

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF A POST-MATERIALIST PARADIGM? THREE TYPES OF THEORIES

Gary E. Schwartz, PhD

What does it mean to have a post-materialist theory? I propose that there are three classes or categories of theories. (1) *Type I post-materialist theories*: neo-physical theories that are derived from materialist theories, where the materialist theories are still seen as primary and are viewed as being fundamentally necessary to create “non-material” (yet physical) phenomena such as consciousness. (2) *Type II post-materialist theories*: post-materialist theories of consciousness existing alongside materialist theories, where each class of theories are seen as primary and are viewed as not being derivable from (i.e. are not reducible to) the other. And (3) *Type III post-materialist theories*: where materialist theories are

derived from, and are a subset of, more inclusive post-materialist theories of consciousness; here post-materialist theories are seen as primary and are viewed as the ultimate origin of material systems. Type I theories are the least controversial, Type III are the most controversial. The three types of theories are considered in the context of the history of the emergence of post-materialist science.

Key words: post-materialist science, paradigm shift, physicalism, primary, consciousness

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I believe we are riding the cusp of the biggest paradigm shift in the history of science. What could be more exciting!!!

Neil Grossman, PhD

What does it mean to have a “post-materialist” theory?

If, as Charles Tart¹ wrote in his book *The End of Materialism*, the mainstream paradigm in science is being expanded (if not seriously questioned) by a wealth of contemporary findings in consciousness studies in general, and parapsychology in particular, what will replace this paradigm? What might a post-materialist theory look like?

In this paper, I propose that there are three basic categories or types of theories that may be required for addressing what could be, as Grossman² puts it, “the biggest paradigm shift in the history of science.”

The three types of post-materialist theories are

Type I post-materialist theories: neo-physical theories that are derived from materialist theories, where the materialist theories are still seen as primary and are viewed as being

fundamentally necessary to create “non-material” (yet “physical”) phenomena such as consciousness.

Type II post-materialist theories: Post-materialist theories of consciousness existing alongside materialist theories, where each class of theories are seen as primary and are viewed as not being derivable from (i.e., are not reducible to) the other.

Type III post-materialist theories: where materialist theories are derived from, and are a subset of, more inclusive post-materialist theories of consciousness; here post-materialist theories are seen as primary and are viewed as the ultimate origin of material systems.

Whereas Type I theories are minimally controversial, Type II theories are moderately controversial, and Type III theories are the most controversial.

Before considering the three types of theories, it is useful to briefly review the history of emerging formalization of post-materialist science and place the evolution of future theories in context.

TWO SEMINAL MEETINGS ON POST-MATERIALIST SCIENCE

These challenging theoretical questions were addressed in the course of two seminal “think tank” meetings on the emergence and evolution of post-materialist science. The first meeting was conceived and organized by Lisa Miller, PhD and was held at Columbia University in the spring of 1999. It consisted of approximately a dozen senior scientists, spanning

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This essay was inspired in part by a set of e-mail exchanges in various forums including the participants of the 2014 International Summit on Post-Materialist Science, Spirituality and Society concerning historic and emerging post-materialist theories. I would like to thank the reviewers of this article for their careful and thoughtful suggestions. I have cited a few of their comments and recommendations in this article.

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physics and engineering to psychology and medicine. Most of the participants had contributed invited chapters to the *Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality* edited by Miller.³

I had written a chapter for the Miller volume,⁴ and I had the good fortune to participate in the meeting. It was there that I first learned of the term “post-materialist science” and was introduced to its profound conceptual, empirical, political, and societal implications.

Inspired by the Columbia meeting, I decided to convene a follow-up meeting in the winter of 2014 titled the International Summit on Post-Materialist Science, Spirituality, and Society. The Summit was co-sponsored by the University of Arizona and Columbia University, and was hosted by Canyon Ranch in Tucson. The Summit was co-organized by Miller and by Mario Beauregard, PhD, who had recently joined the Laboratory for Advances in Consciousness and Health at the University of Arizona as a senior researcher.

