

Materialist science and inner experience

Wim Bonis

During the corona crisis, much attention was paid to the importance of science. When it came to the viruses that pose a threat to health and humanity, the media primarily consulted virologists. When it had become clear that the impact of the virus and the restrictions on freedom necessitated a somewhat broader vision, scientists from various other disciplines were also consulted. But it was made clear time and again that it was very important to keep consulting scientists in particular on these kinds of issues, to keep listening to their insights, to keep basing the restrictive measures on them, and also to keep adapting our behavior accordingly. Virus deniers and supporters of conspiracy theories were regularly portrayed, to show where not taking the insights of science seriously could lead to. The suggestion that science is just an opinion was relegated to the realm of fables as sheer nonsense: after all, science is always about nothing but objectivity and facts, which are constantly adjusted on the basis of advancing insights.

Materialism and objectivity

Indeed, in mainstream science objectivity is considered the most important criterion and only the facts resulting from objective research are considered valuable and trustable. But it is rarely mentioned that this is a very specific form of science, namely mechanistic or materialistic science. This form of science assumes that life is some kind of machine, about which we can learn more by studying its separate parts; and which considers matter the ultimate foundation of life. According to this science, we can turn the world that surrounds us, all life including ourselves, into an object of research, and this research can result in scientific *facts*. And when we put all these facts together and relate them to each other, we should eventually get a reliable picture of reality. This objectification of life means that the researcher first had to place him- or herself at an appropriate distance from the research

object, in order to ensure that the results are influenced as little as possible by the subjective involvement of the researcher. In other words, for this researcher the life that he or she is examining always exists outside of him- or herself. The researcher is then an independent, unchangeable entity that exists completely outside the research object.

Observing life objectively, however, is not innate to us: it is an artificial way of dealing with life. The Polish philosopher Henryk Skolimowski spoke of *the Yoga of Objectivity* in connection with the mastering of this objective observation. We are, as he pointed out, not born with an objective view of life, but as thoroughly subjective beings, with a mind that participates fully in the surrounding world.¹ Thus, through the Yoga of Objectivity, we must first unlearn something, namely to stop being subjectively involved in life and feeling deeply connected to it. You could also say that the internalization of the objective vision is a suppression of a way of dealing with life that is an inseparable part of who we are as human beings. In short, it is an impossible task.

In this regard, as many thinkers have emphasized – including the Dutch anthropologist Jan van Baal, but also psychologists from Freud to Jung and further – we all have *a dual nature*: one side of ourselves feels inextricably connected to surrounding life and another side of ourselves feels completely separated from this life, set up against it. The latter side of ourselves, which in psychology is called *the ego*, is probably potentially present in us from the start, but does not really manifest itself until a few years after we are born – fed by experiences and memory. Psychologically, the ego resides in our consciousness and the connected side of ourselves resides in our unconscious. We cannot do without this ego, but its initial development can be quite overwhelming and throw us completely off balance. In its undeveloped state, it tends to unconditionally put itself to the fore and to connect with our sense of identity. This development has not only occurred in our individual lives, but has also occurred culturally in a collective way: about six thousand years before our era, as the English psychologist Steve Taylor has convincingly shown in his book *The Fall*, on a collective scale we have been dealing increasingly with what he has called *an ego explosion*. According to him, this ego explosion has determined the entire course of Western culture and has reached a critical level in our time – and

that's why we can't get around the fact that a profound change in this field has become absolutely necessary.²

But although the undeveloped ego has always considered itself a powerful autocrat, that other side of our being, the side that feels inseparable from surrounding life, has never disappeared. We really do have a dual nature that continues to be present throughout our entire life. When the ego has put itself forward as an imaginary autocrat and has bonded with our sense of identity, *a restless state of incessant inner conflict* has arisen, in which a smaller superficial side of ourselves must constantly reassert a powerful position against a much larger, more powerful and deeper side of ourselves. Physically, it is a conflict of the head with the heart. From within the position of the ego, the natural balance that exists between the heart and the head has been disturbed.

