions.

These religious or spiritual systems usually do not centre on a personal deity - some of them reject the idea of God entirely.

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Source: ChatGPT. "Tell me about Non-theist religious views." May 2025.

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[Penn, Amanda. Non-Theistic Religion: Deep Beliefs Without Gods. Nov 2019. Shortform website (mostly behind Paywall). Viewed Oct 2025.

<https://www.shortform.com/blog/non-theistic-religion/>]

Non-theist religions

- Do not centre on a personal deity:
They may reject the idea of God entirely
- Interpret “divine” as **symbolic, impersonal, or experiential**
- Emphasize **ethics, mindfulness, cosmology, or transcendence**
- They answer existential questions (like "Why are we here?" and "What matters?") without appealing to a creator God.

ChatGPT. “Tell me about Non-theist religious views.” May 2025.

80

(80) Instead, they emphasise the spiritual, the mystical.

In general they interpret “divine” as symbolic, impersonal, or experiential.

They emphasize **ethics, mindfulness, cosmology, or transcendence** rather than divine intervention; and

They answer existential questions (like "Why are we here?" and "What matters?") **without appealing to a creator God.**

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Source: ChatGPT. “Tell me about Non-theist religious views.” May 2025.

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Examples of some of the Non-Theist Religious Traditions

- 1. Buddhism (most schools):** No creator God; the universe is eternal and cyclical. Focuses on **personal experience, meditation, ethical living, impermanence.**
- 2. Jainism:** No God; the universe is **eternal, self-regulating.** Belief in individual souls, but not a creator or intervening deity.
- 3. Certain Schools of Hinduism e.g. Samkhya and early Mimamsa schools:** The universe functions through eternal laws (Dharma and Karma), not divine will.
- 4. Daoism (especially classical / philosophical):** The **Dao** is not a god, but the **impersonal, natural order of reality.** Harmony comes from **living according to nature** and the Dao. Spiritual depth through balance, not worship.
- 5. Certain Humanist Spiritualities or Naturalistic Religions:** e.g., Embrace ritual, community, and meaning **without supernatural claims.** The sacred is found in **nature, the cosmos, or human dignity.**

81

ChatGPT. "Tell me about Non-theist religious views." May 2025

(81) Here are some examples of the most prominent Non-theist religious traditions. I will leave you to read this list and the attributes of these religions later.

=====

Examples of Non-theist Religious Traditions

- 1. Buddhism (most schools):** No creator God; the universe is eternal and cyclical. Focuses on **personal experience, meditation, ethical living, impermanence.**
- 2. Jainism:** No God; the universe is **eternal, self-regulating.** Belief in individual souls, but not a creator or intervening deity.
- 3. Certain Schools of Hinduism e.g. Samkhya and early Mimamsa schools:** The universe functions through eternal laws (Dharma and Karma), not divine will.
- 4. Daoism (especially classical / philosophical):** The **Dao** is not a god, but the **impersonal, natural order of reality.** Harmony comes from **living according to nature** and the Dao. Spiritual depth through balance, not worship.
- 5. Certain Humanist Spiritualities or Naturalistic Religions:** e.g., Embrace ritual, community, and meaning **without supernatural claims.** The sacred is found in **nature, the cosmos, or human dignity.**

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Source: ChatGPT. "Tell me about Non-theist religious views." May 2025.

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Core Features of some Non-theist Religions (simplified)

<u>Feature</u>	<u>Description</u>
No personal deity	Do not rely on a creator or sustaining God
Transcendence through practice	Achieve peace, insight, or liberation via personal effort
Cyclic or impersonal cosmos	Reality is often self-originating or governed by natural laws
Emphasis on ethics and awareness	Moral action and self-knowledge are central
Symbolic use of myth	Myths are often read metaphorically, not literally

ChatGPT. "Tell me about Non-theist religious views." May 2025

82

(82) But here is a simple list of some of the core features of some Non-theist religions. This is an oversimplified list, and there are many other ways in which Non-theist religions work.

They all find Materialism wanting, and push against and generally across its boundaries.

They all emphasise the spiritual, and many also embrace the "natural" as an holistic "force".

