

Materialism

Written by W.J.Pais

As the word itself signifies, Materialism is a [philosophical](#) system which regards matter as the only reality in the world, which undertakes to explain every event in the [universe](#) as resulting from the conditions and activity of matter, and which thus denies the [existence of God](#) and the [soul](#).

. It is diametrically opposed to [Spiritualism](#) and [Idealism](#), which, in so far as they are one-sided and exclusive, declare that everything in the world is spiritual, and that the world and even matter itself are mere conceptions or [ideas](#) in the thinking subject. Materialism is older than [Spiritualism](#), if we regard the development of [philosophy](#) as beginning in [Greece](#).

. The ancient Indian philosophy, however, is idealistic; according to it there is only one real being, *Brahma*; everything else is appearance, *Maja*.

. In Greece the first attempts at philosophy were more or less materialistic; they assumed the existence of a single primordial matter — water, earth, fire, air — or of the four elements from which the world was held to have developed. Materialism was methodically developed by the [Atomists](#).

. The first and also the most important systematic Materialist was Democritus, the "laughing [philosopher](#)". He taught that out of nothing comes nothing; that everything is the result of combination and division of parts (atoms); that these atoms, separated by empty spaces, are [infinitely](#) numerous and varied. Even to man he extended his [cosmological](#) Materialism, and was thus the founder of Materialism in the narrow sense, that is the denial of the [soul](#).

. The [soul](#) is a complex of very fine, smooth, round, and fiery atoms: these are highly mobile and penetrate the whole body, to which they impart life. Empedocles was not a thorough-going

Materialism

Written by W.J.Pais

Materialist, although he regarded the four elements with

[love](#)

and

[hatred](#)

as the formative principles of the

[universe](#)

, and refused to recognize a spiritual Creator of the world.

[Aristotle](#)

reproaches the Ionian

[philosophers](#)

in general with attempting to explain the evolution of the world without the

Nous

(intelligence); he regarded Protagoras, who first introduced a spiritual principle, as a sober man among the inebriated.

[Read More](#)