Growth to maturity has everything to do with a healthy further development of the ego. But if the ego does not learn to develop into a mature version of itself, it can only continue to occupy its leadership position through suppression and even denial of the deeper connected side of ourselves. As long as the inner imbalance and the struggle associated with it are not recognized as such and remain unconscious, that struggle inevitably projects itself dualistically onto the outside world. The evolved ego then remains blind to the fact that there is a state of balance in which the ego is subservient to the deeply connected side of ourselves – a state of balance in which, physically speaking, the brain is a servant of the heart. I will return to this when later in this article I come to talk about the ideas of Joseph Chilton Pearce.

We may assume that the Yoga of Objectivity takes place on the ego level. According to Skolimowski, it has done a lot of damage to Western society: 'Objectivity means clinical detachment and dispassionate forms of observation, the forms of perception that atomize phenomena that we investigate. Objectivity assumes that things exist in isolation, that every phenomenon we examine is the universe in itself, independent of larger wholes from which it has been cut out. (...) The mind trained in the Yoga of Objectivity over a number of years *becomes* cold, dry, uncaring; always atomizing, cutting, analyzing. This kind of mind has lost the capacity of empathy, compassion, love.'³ The idea of objectivity, of keeping one's

distance from the surrounding world and analyzing it in an uninvolved way, fits very well into an egocentric view of life.

Qualities such as being cold, indifferent and analytical, or being empathetic and feeling compassion are common human qualities. Yet we recognize the qualities of indifference and analysis, which Skolimowski has linked to the objective mind, as more masculine qualities, and recognize the qualities we have lost in the process, including empathy and compassion, as more feminine qualities. We can also recognize this distinction between the masculine and feminine in the distinction in our dual nature between a sense of separation and a sense of interconnectedness. We must not forget that these distinctions are largely culturally determined, and that all the mentioned qualities are potentially present in both men and women: women too can become cold and indifferent, and men need not lose their capacity for empathy and compassion. But it is of course true that the collective diffusion of our sense of separation, as a result of the ego explosion that began about six thousand years ago, coincided with the rise of patriarchy – and that the Yoga of Objectivity originated a few centuries ago in a scientific context in which men ruled well into the 20th century.

Control from without

It is good to realize that the objective view of life, our identification with the ego and the desire for control that results from this are not separate from each other. Both objectivity and the ego presuppose that we can try to observe the world from without. To make this possible, we not only – as pointed out by Skolimowski – had to detach ourselves from our own subjectivity, our inner experience, but also as detached observers from surrounding life. It is a form of strong imagination, because in reality, of course, we can never observe life from without. We are always part of it and fully absorbed in it. The idea to separate ourselves from life as observers is prompted by the desire to try to gain control of this life.

We have clearly seen during the corona crisis that control plays a central role in the objective view of materialistic science. Creating and deploying vaccines, constantly monitoring the infections, the new variants and the level of hospital admissions: all these actions were aimed at trying to keep the virus under control as much as possible. In fact, the virus itself never

stopped showing us that interconnectedness is an essential part of life, and science was mainly used to undo or suppress that interconnection as much as possible – a reflection of the situation in our own dual nature.

Therefore, perhaps it is not entirely coincidental that we have been confronted with a pandemic that has turned human society upside down on a global scale: it has reminded us that we are still inextricably connected with each other on a planetary scale, and more broadly with the surrounding natural world. And you could even say that the fact, that the virus has been able to make us quite sick and could even put an end to our lives in the short term, has presented us a mirror in which we could see that we are not separated from Mother Earth's waning health and the unimaginable diversity of life She has always nurtured. The virus has very clearly reminded us that we cannot continue to strive exclusively to create a healthy and balanced life just for ourselves – and, within our society, exclusively for a small privileged part of humanity. We are reminded that we must always consider the larger context: the entire human community scattered all over the globe, and on an even larger scale, *the Earth Community*, which includes all non-human living beings on our planet.⁴ In this community we are all inextricably connected to each other and together to the larger matrix that includes and nourishes us, in a biological, psychological and spiritual sense. The corona crisis has now also made it very clear to us that it cannot be seen in isolation from all other crises that we as humanity are currently confronted with, including of course the climate crisis.

