

Excerpt from *Matter and Memory* [1896, 1910] (*Key Writings*, 81-137)
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Introduction [1910]

- I) Topic: affirms reality of spirit & matter; determines relation via study of memory
- II) Previous difficulties from realist / idealist conception of matter;
 - A) Both go too far
 - 1) Idealism reduces matter to our perception of it
 - 2) Realism
 - (a) makes matter into a thing w/ power of producing representations
 - (b) although this thing is of a different nature than representations
 - B) B adopts perspective of “common sense”: matter as aggregate of “images”:
 - 1) More than idealist “representation”
 - 2) Less than realist “thing”
 - C) Previous philosophers
 - 1) Berkeley
 - (a) Helps by showing that 2nd qualities are as real as 1st qualities
 - (b) Errs by matter in mind as pure idea, so he can't account for physics
 - 2) Descartes
 - (a) Erred by putting matter too far away, as pure geometrical extension
 - (b) He must see mathematical order of universe as accident
 - 3) Kantian criticism needed then
 - (a) Provides ground of physics
 - (b) But only by limiting range of senses and understanding
 - D) All these problems would have been avoided by adopting common sense
- III) Relation of soul and body is main topic
 - A) Previous philosophy
 - 1) Either vague “union” thesis
 - 2) Or contemporary theses (which both allow prediction of consciousness from brain)
 - (a) Epiphenomenalism:
 - (i) thought as function of brain
 - (ii) consciousness as epiphenomenal (= non-functional supplement caused by brain events but with no causal effect on brain events)
 - (b) Parallelism: mental / brain states are two languages for same thing
 - B) Bergson admits a “connection,” but denies this implies parallelism
- IV) Memory is the key to the study:
 - A) Intersection of mind and matter;
 - 1) Psychical state is “immensely wider” than cerebral state
 - 2) Thoughts are accompanied by images qua sketches of bodily action:
 - 3) This is what the brain does: prepares for bodily movements
 - B) But this brain function can't account for abstract thought (“beyond human state”)
 - 1) So brain is limiting organ, oriented to action (“attention to life”)
 - 2) Disease states / dream states are mind set free from attention to life
 - C) Relation of psychology and metaphysics

- 1) Spheres of inquiry
 - (a) Psychology as study of mind / brain oriented to utility (human animal)
 - (b) Metaphysics as study of mind trying to transcend utility (spirit)
- 2) Bad results of unanalyzed exchange
 - (a) Habits formed in action find their way into speculation
 - (b) And there they form fictitious problems
 - (c) Which metaphysics must begin by dispelling

Chapter I: On the Selection of Images for Representation: The Role of the Body

- I) Images (from behind philosophical “veil of ignorance” re realism vs idealism)
 - A) Laws of nature govern all action / reaction of images; future contained in present
 - B) BUT my body is picked out as special image
 - 1) I also know it from w/in bcs of affections, interposed btw
 - (a) External excitations
 - (b) Internally prepared movements
 - 2) Affections are invitations to act, with leave to wait or do nothing
 - 3) Cness present in willed action but fades with automatic habit
 - 4) Affect can’t be predicted from antecedents; adds something new to universe
- II) Critique of idealism: of brain as organ of representation of the whole
 - A) 3rd person view of body (“bodies similar to mine”)
 - 1) Leads to view of body as source of representations
 - 2) Argument from part / whole relation
 - (a) Concludes that body is a center of action
 - (b) Not a means of producing representations
 - B) Body as source of real action = source of novelty = presentation of choice
 - 1) Change of images with change of distance means that
 - 2) Images are sketches of potential action (JJ Gibson: “affordances”)
 - C) Thought experiment of cutting nerves lets us define matter / perception of matter
 - 1) Matter = aggregate of images
 - 2) Perception = images referred to potential action of one image, my body
- III) Physiology as preparation for action, not as ground of representation
 - A) “function of nerve substance is to conduct, to coordinate, to inhibit movements”
 - B) Problem: thinking that brain can be isolated from rest of universe
 - 1) Perception as translation or picturing of nervous states
 - 2) But this isolation of the brain is absurd
 - C) Thus perception only varies w/ brain states vs being determined by them
- IV) Restatement of problem:
 - A) 2 systems of images
 - 1) Cness: images as relative to my body as center
 - 2) Science: images referred to one another w/o center
 - B) Philosophical errors
 - 1) Subjective idealism = deriving science system from cness system
 - 2) Materialistic realism = deriving cness system from science system
 - C) Problems with each position
 - 1) Realism needs *deus ex machina* for perception (epiphenomenalism)

