

## WHY THE DESIRE FOR KNOWLEDGE IS FUNDAMENTAL

### Study Topics

#### principles of desiring knowledge

#### **2.0 The Drive To Know**

We seek something more in things that exceeds what is immediately given to us. This addition we seek splits our whole being into two parts; our objective outer perception and our subjective inner thought-world. We become conscious of contrasting with the world. The universe appears to us as two contrasting sides: *Self and World*.

#### **2.1 Materialism**

Materialism begins with the thought of Matter or material processes. But, in doing so, it is confronted by two different sets of facts, the material world and the thoughts about it. Thoughts are understood as purely physical processes.

#### **2.2 Spiritualism**

The *Spiritualist* denies Matter (the World) and regards it as merely a product of Mind (the Self).

#### **2.3 Realism**

If one would really know the external world, one must look outwards and draw on the fund of experience.

#### **2.4 Idealism**

What Fichte has actually accomplished is a magnificent *thought-picture* of the world, but one without any empirical content.

#### **2.5 Materialistic Idealism**

Materialism explains all world phenomena, including our thoughts, to be the product of purely material processes, but, conversely, Matter and its processes are themselves a product of our thinking.

#### **2.6 Indivisible Unity**

The third form of Monism sees the indivisible unity of Matter and Mind in even the simplest physical particle.

#### **2.7 Polarity Of Consciousness**

We first encounter the basic and original polarity in our own consciousness. We are the ones who detach ourselves from the mother soil of Nature and contrast ourselves with the World as Self.

#### **2.8 Feeling Impulse**

It is true that we have estranged ourselves from Nature; but it is equally true that we feel we are within Nature and belong to her. This can only be due to Nature's influence on us, which also lives in us.

#### **2.9 Knowing Nature Within**

We can only find Nature outside us after we first know it *within* us. What corresponds to Nature within us will be our guide.

#### **2.10 Something More Than "I"**

We must come to a point where we can say: Here we are no longer merely 'I', here is something more than 'I'.

#### **2.11 Description Of Consciousness**

I have not been concerned with scientific results, but rather with a simple description of what we all experience in our own consciousness. Even those sentences about the attempts to reconcile Mind with the World have only been included to clarify the actual facts.

#### **2.12 Facts Without Interpretation**

My concern is not how science has interpreted consciousness, but rather how we experience it moment by moment.



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe  
1749–1832

Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust,  
Die eine will sich von der andern trennen;  
Die eine hält, in derber Liebeslust,  
Sich an die Welt mit klammernden Organen;  
Die andre hebt gewaltsam sich vom Dust  
Zu den Gefilden hoher Ahnen.  
FAUST, I, 1112–1117.

Two souls, alas! reside within my breast,  
And each withdraws from, and repels, its brother.  
One with tenacious organs holds in love  
And clinging lust the world in its embraces;  
The other strongly sweeps, this dust above,  
Into the high ancestral spaces.

*Faust, Part I, Scene 2.*  
(Bayard Taylor's translation)

top

## 2.0 The Drive To Know

[1] IN these words Goethe expresses a trait which is deeply ingrained in human nature. Man is not a self-contained unity. He demands ever more than the world, of itself, offers him. Nature has endowed us with needs, but left their satisfaction to our own activity. However abundant the gifts which we have received, still more abundant are our desires. We seem born to dissatisfaction. And our desire for knowledge is but a special instance of this unsatisfied striving.

Suppose we look twice at a tree. The first time we see its branches at rest, the second time in motion. We are not satisfied with this observation. Why, we ask, does the tree appear to us now at rest, then in motion? Every glance at nature evokes in us a multitude of questions. Every phenomenon we meet presents a new problem to be solved. Every experience is to us a riddle. We observe that from the egg there emerges a creature like the mother animal, and we ask for the reason of the likeness. We observe a living being grow and develop to a determinate degree of perfection, and we seek the conditions of this experience. Nowhere are we satisfied with the facts which nature spreads out before our senses. Everywhere we seek what we call the explanation of these facts.

*everywhere we  
seek what we call  
the explanation of  
these facts*

[2] The something more which we seek in things, over and above what is immediately given to us in them, splits our whole being into two parts. We become conscious of our opposition to the world. We oppose ourselves to the world as independent beings. The universe has for us two opposite poles: Self and World.

[3] We erect this barrier between ourselves and the world as soon as consciousness is first kindled in us. But we never cease to feel that, in spite of all, we belong to the world, that there is a connecting link between it and us, and that we are beings within, and not without, the universe.

[4] This feeling makes us strive to bridge over this opposition, and ultimately the whole spiritual striving of mankind is nothing but the bridging of this opposition. The history of our spiritual life is a continuous seeking after union between ourselves and the world. Religion, Art, and Science follow, one and all, this goal. The religious man seeks in the revelation, which God grants him, the solution of the world problem, which his Self, dissatisfied with the world of mere phenomena, sets him as a task. The artist seeks to embody in his material the ideas which are his Self, that he may thus reconcile the spirit which lives within him and the outer world. He too, feels dissatisfied with the world of mere appearances, and seeks to mould into it that something more which his Self supplies and which transcends appearances. The thinker searches for the laws of phenomena. He strives to master by thought what he experiences by observation.