Dualistic struggle

By successfully realizing the Yoga of Objectivity within ourselves, we teach ourselves to focus our attention on the (material) world outside, forgetting that we ourselves are actually parts of it as well. As mentioned earlier, we must constantly reaffirm our sense of separation for ourselves. As long as we do not recognize the inner struggle that accompanies this as such, we have little choice but to dualistically project the imbalance in our dual nature onto that outer world: from the position of our undeveloped ego, which has become inextricably linked to our sense of identity, we experience ourselves primarily as beings who feel opposed to the outside

world. Then this outside world can often feel quite threatening, in which people only seem to be out to damage or nullify our identity.

The resulting dualistic battlefields manifest themselves in various fields. In the corona crisis, for example, we have collectively identified ourselves with keeping ourselves disease-free and we have declared the cause of the disease, the corona virus, our enemy. But we have also seen a dualistic struggle manifesting in other areas, such as groups of vaccinated people fighting with groups of unvaccinated people, and vice versa. The constantly recurring political tensions between countries, including threatening war language in which both declare each other a threatening enemy, the one who is escalating the conflict, is also linked to the imagined objectivity and separation of the ego. So objectivity is not as harmless as it may seem at first glance. It can cause a lot of damage and suffering.

Material exploitation

In our 'secularized' society, science is the first to be consulted when it comes to understanding issues such as climate change and discrimination. We assume that science will help us pre-eminently to create a sustainable society that will be more in balance with the natural environment, and in which people will also treat each other much more equally than is currently the case. These are no small ambitions. But I don't think we're going to realize it with the exclusive help of materialist science. History has shown that in the materialist view of life, paradoxically matter has not been understood in its full nature. It has been reduced to 'dead matter', which is 100% available to humankind to be exploited. The exploitation of raw materials, such as oil and gas, which we have started to extract from the ground everywhere on earth without too much reserve, could only take place on the basis of the materialist vision. So the subsidence that has become widespread in the Dutch province of Groningen in recent years due to years of gas extraction, and which has caused and still causes a lot of damage to houses, we owe to science! Science could assign no more than purely material value to the 'natural resources'.

Directly connected with this is, of course, the idea of *landownership*. The idea of owning land and therefore being allowed to exploit everything in that land is clearly based on the materialist view. The fact that we take it

for granted that we can own pieces of land, to the exclusion of all other people, shows how deeply entrenched the materialist vision is in our society. By landownership the inverted, original relationship of humankind with the natural environment – in which belonging to the land, and in a larger context, to the earth, and feeling deeply connected to it, has been central – is largely excluded. As is well known, this original sense of belonging to the land has managed to survive in many indigenous cultures. Taking care of the land is related to this sense of belonging. As history has clearly shown, landownership does not inspire people to take care of the actual land – the landscape we can see and feel all around us, which consists not only of the tangible ground under our feet but also of the rivers, the seas, all the plants, animals, the air, and ourselves as well, all of it is inextricably interwoven with each other in one interconnected whole.

Although there definitely is a material and tangible side to the actual land, this is a mere manifestation of its hidden side, its soul. The actual land is always an animated land as well. In our sense of belonging to the land, every landscape is a local manifestation of the *Anima Mundi*. The materialist scientific view does not acknowledge this animated quality of the land. It has not only reduced the land to mere matter that we can deal with freely in any way that we see fit. It is also strongly related to an abstract version of the land – the one that is represented by the national flag, the national anthem and so on; in short, the kind of land that leads people to nationalism, to creating artificial borders, which mostly results in conflicts and wars. And from this basis of the materialist scientific view, which has been responsible for our worldwide exploitative behaviour with regard to the actual land, we want to create a sustainable balance again between humankind and nature? In this regard, let me recall Albert Einstein's famous saying: *We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.*

The oppression of women and suppression of the feminine

Closely connected with the exploitation of the ground beneath our feet is the oppression of woman and also of suppression of the feminine (in both man and woman). It is known that men are often associated with culture and women with nature – with the intention of emphasizing the higher status of

men and their greater contribution to human society. The science that developed in the 17th century mainly aimed to bring order to the supposed disorder of nature, to gain control over it. Nature was believed to function like a machine and so the science associated with it is called *mechanistic science*. Since this science assumed that the essence of life was material in nature, it was, of course, also a materialistic science. Carolyn Merchant has convincingly linked the rise of this science to the oppression of women, in her book *The Death of Nature*.⁵ Riane Eisler has shown in her book *The Chalice and the Blade* that the control over nature and the domination of men in the form of society that is associated with it, goes much further back in time than the 17th century. According to her, we are dealing here with a paradigm shift from a *partnership culture*, in which there has been an egalitarian relationship between men and women, to a *dominator culture*, which started a few thousand year before our era and from that period has expanded over the entire Western world.⁶ As pointed out earlier, in this same historical period this paradigm shift has manifested itself psychologically in the form of the ego explosion.

