

## The philosophy of materialism

### PHILOSOPHY FOR THE FUTURE

Edited by Roy Wood Sellars, V. J. McGill  
and Marvin Farber

Macmillan, New York, 640 pp. \$7

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IT is unfortunate that the word "event" has been so much used to describe the publication of various books, for when the term really applies it has become too threadbare to have much meaning. However there is no other word to categorize the appearance of *Philosophy for the Future*. Its subtitle, *The Quest of Modern Materialism*, indicates the eventful character of this book.

Philosophical materialism has been under an intellectual cloud for so long now—roughly half a century—that its sudden re-emergence as a fully articulated system that makes no concessions to idealism, theism, deism, or any of their philosophical fellow-travellers, cannot fail to produce shock waves which will reach even the most isolated metaphysical ivory towers. The present volume is made particularly significant by the fact that its three editors are all top names in American philosophy, and the majority of its twenty-seven contributors are equally well known in their respective philosophical or scientific fields.

Naturally a volume of six hundred and forty small print pages, with thirty separate essays by almost as many contributors, cannot be of uniform quality throughout nor of uniform interest to any single reader. After three weeks of careful reading, however, this reviewer is impressed by the excellence of nearly all the essays; perhaps even more impressive is the integration of the book and the consistency of the general viewpoint set forth by the many different authors. In only one case (C. W. Churchman's "A Materialist Theory of Measurement") is there an impression that the article is here for a free ride on the coat tails of materialism.

For this is no loosely knit collection of random essays masquerading as a book, but rather a full expression of a single pervasive position as formulated by more than a score of separate thinkers. After a brief but challenging Foreword by the three editors, there are five articles on the history of materialism. Of these, perhaps the best is that by Christopher Hill on "Hobbes and English Political Thought," which is a fresh treatment of what would appear to be an exhausted subject. Next come two difficult but worthwhile essays on some epistemological aspects of materialism by Roy Wood Sellars and E. J. Nelson. Four essays on mathematics, astronomy, cosmology and quantum mechanics follow.



All seem excellent, although experts in these areas might find some points to criticize which escape a mere philosopher.

The biological and psychological section contains particularly good chapters on "Levels in the Psychological Capacities of Animals" (T. C. Schneirla) and "Psychoanalysis" (Judson Marmor). The social science chapters which follow are less even in quality and significance, but Leslie White's "Ethnological Theory" is extremely enlightening and thought-provoking, at least for a non-expert. The concluding essays are more strictly philosophical; here again the general level is high, with Abraham Edel's essay on the theory of ideas and John Reid's "Nature and Status of Values" particular favorites of mine.

In terms of general intellectual significance, the Foreword indicates the radical character of the book. Especially revolutionary (philosophically speaking) is the criticism of philosophical naturalism: "Unfortunately, the historical forms of naturalism have often been distinguished by their readiness to compromise, or cautiously to set limits to the use of scientific method."

In another passage the most popular form of naturalism in America today, that influenced by Dewey and his followers, is attacked as ". . . reluctant to commit itself to a positive theory of the world, (whereas) materialism endeavors to set forth a synoptic view of man and the universe implicit in the sciences at their present stage of development."

Nor will the editors of the present volume take refuge in the usual precaution of repudiating their historical antecedent as "crude" materialism. Acknowledging that all systems become more refined as they are filtered through the minds of successive thinkers, and acknowledging also that the concept of "matter" has undergone much change of late, these resurgent contemporary materialists still believe that their "crude" eighteenth and nineteenth century predecessors were far nearer to philosophical truth than either their historical opponents or the twentieth century anti-materialists.

For the present reviewer, long accustomed to having his own philosophical naturalism attacked as everything from "degrading" through "crude" to "atheistic," it is an unusual and refreshing experience to be told by the authors of *Philosophy for the Future* that his viewpoint is "cautious," "compromising" and "conservative." It is, in fact, a pleasant relief to fall back from the front-line trenches to a comparatively safe rest area while Sellars, McGill, Farber and their many collaborators carry on up front where the battle is hottest.

The future of philosophy is likely various forms of holism. Understanding human possibility in relation to a whole planet of ecosystems is a wonderful frontier for philosophy. It could ground beneficial societal change and help create unity where things should be whole, such as in education, thinking, and in the halls of power. Philosophy is also terrific at establishing and synthesizing values, which is also about whether something is whole and sound, integrated and viable. I hope that in the future philosophy applies its charge of being the love of wisdom to how people negotiate our union. The notion of "future contingent objects" involves important philosophical questions, for instance the issue of ethical obligations towards future generations, quantification over "future contingent objects" etc. However, this entry is confined to the study of future contingent statements. The problem of future contingents is interwoven with a number of issues in theology, philosophy, logic, semantics of natural language, computer science, and applied mathematics. The theological issue of how to reconcile the assumption of God's foreknowledge with the freedom and moral accountability of human. Look up quantum philosophy on Google and you won't get much except for a Wikipedia page that, besides the usual worn-thin donation plea, promotes a 2002 book written by Roland Omnès. The book itself is likely worth a read but, as far as Medium patronage goes, we need only feast on the silver linings. Philosophy, as a subject, seems immune to the winds of time. To assume that there will be no need for philosophy in our techno-driven future is just as ludicrous. And to not anticipate the convergence between our curiosity and the increasingly-complex ways by which we're coming to better understand reality well, that's just a missed opportunity to ask deeper questions. Want More? Join 2700+ fellow readers for ideas about philosophy, life, culture, and psychology. Read On: Time is..

Philosophy & the Paranormal. What is Materialism? Michael Philips on the shaky foundations of the most popular philosophical theory of modern times. Most academic philosophers these days will tell you, without hesitation, that they are materialists. Materialism asserts that everything is or can be explained in relation to matter. This would be straightforward enough if we had a clear and stable idea of matter. But do we? Unfortunately, we don't. There have been big changes since Descartes introduced his version of the mind/body problem in the 17th century. Descartes argued that the essence

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In philosophy, materialism is a monistic (everything is composed of the same substance) ontology that holds that all that can truly be said to exist is matter; that fundamentally, everything is material and all phenomena are the result of material interactions. As a monist ontology, materialism is different from ontological theories based on dualism (two kinds of substance), or pluralism (several kinds of substance). In terms of singular explanations of the phenomenal reality, materialism stands in

Materialism, in philosophy, the view that all facts are causally dependent upon physical processes, or even reducible to them. The word materialism has been used in modern times to refer to mechanical materialism, the theory that the world consists entirely of material objects. This article covers the various types of materialism and the ways by which they are distinguished and traces the history of materialism from the Greeks and Romans to modern forms of materialism.

Types of materialist theory. Mechanical materialism is the theory that the world consists entirely of hard, massy material objects, which, though perhaps imperceptibly small, are otherwise like such things as stones. (A slight modification is to allow the void "or empty space" to exist also in its own right.) Dialectical Materialism is the philosophical basis of Marxism and Communism. The term, which was never actually used by Marx himself, refers to the notion of a synthesis of Georg Hegel's theory of Dialectics (the concept that any idea or event - the thesis - generates its opposite - the antithesis - eventually leading to a reconciliation of opposites - a new, more advanced synthesis) and Materialism (in the respect that Dialectics could also be applied to material matters like economics).

Historical Materialism (or the "materialist conception of history") is the Marxist methodological approach to the study of society, economics and history which was first articulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1820 - 1895), and has been expanded and refined by many academic studies since.