*only when we have  
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content do we recapture the  
connection*

Only when we have transformed the world-content into our thought-content do we recapture the connection which we had ourselves broken off.

We shall see later that this goal can be reached only if we penetrate much more deeply than is often done into the nature of the scientist's problem.

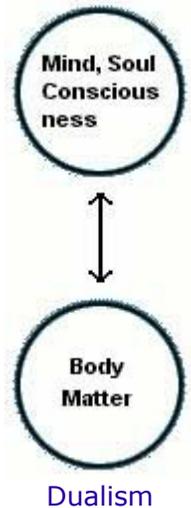
The whole situation, as I have here stated it, meets us, on the stage of history, in the conflict between the one-world theory, or Monism, and the two-world theory or Dualism. Dualism pays attention only to the separation between the Self and the World, which the consciousness of man has brought about. All its efforts consist in a vain struggle to reconcile these opposites, which it calls now Mind and Matter, now Subject and Object, now Thought and Appearance. The Dualist feels that there must be a bridge between the two worlds, but is not able to find it. Monism pays attention only to the unity and tries either to deny or to slur over the opposites, present though they are. Neither of these two points of view can satisfy us, for they do not do justice to the facts.

**dualism:** two-world theory that pays attention only to the separation between the Self and the World.

**monism:** one-world theory that pays attention only to the unity and tries to deny the differences.

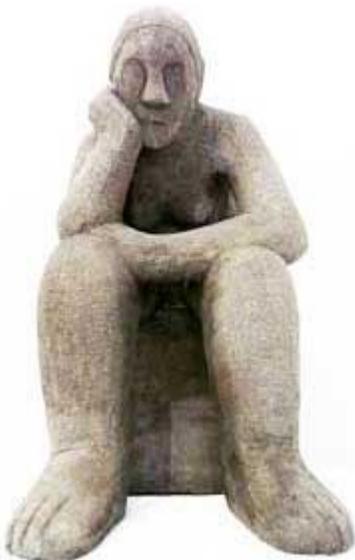
The Dualist sees in Mind (Self) and Matter (World) two essentially different entities, and cannot therefore understand how they can interact with one another. How should Mind be aware of what goes on in Matter, seeing that the essential nature of Matter is quite alien to Mind? Or how in these circumstances should Mind act upon Matter, so as to translate its intentions into actions? The most absurd hypotheses have been propounded to answer these questions.

However, up to the present the Monists are not in a much better position. They have tried three different ways of meeting the difficulty. Either they deny Mind and become Materialists; or they deny Matter in order to seek their salvation as Spiritualists; or they assert that, even in the simplest entities in the world, Mind and Matter are indissolubly bound together, so that there is no need to marvel at the appearance in man of these two modes of existence, seeing that they are never found apart.



[top](#)

## 2.1 Materialism



How does Matter come to reflect upon its own nature?

[5] Materialism can never offer a satisfactory explanation of the world. For every attempt at an explanation must begin with the formation of thoughts about the phenomena of the world. Materialism, thus, begins with the thought of Matter or material processes. But, in doing so, it is *ipso facto* confronted by two different sets of facts, viz., the material world and the thoughts about it.

**materialism:** tries to explain the world in terms of matter and material processes.

The Materialist seeks to make these latter intelligible by regarding them as purely material processes. He believes that thinking takes place in the brain, much in the same way that digestion takes place in the animal organs. Just as he ascribes mechanical, chemical, and organic processes to Nature, so he credits her in certain circumstances with the capacity to think.

He overlooks that, in doing so, he is merely shifting the problem from one place to another. Instead of to himself he ascribes the power of thought to Matter. And thus he is back again at his starting-point. How does Matter come to think of its own nature? Why is it not simply satisfied with itself and content to accept its own existence? The

Materialist has turned his attention away from the definite subject, his own self, and occupies himself with

an indefinite shadowy somewhat. And here the old problem meets him again. The materialistic theory cannot solve the problem, it can only shift it to another place.

[top](#)

## 2.2 Spiritualism

[6] What of the Spiritualistic theory? The Spiritualist denies Matter (the World) and regards it merely as a product of Mind (the Self). He supposes the whole phenomenal world to be nothing more than a fabric woven by Mind out of itself.

**spiritualism:** tries to explain the world in spiritual terms as being a product of mind/spirit.

This conception of the world finds itself in difficulties as soon as it attempts to deduce from Mind any single concrete phenomenon. It cannot do so either in knowledge or in action. If one would really know the external world, one must turn one's eye outwards and draw on the fund of experience. Without experience Mind can have no content.



