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## Implications of Idealism on Science

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### Introduction

Persisting for over two centuries, a preoccupation with the implications that idealism poses for science and philosophy started in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century with Immanuel Kant. Nicholas Boyle, principal investigator of a project concerned with unearthing the various impacts of idealism, states that “questions and issues revolving around the rise of the German idealist movement have had a lasting impact on the way we think”. Kant espoused the idea of “transcendental idealism”, suggesting that the “mind was the keyway in which we perceive the world, and that the world was filtered by perception” (Boyle, 2012). In attempts at establishing an objective account of reality, Kant argued that we can only understand the world by “experiencing it through our senses then applying a framework of concepts to those experiences” (Boyle, 2012). Idealism can be described as an understanding of external reality that is indistinguishable from the internal subjective experience of human perception. This constitutes the external world with mental qualities. In layman’s terms, understanding the real world is dependent on human perception. Giving birth to a new theory of mind and pointing out the limits of cognition, idealism claims that what we see is a “world of appearances processed by our minds, and that it is impossible to understand it independently of ourselves” (Boyle, 2012).

Our current paradigm is indeed effective – whereby it is useful and successful at certain things – but to stand out and continue in our evolution embracing idealist implications could become prioritized. The position taken in this paper is that despite the implications of idealism on science discussed herein, building a new scientific paradigm is not only possible, but that idealism itself forms the basis of salient paradigm-building.

## Analysis

Upon analyzing the implications set forth by idealism I am faced with striking realizations; one of the insights gleaned from idealism can be found in asking the question: what happens prior to the moment of witnessing? Stemming from that question one can reasonably assert that all we can know is that nothing was happening prior to the moment it was observed. The implication of the question posed directly affects how exactly science is done such that the researchers' state of mind is inextricably nested within their observation of what is going on in the outside world.

How exactly is this a problem? The implications of idealism pose a problem for science in describing how the world really is, especially in terms of there being external physical objects outside of - and prior to - the realm of internal subjective experience. If a researcher is locked into the subjective experience of *their* reality, then how exactly can science extrapolate any research done past the confines of when and where something was studied? That is to say, the findings can never really be applied outside of when and where they took place. Despite the inescapable nature of this problem, there can however be solutions recovered about reality and human nature from idealism that accounts for the problems it raises in addition to addressing criticisms against it.

## Psychological Organs

Coinciding with biological evolution is a marked and parallel psychological evolution. An example would be the evolution of the human eye deemed as a psychological adaptation representing a “metaphysical tube” (V. Smith, personal communication, January 23, 2020) bridging physical stimuli into the metaphysical framework of the mind. As such, would it not be reasonable to suppose that the mind is also an exquisitely crafted structure? And should not our psychological architecture also contain mental organs? Furthermore, what would lead us to assume that psychological mechanisms are less well-engineered than physiological organs?

The German idealist Johann Gottlieb Fichte described the mind as a psychological structure whereby the “organ of positing [the mind] is reason itself” (Lachs & Shade, 2014, p. 73). The translation of “positing” from the German verb “setzen” - which Fichte used - does not

capture his intended meaning. “Setzen” translates as a word that may be used to express agreement *and* opposition (conjecture and refutation) or roughly: the act of establishing a reasoned claim. The richness of “setzen” is described as being due “precisely to this amphibious character: it is equally at home in the realms of theory and practice”. From this Fichte takes advantage of the ambiguity by using “setzen” to “denote an activity that is both cognitive and creative [convergent and divergent] and represents the unity of reason and will, the theoretical and the practical” (Lachs & Shade, 2014, p. 73). Supports of idealism are able to wield an intellectual object that is evident in the language, accounting for its ability to posit a stance as well as refute its opposite, based on the principles of idealism itself.

Evolution as a process of change never fails to cease. The evolution of the human triune brain evolved over time from reptilian to paleo-mammalian to neo-mammalian (Sagan, 1977, p. 57). As such it can reasonably be inferred that due to most of our biological evolution being homeostatic, the dynamic evolution occurring on the mental level (psychological structures) is still underway. The embodiment of reason as a developed mental organ could be considered the main driving force at edging out the old scientific paradigm. Opposed to operating solely on historically primal instincts, humanity has made the evolutionary step of self-affirmation via creative and intelligent endeavours in the modern context and out of the historical context of the Pleistocene. The latter can be affirmed by stating “reason in its primordial unity is thus conceived as the infinite and intelligent source of all, totally absorbed in its creative, all-encompassing act” (Lachs & Shade, 2014, p. 73). The continued evolution that establishes a *self* within its own environment is itself a psychological adaptation in response to external stimuli; it is advantageous to survive in the world if an organism has a theory of mind, a sense of self, or ego, to strive for the continuation of itself. In the case that “external stimuli” is refuted against the underpinnings of idealism, I would retort that the world that we experience is only via mental states. Upon analyzing what the external and internal denote, a realization that the only existing boundary between internal and external is only established by the self, or the ego, for the sake of its individual existence. Breaking down mental categories releases the constraints of the ego, or self, whereby rendering the distinction created between internal and external as mere thought form.