- 2) Idealism needs pre-established harmony for science / order of nature
 - D) Presupposition of realism and idealism: perception is epistemic (vs pragmatic)
 - 1) Realism: perception is only “confused and provisional science”
 - 2) Idealism: science only “symbolic expression of real” (known in perception)
 - v) B’s pragmatic reading of biological perception
 - A) All organisms react to environment
 - 1) In higher vertebrates, spinal cord = reflex vs brain = voluntary action
 - 2) Brain is just more complex part of nervous system (diff of degree, not kind)
 - B) Thus brain is part of communication system (it doesn’t form representations)
 - 1) Brain *analyzes* movements received and *selects* movements executed
 - 2) It is thus a “zone of indetermination” regarding action
 - (a) Organisms are “centers of real action”
 - (b) Perception is pragmatic; it is oriented to organism’s action
 - C) Complexity of organism regulates perception / action relation
 - 1) B’s formulation: “perception is master of space as action is master of time”
 - (a) Cf. Spinoza: what a body can do is linked to what can affect it
 - (b) Cf. van Uexkull and ethology:
 - (c) We would need careful analysis to compare B with phenomenological movement in contemporary cog sci
 - (i) enaction of a world [Franciso Varela]
 - (ii) mind in life [Evan Thompson]
 - (iii) action in perception [Alva Noe]
 - 2) B’s argument
 - (a) Lower organisms:
 - (i) Organs of motion and perception are the same
 - (ii) Perception is limited to mere contact and reaction tends to automaticity
 - (i) JP: This is all true, but chemotaxis is well-studied in E. coli, and it is a very complex and fascinating phenomenon
 - 1. Sensing of chemical gradients (=smell); not just an “object”
 - 2. Orientation of action (sense as direction)
 - 3. Difference btw good and bad (sense as signification)
 - 4. Temporal synthesis / working memory
 - (ii) Biologists investigating this use homogeneous time
 - (b) Higher organisms:
 - (i) Perception occurs at a distance
 - (ii) The organism is affected by and can affect more things
- vi) Genesis of perception: the hypothesis of pure perception
 - A) Actual perception always involved with two forms of memory
 - 1) Memory as recognition
 - (a) Memories supplant perception (becomes signs that trigger memories)
 - (b) This is clichéd perception (cf. Impressionists: must learn to see)
 - 2) Memory also is synthesis of perception qua duration
 - B) Hypothesis of a pure perception from which conscious perception is generated
 - 1) Confined to present and absorbed in “molding itself to an object”
 - 2) This is an idealized perception, a thought experiment
 - 3) By neglecting this, philosophers make two mistakes

