

# PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE

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The term natural philosophy, or the philosophy of nature, has several applications, according to its historical context. Before the development of modern science, “natural philosophy” referred to the objective study of nature and the physical universe, and is considered the counterpart, or the precursor, of what is now called natural science, especially physics.

*Naturphilosophie*, a German philosophical movement prevalent from 1790 until about 1830, is chiefly associated with Friedrich Schelling and G.W.F. Hegel, and championed the concept of an organic and dynamic physical world, instead of the mechanism and atomism of the materialists.

Most recently, developments in physics and biology have initiated philosophical discussions on a whole new range of topics, mostly concerning the relationship of humans with nature and humanity’s perception of natural reality. Modern natural philosophy explores the fundamental nature of natural reality and its implications for mankind, and includes fields such as environmental ethics, the philosophy of biology, and the philosophy of physics.

Nature has two inter-related meanings in philosophy. On the one hand, it means the set of all things which are natural, or subject to the normal working of the laws of nature. On the other hand, it means the essential properties and causes of individual things.

How to understand the meaning and significance of nature has been a consistent theme of discussion within the history of Western Civilization, in the philosophical fields of metaphysics and epistemology, as well as in theology and science. The study of natural things and the regular laws which seem to govern them, as opposed to discussion about what it means to be natural, is the area of natural science.

The word “nature” derives from Latin *nâtúra*, a philosophical term derived from the verb for birth, which was used as a translation for the earlier ancient Greek term *phusis* which was derived from the verb for natural growth, for example that of a plant. Already in classical times, philosophical use of these words combined two related meanings which have in common that they refer to the way in which things happen by themselves, “naturally”, without “interference” from human deliberation, divine intervention, or anything outside of what is considered normal for the natural things being considered.

Understandings of nature depend on the subject and age of the work where they appear. For example, Aristotle’s explanation of natural properties differs from what is meant by natural properties in modern philosophical and scientific works, which can also differ from other scientific

and conventional usage. Here we can talk about some theories of philosophy which produce knowledge from nature but in some different ways. For example realism, idealism and etc.

Contemporary philosophical realism is the belief that some aspects of reality are ontologically independent of our conceptual schemes, perceptions, linguistic practices, beliefs, etc. Realism may be spoken of with respect to other minds, the past, the future, universals, mathematical entities (such as natural numbers), moral categories, the material world, and thought. Realism can also be promoted in an unqualified sense, in which case it asserts the mind-independent existence of the world, as opposed to skepticism and solipsism. Philosophers who profess realism often claim that truth consists in a correspondence between cognitive representations and reality.

Realists tend to believe that whatever we believe now is only an approximation of reality but that the accuracy and fullness of understanding can be improved. In some contexts, realism is contrasted with idealism. Today it is more usually contrasted with anti-realism, for example in the philosophy of science. Naive realism, also known as direct realism, is a philosophy of mind rooted in a common sense theory of perception that claims that the senses provide us with direct awareness of the external world. In contrast, some forms of idealism assert that no world exists apart from mind-dependent ideas and some forms of skepticism say we cannot trust our senses. The naive realist view is that objects have properties, such as texture, smell, taste and colour, that are usually perceived absolutely correct. We perceive them as they *really* are.

Scientific realism is, at the most general level, the view that the world described by science in the real world, as it is, independent of what we might take it to be. Within philosophy of science, it is often framed as an answer to the question “How is the success of science to be explained?” The debate over what the success of science involves

centers primarily on the status of unobservable entities apparently talked about by scientific theories. Generally, those who are scientific realists assert that one can make reliable claims about unobservables (viz., that they have the same ontological status) as observables. Analytical philosopher generally have a commitment to scientific realism, in the sense of regarding the scientific method as a reliable guide to the nature of reality. The main alternative to scientific realism is instrumentalism .

On the other hand there is another theory, i.e., Idealism. Idealism is the group of philosophies which assert that reality, or reality as we can know it, is fundamentally mentally constructed, or otherwise immaterial. Epistemologically, idealism manifests as a skepticism about the possibility of knowing any mind-independent thing. In a sociological sense, idealism emphasizes how human ideas—especially beliefs and values—shape society. As an ontological doctrine, idealism goes further, asserting that all entities are composed of mind or spirit. Idealism thus rejects physicalist and dualist theories that fail to ascribe priority to the mind.