## Scientific Paradigm Evolution

Coupled with the biological-psychological evolution runs another parallel evolution - that of the scientific paradigm itself. As stated in *Theory and Reality*, “a lineage of organisms in evolutionary time will usually exhibit long periods of relative stasis”; “these periods of equilibrium are punctuated by periods of rapid change in which new fundamental structures arise”; “the periods of stasis also feature a kind of homeostasis in which the genetic system tends to resist substantial change”; “the analogy between Kuhn’s theory and the biological theory of punctuated equilibrium shows the same kind of convergence on a story about the processes of change” (Godfrey-Smith, 2008, p. 100). On an evolutionary timeline, successfully reproduced biological and psychological adaptations parallel the evolution of the current scientific paradigm. Furthermore, it is the parallel in the mechanism of selecting *against* what does not work evolutionarily, with the principle of Popper’s *falsification* model of science (Godfrey-Smith, 2008) that more accurately describes how similar a scientific paradigm is to the biological and psychological selection process of evolution.

## Cultural/Sociological Evolution

The cultural unit of selection - the meme - as coined by Richard Dawkins (2016), furthers the propensity for psychological organs to evolve. The rapidly changing nature of our present cultural memes conform to the idea of the period of rapid change following the punctuated equilibrium found in biological evolution. Conforming to the parallel nature found in the evolution of biology - as well as with scientific paradigms - rests the underlying rapid change occurring within the psyche and framed by culture. The ability with which we conduct science in society is not necessarily hampered by the radical subjective implications set forth by idealism, it in fact bolsters its efficacy. Contrarily, rather than science being impacted negatively the consequences of idealism could be foundational in paradigm-building on an entirely unprecedented level. Going almost without refutation is the notion that the current epoch of humanity is undergoing the beginnings of a vast psychological and sociological paradigm shift - in addition to an imminent scientific paradigm shift.

## Criticism

An immediate objection against idealism would be in taking a position within the realist camp. The realist, as noted by Kant, regards “space and time as independent of our sensibility” and “the realist therefore interprets outer appearances as things in themselves, which would exist independently of us and of our sensibility and thus would also be outside us according to pure concepts of the understanding” (Allison, 2004, p. 21).

An idealist could in all actuality pit realist descriptions of reality against the accuser. For instance, a realist might posit that if they were to throw a rock at your head, without your prior knowledge of the rock’s trajectory it would still hit and hurt you. Which is to say that without observing the rock existing, it still exists; combating the notion that nothing occurs prior to witnessing - implying the existence of an external reality - refuting the radical notion of idealist subjectivity. In refutation, I would say that it is *only* through mental states that we identify what that rock is, how it felt, and that it happened to *me*. Therefore applying the knowledge with the phenomena of “rock” and “hitting” and “*my* head”, all categorized by mental structures. Without having prior knowledge of language by applying meaning to sounds as established by the subjects’ mind, we could never experience and *know* the phenomena of any scenario experienced in the subjective mind.

Does the external world still exist even if we do not *know* about it? If it did, we can never know it; the mental faculty is not present within our experiencing structure to know. In searching for an external world, drawing a comparison between *it* and searching for the failed idea of “phlogiston” (D. Haas, personal communication, January 23, 2020) could be made. Understanding the previous example - coupled with the scientific method - may deem the very assertion of a physical reality to be nothing more than a case of limited perception; a failed hypothesis, although one that has still lead science closer to what reality *really* is.

## Conclusion

Considering that idealism has seemingly sat on the ‘back-burner’ of philosophy due to the radically subjective implications on science, it has provided an open backdrop for a spacious realm of thought. By considering idealist implications, science can further the evolution of the

new paradigm by radically embracing what we do have access to, rather than failed attempts at what we can never access and continuing the scientific method further. The object of this paper is in demonstrating the biopsychosocial model of evolution that converges with the evolution of our scientific paradigm with biology, psychology, and society as a singular process, that unfurls itself via parallel processes - which appear to be, perhaps, contingent to one another.

With science acting as the embodiment of reason, it represents a great evolutionary ally that may find utility in amplifying the implications set forth by idealism - especially in finding equilibrium within our current scientific paradigm - as well as building a salient new paradigm. When observing the implications of scientific experimentation, nothing can be known that exists outside of, prior to, or even after, the level of human conscious awareness - and therefore value is found in radically embracing our subjective experience.

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