Although – as said earlier – feminine and masculine qualities cannot simply be equated with the exclusive qualities of women and men, and are potentially present in both sexes, it is true that with the cultural oppression of women whatever was associated with *the feminine* was also shifted to a subordinate place, and whatever was associated with *the masculine* was brought to the fore. Human qualities such as dominance, toughness, struggle, intellect, culture and, of course, objectivity and scientific knowledge, were associated with masculinity. And other human qualities such as cooperation, softness, care, feeling, empathy, nature and subjective inner experience were associated with the feminine. It is therefore understandable that not only men, but also the qualities regarded as masculine, have been accorded an important place in materialist science. While material nature received the scientist's full attention, it was reduced to only its tangible and measurable form – subordinate and under the control of the researching, scientific minds of men.

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The brain and the heart

Materialist science has always been primarily a matter of the brain, more specifically of the ratio that resides mainly in the left hemisphere. In this view we identify who we are with everything that takes place in our brain, as was once expressed by René Descartes through the statement *I think, therefore I am* and more recently through the title of the book *We are our brain* by the Dutch scientist Dick Swaab.⁷ From this view of life, it had to be that the cells of our brain produce our consciousness. After all, where else would it come from? And this also meant that with the death of our body and brain, our consciousness would logically also cease to exist. Where else would it be if its (supposed) basis has completely gone?

In this light it is understandable that materialist scientists do not like the flood of near-death reports and studies that reveal a completely different reality... They do their utmost to find an explanation that fits in with their materialist vision, and come up with explanations that they were just hallucinations or intense dreams; or that there was still some life present in the human body during a near-dead experience and therefore it says nothing about the continuation of consciousness *after* death. In short, they have done their best to qualify the near-death experiences as nothing special, so that they have been able to ignore them easily, without too much protest by fellow scientists.⁸ But importantly, the exclusive focus and linkage of our identity to our brain means that the function of the heart is reduced to a mechanical pump to move blood through our body and to ensure that we don't die.

American author and researcher Joseph Chilton Pearce has reported in his books on research which has shown that the brain and heart really belong together in one large inclusive system. In this system the heart is the central organ. According to him, the heart is in charge and the brain in which the mind is supposed to reside is but a servant; the heart is the center of our intelligence and the brain the center of our intellect. He went on to argue that it is natural to allow our intellect to be guided by our intelligence: the primacy of our intelligent heart goes back to the very roots of our being, and of life in general. He has pointed out that through the entrance of the heart we can feel intimately connected to the natural world around us, even

feel part of a larger web of influence that extends all the way into the universe.⁹

By focusing exclusively on our brain and thereby making the heart a servant of the brain, we have also reversed the roles: by letting the intellect rule over the intelligence, we have disturbed the natural balance in ourselves. Needless to say, this imbalance is reflected in the aforementioned linkage of our identity to the uneducated ego – which feels utterly separated from everything and everyone, and therefore puts us quite permanently in the fight-or-flight mode – and in the simultaneous oppression of the other side of our dual nature, the side that feels very deeply connected with life, with the whole surrounding natural world.

The power of inner experience

As I have indicated above, materialist scientists have tried to ignore matters that do not fit the materialist view – such as the near-death experiences – as much as possible or to explain them in such a way that the materialist view remains completely intact. There are also other experiences to which materialist science tries to close its eyes as much as possible. I am thinking, for example, of the telepathic, clairvoyant and precognitive abilities of humans, which have been observed not only in our ‘primitive’ ancestors and among indigenous peoples, but also in ‘modern humans’ and even in animals. According to the materialist view in which consciousness is produced by the brain cells, phenomena like telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition cannot exist at all. Therefore materialist scientists have had little or no interest in them and have considered researching them a priori a waste of energy and time.