The earliest extant arguments that the world of experience is grounded in the mental derive from India and Greece. The Hindu idealists in India and the Greek Neoplatonists gave panentheistic arguments for an all-pervading consciousness as the ground or true nature of reality. In contrast, the Yogâcâra school, which arose within Mahayana Buddhism in India in the 4th century

CE, based its “mind-only” idealism to a greater extent on phenomenological analyses of personal experience. This turn toward the subjective anticipated empiricists such as George Berkeley, who revived idealism in 18th-century Europe by employing skeptical arguments against materialism.

Beginning with Immanuel Kant, German idealists such as G. W. F. Hegel, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, and Arthur Schopenhauer dominated 19th-century philosophy. This tradition, which emphasized the mental or “ideal” character of all phenomena, gave birth to idealistic and subjectivist schools ranging from British idealism to phenomenalism to existentialism. The historical influence of this branch of idealism remains central even to the schools that rejected its metaphysical assumptions, such as Marxism, pragmatism and positivism.

By the word “Philosophy of Nature” we mean a theory of this nature environment explaining it in its entirety. For example we take materialism. According to this theory it can refer either to the simple preoccupation with the material world, as opposed to intellectual or spiritual concepts, or to the theory that physical matter is all there is. This theory is far more than a simple focus on material possessions. It states that everything in the universe is matter, without any true spiritual or intellectual existence. Materialism can also refer to a doctrine that material success and progress are the highest values in life. This doctrine appears to be prevalent in western society today. Materialism can also refer to the term, Cultural Materialism.

Materialism and its theories can be traced as far back as the poem *The Nature of Things*, written in the first century B.C. by Lucretius. Other defining works include *The System of Nature* by Paul d’Holbach, *Force and Matter* by Ludwig Buchner, and the more recent research done by Richard Vitzthum, *An Affirmative History and Definition* (1996).

Materialism as a philosophy is held by those who maintain that existence is explainable solely in material terms, with no accounting of spirit or consciousness. Individuals who hold to this belief see the universe as a huge device held together by pieces of matter functioning in subjection to naturalistic laws. Since materialism denies all concepts of Special Creation, it relies on the Theory of Evolution to explain itself, making beliefs in materialism and evolution interdependent.

The first question this world view should cause most of us to ask is, “If all that exists is matter only, where did the natural laws that govern it come from?” New scientific discoveries in the areas of biological complexity, cosmological design, quantum physics, and information theory bring these materialistic assumptions into doubt. A massive quantity of evidence demonstrates that the universe and its material aspects are connected by a network of energy, design and information. We now see much more than matter - we see the result of conscious creation.

Materialism, at its simpler level, involves the focus on material “things” as opposed to that which is spiritual or intellectual in nature. We live in a world surrounded by and composed of matter. It is natural, therefore, that we may become distracted from spiritual or intellectual pursuits by material possessions, but this is frequently where problems occur. We can become obsessed by a desire to obtain them, or simply frustrated by the need to maintain them.

The questions this attitude should cause us to ask are, “Are material things really more important than anything else? Is material success the highest goal? If things are all there are, what’s life all about? Why am I here at all? If life is really just about materialism, why should I even try to live a moral life? What does it matter how I treat others or how I live, as long as I have what I want? Why does what I believe about the origin of life matter?”

In a court of criminal law, a conviction arrived at by any jury requires proof beyond a shadow of a doubt. Current theories of materialism appear to be clouded by shadows and doubts. We needn't conclude that it is necessary to take a completely opposite view. After all, as C.S. Lewis once said, "God ... likes matter. He invented it." Consider, instead, how what you choose to believe affects how you live, for as Lewis also said, "different beliefs about the universe lead to different behavior." What we believe must either be true or false. Before settling on the position you choose, you owe it to yourself to keep seeking the truth about life, death and the universe.

Materialism is a world view based on a naturalistic understanding of reality. In materialism, the natural world is all there is. There is no supernatural—neither spirit nor soul nor God. There is only "nature": the cosmic matrix of matter and energy operating according to physical laws. Reality is what is objective, observable and reproducible. For the materialist, the science is "in": everything as a product of physical processes. On the surface of things, this would seem correct.

Our everyday experience is one of matter and energy: we program iPods, plant trees, drive cars, and marvel at stars; we struggle against an unseen force as we climb the stairs; we are stung by a hidden power after touching the door knob; and an invisible, intangible force guides our compass needle to true north.