[top](#)

## 2.3 Realism

Similarly, when it comes to acting, we have to translate our purposes into realities with the help of material things and forces. We are, therefore, dependent on the outer world.

[top](#)

## 2.4 Idealism



The most extreme Spiritualist or, if you prefer it, Idealist, is Johann Gottlieb Fichte. He attempts to deduce the whole edifice of the world from the "Ego." What he has actually accomplished is a magnificent thought-picture of the world, without any empirical content. As little as it is possible for the Materialist to argue the Mind away, just as little is it possible for the Idealist to do without the outer world of Matter.

*what he has actually accomplished is a magnificent thought-picture of the world*

**Johann Gottlieb Fichte**  
1762–1814

[top](#)

## 2.5 Materialistic Idealism

[7] A curious variant of Idealism is to be found in the theory which F. A. Lange has put forward in his widely read *History of Materialism*. He holds that the Materialists are quite right in declaring all phenomena, including our thought, to be the product of purely material processes, but, in turn, Matter and its processes are for him themselves the product of our thinking.



"The senses give us only the effects of things, not true copies, much less the things themselves. But among these mere effects we must include the senses themselves together with the brain and the molecular vibrations which we assume to go on there."



**Friedrich Albert Lange**  
1828- 1875

That is, our thinking is produced by the material processes, and these by our thinking. Lange's philosophy is thus nothing more than the philosophical analogon of the story of honest Baron Munchhausen, who holds himself up in the air by his own pigtail.

[top](#)

## 2.6 Indivisible Unity

[8] The third form of Monism is that which finds even in the simplest real (the atom) the union of both Matter and Mind. But nothing is gained by this either, except that the question, the origin of which is really in our consciousness, is shifted to another place. How comes it that the simple real manifests itself in a twofold manner, if it is an indivisible unity?

[top](#)

## 2.7 Polarity Of Consciousness

[9] Against all these theories we must urge the fact that we meet with the basal and fundamental opposition first in our own consciousness. It is we ourselves who break away from the bosom of Nature and contrast ourselves as Self with the World. Goethe has given classic expression to this in his essay *Nature*. *fundamental separation results from polarity of consciousness*



"Living in the midst of her (Nature) we are strangers to her. Ceaselessly she speaks to us, yet betrays none of her secrets."

But Goethe knows the reverse side too:

"Mankind is all in her, and she in all mankind."

**Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**  
1749-1832

[top](#)

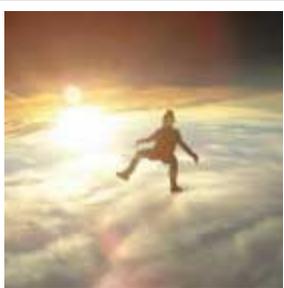
## 2.8 Feeling Impulse

[10] However true it may be that we have estranged ourselves from Nature, it is none the less true that we feel we are in her and belong to her. It can be only her own life which pulses also in us.

[top](#)

## 2.9 Knowing Nature Within

[11] We must find the way back to her again. A simple reflection may point this way out to us. We have, it is true, torn ourselves away from Nature, but we must none the less have carried away something of her in our own selves. This quality of Nature in us we must seek out, and then we shall discover our connection with her once more.



A spiritual entity  
utterly alien to  
Nature.

Dualism neglects to do this. It considers the human mind as a spiritual entity utterly alien to Nature and attempts somehow to hitch it on to Nature. No wonder that it cannot find the coupling link.

We can find Nature outside of us only if we have first learnt to know her within us. The Natural within us must be our guide to her. This marks out our path of inquiry. *we can find Nature outside of us only if we have first learned to know her within us*

We shall attempt no speculations concerning the interaction of Mind and Matter. We shall rather probe into the depths of our own being, to find there those elements which we saved in our flight from Nature.

[top](#)

### **2.10 Something More Than "I"**

[12] The examination of our own being must bring the solution of the problem. We must reach a point where we can say, "This is no longer merely 'I,' this is something which is more than 'I.' "

[top](#)

### **2.11 Description Of Consciousness**

[13] I am well aware that many who have read thus far will not consider my discussion in keeping with "the present state of science." To such criticism I can reply only that I have so far not been concerned with any scientific results, but simply with the description of what every one of us experiences in his own consciousness. That a few phrases have slipped in about attempts to reconcile Mind and the World has been due solely to the desire to elucidate the actual facts. I have therefore made no attempt to give to the expressions "Self," "Mind," "World," "Nature," the precise meaning which they usually bear in Psychology and Philosophy.



Concerned simply with a description of what every one of us experiences in his own consciousness.

[top](#)

### **2.12 Facts Without Interpretation**

The ordinary consciousness ignores the sharp distinctions of the sciences, and so far my purpose has been solely to record the facts of everyday experience. To object that the above discussions have been unscientific would be like quarreling with the reciter of a poem for failing to accompany every line at once with aesthetic criticism. I am concerned, not with the way in which science, so far, has interpreted consciousness, but with the way in which we experience it every moment of our lives.