

Matter and Memory Chapter 4

John Protevi / LSU French Studies / Permission to reprint granted for academic use
protevi@lsu.edu / www.protevi.com/john/Bergson/MM4.pdf

- I) Role of body: to limit the life of spirit, orienting us to action
 - A) Perception: body measures our virtual action on things
 - B) Memory: body chooses useful memory to complete present situation re action
 - 1) Choice of memory is loose as we have many memories to fit each situation
 - 2) Mind [*l'esprit humain*] presses whole of memories against body as filter
- II) Metaphysical problem of union of soul and body
 - A) Both distinction and union here
 - 1) Distinction
 - (a) Perception places us w/in matter
 - (b) Memory puts us into spirit
 - 2) Union
 - B) Obscurity of the problem due to “double antithesis” of understanding
 - 1) Extended and unextended / Quality and quantity
 - 2) Pure perception and pure memory offer way out
 - (a) Pure perception
 - (b) Pure memory
- III) Method of intuition
 - A) Source of our problems
 - 1) We break up continuity of duration in immediateness for practical purposes
 - 2) And we then try to put it back together by addition:
 - (a) This is only a “factitious unity of an empty diagram”; it is lifeless
 - (b) Empiricism and dogmatism (idealism) agree in starting here
 - B) But we should be able to “seek experience at its source”
 - 1) Requirements:
 - (a) Break with “intellect enslaved to certain necessities of bodily life”
 - (b) “restore to intuition its original purity and so recover contact with the real”
 - 2) Procedure:
 - (a) Place ourselves at the turn of experience; dawn of human experience
 - (b) Above the turn
 - (i) Reconstitute the infinitely small elements we perceive of real curve
 - (ii) Philosopher / mathematician: integrate differential to find function
- IV) Recap of *Time and Free Will*
- V) Application of method of intuition to problem of matter
 - A) Disengaging concrete extension from homogeneous space
 - B) Concrete extension [= dilated duration]
 - 1) Continuous, diversified, organized
 - 2) Perceived (vs. conception of homogeneous space)
 - 3) Must be seen by effort of getting behind symbolic diagram covering it up
 - 4) And confirmed by showing how diagram leads to philosophical problems
- VI) Results revealed by intuition to be adduced in support of concrete extension
 - A) Every movement is indivisible

- 1) Example: moving hand from A to B
 - (a) Image of movement and act of moving
 - (b) Indivisible movement vs divisible traversed line (series of possible stops)
 - 2) We sense indivisible movement but have illusion of series of positions
 - (a) Imagination that we could stop at any point
 - (b) Facilitated by distinguishing moments of duration so that at each moment the object occupies a position
 - (i) But this is illusion generated by modeling duration on spatial line
 - (ii) Zeno's paradoxes flow from this illusion
 - (i) Common sense and language
 1. Regard a becoming as a thing to be used
 2. Express needs of practical life
 - (ii) But the philosopher needs to restore mobility to movement
 - (iii) Treatment of the four paradoxes
- B) There are real movements
 - 1) Mathematics: movement only change of distance relative to points
 - 2) Physics: movement as "indisputable reality" but still referred to space
 - (a) Relative vs absolute motion and space
 - (b) Force as ground of real movement
 - (i) Understood in physics only as acceleration
 - (ii) "metaphysically" understood as effort, but that is only cness of motion
 - 3) Bergson: "draw out of movement the mobility which is its essence"
 - (a) Internally grasped as change of state or change of quality
 - (b) Externally grasped as real change in sensible quality
 - (c) Changes in bodies seems intermediate, so we move to next proposition
- C) All division of matter into independent bodies is artificial
 - 1) Immediate data of cness
 - (a) Body as independent material object presented as system of qualities w/ resistance [touch] and color [sight] being at center
 - (b) Data of sight and touch have extension in space and thus continuity
 - 2) Why not then say that change is change in aspect of whole?
 - (a) Kaleidoscope / moving continuity is given / all changes and remains
 - (b) So why dissociate
 - (i) permanent bodies
 - (ii) change as homogenous movements in space?
 - 3) Science
 - (a) Is demonstrating reciprocal action of all matter
 - (b) And hence universal continuity
 - 4) Science and cness agree
 - (a) Immediate data of cness
 - (b) Remotest aspirations of science
 - 5) Life needs are reason for setting up illusion of moving bodies
 - (a) First distinction is my body, which in turn distinguishes other bodies
 - (b) Nutrition as focus on what will satisfy a need
 - (c) All needs are "searchlights"
 - (i) Single out from continuity of sensible qualities

