



Matter and Memory

Henri Bergson , *W. Scott Palmer* (translator) , *Nancy Margaret Paul* (translator)

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One of the major works of an important modern philosopher, Matter & Memory investigates the autonomous yet interconnected planes formed by matter & perception on the one hand & memory & time on the other. Henry Bergson (1859-1941) was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1927. His works include Time & Free Will, An Introduction to Metaphysics, Creative Evolution & The Creative Mind.

Matter and Memory Details

Date : Published November 8th 1990 by Zone Books (NYC) (first published 1896)

ISBN : 9780942299052

Author : Henri Bergson , W. Scott Palmer (translator) , Nancy Margaret Paul (translator)

Format : Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Nonfiction, Theory, Science, Psychology, Cultural, France, Academic, Nobel Prize, Metaphysics, Literature, 19th Century

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Download and Read Free Online Matter and Memory Henri Bergson , W. Scott Palmer (translator) , Nancy Margaret Paul (translator)

From Reader Review Matter and Memory for online ebook

Cole Tucker says

Slow burn.

??v?? εαυα says

Excellent, lucid, insightful, thought-provoking, delightful... a great work by Henri Bergson!

Andrew says

like a ceiling fan loaded with cauliflower on meat hooks

Agross says

this book is kinda boring. I may not finish it

Brian Kubarycz says

A fascinating and imaginative attempt to resolve difficulties besetting modern psychology, in particular with regard to the apparent schism between anatomy and consciousness. Bergson's treatment of this problem entails an attempt to identify the common ground between realist and idealist approaches to matter and space, and subsequently elaborate the possibility of a third position from which to view these two phenomena, one which views space not in speculative terms (as an object we can know) but rather pragmatic terms (as a tool we can use).

Bergson's text should proved quite challenging for a contemporary reader, insofar as his point of departure and constant touchstone, is 19th-century experimental psychology - a broad field of laboratory research about whose assumptions, methods and technologies most current readers will know relatively little.

Wil says

no one cares what I think

Garron says

Henry Bergson was a brilliant mind. In *Matter and Memory* he systematically breaks down contemporary (to his time) scientific and philosophic ideas in order to prove that matter and the soul are distinct; hence, he seeks to show that our soul/spirit cannot be rendered down as being mere matter within our body. In doing this, he is responding to Théodule Ribot who argued that memories belong to a certain part of the brain, and thus, they exist as matter.

The downfall of this book, and my one warning to anyone who make pick it up, is that it is complex and hard to follow unless you are well accustomed to reading this type of philosophic text. I found the reading myself, and would suggest it to be done over a long period of time over many short intervals of reading dispersed by long intervals of thinking.... If it was an easier text to work through this book would have been 5 stars. However, difficulty is often a symptom of this type of theory, and not a result of the authors/translators on ability to explain their work in writing.

The most fascinating aspect of his argument for me was in regards to motion, and how we do not seem to think in motion as a thing itself, but instead view it from our own perceptions as existing on a spatial plane. His followup, showing that space does not define motion, but instead motion defines space is cleverly argued and the logic is sound; I enjoy how because of this, changes in quality can also be seen as motion through vibrations, which leads to the possibility of multiple realities that exist outside of our given perceptions.

Sara-Maria Sorentino says

William James, the most darling of men, wrote that Bergson was "for me, a magician. Whereas, when I open most philosophical books, I get nothing but a sort of marking time, champing of the jaws, pawing the ground, and resettling into the same attitude like a weary horse in his stall, turning over the same few threadbare categories, applying the same solutions and the same objections, here on every page new horizons open. It is like the breath of the morning and the song of birds. And to me it tells of reality itself and not merely of what previous dusty-minded professors have written about what other still more previous professors have thought about reality. Nothing in Bergson is shop-worn or second-hand" (in Richardson's *William James: in the maelstrom of American modernism*, 427). For James it took a second reading of *Matter and Memory* to excite such gushing praise. I suppose it will take at least that for me.