They all provide some form of religious or spiritual answer to the seeming problems of Materialism; especially regarding both the afterlife, and also morality.

And in general, they rest on some of the ideas which have since been embedded into modern Idealism and Dualism.

=====

<u>Feature</u>	<u>Description</u>
No personal deity	Do not rely on a creator or sustaining God
Transcendence through practice	Achieve peace, insight, or liberation via personal effort
Cyclic or impersonal cosmos	Reality is often self-originating or governed by natural laws
Emphasis on ethics and awareness	Moral action and self-knowledge are central
Symbolic use of myth	Myths are often read metaphorically, not literally

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Source: ChatGPT. "Tell me about Non-theist religious views." May 2025.

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Theist Religions (especially the Abrahamic Religions)

“Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy”

83

[Existential Vertigo is Revelation](#) Matt Whiteley. Substack

(83) And finally, in contrast, we approach the Theist religions – especially those of the Abrahamic tradition.

And, from an almost incomprehensibly broad sweep, Whiteley chooses **Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy** as a single signpost for all three of the Abrahamic religions, the major Theistic religions of our time.

Whiteley says: “Written in 523–24 AD, the Consolation bridges the classical world of late antiquity to the medieval world that would follow, its influence being considerable for the next millennium. The Consolation would be translated by Alfred the Great in the courts of Anglo-Saxon Wessex, by Chaucer into Middle English prose and would influence literary works that are still widely read today, not the least Dante’s Divine Comedy.”

=====

[Whiteley, Matthew. Existential Vertigo is Revelation. *Substack*. 05 April 2025.
<https://substack.com/@thisisleisfullofnoises/p-160621658>]

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Lady Philosophy's admonition:

“...when storms of life
Inflate the weight of earthly care,
The mind forgets its inward light
And turns in trust to the dark without.”

(Whiteley 2025)

[Existential Vertigo is Revelation](#) Matt Whiteley. Substack

84

(84) Whiteley continues: This “short book contains a dialogue between Boethius, who is in prison awaiting torture and execution, and a woman who appears to him as a representation of philosophy. Boethius is tearfully bemoaning his state when Lady Philosophy appears, and offers not comfort but admonition. Boethius’ state of fortune has caused him to forget what he has learned:

“...when storms of life
Inflate the weight of earthly care,
The mind forgets its inward light
And turns in trust to the dark without.”

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[Whiteley, Matthew. Existential Vertigo is Revelation. Substack. 05 April 2025.
<https://substack.com/@thisisleisfullofnoises/p-160621658>]

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Lady Philosopher – Life's Purpose

Life's purpose is

- not in the acquisition of contingent fortune but
- ***the use of moral reason to realise that***
 - ***all desire is desire for the good,***
 - ***possessed only by the soul's ascent towards God.***

85

[Existential Vertigo is Revelation](#) Matt Whiteley. Substack

(85) Lady Philosophy argues that “...life's purpose is not in the acquisition of contingent fortune but **the use of moral reason** to realise that all desire is **desire for the good**, possessed only by **the soul's ascent towards God.**”

=====

[Whiteley, Matthew. Existential Vertigo is Revelation. Substack. 05 April 2025.
<https://substack.com/@thisisleisfullofnoises/p-160621658>]

=====

Lady Philosopher's "Resounding Conclusion"

Avoid vice, therefore, and *cultivate virtue*;
lift up your mind to the right kind of hope, and
put forth humble prayers on high.

A great necessity is laid upon you, if you will be honest with
yourself,

a great necessity to be good,
since you live in the sight of a judge who sees all things.

(Whiteley 2025)

86

[Existential Vertigo is Revelation](#) Matt Whiteley. Substack

(86) And in a call perhaps to the Virtue Ethics of the classical world, she concludes:

- **"Cultivate virtue..."**
- **A great necessity is laid upon you**, if you will be honest with yourself, ... **to be good**;
- ... **since you live in the sight of a judge who sees all things."**

And there it is – a full refutation of the Materialist view, an embrace of the **dualism** of the mortal material world on the one hand, the immortal Soul on the other. And a God – who sees all, and judges all – against the objective moral standard of "good".

Nothing of my "Materialism Package" remains – Materialism, Nominalism, Monism and Moral Relativism are all rejected.

