

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor:

I am honored that a trained philosopher like Michael Potts has reviewed my *The End of Materialism: How Evidence of the Paranormal Is Bringing Science and Spirit Together* (EoM) so favorably, applying more demanding standards of philosophy in general and philosophy of science in particular than I used as guidelines in writing. Every one of his suggestions for expanding the depth of inquiry in the text is a worthwhile direction for philosophers and scientists to explore in. While honored, though, I do want to remind the nonphilosopher reader that EoM is not a philosophy book, it's a psychology book, aimed at troubled, as well as curious, readers. Because it wasn't particularly aimed at professionals, I kept my science and philosophy basic and light.

Publishers like catchy titles, of course, hoping they tempt readers to pick the book up, read, and buy, but if I wanted to be very technically accurate, I would have called the book something like *Psychological and Empirical/Scientific Considerations Concerning the Psychological Syndrome of "Dismissive Materialism," Its Potentially Harmful Effects on Ordinary People, and Evidence for the Rejection of Dismissive Materialism as a Complete Psychological and Philosophical Stance Toward Life*. But who would care about reading such a tome?

Ordinary people seldom draw fine distinctions between various kinds of materialistic/physicalist worldviews, as opposed to various religious/spiritual worldviews. The latter views basically say there is much more to life than material gratification in a meaningless physical world, there's a "higher" aspect of existence that is just as "real" as the physical; the former views that reality is nothing but material objects, bounced around by physical forces, it has no inherent meaning, and in the end we just die, and none of that means anything in any real sense.

I wrote primarily as a psychologist and scientist, though, and as a psychologist, especially a transpersonal psychologist, I have many reasons to believe that *people need meaning in their lives*, meaning on a much bigger scale than what's the best way to get my next bite to eat. Without such meaning, various kinds of psychopathologies and maladaptive behaviors develop.

When I lecture in this area, I often start, after establishing some friendly rapport with my audience, by asking for a show of hands: who has had some sort of religious, spiritual, or mystical experiences that mean a lot to them? For the kinds of audiences I draw, most hands go up. I then announce that, moving into the role of Mainstream Scientist (I've published in prestigious mainstream journals, I can pull that off for a moment), I must

tell them that basically *they are stupid and or nuts*. Their precious experiences are delusions, examples of brain malfunctions. If I want to push even harder to make my point, I can add that it is clinging to delusory spiritual and religious beliefs like this, like they do, that keep us from rationally solving the problems of the world, so they are hurting everybody as well as being stupid themselves.

I make it clear very quickly that this was a didactic ploy to remind them of the highly prevalent attitudes of Scientific Materialism and its effects, not my actual, personal evaluation of them—I don't like to hurt people, even for worthwhile educational experiences. But I know from the hundreds and hundreds of people who have contacted me over the years that there are many, many people in the world who have been cowed and invalidated by what they think of as *the facts of science*, dismissing and pathologizing their personal experiences, and have had unnecessary struggles with their spiritual lives or tried to suppress them as a result. In EoM and my other work, I try to get people to see that it is not essential science per se (we need not be concerned with various philosophical variations of science at this level) that has told them they are stupid and crazy, it is an attitude of people caught up in what I technically call the attitude of Dismissive Materialism.

Dismissive Materialism is a cognitive and emotional stance that says all religion and spirituality (except, perhaps, for the social benefits of belonging to a supportive organization) are stupid nonsense, and automatically dismisses any data or arguments to the contrary without bothering to really evaluate them. After all, such alleged “data” and “beliefs” would just be the misperceptions and rationalizations of deluded people, so why waste time thinking about them? Every parapsychologist has had many encounters with Dismissive Materialism, the “ESP means error some place” attitude, don't bother me with your data.

Again, the many philosophical and scientific variations suggested by Potts, which I am familiar with, are indeed rich directions to explore for professional philosophers and scientists, but my purpose in writing EoM was to make those who have suppressed their spirituality or have conflicts within their spiritual life because they think science has disproved it, more aware that actual, essential science is *not* the same thing as Dismissive Materialism, as Scientism. Indeed, in looking at the data of parapsychology, I argue that it is reasonable to be *both scientific and spiritual* in outlook, not to automatically reject or suppress one or the other. Of course there is lots of nonsense labeled spiritual and religious, as there is in all areas of life, and we need to always be as discriminative as possible. But if you are sincerely interested in the spiritual, or your life has spiritual experiences, I am telling you, as a scientist, you are *not* necessarily stupid or crazy! I know I've helped many people in the past by educating them this way, and hope EoM will continue to do that.

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To the Editor:

I am grateful for Professor Tart's gracious letter in reference to my review of his book *The End of Materialism*. My initial response is that I recognize that *The End of Materialism* was written for a "lay audience" and that its approach was from the standpoint of psychology. However, since I was writing a review for a scholarly journal, it was my responsibility to write the review from a scholarly point of view. Such a viewpoint required a discussion of areas that I believed would be helped by further clarification and elaboration.

Tart emphasizes the fact that his book was written for the general public. As such, *The End of Materialism* does an outstanding job of encouraging people to understand both the dogmatism of scientific materialism and the anomie resulting from it. I agree with Professor Tart's point that a loss of transpersonal meaning leads to both psychological and behavioral problems. For example, it may be the case that the extent of alcohol and drug abuse in Western culture is, in part, linked to an existential emptiness stemming from an ethic of shallow self-fulfillment through pleasure. Although in a university setting materialist professors may accept a non-self-centered ethic, for the average person, hedonistic pleasure may be all that remains in a world stripped of a spiritual component.

As an academic myself, I have heard both colleagues and students espouse the attitude of "dismissive materialism" mentioned by Professor Tart. A colleague once compared my belief in a nonmaterialistic realm (specifically, my belief in a transcendent God) to belief in "witch doctors." Although I could have replied that there may be more to "witch doctors" than he believed, I understood that he was being dismissive of the possibility of any kind of spiritual realm. Thus I have experienced first-hand how rabid skeptical materialists are every bit as dogmatic as religious Fundamentalists—they are really *secular* Fundamentalists. Sadly, they strive to convince students that spirituality and the contemporary world, especially the scientific world, do not mix. Some students are convinced—they leave their classes with their faith shattered and their lives stripped of any belief in the transcendent and of any belief in a meaning beyond the self.

The End of Materialism serves its purpose well—to convince the average person that science is not opposed to spirituality. And it does that in a "subversive" way—by showing how the very science that society worships reveals, at the very least, the possibility that there is more to reality than mere matter. Parapsychology is the science that reverses the destructiveness

of the earlier scientific faith in materialism, and that carves out a space for spiritual reality. My sincere hope is that Professor Tart's book will be successful in its goal of convincing people that in the world of contemporary science there remains room for belief in such a spiritual realm.

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