A different methodological plod than the ones I've been dimly trailing. The short of it is something like this:

Pure perception, as less than the image and arising from without, fixes matter for the purposes of practical destinations; discernment, in its necessary poverty, is such as a result of the utility-oriented demands of the body. The body--the surface of which is carved out as the common limit of the external and internal--prepares pragmatically, situating a temporal horizon as a place of passage, for action, for the present. Perception meets memory in this active plane--the plane in which our body condenses its past unconsciously as motor habits, associated with the nerves, and as images, a pure memory consisting of independent recollections. This pure memory is a virtual representation of an absent object, and as such, is something different in kind (implicitly targeting psychophysical parallelism) from perception. Memory exists in different tones, appearing in dream tones of psychic life, states not regulated towards action. Our fugitive memories 'borrow warmth which gives it life' from perception, continuing and retaining the past with a view to needs, and they intertwine resulting in alternating currents: as both a centripetal force arising from the external object and a centrifugal force, an eddy of pure memory, pure virtuality, in the current that flows back towards engagement and actualization through the body and perception.

It seems important to wonder why I read this. As I work on answering that, I'll leave here a remnant of what has been initially promising in Bergson's work: the articulation of duration, his focus on needs, his unwillingness to separate subject and object for too long, the weaving back and forth from dualism to monism and back again (detailed in Deleuze's book), and the glimmers of infinity in the fabric of reality.

Also, this is the second book to inform me, in not so many words, that neurology is something I might begrudgingly have to confront, some distant day.

David Balfour says

Dualism

Bergson is a dualist, and he spends a large portion of this book reconciling traditionally opposed dichotomies like matter and mind, quantity and quality, necessity and freedom. Memory is the bridge that makes this all possible; it's "the intersection of mind and matter" (13).

Perception and Recollection

Bergson argues against the idea that recollection is just a weakened repetition of a past perception, or that there is only a difference of intensity between the two. Their fundamental difference becomes quite clear when he tries to imagine the point at which they become one another. He writes that if the recollection of a perception is just a weakened version of that perception, then "it might make us, for instance, take the perception of a slight sound for the recollection of a loud noise" (239). A dull perception might imprint a memory, but it does not reduce to one. In itself, it is a dull perception, and it's absurd to suggest that its lack of intensity means that it doesn't just create a memory in the act of being remembered, but that it is already a recollection from the moment of its initial experience.

Bergson also questions how recollection could be a weakened perception on the basis that the latter presupposes a perceived object, but the former does not. He concedes that in *pure* perception, there seems to be a more or less one-to-one relationship between the external object and cerebral states, with the perceived object causing a specific state of the brain that is essentially its continuation. This cerebral activity causes certain perceptions, and the brain can prolong them in the form of a recollection: "It is true that, from the moment when the recollection actualises itself in this manner, it ceases to be a recollection and becomes once more a perception" (240). But it's not clear exactly what causes these recollections; without an external stimulus they would seem arbitrary. How is it possible that we can represent things to ourselves which aren't actually present to the organs of sense, if the cerebral states that correspond with perception are just a continuation of things that *are* actually present to us? This suggests that there is something besides perception which allows us to recall things that are not actually present: As "our perception of the present object is something of that object itself, our representation of the absent object [in recollection] must be a phenomenon of quite another order than perception [...]" (236). Perception and recollection are thus qualitatively different things, and the latter isn't just a weakened version of the former. Pure perception has a one-to-one correspondence with external material objects, but memory – which gives birth to recollection – is something else entirely, and occupies the place of spirit in Bergson's dualism, as against matter:

We understand then why a remembrance cannot be the result of a state of the brain. The state of the brain continues the remembrance; it gives it a hold on the present by the materiality which it confers upon it: but pure memory is a spiritual manifestation. With memory we are, in truth, in the domain of spirit (240).