- (a) They think of perception as “interior and subjective vision”
 - (b) They see memory as weak perception
- C) Route to perception (“representation”) is by diminution, not addition
 - 1) (In itself), a material object is temporally extended / linked to entire universe
 - 2) But (for us) a perception / representation grabs only the shell of the object
 - 3) Representation is virtual, needing actualization by diminution
 - 4) This diminution is done by organism, which picks out only what interests it
- D) Metaphor of light and photographic plate
 - 1) Perception is like a mirror image; it is virtual, “symbolizing” reflection of light
 - 2) “objects merely abandon something of their real action in order to manifest their virtual influence of the living being upon them”
- E) “Necessary poverty of conscious perception”
 - 1) For images, only diff of degree, not kind, btw being and being perceived
 - 2) We perceive via discarding what we have no interest in
 - 3) “perception of an uncs material point whatever, in its instantaneousness, is infinitely greater and more complete than ours, since the point gathers and transmits the influences of all the points of the material universe”
- VII) Genesis of the illusory problems: thinking of perception as brain photograph
 - A) The photograph is already taken, at the heart of things and everywhere
 - 1) Modern physics
 - 2) Leibnizian monads [JP: cf. Whitehead]
 - B) Brain is only screen for picture; it’s not mechanism of development
 - 1) Real action passes through
 - 2) Only the virtual action remains (perception as sketch of action)
 - C) Realist problem from assuming isolated brain generating representations
 - D) But a consistent biological perspective shows perception as pragmatic limitation
 - 1) It’s AS IF perception occurs in brain and is projected out to things
 - 2) BUT this is just following scientific spatializing / reifying of a process
 - 3) In reality, the process is a whole and perception occurs in the object
- VIII) Perception as “veridical hallucination” (= spontaneous cerebral image generation)
 - A) This is a philosopher’s view (vs. common sense)
 - 1) Comes from illusion of isolating brain
 - 2) And from hallucinations and dreams seen as internally generated
 - B) But this forgets contribution of memory
 - 1) Forecast: memory contributes to perception (and like it is not solely cerebral)
 - 2) Need now only see that congenitally blind people never have visual images
 - 3) So actual perception of images needs memory (like hallucinations / dreams)
 - 4) But ex hypothesi, pure perception does not need memory
 - 5) As pure perception has images (but doesn’t get them from memory)
 - 6) THEN, no image w/o an object
 - C) Perception as posing questions to a body’s motor capacities
 - 1) Perception is then lessened
 - (a) By cutting nerves (some part of object can no longer pose question)
 - (b) By habit (the answer – what motion should happen? – is already given)
 - 2) Missing is discernment (diminution) of image to produce perception
 - D) Source of illusion is false separation of sensory – motor nexus

- 1) Internal sensory quality different even for externally identical movements
 - 2) "truth is that perception is no more in the sensory centers than in the motor centers; it measures the complexity of their relations ..."
- IX) Perception is outside with things; it is not a projection of inside sensations
- A) Subjective genesis: from outside (all images) to inside (my body as center)
 - B) Analysis of facts to dispel illusions from inverse supposition (projection of inside)
 - 1) Senses require education
 - 2) "specific energy of nerves"
 - 3) Passing by degrees from extended representation to unextended affection
 - (a) Perception as exteriorization overlooks affection as btw images and ideas
 - (b) Increasing action of object of perception on our body yields affect of pain
 - (i) This seems to confirm diff degree btw affection and perception
 - (ii) And that perception is externalization / projection of affection
 - (c) But this doesn't explain either pain or perception
 - (i) Mystery how affection become extended by decrease of intensity
 - (ii) Affect as confused representation misses positive aspect
 - (iii) Why the sudden onset of pain?
 - (d) Bergson's theory of pain: failed local motor effort locked in sensory nerve
 - (e) Metaphor: perception = reflection / affection = absorption
 - C) Demonstration of necessity of affection from perception
 - 1) Perception measures possible / virtual action of things from a distance
 - 2) Affection is actualization of this action at zero distance
 - (a) "sensations are to perceptions as real action is to virtual action"
 - (b) At surface, our body is both perceived and felt
 - D) Once again, perception is external and affection is internal
 - 1) Correction of theory of pure perception:
 - (a) Affection is mixed w/ real perception
 - (b) "affection is not primary matter of which perception is made; it is rather the impurity with which perception is alloyed"
 - (c) This is origin of error of seeing perception as aggregate of sensations
 - (i) Reinforced by false view of space
 - (ii) And some "misinterpreted facts"
 - 2) Examination of the "misinterpreted facts"
 - (a) Appears as if we had to learn how to localize affective sensations
 - (b) Relation of personality and images
 - E) Summary and contrast of pure perception and current psychology
 - 1) Psychology moves outward from affective sensation
 - 2) Pure perception starts not from affection but from action
- x) Reinstating memory in real perception
- A) Memory images survive via utility;
 - 1) They complete present experience
 - 2) End up covering it over
 - 3) Perception ends up just an occasion for remembering
 - 4) In our interest to have perceptions as mere signs of real (vs parts of real)
 - B) Overlooking the mixing of memory and real perception
 - 1) Forgetting the pure perceptive core