As in the millennia before Boethius, and the centuries since, much of humanity has either chosen or been persuaded, in one way or another, to shun Materialism and embrace this Dualism; and, also, to embrace Objective Morality. And much of humanity continues to do so to this day.

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[Whiteley, Matthew. Existential Vertigo is Revelation. Substack. 05 April 2025.
<https://substack.com/@thisisleisfullofnoises/p-160621658>]

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Discussion 5 (10 minutes)

What are your thoughts about
this section on
Non-theist and Theist Religions?

87

(87) What are your thoughts about this section on Non-theist and Theist religions, and their relationship with Materialism.

=====

CONCLUSION

So – where are we?

88

(88) So, where have we got to?

=====

So – where are we?

For the Materialists, Richard Dawkins says:

- Materialism remains irresistible.
- We can live fulfilling lives, even in that knowledge and the knowledge of its consequences

89

(89) Well...,

For the Materialists, Richard Dawkins says:

- Materialism remains irresistible.
- And we absolutely can live fulfilling lives, even in that knowledge, and the knowledge of its consequences

So – where are we?

For the Disenchanted: :

- Ted Hodgson says Enchantment can be ours if we seek it
 - “We need to keep a mystical sense of wonder, of enchantment, in our lives even as scientism and skepticism sometimes seem to threaten its obliteration.”
- And Humanists point to the moral code we can choose to live by.
 - “Ethical decisions based on reason, empathy, concern for humans and sentient animals.”

Hodgson, Ted. [Enchantment as a form of philosophical engagement](#). *Gerrards Cross Philosophy Group*. 26 March 2025
Humanists UK website. Viewed Sep 2025

90

(90) For the Disenchanted:

Ted Hodgson says Enchantment can be ours if we seek it

- “We need to keep a mystical sense of wonder, of enchantment, in our lives even as scientism and scepticism sometimes seem to threaten its obliteration.”
- Simultaneously, the Humanists point to the moral code we can choose to live by.

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[Hodgson, Ted. Enchantment as a form of philosophical engagement. *Gerrards Cross Philosophy Group*. 26 March 2025.

<https://www.gxpg.co.uk/events/enchantment-as-a-form-of-philosophical-engagement/>]

[Humanists UK website. Viewed Sep 2025.

<https://humanists.uk/humanism/>

=====

So – where are we?

For the Metaphysicians, the “New Mysterians” point either

- to the ingredients of sub-atomic consciousness,
- or to the “Mega-Meta-Mind”.

91

(91) For the Metaphysicians, the “New Mysterians” point either

- to the ingredients of sub-atomic consciousness,
- or to the “Mega-Meta-Mind”.

=====

So – where are we?

And, for the Convinced: Matt Whiteley says:

- “...in the age of modernity it is up to us as individuals to remind ourselves of everything we have forgotten.”

92

(92) And for the Convinced: Matt Whiteley says:

- “...in the age of modernity it is up to us as individuals to remind ourselves of everything we have forgotten.”

=====

Discussion 6 (10 minutes)

Is Materialism Resistible?
And what does this mean for ME (Myself)?

(and should we perhaps listen
to Weber? or to Dawkins?
or to Boethius?)

93

(93) So, before we end, what are your thoughts about this whole talk in general and Materialism in particular?

=====

EPILOGUE

“Faith is faith – either way”

94

(94) What an extraordinary journey, since I shared that train with Adrian! To travel is to learn, and I have travelled far, through seventeen “isms”, barely stopping, but, where I could, drinking deep. My thirst remains, and I feel I have much further to travel still.

And I have learned this - certainties do not exist. Whiteley’s most profound phrase comes at the end, when he says: **“faith is faith – either way”**. And faith runs through every one of the “isms” that we have discussed today.

Above all **I need to learn to understand where others have, or are seeking to, put their faith;**

and **how to live well with their choices, as well as my own.**

Thank you for listening, and also for taking part.