Of course, these ‘supernatural’ phenomena all fall under the heading of *inner experiences* – subjective experiences in which life is experienced *from within*. However, materialist science is limited to studying life *from without*, in the hope that this approach will eventually teach us something about the inner side of life. But then it is still concerned with following a path from *the outside in*. The life that is lived and experienced from within – the inner experience that takes place continuously in everyone without exception from *the inside out* – is simply of a completely different order. In fact, this is and remains virtually unattainable for the process of objective observation

and analysis. Therefore, for example, a depth psychologist like Carl Jung cannot be classified as a materialist scientist. He has dared to follow the path from the inside out and has widely consulted his own inner experience in order to gain a better insight into the functioning of the human psyche.

The inner experiences of phenomena such as near-death experiences, telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition show that we humans always remain connected with surrounding life in an invisible way. Despite the fact that from our sense of separation at the ego level we get the impression that we move through life as independent beings separately from each other. When we go through near-death experiences, through telepathic, clairvoyant and precognitive experiences, we are made conscious of the fact that there exists another side of ourselves beyond our ego – the deeply interconnected side of our dual nature. They bring us into contact with it.

Objective distance and empathy exclude each other

We must of course not ignore the fact that materialist science, with its ideal of objectivity, has certainly brought many things that have been particularly helpful to our human society. I am thinking of the many technical marvels, including airplanes, the Internet, mobile phones, but also DNA tests that help to better map history and track down criminals, and (the development of) effective vaccines that have saved many lives. But this does not take away the fact that materialist scientists should also recognize the limits of their scientific approach. When there the importance of our subjective involvement with and connection to life is not recognized within the scientific context, we may rightly wonder to what extent the all too rigorous application of materialist science with its ideal of objectivity is not going to be counterproductive and to cause enormous damage. In this respect, I have already referred to the conflicts that arise from the dualistic vision of life and the practice of landownership.

The problem with bringing the ideal of objectivity to the foreground, and the associated detachment and urge to struggle, is not only that positive human qualities such as openness, empathy and empathy, part of subjective experience, are systematically undervalued, but also that objectivity and subjectivity *cannot exist simultaneously*. It is a fact that you cannot keep someone at a safe distance, consider someone an object, and at the same

time approach that person and empathize with him or her as a subject. In a more extreme form, it is a fact that you cannot fight an enemy and at the same time empathize with the person you have identified as an enemy. It really is a matter of one *or* the other.

It is true that during an individual physical confrontation with an enemy, you can suddenly see the human being in that other person, that you suddenly become aware that the other person is not so different from yourself, so that the enemy image immediately disappears. Anonymous enemy images, for example, shaped by the intervention of a digital screen and kept alive by the distance of that screen, can dissolve like snow in the sun when a physical encounter takes place between someone and his 'digital enemy'. The imagined enemy appeared to exist only on a safe and anonymous distance. Physical contact is not always able to directly annul imagined enemies, as we can see with physical political negotiations between countries whose leaders or politicians are trying to end a mutual conflict. Somehow, an imagined enemy with a strong connection to a collective national identity, with a historical background, can artificially keep the mutual distance intact – and thereby manage to further enlarge and escalate the conflict.

But when face-to-face contact with another person lasts a little longer, and is allowed to deepen, we often realize that the interconnected side of ourselves is still much more powerful than the part that tries to keep the other at a distance. Then we are reminded again what the difference is between inner power and external power – the power over others. Then we know again that we are first and foremost beings who feel deeply connected to the surrounding world – beings with an immense inner power.

The internal and external world

Not only direct face-to-face contact with other people can make us aware that the interconnected side of ourselves is still powerfully present. In particular, direct contact with the natural world around us – the world beyond the human world, that David Abram had called *the more-than-human world* – can help us greatly to activate the connected side of our dual nature. In this regard, the anthropologist Keith Basso has spoken eloquently about *face-to-place* contact.¹⁰ During his research among the Apache

community Cibique, he noticed that for the residents contact was much more than simple face-to-face contact. Local places also turned out to have a special personal meaning for them, which was at least as important as the relationships between people. By using the term *face-to-place*, Basso wanted to emphasize that for these people, the local places had a personality similar to their own and that the relationship between them was also mutual in nature.¹¹

If we realize that early humans, our prehistoric ancestors, had much more contact with the natural world around them, with the surrounding landscape, it is quite conceivable that this face-to-place contact must have once been a widespread experience of reality – an experience of reality that we 'modern people', who spend a large part of our time indoors and often live in an urban environment, have largely lost sight of. But this face-to-place contact can of course be reactivated by us and be made a more conscious part of our daily experience. It goes without saying that for such awareness we have to leave the house and go into the outside world. This need not be outside the town or city where we happen to live, but if we move outside the city, and move through a natural environment, feel included in a landscape, then we can become much more aware of our face-to-place contact with the more-than-human world.