There may again be "Philosophy of Nature" which is not interested in such reduction of one aspect of nature to the other. It is asserted that matter, life, mind, spirit and the laws governing them are qualitatively different. All of them are real as different stages in the life-history of the universe. The world is a dynamic, evolving reality and matter, life, mind and spirit are successive levels that nature has reached in its progressive development. Since the days of Darwin who applied the law of evolution to the biological phenomena, evolution has become one of the fundamental categories of explaining the manifoldness of the universe. Darwin's Theory of Evolution is the widely held notion that all life is related and has descended from a common ancestor: the birds and the bananas, the fishes and the flowers — all related. Darwin's general theory presumes the development of life from non-life and stresses a purely naturalistic (undirected) "descent with modification". That is, complex creatures evolve from more simplistic ancestors naturally over time. In a nutshell, as random genetic mutations occur within an organism's genetic code, the beneficial mutations are preserved because they aid survival — a process known as "natural selection." These beneficial mutations are passed on to the next generation. Over time, beneficial mutations accumulate and the result is an entirely different organism (not just a variation of the original, but an entirely different creature).

While Darwin's Theory of Evolution is a relatively young archetype, the evolutionary world view itself is as old as antiquity. Ancient Greek philosophers such as Anaximander postulated the development of life from non-life and the evolutionary descent of man from animal. Charles Darwin simply brought something new to the old philosophy — a plausible mechanism called "natural selection." Natural selection acts to preserve and accumulate minor advantageous genetic mutations. Suppose a member of a species developed a functional advantage (it grew wings and learned to fly). Its offspring would inherit that advantage and pass it on to their offspring. The inferior (disadvantaged) members of the same species would gradually die out, leaving only the superior (advantaged) members of the species. Natural selection is the preservation of a functional advantage that enables a species to compete better in the wild. Natural selection is the naturalistic equivalent to domestic breeding. Over the centuries, human breeders have produced dramatic changes in domestic animal populations by selecting individuals to breed. Breeders eliminate undesirable traits gradually over time. Similarly, natural selection eliminates inferior species gradually over time.

Darwin's Theory of Evolution is a slow gradual process. Darwin wrote, "...Natural selection acts only by taking advantage of slight successive variations; she can never take a great and sudden leap, but must advance by short and sure, though slow steps." Thus, Darwin conceded that, "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down." Such a complex organ would be known as an "irreducibly complex system". An irreducibly complex system is one composed of multiple parts, all of which are necessary for the system to function. If even one part is missing, the entire system will fail to function. Every individual part is integral. Thus, such a system could not have evolved slowly, piece by piece. The common mousetrap is an everyday non-biological example of irreducible complexity. It is composed of five basic parts: a catch (to hold the bait), a powerful spring, a thin rod called "the hammer," a holding bar to secure the hammer in place, and a platform to mount the trap. If any one of these parts is missing, the mechanism will not work. Each individual part is integral. The mousetrap is irreducibly complex.

As distinguished from the ancient or medieval outlook. This evolutionary philosophy of Nature regards matter, life, mind and spirit as different stages that are progressively revealed through the successive acts of the cosmic drama. It is also believed that since evolution is essentially teleological, The final cause or the end must be the highest form of reality with reference to which we must interpret the whole of the universe, Spirit is the highest stratum reached by cosmic evolution so far. Here we can remember the theory of Absolute Idealism.

Absolute idealism is an ontologically monistic philosophy "chiefly associated with G. W. F. Hegel and Friedrich Schelling, both German idealist philosophers of the 19th century, Josiah Royce, an American philosopher, and others, but, in its essentials, the product of Hegel." It is Hegel's account of how being is ultimately comprehensible as an all-inclusive whole. Hegel asserted that in order for the thinking subject (human reason or consciousness) to be able to know its object (the world) at all, there must be in some sense an identity of thought and being. Otherwise, the subject

would never have access to the object and we would have no certainty about any of our knowledge of the world. To account for the differences between thought and being, however, as well as the richness and diversity of each, the unity of thought and being cannot be expressed as the abstract identity "A=A". Absolute idealism is the attempt to demonstrate this unity using a new "speculative" philosophical method, which requires new concepts and rules of logic. According to Hegel, the absolute ground of being is essentially a dynamic, historical process of necessity that unfolds by itself in the form of increasingly complex forms of being and of consciousness, ultimately giving rise to all the diversity in the world and in the concepts with which we think and make sense of the world.

The absolute idealist position was dominant in nineteenth century England and Germany, while exerting significantly less influence in the United States. The absolute idealist position should be distinguished from the subjective idealism of Berkeley, the transcendental idealism of Kant, or the post-Kantian transcendental idealism of Fichte and early Schelling.