In the final report of the Summit,⁵ I recounted one of the more striking differences I had witnessed among the participants at the Columbia meeting. I described them as “apparent tensions” between

- (1) *participants who wanted to restrict post-materialist science to those effects of consciousness, which were least controversial and presumably mediated by the brain (e.g., research documenting mind to mind telepathy and the effects of mind on physical objects), versus*
- (2) *those participants who wanted to feature the emerging integration of science and spirituality as inspired by—and some would say, as required by—the evolution of post-materialist science (including applications to health and healing, ecology, and the evolution of consciousness broadly defined).*

In creating the list of eleven participants invited to attend our Arizona Summit, we purposely restricted the participants to those individuals whose professional and personal lives fit the broad category of (2) above. We wished to give equal weight at the Summit to (A) the emergence of post-materialist science and (B) its deep implications for the evolution of connections between science and spirituality in contemporary society.

Interestingly, even among the eight senior scientists who were able to attend the Summit,⁵ and despite their overlapping spiritual proclivities, they varied substantially in their predictions and preferences concerning the evolution of future post-materialist theories. These differences were motivated not only by fundamental theoretical and methodological considerations. They were motivated by sociological and political considerations as well—e.g., the co-organizers' strong intention to foster conditions of openness (and friendliness) for encouraging innovative (and controversial) theories and research. The website www.opensciences.org, which was conceived at the Summit, was designed with these considerations in mind.

Following the Summit, I participated in the process of our attempting to formulate a concise consensus definition of post-materialist science for an anthology (www.parammedia.com, in progress) of invited chapters on the evolution of

post-materialist science (edited by Mario Beauregard, PhD, Gary E. Schwartz, PhD, and Natalie Trent, PhD). As I witnessed the differences of opinions expressed about what future theories of post-materialist science might look like, it became clear to me that there were three general categories or types of theories being put forth as potential candidates for future post-materialist theories.

Moreover, in pondering these different types of future theories, it became clear to me that in principle, it was possible that future research might discover that post-material science would need to incorporate *each of the three types of theories* to fully encompass what Rupert Sheldrake,⁶ PhD, calls the “nature of nature” and the cosmos.

What follows is a brief consideration of each of the three types of theories. The reader should recognize that the intention of this article is not to review the evidence addressed by a given theory per se, but rather to consider the nature of the types/classes of theories that are being developed to explain certain classes of evidence.

TYPE I POST-MATERIALIST THEORIES

Type I post-materialist theories assume that (1) materialist theories are primary and (2) phenomena such as consciousness, including non-local consciousness, although they may be “non-material” (e.g., do not meet the classical criteria of having mass and being localized as such), are nonetheless still “physical” and obey physical laws.

I sometimes think of this as “neo-physicalism” in the sense that these theorists posit that energy and information are in essence “physical” even though they are not “material” (i.e., their form and properties are not of classical matter with properties of mass and momentum).

Neo-physical theories allow for “info-energy” and “fields” (including “quantum” fields) to exist “independently of matter” and therefore operate in “non-material” yet physical ways. Proponents of neo-physical theories posit that this class of theories can potentially be used to explain phenomena including near-death out-of-body experiences and evidence of life after death.

For example, Stuart Hameroff, PhD, and Roger Penrose, PhD, microtubules theory of consciousness in biological systems proposes that consciousness is created materially via microtubules, but once created, can exist and operate as organized quantum fields in the vacuum of space.⁷ Hameroff and Penrose are “materialists” in the sense that they view matter (e.g., neurons as material systems) as being essential to the creation of consciousness, but they are “post-materialists” in the sense that the hypothesized quantum field physical nature of consciousness (a “neo-physical” theory) allows it to function above and beyond its original material form.

Similarly, when I was a professor at Yale University in the early 1980s, I derived a mathematical model which integrated feedback and systems theory with electromagnetic and quantum physics. The core of the theory was the creation of “dynamical info-energy feedback systems” within material systems which could continue as dynamical self-organized info-energy feedback systems in the absence of material structure.⁸

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