- 2) Seeing in covering by memory the internal generation of images
- C) Capital error: seeing only difference of degree btw memory and perception
 - 1) Exchanging from intermixing
 - (a) Actual perceptions are interlaced w/ memories
 - (b) [Pure / virtual] memories only become actual by “borrowing body of some perception into which it slips”
 - 2) Psychology’s error
 - (a) Instead of dissociating pure memory and pure perception
 - (b) They see the mixed states as simple
 - (c) And arrange them in a single scale according to degree of mixture
 - 3) Results
 - (a) Vitiate theory of memory;
 - (i) Making recollection only a weakened perception makes us miss essential difference of past / present
 - (ii) Making perception only a stronger recollection misses the way pure perception puts us at the heart of things
 - (b) This error sets up realism vs idealism false dichotomy
 - (i) Both think perception is “veridical hallucination”
 - (ii) Both think perception is contemplation / speculative knowledge
 - 4) Bergson’s view, which dissolves realism / idealism false problem by intuition
 - (a) Past is only idea; that which no longer acts
 - (b) Present is ideo-motor; that which acts

XI) Further development

- A) Pure perception has duration; memory as temporal synthesis / condensation
- B) Relation of realist view of matter and our perception

- 1) Opposition:
 - (a) Perception = series of discontinuous pictures
 - (i) No deduction possible
 - (ii) Because of qualitative heterogeneity
 - (b) Realist matter can have its evolution deduced by mathematical laws
 - (i) Because it sees matter as homogenous changes in space
 - (ii) While perception is restricted to unextended sensations in time
- 2) Reconciliation
 - (a) Qualitative heterogeneity of perceptions results from memory as temporal synthesis condensing many successive vibrations into instant appearance
 - (b) If we could spread out those successive vibrations we would pass from perception to matter, approaching realist matter as homogenous vibrations
 - (c) “Subject and object would unite in extended perception”
 - (i) Subjective side of perception = memory as synthesis / contraction
 - (ii) Objective reality of matter = vibrations into which perception is broken
- 3) Formula: “questions ... of subject and object ... should be put in terms of time rather than space”

XII) Pure memory lets us occupy middle position btw materialism and spiritualism

A) Traditional dilemma

- 1) Materialism
 - (a) Pure perception means more in matter than what is given

- (i) Cness = discernment of interest
 - (ii) Thus only a difference of degree btw matter and perception of matter
 - (iii) Thus matter has no secret powers (it is not virtual, but actual)
 - (iv) But can only "receive, inhibit, or transmit movement"
- (b) BUT materialism holds that brain matter is special and can generate cness
- 2) Spiritualism follows this; giving to spirit what it steals from matter
- B) Bergson's solution:
 - 1) Eliminate all hidden power / virtuality from matter
 - 2) Establish spirit as independent reality
- C) Forecast of treatment of memory as essential problem
 - 1) If pure perception gives us the essence of matter
 - (a) Then if memory adds subjective perception, it must not be material
 - (b) And thus pure memory cannot depend on brain
 - 2) Restatement in clearer language:
 - (a) If we can show that brain is only small part of memory
 - (b) Then we undercut materialism which sees brain as store of memories
 - (c) Formulae for B's view of memory
 - (i) "spirit in its most tangible form"
 - (ii) "point of contact between cness and matter"
 - (iii) "interaction of spirit and matter"
 - 3) Last formulation
 - (a) Pure perception leads in two directions w/o immediate verification
 - (i) Psycho-physiology: brain as instrument of action
 - (ii) Metaphysics: we touch reality in immediate intuition
 - (b) Study of memory allows us to verify these two hypotheses