

# On First World Problems

2020 January

During the late Oughts, roughly 2006 through 2012, it was very common and interesting, to me, for Westerners to call many of their own problems "First World Problems". At the time of writing, you can find explanations of the various intents and interpretations of this "meme" (That word wasn't really used yet). You can get the gist of the idea by scrolling through twitter threads from the really old days(2006). I won't be talking about the more presently common iteration of this line of thinking, since this one is still clear in my young mind.

To start, no body really cares about the Cold War anymore and only slightly fewer people know about it. From the overview you made of the previous paragraph, you astutely realized that the designation "First World" doesn't really have much to do with the organization that is tracks Santa Claus every single year, nor the one tasked with fighting the dreaded scourge, Comm... My disdain for poor naming aside, the label "First World" has come to refer to places with comparatively higher material wealth and/or "quality of life".

Does this seem right to you? It shouldn't, because it is absolutely wrong. Maybe not "absolutely", but terribly wrong. I am not making the tired argument of finding African cities that match or surpass the beauty of certain American ones(Google Rwanda). Making the point a little clearer: What undergirds all First World Problems? And you can't say anything like 'material conditions', 'GDP per Capita', 'Trains arriving, mostly, on time', 'No recent civil wars or insurgencies' or statistics provided by any transnational organization.

The answer is Materialism.

"But isn't this just like the answers, you told me not to give?" No it isn't. Materialism is a world view. It can't be really be measured with a stopwatch

or fancy United Nation indices, like trains and "quality of life" but it seems fairly apparent.

If you search "Materialism" into a search engine, you get the impression that there are two common, but distinct, uses of the word. One referring to a metaphysical position and the other to having avarice as a main social value. It is a stretch for me to say that these are the same thing, but these really are the same thing.

Starting with the "metaphysical" version of this. It is basically the cloud that centers around the idea "Everything, yes EVERYTHING, is fundamentally matter". We can broaden this already broad stroke by including forces, energies and whatever physical construct one would like, the idea is the same. So a Materialist could say "This apple is made of molecules! And those molecules are made of atoms!", to which a normal person, would reply "OK! Nice!". But how does our friend know that what he sees is an apple? The normal person could answer this question by, in my opinion, confidently appealing to some kind of form. "It looks, tastes, sounds and feels like an apple!" is frankly a good enough reason to think a thing was an apple. This is of course mediated by having knowledge of the subject i.e. The difference between an apple and an apricot, apple and a pear, A water apple taste less sweet than a Granny Smith e.t.c. This isn't to say that all non-materialists are in agreement on what constitutes an apple, people could have different justifications for classifications of apples and fruits based on language of use, phylogeny & genetics, calorie count, skin colour, morphology, taste, content of character and so on. However in all of these cases, some appeal to some kind of form is explicitly or implicitly used. The Materialist, or Physicalist, does not have this available. This is because he, unintentionally I presume, poisons the cake every time he tries to bring it out of the oven.

"How would you know if Helium was present in a certain place?"

"Well, I would just perform some chemical tests on it. I could even inhale it and listen to my cute squeaky voice to double confirm."

"But how would the tests work! Wouldn't the atoms that were used in the last test ever used to identify Helium be completely different from the ones present?"

"You don't get it! ALL Helium atoms are the same!"

"How could you say such a thing? How could you really say that ALL Helium atoms are the same!?"

The thing about Materialism is that usage of language completely betrays it. Ideas(feel free to laugh here) like "pattern", "kind", "species", "race", "class", "type", "index", that a self-professed Materialist might use would lead you to doubt him. I don't even know if a #Real Materialist

could even use any language at all, for that matter.

"Of course they would be capable to use language! They just think that it is not your soul, spirit, or immaterial mind, but your brain, neurons, and nervous system that is doing the talking!" (Please keep rereading this attempted defense)

I think that this exact problem will arise with all kinds of monisms that are made of material. For example, Schopenhauer or Nietzsche's monism of the will do not really have this self-contradictory aspect. Well, they kind of do, but it's not really a problem for other reasons that are very interesting, but you can't just vomit whatever connections you want unto a page and expect a reader to be pleased by it.

To unaesthetically tie a bow on this "philosophical" part, which would probably be one of the first times you accurately called out a straw-man flaying and lashing. Like stated earlier, you will probably never find someone who both explicitly and consistently believes the points above. He would probably find difficulty understanding what "straw" and "man", forget about how something could even be both at the same time!

But we should not give our imaginary friend too much hassle! If he is blind in both eyes, thank God we are only blind in our right eye, for at least we know what straw is!