=====

List of “isms” I have learned about:

Materialism (including Physicalism, Nominalism)

Idealism, Realism, Nominalism

Monism, Dualism

Panpsychism

Empiricism, Rationalism

Humanism, (Dis) Enchantment

Non-Theism, Theism

Moral Objectivism, Moral Relativism, Nihilism

Scientific Mysterianism (McGinn) =====

Endnotes

Endnote 1

Where does Mathematics lie on the “Map of Reality”?

Cowling, Sam and Daniel Giberman, "Nominalism in Metaphysics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2025 Edition), E.N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (eds.)
Frege, Gottlob, 1984, *Foundations of Arithmetic*, Oxford: Blackwell. Transl. by J.L. Austin, 1953
Benacerraf, Paul, 1973, "Mathematical Truth", *Journal of Philosophy*, 70(19): 661–679.
Linnebo, Øystein, "Platonism in the Philosophy of Mathematics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2024 Edition), E.N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (eds.)
Balaguer, Mark. 1998. (revised by Hosch, WL 2007) *Mathematical Platonism: for and against*. Britannica.
Szabó, L.E. *Physicalism Without the Idols of Mathematics*. Found Sci 30, 89–108 (2025)

96

Endnote 1 (from slide 17):

Where Mathematics lies on the “Map of Reality” in slide 17 is a fundamental and non-trivial question. Mathematics comprises the “Abstract Entities” that Mathematical Platonists see fitting into the Metaphysical Realism box. [Cowling et al 2025]. These entities are not found in space and time, are not mental, and are not physical. Physicalists are charged with explaining how, if they exist, these fit with their description of Physicalism.

Britannica says: “Philosophers have come up with numerous arguments for and against Mathematical Platonism.... The pro-Platonist argument was first clearly formulated by Frege (1884, transl 1953),... and the locus classicus of the anti-Platonist argument is a 1973 paper by the American philosopher Paul Benacerraf [Benacerraf 1973]” [Britannica 2007]; subsequently improved by Field. [Linnebo 2023].

And Balaguer gives a detailed description of the Epistemological Argument against Platonism [Balaguer 2025].

However, all this misses a key point. Are the laws of mathematics “part of Physicalism”? The best reference to this found so far is by Szabo Laszlo, in which he says: “The only situation in which [logic and mathematics] can become meaning-carriers is when they are involved in a physical theory. But, in this role they represent a physical concept.” [Szabó 2023]. This presents a possible argument that logic and mathematics do indeed form a logical “part of” Physicalism. And in his section on “Numbers and Abstracta” Soltjar cites a number of other attempts to deal with this issue [Soltjar 2021].

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[Cowling, Sam and Daniel Giberman, "Nominalism in Metaphysics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2025/entries/nominalism-metaphysics/>
Excellent separate descriptions of the arguments for rejecting Universals, and for rejecting Abstract Concepts.]

[Frege, Gottlob, 1984, *Foundations of Arithmetic*, Oxford: Blackwell. Transl. by J.L. Austin, 1953.]

[Benacerraf, Paul, 1973, "Mathematical Truth", *Journal of Philosophy*, 70(19): 661–679.

[/http://thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Course_Websites/Math_S08/Readings/Benacerraf.pdf](http://thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Course_Websites/Math_S08/Readings/Benacerraf.pdf)]

[Linnebo, Øystein, "Platonism in the Philosophy of Mathematics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/platonism-mathematics/>
Describes Frege's and Field's arguments for and against Mathematical Platonism.]

[Balaguer, Mark. 1998. (revised by Hosch, WL 2007) Mathematical Platonism: for and against. *Britannica*.

<https://www.britannica.com/science/philosophy-of-mathematics/Logicism-intuitionism-and-formalism#ref259819>

Describes the arguments of Frege and Benacerraf.]

[Szabó, L.E. Physicalism Without the Idols of Mathematics. *Found Sci* 30, 89–108 (2025).

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10699-023-09920-1>

"[logic and mathematics] can become meaning-carriers is when they are involved in a physical theory. But, in this role they represent a physical concept".

This is a possible argument that the laws of logic and mathematics form a logical "part of" Physicalism.]

