

**Materialism and Idealism.**

Materialism and idealism are usually regarded as absolute opposites. Materialism is represented as a miserable, comfortless, hopeless, sad and empty theory, only fit for hypochondriacs, misanthropes or pure materialists; whilst in opposition to this the so-called idealism professes to satisfy the higher intellectual and spiritual necessities of man and to raise him, by a higher conception of the world and of life, above the deficiencies and nothingness of this early life. In truth, however, this is so incorrect that the materialism of science may rather with perfect justice be described as the highest idealism of life. For the more we free ourselves from all delusive imaginations of a world above us and outside of us, or of a so-called future, the more do we find ourselves naturally directed with all our forces and endeavors to the present, or to the world in which we are living and feel the necessity of arranging this world and our life as beautifully and advantageously, as possible both for the individual and for the whole.

It is clear that thus a perfectly immeasurable field of exertion and action is opened up for the idealism or the idealistic striving of human nature,—a field, it is true, which no longer lies beyond the stars, but under our feet, and sets reality in place of imagination. There are consequently no more zealous pioneers of progress, no greater friends of freedom and no more spirited defenders of the general equality of mankind in rights and happiness than the Materialists and Freethinkers. Their faith (for even the materialists have a faith) is, that man is better than he seems, that he can do more than he thinks, and that he deserves to be happier than he is. Heaven and hell, those primeval bugbears of spiritual despotism, exist also for the materialist; but he seeks and finds them, not, as of old, outside of man, but within him, and shows that it depends solely upon man himself and his conduct whether he shall have a heaven or hell upon earth.

This striving for human perfection, or for earthly improvement and felicity has given rise to the further objection to materialism, that its sole object is sensual satisfaction and enjoyment, and that therefore, in the satisfaction of mere animal impulses it neglects the higher spiritual needs of man, the interests of his soul. This objection rests upon so absurd and evident a confusion of scientific or theoretical materialism, with practical materialism or the materialism of life, that it scarcely deserves serious refutation. The materialism of science and the materialism of life are things which differ toto

coelo, and which can be confounded with each other only by malevolence or incompetency. Whoever sacrifices his life to investigation, his personal interests to the truth, and the fact of his activity to the improvement of the lot of humanity has no leisure to run after sensual enjoyments, and is in reality a far greater idealist than those who find in their idealism a means of obtaining great offices, fat livings, rich salaries or brilliant distinctions. But even should materialism, when more widely diffused, among mankind, contribute, (except among its scientific supporters) to strengthen the striving after the enjoyments of this world, which indeed is already sufficiently strong, this could only be greeted with satisfaction in the interests of progress,—always supposing that the kind of enjoyment was such, in the sense of scientific-materialistic conception of the universe, as did not merely satisfy the gross and animal impulses, but at the same time acted ennoblingly upon the body and mind.

By this means we should again approach that cheerful and joyous conception of the Universe which was held by classical antiquity, from which we have been unfortunately carried far away by monkery and ecclesiastical greed of power; and those innumerable and immense aids to civilization, which we have and the ancients did not possess, would incalculably facilitate, increase and ennoble our enjoyments.

All this shows that materialism and idealism are not as so many suppose, born enemies, but that at the bottom they are only different expressions for one and the same thing. In theory, materialism far exceeds the old idealistic philosophy in ideal value, as much as it does not, like the latter, assume a multitude of observational facts as inexplicable, and therefore deduce them from supernatural or innate causes (e.g., the mind), but it goes to the bottom of things and seeks to embrace their most intimate and final connections. In practice it exceeds all other systems and conceptions of the universe by setting the ideal world within us in place of the ideal world without us, and endeavors to guide it towards realization. No other philosophy has ever stood like this in the closest connection with life itself; and the best touchstone of its value and correctness will be found in the influence which it has already exerted and will yet exert upon life and its forms. Just as its theory is simple, unitary, clear and definite, so also is its practical tendency and its whole programme with regard to the future of man and of the human race may be expressed in six words, which contain all that can be theoretically or practically required for this future, namely: Freedom Culture and Prosperity for all.—BUCHNER.

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