It is interesting that through face-to-place contact the boundary between inside and outside can be drawn less and less sharply. I am convinced that human development once moved from *outdoor spirituality* to *indoor religions* – from a spiritual experience in the natural world, inspired, of course, by face-to-place contact, to a religious experience that took place mainly between the four walls of a temple and later in a synagogue, mosque or church. This profound change was also reflected in the change from an oral culture to a culture in which the written word and the texts in (Sacred) books started to play a central role.¹² Later, I think, that indoor focus also became an important part of materialist science, despite the fact that the focus did shift from mind to matter. Materialist science did start to investigate the world outside, but in principle it did so mainly from an indoor context, in which the laboratory and library played an important role. But Charles Darwin already left the laboratory and library in the 19th century, when he got on the Beagle to pay a lengthy visit to the outside

world. And in scientific disciplines such as anthropology, primatology and ecology, of course, the indoor context had to be left behind even more and more often: real 'fieldwork' had to be done, but this also put their exclusive materialist basis under increasing pressure.

When, for instance, the English primatologist Jane Goodall started to give names to the chimpanzees that she studied in Africa in the 1960s, from a materialist point of view as a scientific researcher she had made the mistake to participate subjectively in the chimpanzee world. She had given individual names to the chimpanzees. By doing this, according to the objective principles she had empathized with the individual lives of the chimpanzees too much and had started to feel too strongly connected to them. She had not respected the objective distance – and thereby she had also lost, initially, her scientific credibility. Gradually, however, her research results were taken seriously after all in the scientific community. And nowadays it is no longer problematic for primatologists to give names to the animals that they study.

The more face-to-face contact comes to life again and is experienced consciously by us, the more the external world will become part of our internal world – an animated world in which all life has an invisible inner dimension and source, just as with ourselves. That is why we feel deeply connected to it. The more we start to feel at home in the surrounding natural world, we experience ourselves again as an inseparable part of an immeasurable nature that surrounds us everywhere and feeds us continuously – a wonderful world that is not separated, and has never been separated, from our daily life. Understandably, by this kind of experienced reality the basis of the materialist worldview is increasingly thrown in disarray.

The broadening and deepening of science

I think it has become clear that the exclusive objective approach to life, as is also the basis of materialistic science, certainly cannot reveal to us all the secrets of life. Scientists are of course also primarily people like everyone else, with a rich inner experience. They often started to follow the scientific path because they wanted to know and understand themselves and life in general a little better. That is why a growing number of scientists from

various disciplines are arguing to broaden and deepen the basis of science. Some have been doing this already for decades. In this regard I am thinking of Rupert Sheldrake, David Bohm, Fritjof Capra, Malcolm Hollick, Jeremy Lent, Andreas Weber, Stephen Harrod Buhner, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Ervin Laszlo, Steve Taylor, David Hamilton, Jane Goodall, Frans de Waal, Elisabeth Satouris, Jude Currivan, Bruce Lipton, Pim van Lommel, and Eben Alexander. But they are certainly not the only ones who have set out on this path.

It is striking that their pioneering work is often still viewed with suspicion by the materialistic scientists: despite the increased appreciation that has fallen to some, they are often still ignored – not just by fellow scientists but also by the mainstream media. Sometimes these ‘non-materialist’ or ‘post-materialist’ scientists are even attacked incredibly hard and personally. Through their research they have shown increasingly clearly and convincingly that the materialist approach to science is not the only form and has become an obsolete form when it comes to understanding the essence of life. They have shown that there is a paradigm shift happening in science that actually started about a hundred years ago with Einstein's theory of relativity and quantum mechanics. In that development, it has become increasingly clear that the sharp line between keeping an objective distance and being subjectively involved, which is still held high by materialist scientists, is increasingly getting blurred.