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Endnote 2

Kant's synthesis of Rationalism versus Empiricism

97

McCormick, Matt. [Immanuel Kant: Metaphysics](#). Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (IEP). Visited Sep 2025

Endnote 2 (from slide 19):

Rationalism versus Empiricism is not considered here, because in this analysis it does not make a difference. Some time ago Kant aimed to resolve the Enlightenment period debate between these two schools of thought by synthesising them together. The IEP's full quote reads:

"A large part of Kant's work [*The Critique of Pure Reason*] addresses the question 'What can we know?' The answer, if it can be stated simply, is that our knowledge is constrained to mathematics and the science of the natural, empirical world. It is impossible, Kant argues, to extend knowledge to the super-sensible realm of speculative metaphysics. The reason that knowledge has these constraints, Kant argues, is that the mind plays an active role in constituting the features of experience and limiting the mind's access only to the empirical realm of space and time.

Kant responded to his predecessors by **arguing against the Empiricists that the mind is not a blank slate that is written upon by the empirical world**, and by **rejecting the Rationalists' notion that pure, a priori knowledge of a mind-independent world was possible**. Reason itself is structured with forms of experience and categories that give a phenomenal and logical structure to any possible object of empirical experience. These categories cannot be circumvented to get at a mind-independent world, but they are necessary for experience of spatio-temporal objects with their causal behaviour and logical properties. These two theses constitute Kant's famous transcendental idealism and empirical realism." [McCormick. In IEP]

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[McCormick, Matt. Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (IEP). Visited Sep 2025.
<https://iep.utm.edu/kantmeta/#H2>] =====

Endnote 3

Morality – Nihilism, and Evolution

Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter, "[Moral Skepticism](#)", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)
FitzPatrick, William, "[Morality and Evolutionary Biology](#)", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)

98

Endnote 3 (from slide 25):

Materialism is also consistent with the more extreme view of **Moral Nihilism** - the view that there is nothing that has intrinsic morality, [i.e. “there does not exist anything that is morally wrong”]. [Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. 2004]. And it is consistent with the idea that **feelings of morality** are **biological human traits** developed through evolution, [i.e. a “part of evolved human nature to employ moral judgment in governing human behaviour”]. [FitzPatrick, William. 2025].

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Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter, "Moral Skepticism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2024/entries/skepticism-moral/>

FitzPatrick, William, "Morality and Evolutionary Biology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2025/entries/morality-biology/>

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Endnote 4

What is the “Self”?

Shen, Stephanie. [The Self and Consciousness](#). Medium. 25 August 2025.

99

Endnote 4 (from slide 33).

Stephanie Shen has written an interesting article speculating on “...Why ‘I Think, Therefore I Am’ Might Be Backwards”. She writes:

“The concept of the self has been broadly recognized as essential to consciousness. But what exactly is the relationship between them? **Is the self simply the content of consciousness or, more essentially, the seat that grounds consciousness?**

I think it is both.

..... When Descartes declared, ‘*I think, therefore I am*’, he clearly acknowledged the self’s existence. But he would have been correct if the order were reversed: *I am, therefore I think.*” [Shen 2025]

=====

[Shen, Stephanie. The Self and Consciousness. Medium. 25 August 2025.

<https://medium.com/illumination/the-self-and-consciousness-6f6494973145>

An interesting Materialist description of the relationship between Consciousness and Self.

“*I am, therefore I think.*”]

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Endnote 5

The explanatory gap

100

Flanagan, Owen, 1992. *Consciousness Reconsidered*. MIT Press. (1993. Bradford Books.)

Endnote 6 (from slide 42):

Kuhn says: "Owen Flanagan addressed "the gap between the first-person way in which conscious mental life reveals itself and the way it is, or can be described, from an objective point of view" by asserting bluntly, "mind and brain are one and the same thing seen from two different perspectives. The gap between the subjective and the objective is an epistemic gap, not an ontological gap." Indeed, he claims, "it is precisely the fact that individuals possess organismic integrity that explains why subjectivity accrues first-personally" (Flanagan, 1992). " [Kuhn 2024 p44.]

=====

[Flanagan, Owen, 1992. *Consciousness Reconsidered*. MIT Press. (1993. Bradford Books.)
<https://direct.mit.edu/books/monograph/4714/Consciousness-Reconsidered>]

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Endnote 6

Disenchantment

Weber, Max. [Science as vocation](#). (1917) From H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Translated and edited)
From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, pp. 129-156, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946

101

Endnote 6 (from slide 48):

The full quote from Weber is:

“Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. **This means that the world is disenchanted.** One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This above all is what intellectualization means” [Weber 2017].