- (ii) Those distinct bodies that can serve as satisfactions
- 6) Beware transposing distinct bodies (useful action) into speculative knowledge
 - (a) Chemistry studies (solid) bodies, at level of atom
 - (b) But physics shows dissolution of solidity of atom
- 7) Science shows reciprocal action of all parts of matter
 - (a) We imagine, under influence of life habits, bodies and forces (“threads”)
 - (b) But science shows convergence of atom and force toward common limit and hence universal continuity [= immediate data of cness]
 - (c) “pervading concrete extensity [there is] modifications, perturbations, changes of tension or of energy and nothing else”
- D) Real movement is transference of a state, not that of a thing
 - 1) Narrowing interval btw heterogeneous qualities and homogenous movements
 - (a) Difference seems impassible:
 - (i) quality of sensation
 - (ii) vs quantity of movement
 - (b) BUT, real movements are not difference of quantity but differences of qualities: internal vibrations
 - (i) Motion in mechanics is only common denominator
 - (ii) In themselves, motions are indivisibles / durations
 - (i) Linking together successive moments of time with “thread of variable quality” (similar to continuity of our cness)
 - (ii) For example, irreducible difference of 2 perceived colors occurs via contraction into our duration of vibrations
 1. If we could slow down these vibrations, we would see them approach pure vibrations (like deep music notes)
 2. When their rhythms would tally with rhythm of our duration
 - a. we see perceived quality
 - b. analyze itself into continuity of successive vibrations
 - 2) Vital needs hinder seeing this “mutual approach of quality and motion”
 - (a) Habit of attaching movement to solid bodies is projection of human needs
 - (b) Which renders incomprehensible perception as grasp of state of our cness and a reality of matter
 - 3) Excess of matter over perception is only ground of our belief in external world:
 - (a) Objectivity of perceived consists in what goes beyond what it yields
 - (b) That is, in all the movements in its depths (below the surface grasped by perception as useful to our needs)
 - (c) Mechanism formalizes this belief via deducibility of states of matter
 - (i) Only works by placing movements w/in qualities as internal vibrations
 - (ii) And by seeing vibrations as less homogenous / qualities as less heter.
 - (iii) And by attributing difference in aspect btw vibrations and qualities to the “necessity, for this undefined multiplicity, of being contracted into a duration too narrow for separating its moments”
 - 4) Duration and time
 - (a) Duration of our cness has its own (biologically determined) rhythm
 - (i) This doesn't match time of physics: example of red light
 - (ii) We can divide space indefinitely (discrete multiplicity)

- (iii) But we cannot divide our cness indefinitely (continuous multiplicity)
 - (i) [JP: Cf. chunkiness of cerebral processes]
 - (ii) [JP: Time needed for formation of resonant cell assemblies]
 - 5) Many durations / rhythms
 - (a) Re: consciousness
 - (i) measuring different kinds of cness in scale of being
 - (ii) hard to conceive bcs of habit of thinking of homogenous time
 - (b) Re: perception
 - (i) = condensation of dilute existence into more intense life
 - (ii) = summing up a long history
 - (iii) = immobilizing [the internal movements / vibrations of "things"]
 - (c) Re: Ontology
 - (i) Perception is (in one sense) in me via contraction into my duration
 - (ii) But w/o my perception
 - (i) "things" go back into themselves
 - (ii) Sensible qualities are diluted into a much slower duration
 - (iii) Matter is thus "resolved into numberless vibrations, all linked together in uninterrupted continuity, all bound up w/ each other, and traveling in every directions like shivers through an immense body"
 - 6) Fatiguing vision of matter (intuition above turn in experience)
 - (a) Moving above turn in experience (to pure experience)
 - (i) Connect together discontinuous objects of every experience
 - (ii) Resolve continuity of qualities into vibrations
 - (iii) Fix attention on vibrations
 - (i) Abstract them from divisible space
 - (ii) Feel them as motions, just as we feel our own motions
 - (b) Moving below turn (to human experience)
 - (i) Reintroduce cness and needs of life
 - (ii) Observe how our perception is condensation of "inner history of things"
 - (i) Quasi-instantaneous views
 - (ii) Pictures in which colors condense infinity of elementary changes
 - (iii) Like the way we see image of a man running
 - (iii) Our vision only takes in effects of multiplicity of inner repetitions
 - (i) These effects are discontinuous
 - (ii) And we "rebuild" motion as series of positions of objects
 - (iv) Universal and inward change is localized on surface of objects
 - (i) Stable in qualities
 - (ii) Mobile as to positions
- VII) Genesis of homogeneous space and time
 - A) There are natural divisions of things via evolutionary history, but separation of thing and environment cannot be absolute and clear-cut. So how do we account for the genesis of homogeneous space and time? Via perception and memory.
 - 1) Perception (space): merely sketches our possible action,
 - (a) Limits things where action stops, dividing continuity of concrete extension
 - (b) It does this via projection of conceived homogenous space
 - 2) Memory (time) solidifies continuous flow into sensible qualities

- (a) Prolongs past into present (contraction of past into images)
 - (b) Freedom and necessity
 - (i) Immediate reactions = material necessity
 - (ii) Free action = beings which fix becoming to which own becoming clings
 - (i) Solidification of becoming into distinct moments
 - (ii) Condensing / digesting matter into reactions passing through
“meshes of natural necessity”
 - (iii) Greater tension of duration = greater intensity of life
 - (i) Degree of concentrating power of perception
 - (ii) Measure of their liberty
 - (iv) IOW, you are more free the more you disengage from rhythm of matter
 - (c) To co-ordinate our duration and that of things, we imagine a
“diagrammatic design of succession in general”
- VIII) Thus homogenous space / time are only “diagrammatic design of our eventual action upon matter”: but forgetting this generates philosophical problems
- A) Metaphysical dogmatism
 - B) Realism and idealism
- IX) Return to conclusions of Chapter One