

**THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN IDEALISM,
ANIMISM, AND PAGANISM**

by Mont

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INTRODUCTION

I am glad that you, my dear reader, decided to read this little article I made about some topics I like. First and foremost, it's crucial for me to explain to you, the reader, about a little bit of my life, as it might help understand better the topics that will be covered in the next chapters.

You can call me Mont. I am not academically inclined towards philosophy nor theology, I am a biologist by profession. My first language is not english, therefore expect some bad grammar, although I will try my best to keep it formal and understandable.

In relation to the content of this article, we will not be talking about my experiences nor anything of that sort, although I might be giving some commentaries and opinions on the topics presented. This article is an attempt at formalizing my thoughts on idealism, animism, and paganism, aswell as the relationships that each of them have with each other.

Lastly, I will be giving a brief overview of the chapters to come. As it might be noticeable (if you saw the table of contents), the article follows, more or less, the format of the plot of a "narrative": it has the start of the story, the exposition of the conflicts, the action with climax, and then the resolution.

On the definitions chapter, we are going to be exploring the divergent definitions given to each of the terms (idealism, animism, paganism). After that is done, we are going to choose the one definition (for each of the terms) that will continue to be used on this article.

Next, we will go through each of the ideas, one by one, comparing them with the previous ones discussed. The last chapter, final thoughts, is the conclusion chapter, showing everything that was talked about in a very compressed way.

Now it's time for us to travel on this journey together. I hope you learn something new and, hopefully, have fun reading. Ready, set, go!

DEFINITIONS

2.1 IDEALISM

The word "idealism" is basically an umbrella term because, depending on the context, it could mean something completely different. For example, this medical article published in 2006 uses the definition of idealism as "the cherishing or pursuit of high or noble principles, purposes, or goals [16]. Although there's no such a thing as a "wrong definition", it's certain that said definition is not the same one used by Hegel and other self-declared idealists, for example [3].

As stated by Guyer and Horstmann in their entry on "The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy", there are two modern conceptions of idealism in philosophy: the one that says that something mental is the foundation of reality (also called ontological idealism) and the one that says that everything we can and will ever know is dependent on the mind (also called epistemological idealism) [10]. In our case, we will be sticking with an ontological definition, as we are going to dive deeper into the being, not the adquirement of knowledge.

Back to talking about Hegel, it's in our interest to mention his work called "Science of Logic" (in this case, "Volume One: The Objective Logic, Book One: The Doctrine of being"), as he divides the being into three parts of his dialectical logic: determinate being (quality), magnitude (quantity), and measure (synthesis of both). Inspired by that division, I believe it would be wise, when talking about idealism, to utilize the ideas of quality and quantity as a basis for the definition.

Therefore, by merging together both the ontological idealism definition given previously and also the inspiration from Hegel, we reach to the definition that will be used on this article:

"Idealism is the idea that quality is the ultimate foundation of all reality."

Although this definition might be seen as confusing by some, it will be explained and defended better in the next chapter.

2.2 ANIMISM

Animism does not suffer the same problems as idealism, for it's not really an umbrella term, but it does suffer with another type of problem: it's a fuzzy term. The word was first coined by Sir Edward Burnett Tylor in his work "Primitive Culture", published in 1871, calling it initially as the "doctrine of souls and other spiritual beings" [18].

In spite of the fact that he initially calls animism just that, he does give, on page 294, an interesting remark, as he says:

"To the theory of animism belong those endless tales which all nations tell of the presiding genii of nature, the spirits of the cliffs, wells, waterfalls, volcanoes, the elves and wood nymphs seen at times by human eyes when wandering by moonlight or assembled at their fairy festivals."

That observation of Tylor is intriguing, given that other authors also do characterize animism as having those traits. Graham Harvey, in his 2005 book "Animism: respecting the living world", explores the divergences and evolutions of the term through time [11]. Below is a table that shows three of the most significant, in my opinion, ideas from other thinkers that were brought up by Harvey:

Person	Idea
David Hume	Attributing signs of human likeness, beautiful in poetry and absurd in philosophy.
James Frazer	Savages see and treat the world as animate, like themselves, as if the world had souls.
Irving Hallowell	Recognition of personhood in a range of human and other-than-human persons.