=====

[Weber, Max. Science as vocation. (1917).

From H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Translated and edited), From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, pp. 129-156, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946.

<https://sociology.sas.upenn.edu/sites/default/files/Weber-Science-as-a-Vocation.pdf>

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Endnote 7

Disenchantment
Weinberg – “we can at least make
a point for ourselves”

102

Kuhn, Robert Lawrence. “[A landscape of consciousness: Toward a taxonomy of explanations and implications](#).” Section 22, p149. Science Direct. August 2024
Closer to Truth – [“Arguments Against God”](#). Discussion between Steven Weinberg and Robert Lawrence Kuhn. At 20:30 minutes

Endnote 7 (from slide 51).

In a similar vein, the Nobel Laureate and physicist Steven Weinberg said:

“ ‘The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless’ (Weinberg 1997).” But he subsequently said: “ ‘ ... **[even] if we don't find a point in nature, we can at least make a point for ourselves.** We can love each other and find beauty in things. And one of the things that gives point to some of our lives is the process of discovering nature, discovering the laws of nature. But whatever point there is, it is one that we have to give to ourselves.’ ” (Weinberg. 2006).

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[Kuhn, Robert Lawrence. “A landscape of consciousness: Toward a taxonomy of explanations and implications.” Section 22, p149. Science Direct. August 2024

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0079610723001128#sec21>

This quote comes from an interview:

Closer to Truth – “Arguments Against God”. Discussion between Steven Weinberg and Robert Lawrence Kuhn. At 20:30 minutes.

<https://closertotruth.com/video/arguments-against-god/>

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Endnote 8

Ontological versus Epistemological Idealism

103

TheRealAmeil (@r/consciousness). "[How Should We Understand Metaphysical Idealism?](#)". Reddit

Endnote 8 (from slide 65).

When the term Idealism is used unqualified it usually refers to that which philosophers call Ontological Idealism. Ontology addresses the question of “what is real?” – of reality itself. Here, reference to Idealism means to Ontological Idealism; and not Epistemological Idealism, as discussed for example by Kant. Epistemological Idealism on the other hand, including Kant’s Transcendental Idealism and also some others, addresses the question of how we might get to learn about and understand reality, and in particular the view that we cannot understand reality itself – we can only see it through the lens of our own perception and experience. That is not the focus here.

Kuhn puts it this way:

“The focus here is ontological idealism, where ultimate reality is mind or awareness or thought, while everything else, including all physical worlds and universes and all that they contain, are derivative or illusionary. (I do not consider epistemological idealism, where all we can know is constrained by the structure of human thought.)” [Kuhn 2024 p121].

This article on Reddit (not usually to be taken as a definitive source) paints an excellent and vivid picture of some of the myriad complexity and “instances” of idealism.

[TheRealAmeil (@r/consciousness). “How Should We Understand Metaphysical Idealism?”. *Reddit*.

https://www.reddit.com/r/consciousness/comments/1dncw3f/how_should_we_understand_metaphysical_idealism/ =====

Endnote 9

Chalmer's "Realist Idealism"

104

David Chalmers. [Idealism and the mind-body problem](#). William Seager (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism*, Routledge (2020)

Endnote 9 (from slide 68):

[Kuhn 2024] (section 16) notes that Chalmers says that:

"Idealists are not necessarily committed to anti-realist views about the physical world, though some are, especially among Eastern traditions. It is perfectly coherent for an idealist to regard the physical world as "real" in the sense that it exists when no one is looking; "[The physical world really exists out there, independently of our observations;] it just has a surprising nature", having been formed from mental fundamentals [Chalmers 2020]."

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[David Chalmers. Idealism and the mind-body problem. William Seager (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism*, Routledge (2020)

<https://www.panpsychism.com/handbook-panpsychism.pdf>

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Appendix 1

Chat GPT Dialogue: Reasons that Materialism makes sense

105

Appendix 1. Reasons that Materialism makes sense: Dialogue with Chat GPT.