The obstinate guarding of the boundary by some materialist scientists is starting to look more and more like swimming against the current of the latest developments and insights – against better judgment. Christianity once found itself in such a threatened position when materialist science emerged in the 17th century and believed it had the answer to all of life's questions. Now the materialist scientists sometimes take a rather unruly attitude towards the ever ‘advancing insight’, which they themselves have put forward as one of the leading mottos of their scientific practice.

Rupert Sheldrake has beautifully portrayed the blurring boundary between objectivity and subjectivity. He has pointed out several times – with some irony – that in his opinion materialist scientists only live according to their objective scientific principles as much as possible during their working hours, but that they immediately drop them at home in the

evenings and during holidays, and that then their subjective experience comes to the fore again.¹³ In other words, experiencing the reality with which we were once born resurfaces and has only been artificially kept in the background during working hours. If we recall for a moment the effects of Skolimowski's Yoga of Objectivity on the human mind – which makes it cold, dry, indifferent, always busy with atomizing, cutting, analyzing –, then it is difficult to imagine that good personal relationships can be built on the basis of that.

For that reason alone no scientist is 100% scientist, not even during working hours, because good relations must also be maintained with fellow scientists. So the subjective side of the scientist also regularly surfaces during working hours, during the many informal moments when private matters are also exchanged with some colleagues. But when scientists as 'pure' scientists discuss the results of their research in the media and at conferences, leaving their personal lives in the background as much as possible, naturally the impression is given that the objective principles are still the most important in their lives, of primary importance – and that their subjective inner experience matters much less, or is at least secondary. As I have stated above, this is not a reflection of balanced duality, but rather of imbalance. In reality, then, the emphasis should be just the opposite: scientists should first and foremost show that they are (fellow) human beings, with human needs of empathy and connection – who also happen to have done important research whose results they would like to share with others. It is an insight that the 'non-materialist' or 'post-materialist' scientists already seem to have integrated into their lives.

The changing view on consciousness

The core of the problem that I have addressed in this article lies in the fact that materialist science has always assumed that life can be studied and examined from without. And from without, of course, we all see chunks of tangible matter, often with little or no apparent presence of consciousness. Then mountains, rivers, trees, and animals like cows soon seem little more than 'a collection of objects' – objects that are all supposed to be separate from each other. I borrowed this insight from the American theologian, cultural historian and ecologist Thomas Berry, who was the first person to

point to the relevance the Earth Community and the way we collectively have done a lot of harm to it, and who eloquently described the core of his vision as follows: *The universe is not a collection of objects but a communion of subjects.*

All in all, it is a bit strange that at some point we humans have decided to study ourselves from the outside in this way as well. This meant that the scientists also had to see themselves primarily as an object that they had to try to study from without as objectively as possible. While, of course, like any other human being, they were still overloaded with an incessant stream of impressions from their inner experience, including being consciousness of themselves and feeling their own living body. From this detached position they became convinced, without having any evidence for it, that the material contents of our heads, the cells of our brains, must have produced consciousness. As stated earlier, from their materialist view of existence there simply could not be any other option. It is actually quite curious that this materialist view on consciousness has been maintained by many academic psychologists to this day.

Fortunately, more and more academic psychologists, including Steve Taylor, recognize that the view that consciousness is a product of the brain cells is no longer tenable.¹⁴ The many reports of near-death experiences that I mentioned earlier also confirm this – and they show how important subjective, inner experience is to be able to understand what it means to be *alive* and what *life* in general really means.

The scientific value of subjectivity

Earlier in this article I discussed Skolimowski's ideas about the Yoga of Objectivity and the fact that we are all born as subjective beings with a participatory mind. He was a philosopher, but fortunately the importance of subjectivity has increasingly been acknowledged by scientists as well. The German scholar and author Andreas Weber, for instance, has argued, in his book *The Biology of Wonder*, that by studying the natural world and all the living beings in it – including ourselves – objectively from without for centuries, science accumulated an incredible amount of knowledge, but in the process it has not come much closer to understanding life. In his view, we can only understand life when we recognize the importance of