With that brief overview on the opinions related to the definition of animism, the one that will be used on this article is the following:

"Animism is the idea that everything possesses subjective experiences."

2.3 PAGANISM

The origin of the word "pagan" can be traced back to the time that the romans officially converted to christianity. It was extensively used by the western roman empire as a way of mocking the countryside folk that continued practicing their ancestral religion [4]. Even though it's considered a pejorative term by origin, it will continue to be used on this article, but not with ill intentions, rather because it's way more simpler to get it all bundled together in a word than to write the same sentence over and over again.

According to Owen Davies's research written on his little introduction to paganism called "Paganism: A Very Short Introduction", the christians that left Europe for trade and conquest did indeed call followers of non-abrahamic religions as "pagans" [7]. Seeing that the creators of the term "paganism" consider it as meaning any non-abrahamic religious tradition, therefore:

"Paganism refers to any non-abrahamic religious tradition."

While that definition does cover many other religions, in this article, we will focus more on western pagan religions.

ON IDEALISM

3.1 QUALITY VERSUS QUANTITY

As it was defined in the last chapter, idealism puts quality as the ultimate foundation of reality. As a result of that, and also seeing how quality and quantity were shown as interplaying phenomena by Hegel, we can ask ourselves a certain question:

- What even is quality and quantity?

Quality, in this context, might differ a little from the usual and casual definition. In day to day conversation, quality might be used as an indicative of how "good" or "bad" something is in said context. However, the definition that will be used here is more related to the term commonly used in philosophy called "qualia".

As the first to introduce the term in its modern sense, Clarence Irving Lewis defined the word "qualia" as the immediate phenomenal qualities of experience, that is, the redness of red, the fluffiness of a cat, the loudness of a firearm [12]. With the word quality, that's what's meant here, granted that the casual way also can be applied as a quality of "goodness" and "badness", as in feeling the good and feeling the bad of said thing.

Now that the idea of quality is grasped, it's easy to define quantity. In a nutshell, just as quality is related to qualia, quantity is related to another term named "quanta". Unlike qualia, quanta doesn't trace that well to any specific first "creator" of the modern definition, however it was used by lots of physicists, including famous figures like Max Planck, for example [14]. Quanta, as the name might or might not suggest to you, is related to quantities, just like in the phrase "I have two oranges", where "orange" is the unit that is being quantified and "two" is the quantity.

Last but not least, there are some final questions that might have been asked, they are the following ones:

- If quality is the foundation of reality to idealists, what would someone that follows quantity as the foundation be called?

- What about the idea that both quality and quantity coexist as foundations?
- Why not a third thing?

In summary, while idealists view quality as the foundation of reality, materialists consider quantity to be its basis. When both perspectives coexist, this framework is known as dualism. Alternatively, the notion of a third, neutral foundation, one that relies on neither quality nor quantity, is called neutral monism. These concepts will be explored in greater detail in the following sections of this chapter.

3.2 PROBLEMS OF MATERIALISM

When we talk about materialism as placing quantities at the foundation of reality, one might ask:

- Quantities of what?

Materialism typically reduces everything to measurable, physical quantities, such as mass, energy, particles, and forces, and constructs units of measurement based on them, such as kilograms, joules, and meters. But what, fundamentally, is a kilogram? Or what is a joule? While organizations like the International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM) provide definitions for these units, there is something deeply problematic about this framework: it doesn't really state what is the quantity for.

According to the General Conference on Weights and Measures, the supreme authority of BIPM, the unit of measurement "second" is defined as the following:

"The second, symbol s, is the SI unit of time. It is defined by taking the fixed numerical value of the caesium frequency $\Delta\nu_{Cs}$, the unperturbed ground-state hyperfine transition frequency of the caesium-133 atom, to be 9.192.631.770 when expressed in the unit Hz, which is equal to s^{-1} ."

- BIPM [2]

Notice anything unusual? They use quantities to define the unit of quantity. Let's give another example:

"The metre, symbol m, is the SI unit of length. It is defined by taking the fixed numerical value of the speed of light in vacuum c to be 299.792.458 when expressed in the unit $m s^{-1}$, where the second is defined in terms of the caesium frequency $\Delta\nu_{Cs}$."