ChatGPT: Materialism in Philosophy – P Dixon dialogue in June 2025:

PD Question:

I would like to understand the reasons that people have for accepting materialism as the correct interpretation of the world.

ChatGPT said:

Great question. The reasons people accept **materialism** as the correct interpretation of the world span science, metaphysics, epistemology, and even practical considerations. Below is a detailed breakdown of the main **arguments in favor of materialism**:

1. Empirical Success of Science

Argument:

Modern science operates on materialist assumptions and has been extraordinarily successful in explaining and predicting phenomena.

Details:

Physics, chemistry, biology, and neuroscience all describe the world in terms of physical entities, laws, and interactions.

Scientific explanations of phenomena (e.g., disease, heredity, perception, consciousness) have progressively replaced spiritual or non-material accounts.

No verified scientific theory requires non-material entities to explain the world.

Conclusion:

Materialism is the best fit with the most successful and predictive system we have: science.

2. Explanatory Power and Simplicity (Occam's Razor)

Argument:

Materialism offers a simpler, more parsimonious ontology than dualism or idealism.

Details:

Occam's Razor favors theories that do not multiply entities beyond necessity.

Materialism posits just one kind of substance: the physical.

Dualism requires explaining not only how two substances exist, but how they interact—something materialism avoids.

Conclusion:

Materialism wins by offering a leaner, more unified view of reality.

3. Dependence of Mental States on Physical States

Argument:

There is overwhelming evidence that mental processes are dependent on brain states.

Details:

Brain damage affects memory, personality, decision-making, and consciousness.

Drugs and electrical stimulation alter mood, perception, and cognition.

Neuroimaging shows correlations between mental events and neural activity.

Conclusion:

If the mind is so closely tied to the brain, it's reasonable to infer that the mind is a physical phenomenon.

4. Continuity with Evolution

Argument:

Evolutionary theory supports materialism by showing that consciousness and cognition developed gradually from simpler physical organisms.

Details:

Humans evolved from non-conscious ancestors via physical processes.

If we are continuous with non-conscious animals, there's no need to posit a non-material "mind stuff" that appeared suddenly.

Consciousness can be seen as a high-level function of biological systems.

Conclusion:

A physicalist explanation of mind fits seamlessly with Darwinian evolution.

5. Causal Closure of the Physical

Argument:

If physical events are always caused by other physical events, there's no room for non-physical causes.

Details:

Physicalism holds that the physical world is **causally closed**—every physical event has a sufficient physical cause.

If mental events (assumed to be non-physical under dualism) caused physical events, it would violate this closure.

Hence, either mental events are physical, or they are epiphenomenal (causally inert).

Conclusion:

To preserve causal coherence, mental phenomena must be physical.

 **6. Predictive and Explanatory Integration****Argument:**

Materialism allows integration across disciplines—from physics to psychology.

Details:

Physics explains chemistry; chemistry explains biology; biology explains neurophysiology; neurophysiology explains psychology.

This unity supports a physicalist ontology.

Materialism encourages interdisciplinary cooperation and theoretical integration.

Conclusion:

Materialism provides a common explanatory foundation across all domains of knowledge.

 **7. Incoherence or Vagueness of Alternatives****Argument:**

Competing theories like dualism and idealism are either poorly defined or fail to explain observable data.

Details:

Dualism struggles to explain how the immaterial mind interacts with the body.

Idealism struggles to explain why the world behaves consistently and independently of individual minds.

Panpsychism and neutral monism remain speculative and lack empirical support.

Conclusion:

Materialism is more clearly articulated and better supported than its rivals.

 **8. Naturalism and the Rejection of the Supernatural****Argument:**

Materialism fits naturally with a secular, scientific worldview that rejects supernatural explanations.

Details:

As belief in gods, spirits, and souls has declined, materialism has grown more attractive.

Naturalism (the view that everything arises from natural properties and causes) presupposes a physicalist ontology.

Conclusion:

For naturalists and secular thinkers, materialism is the only plausible metaphysical foundation.

Would you like to explore the **counterarguments** to any of these points, such as critiques from dualists or proponents of qualia-based objections?

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