"What is man?" or "What am I?" are questions that many thinkers and non-thinkers have considered. I think that these questions are so fundamental that even if some people had not explicitly sub-vocalized or asked/been asked these questions they would have some answer that would satisfy, with "I don't know" being a somewhat recent inclusion. Every social and anti-social phenomenon and movement are part answers to these questions. Every religion, culture, act, choice, thought and their abstentions. "You are what you do" "'To exist' is a verb." *I am aware this is incredibly home of to write*  
I only eat ...

I like reading ... and only watch ...

I think that ... !

I don't like ...

I am a ...

I believe that ...

I want ...

Man must ...

(Feel Free to replace the subjects with 'We' or 'They' or whatever)

What goes in the ellipses doesn't really matter, since I am only speaking in general. Actually, the sentence before this is completely wrong. To speak

of man "in general" precisely preferences one aspect of consideration over multiple available choices. I don't think many realize there is no way to avoid this and that there is no neutral manner of talking of referring to Man. For people more scientifically inclined, you can say that "Man is 70% water", but you could also claim that "Man is star dust". This isn't to say that a thing can't be more than one thing at a time, but to say that even in an area that may be claimed to be completely settled *SCIENCE*<sup>TM</sup>*vsscience*, it is not clear which lens to necessarily use. I think that there have and always will be differing and competing visions of Man and his end or supposed lack of one, so I can't make a dent there. However, the wide and endless access to information appears to have changed the landscape.

The "problem" isn't that there's "a lot of choice", the "problem" is that there is a lot of choice in the space of choices. At least in the world's recent past, from at least the year of our Lord's birth till a certain date in 16XX, occupation/caste, region and religion seem to have been the main spaces. Socially, you could only be in one of these, at anyone time at least. You would also most likely be born, live and die in the same category. Again, this doesn't mean that people didn't convert from one religion, move to new places, or climb social ladders. What I am saying here is that these were , some of, the main spaces in which people considered themselves and others. The demise of region and religion spaces, in the West, were signalled by the Atlantic revolutions, Year of revolutions and further cemented by all subsequent and more presently talked about revolutions. I'm not going to say that the revolutions caused this usurpation, only that something like "National Identity" wouldn't have been distinct from the two spaces mentioned even less than a century prior. You might be wondering, "How does Nationalism replace region and religion? Nationalists are some of the most regionalist and religious people I've ever seen!" You may be right, but only because you have not seen many people. Some wisdom from the Far and near East.

"There cannot be two suns in the sky, nor two emperors on the earth."

"No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one, and love the other: or he will sustain the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Even before the Nationalist revolts of Europe, the question of whether or not the Church or the State should be the one in charge raged in many a place. The "one in charge" has everything to do with identity. The ordering of "God, King and Country" implies a single Master, even if the actions following this cry lead you to believe they mistook the order. Every society punishes the people it wants to. Societies have and will continue to, punish,

purge, expel and/or kill who they deem deserving. This is a description, not a general condemnation of imprisonment, capital punishment, deportation and the like. I remember reading somewhere that "A good society is one that punishes the right people". Every identity that isn't persecuted by the state, must be viewed as one that is allowed to exist. Now the question of who really IS the state limply crawls unto the road. Are the people that vote the state? The people they vote for? The people who tell you to vote for them? Everyone? It isn't apparently clear who really is in charge, and so if some crazy radicals wanted to make the French Revolution look like a dress up doll party, who would they attack? I honestly could not tell you!

That's great and all, but what does all this babble have to do with Materialism? Or even First World Problems? Ok

Not about minor inconveniences or latent racism, flaunting economic development, poverty bashing or the cold war.

The way that the Materialist sees all things as physical, he also sees man. He believes/acts with the directive "Man must eat bread". Every day is another day to win bread. He even has his own alternatives to the famous Prayer pleading for the Bread of Life, LGTB (Let's Get This Bread) or C.R.E.A.M. (Cash Rules Everything Around Me). The undulation between kinds of energies and states of matter waltzes with that of the money going in and out of his person. Each day a mere chemical reaction or physics experiment. Now he is right that man must eat! But then ask him what else man must do and he will reply with the same directive. There is nothing to overcome. The only worthy challenges are those that increase his capacity to win bread. Just watch more X. Just eat more Y. Just buy more Z. Just read more. He will still use distinctions between the "mind" and the "body" in speech, but only in speech. If sound was just as fast as light, both thunder and lightning wouldn't exist.

I shouldn't disparage this person too much, as he is me and probably most people I'll ever meet.