- BIPM [1]

The seven standard units defined by the BIPM (second, metre, kilogram, ampere, kelvin, mole, candela) all follow the same pattern: they utilize the definition of other standard units and/or they use quantities to define said unit, not really specifying what it's really quantifying.

It is indeed possible to write an entire book about that specific critique and it's also not so hard to give a good response against it, but a more important, and harder to counter, critique is related to qualities directly:

- How can, in a world of only quantities, a quality exist?

This question is what brings into light the infamous hard problem of consciousness.

The hard problem of consciousness, as first formulated by David Chalmers in his article called "Facing up to the problem of consciousness", is explained as, in his own words, "the problem of experience":

"It is undeniable that some organisms are subjects of experience. But the question of how it is that these systems are subjects of experience is perplexing. Why is it that when our cognitive systems engage in visual and auditory information-processing, we have visual or auditory experience: the quality of deep blue, the sensation of middle C? How can we explain why there is something it is like to entertain a mental image, or to experience an emotion? It is widely agreed that experience arises from a physical basis, but we have no good explanation of why and how it so arises. Why should physical processing give rise to a rich inner life at all? It seems objectively unreasonable that it should, and yet it does."

- David Chalmers [5]

The materialist, trying to defend his position when coming into contact with said contradiction, usually chooses one of these positions: eliminativism, reductionism, representationalism, or illusionism. Eliminativists, like Paul Churchland, would say that qualities (or qualia) does not really exist [6]. Reductionists, like Daniel Dennett, would prefer saying that it can all be reduced down to how your brain functions [8]. Representationalists, like Michael Tye, defend the idea that qualities are just representational states of the brain, nothing more and nothing else [17]. Lastly, illusionists think the qualities are just illusions, like how Keith Frankish thinks [9].

In contrast to their self proclaimed differences in thought, they all can be summarized as just in denial, considering that neither of them really bridge the gap that is left between their quantitative world and the qualities we perceive. One example given by the reductionist Daniel Dennett is that qualities are just the "desktop interface of a computer", foolishly forgetting that the desktop interface just is a desktop interface because we experience them with our own eyes, therefore being an useless example. At last, it's important to reiterate that there's no knowledge without experiences, and the mistakes of materialism just reinforce that.

3.3 DUALISM AND NEUTRAL MONISM

Just as explained in the first section of this chapter, there are two other views that need to be explored: dualism and neutral monism. Recapitulating, dualism is the view that both quality and quantity are the ultimate foundations of reality and neutral monism is the view that there's another third thing that is the ultimate foundation.

Starting with the critique of the latter, one of the main problems I personally see with neutral monism is the lack of alternatives:

- If it's not quality nor quantity, what else is there to be?

Although it sounds like a silly critique, it does make sense and it is just as valid, considering the neutral monists are the ones that need to make it lack vagueness. Some neutral monists, like Ernst Mach, are just closeted idealists, considering that they see the "neutral one" as being qualitative or, in the case of Mach, "sensations" [13].

Referring to dualism, the most lazy, in my opinion, critique of it is the one done by Bertrand Russell in his book "The Analysis of Mind", which is basically just the application of Occam's razor and it's just weak, considering the razor doesn't apply everywhere [15]. A rhetorical question that I find interesting to ask yourself when talking about dualism is the following one:

- If everything had the quality of yellowness and only that, would quantity even exist?

Another alternative would be to localize it instead of making it apply globally to the entire reality:

- If there's somewhere in reality that only the quality of yellowness exist, where's the quantity there?

Considering that dualists see quantity as being foundational to reality just as quality is, there should be quantity present in those cases. Another remark that arises by using those rhetorical questions is in relation to the uniqueness of a quality, as if it's not possible to isolate a quality, then it's not really a unique quality.

ON ANIMISM

4.1 WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A BAT?

a

4.2 SUBJECTIVENESS IN AN IDEALISTIC REALITY

a

4.3 TAKING CARE OF OTHERS

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ON PAGANISM

5.1 PAGANISM IN THE PAST

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5.2 MODERN PAGANISM

a

5.3 ANIMISM AND POLYTHEISM

a

5.4 REINCARNATION AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

a

FINAL THOUGHTS

This is a test!

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