subjective, inner experiences, of feelings, and fully include those in our scientific research. According to him, every living being experiences life mainly from within, and this concerns not only animals but also plants. Only by experiencing the interiority of other non-human beings, we can understand who we are ourselves: ‘Only in the mirror of other life can we become ourselves. (...) We need the experience of an inside unfolding in front of us, displaying itself as a fragile body. We need other organisms because they are what we are, but with a cunning twist: they are that hidden part of us which we cannot see because we exist through this part and we see with it.’¹⁵ Weber is aware that his research is quite revolutionary and deviates profoundly from what we have been taught in school and college – in which everything was explained as ‘the outcome of material chains of cause and effect’. Although this is still ‘the guiding credo of modern biology’, according to him ‘our connections to the living world as we experience them teach us the opposite.’¹⁶

I suspect that the time when all scientists can integrate inner experience in their research – when they are able to study life in all its fullness from within as well – is nearer than we sometimes think. The dichotomy, described by Rupert Sheldrake, between the office hours in which scientists dedicate themselves to the practice of objective science, and their spare time and holidays in which they can surrender themselves to their subjective feelings, might come to an end. It is perhaps not easy to imagine what it means when a full inclusion of subjective, inner experiences into the dimension of science would be realized on a worldwide scale and how beneficial it would eventually turn out to be for the whole of our society. But one thing we can be sure of: we certainly won’t be losing anything by it.

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Notes

- ¹ Henryk Skolimowski, *The Participatory Mind. A New Theory of Knowledge and of the Universe*, Arkana, London 1994.
- ² Steve Taylor, *The Fall. The Insanity of The Ego in Human History and The Dawning of A New Era*, O Books, 2005.
- ³ Henryk Skolimowski, *The Participatory Mind. A New Theory of Knowledge and of the Universe*, Arkana, 1994, p. 148-149.
- ⁴ If you want to know more about the Earth Community: Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, Sierra Club Books, 1990; Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, Random House, 2000; David C.Korten, *The Great Turning. From Empire to Earth Community*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006; Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, *Active Hope. How to Face the Mess without Going Crazy*, New World Library 2012. See also my article 'Mother Earth and Her Community' that you can download from my website, under the heading 'articles': <https://eng.wimbonis.nl/>
- ⁵ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature. Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1989.
- ⁶ Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade. Our History, Our Future*, Pandora, 1990.
- ⁷ Dick Swaab, *Wij zijn ons brein*, Atlas Contact, 2010.
- ⁸ Zie bijvoorbeeld: Pim van Lommel, *Eindeloos bewustzijn. Een wetenschappelijk visie op de bijna-dood ervaring*, Uitgeverij Ten Have, 2009; Anita Moorjani, *Dying to be me. My Journey from Cancer, to Near Death, to True Healing*, Hay House, 2014; Eben Alexander, *Proof of Heaven. A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*, Simon & Schuster, 2013.
- ⁹ Joseph Chilton Pearce, *The Biology of Transcendence. A Blueprint of the Human Spirit*, Park Street Press, 2004; Joseph Chilton Pearce, *The Heart-Mind Matrix. How the Heart Can Teach the Mind New Ways to Think*, Inner Traditions, 2012.
- ¹⁰ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous. Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, Vintage Books, 1997.
- ¹¹ Peter Nabokov, *Where the Lightning Strikes. The Lives of American Indian Sacred Places*, Viking Penquin, 2006, p. 108.
- ¹² I have written about outdoor spirituality and indoor religions more extensively in my book, *The Whole Story. Healing Our Sense of Separation*, which I have written in the period 2019-2021. It is not yet published.
- ¹³ Rupert Sheldrake, *The Science Delusion. Freeing the Spirit of Enquiry*, Coronet, 2012.
- ¹⁴ Steve Taylor, *Spiritual Science. Why Science Needs Spirituality to Make Sense of the World*, Watkins Media, 2018. See also his interesting blogposts on the website of psychology today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/contributors/steve-taylor-phd>
- ¹⁵ Andreas Weber, *The Biology of Wonder. Aliveness, Feeling, and the Metamorphosis of Science*, New Society Publishers, 2016, p. 30.
- ¹⁶ Andreas Weber, *The Biology of Wonder. Aliveness, Feeling, and the Metamorphosis of Science*, New Society Publishers, 2016, p. 84.