Memory Prisons

Bergson argues that the brain doesn't "imprison [...] recollections in cells" (237) as precisely localised deposits; there is no physical "reservoir of images" (237). The brain is not a jailer. Instead, its role is to facilitate the process of recognition by bringing past perceptions into contact with present ones, creating new possibilities for action. It does this in two ways. Most commonly, recollection is passive and habitual; acted rather than thought. When you put your hand on a hot stove, the brain automatically causes the body to respond, acting out a simple causative relation in which freedom is minimal. The brain can also facilitate behaviour which is active rather than passive by sending memory-images to meet pure perception and mingle with it. This makes actual perception something between the image and the memory-image, or between the present and the past.

Sorry, Kaufman

So how does the brain mix the present with the past? As I've said, the memory-images are not stored as specific deposits in the physical structure of the brain, so there can't be the sort of selective brain damage seen in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, but only a general diminution of faculties. For Bergson, the memory-images which go out to meet the pure perception arise from the interaction between pure memories and the present perception. Bergson is pretty vague about the exact nature of these pure memories, and I'm not sure if they correspond with specific structures in the brain or they're completely spiritual. In any case, there would be less of them than there would be with specific memory-images, because they're more like schemas or general concepts that only become specific memory images in response to external objects. My take on this difficult concept is that a pure memory corresponds with a "virtual state" (239) of the potential relation of the subject's body to other bodies. It's a past perception reduced to an abstract relation of bodies rather than a specific sensory image. It becomes a memory-image that can mingle with pure perception by interacting with an internal, virtual version of the sense organ. So past spatial relations give rise to memory-images by interacting with virtual organs of the sense, in the same way that present spatial relations give rise to pure perceptions by interacting with actual sensory organs.

Freedom and Necessity

According to Bergson, "The state of the brain exactly corresponds to the perception. It is neither its cause, nor its effect, nor in any sense its duplicate: it simply continues it, the perception being our virtual action and the cerebral state our action already begun" (233). This was really hard for me to get my head around because I tend to see "continue" as a synonym for "cause". He explicitly acknowledges that "we cannot substantiate [this] by facts, since on our hypothesis everything is bound to happen as if perception were a consequence of the state of the brain" (235). He asks us to suspend disbelief and allow him verify his theory of pure perception by his theory of memory - which was derived from it in the first place.

Bergson uses the word "tension" to denote the degree of pure perception and pure memory in perception. Our freedom seems to consist in adjusting this tension between the plane of action, which constitutes little more than the present relation of bodies, and the plane of dream which constitutes our whole past. According to Bergson, we are able to summon pure memories from the past and mix them with pure perceptions in the present, creating new potential actions besides those which are offered by external circumstance alone. At one extreme of tension, our entire past is packed into the present perception. At the other extreme, we exist only in the moment. Simpler organisms are less capable of shifting tension in order to detach themselves from the present. Bergson writes that as an organism becomes more complex, we see "an ever greater latitude left to movement in *space*" (248). But we also see "the growing and accompanying tension of consciousness in *time*" (248):

Not only, by its memory of former experience, does this consciousness retain the past better and better, so as to organise it with the present in a newer and richer decision; but, living with an intenser life, contracting, by its memory of the immediate experience, a growing number of external moments in its present duration, it becomes more capable of creating acts of which the inner determination, spread over as large a multiplicity of the moments of matter as you please, will pass the more easily through the meshes of necessity (248).

So memory is a form of power, parallel to physical mobility, that enables us to transcend physical causality; to detach ourselves from the contingencies of the present moment. In this way, our bodies are temporal, but our minds are atemporal. If we base our actions primarily on perception, our freedom is diminished and we become subject to the relentless flow of duration. If we base our actions on recollection, however, we are free: “By allowing us to grasp in a single intuition multiple moments of duration, [memory] frees us from the movement of the flow of things, that is to say, from the rhythm of necessity” (228).

Planes of Consciousness

Bergson imagines consciousness as an upside-down funnel, the point of which connects to a plane symbolising pure perception. Adjusting tension involves sliding up and down the funnel, to let more or less of the past enter the present.

On the plane of action, consciousness exists almost entirely in the present perception. It is an automatic and sensori-motor way of being where the body is of prime importance. At the plane of dream, on the other hand, consciousness packs as much of the past into the present as it can, and the body is much less important. In dreams, there is a disconnect between sensation and potential action; something unbalances “the sensori-motor equilibrium of the body” (174). Recollections are called up almost arbitrarily, without reference to external objects. Bergson suggests that this may also explain near death experiences where someone's body fails and their entire life flashes before their eyes.

Latent Consciousness

The idea that consciousness exists on a spectrum leads to a sort of panpsychism where inert matter responds unthinkingly and automatically to the effects of other bodies on its own, just like organisms at a certain degree of tension:

The material universe itself, defined as the totality of images, is a kind of consciousness, a consciousness in which everything compensates and neutralises everything else, a consciousness of which all the potential parts, balancing each other by a reaction which is always equal to the action, reciprocally hinder each other from standing out (235).

This reminds me of Leibniz's monads which are the simple, unextended building blocks of the universe. Even in matter, they have vague, muddled perceptions and desires which enable them to respond mechanically, but they aren't soul or spirit because they don't have memory or feelings; they exist as if in a “profound, dreamless sleep” (The Rationalists 458). The distinction between animate and inanimate objects is very similar for Bergson; one has memory and the other does not. As an aside, I'll note that strictly speaking, monads are “windowless” and can't interact with one another directly, but God moves them according to a “pre-established harmony” that makes it seem as if they are moving one another.

The Image

Bergson starts from a deliberately naïve perspective when it comes to the relation between mind and body. Quite simply, there doesn't need to be a sharp distinction between them. Everything comes to us as an image, and our consciousness is just a collection of images pertaining to the virtual or potential action of our body - which is another image. There doesn't need to be a perceiving subject if the percepts *are* the subject. Perception therefore exists in the perceived object rather than the perceiving subject: “It is not true that consciousness, turned round on itself, is confronted with a merely internal procession of inextensive perceptions. It is inside the very things perceived that you put back pure perception” (246). So there is no difference between phenomena and noumena, but this does not mean appearance is without independent reality. Perception is like a surgeon's blade, cutting away every image that doesn't pertain to the potential action of one privileged image, the body. Consequently, “The relation of “phenomenon” to “thing” is not that of appearance to reality, but merely that of the part to the whole” (230).

The Illusion of Multiplicity

This brings us to another parallel with Leibniz's *Monadology*, which is the idea that every individual thing expresses every other thing in some sense: "Science [...] by an evermore complete demonstration of the reciprocal action of all material points upon each other, returns, in spite of appearances, to the idea of universal continuity" (197). This seems particularly tenable if we consider the fact that every body exists in a gravitational relation with every other body in the universe. Leibniz writes that there is an "interconnection, relationship, or [...] adaptation of all things to each particular one, and of each one to all the rest" (*The Rationalists* 464). This "brings it about that every simple substance [monad] has relations which express all the others and that it is consequently a perpetual living mirror of the universe" (*The Rationalists* 464). According to both authors, every individual thing participates in the entire universe at once, but only experiences something distinctly if it pertains directly to its body in space and time:

God, in ordering the whole, has had regard to every part and in particular to each monad; and since each monad is by its very nature representative, nothing can limit it to represent merely a part of things. It is nevertheless true that this representation is, as regards the details of the whole universe, only a confused representation, and is distinct only as regards a small part of them, that is to say, as regards those things which are nearest or greatest in relation to each monad [...] In a confused way, they reach out to infinity or to the whole, but are limited and differentiated in the degree of their distinct perceptions [...] Although each created monad represents the whole universe, it represents more distinctly the body which specially pertains to it and of which it constitutes the entelechy (*The Rationalists* 465).

Bergson's view is strikingly similar: "Science [...] shows us each thing exercising an influence on all the others and, consequently, occupying, in a certain sense, the whole of the extended (although we perceive of this thing only its center and mark its limits at the point where our body ceases to have any hold upon it)" (231).

Bergson sees atomistic conceptions of matter as a mere convenience of thought. He is opposed to the idea of a hidden realm of extended corpuscles which obey the laws of necessity according to accidental interactions. We only make space homogenous and infinitely divisible to help organise the potential action of our bodies:

In regard to concrete extension, continuous, diversified and at the same time organized, we do not see why it should be bound up with the amorphous and inert space which subtends it – a space which we divide indefinitely, out of which we carve figures arbitrarily, and in which movement itself [...] can only appear as a multiplicity of instantaneous positions, since nothing there can ensure the coherence of past with present (187).

Space is therefore a kind of schematic or overlay that helps us arrange our bodies in relation to other bodies. It serves a similar role in Kant's transcendental aesthetic, but Bergson proposes it as an avoidable tendency rather than a fundamental prerequisite for experience, and it doesn't hide an inaccessible realm of things-in-themselves.

Intuition

Bergson believes that many philosophical "difficulties, contradictions and problems are mainly the result of the symbolic diagrams which cover [...] up [immediate knowledge], diagrams which for us have become reality itself, and beyond which only an intense and unusual effort can succeed in penetrating" (187). So it's possible to dispel ourselves of these convenient illusions by immersing ourselves in experience, and intuiting images in a continual flow. He uses this method to tackle Zeno's paradox of motion and finds that it's based on a faulty analogy between movement and its trajectory; between motion and the inert line it traces; between something that occurs in time and something that occurs in space:

When I put aside all preconceived ideas, I soon perceive that [...] even my sight takes in the

movement from A to B as an indivisible whole, and that if it divides anything, it is the line supposed to have been traversed, and not the movement traversing it. It is indeed true that my hand does not go from A to B without passing through the intermediate positions, and that these intermediate points resemble stages, as numerous as you please, along the route; but there is, between the divisions so marked out and stages properly so-called, this capital difference, that at a stage we halt, whereas at these points the moving body passes. Now a passage is a movement and a halt is an immobility. The halt interrupts the movement; the passage is one with the movement itself. When I see the moving body pass any point, I conceive, no doubt, that it might stop there; even when it does not stop there, I incline to consider its passage as an arrest, though infinitely short, because I must have at least the time to think of it; yet it is only my imagination which stops there, and what the moving body has to do is, on the contrary, to move. As every point of space necessarily appears to me fixed, I find it extremely difficult not to attribute to the moving body itself the immobility of the point with which, for a moment, I make it coincide; it seems to me, then, when I reconstitute the total movement, that the moving body has stayed an infinitely short time at every point of its trajectory. But we must not confound the data of the senses, which perceive the movement, with the artifice of the mind, which recomposes it. The senses, left to themselves, present to us the real movement, between two halts, as a solid and undivided whole. The division is the work of our imagination, of which indeed the office is to fix the moving images of our ordinary experience, like the instantaneous flash which illuminates a stormy landscape by night (189).

So we think habitually in *things* which our bodies can act upon, and we have a great deal of trouble imagining continuity. As soon as we endeavour to think of something, it's frozen and sealed off from everything else. We even understand movement and duration in terms of space. That is, language and common sense use spatial metaphors to describe time, even though it's fundamentally different.

Gabriel says

Not the easiest book by Bergson, but one of the most fascinating. The 1. chapter about perception is extremely original, still discussed by philosophers and scientists. The 4. chapter broaches Bergson's contemporary Physic und transports us behind matery and mind, over the dualism Bergson's writings are steeped of elsewhere. The scientific material Bergson is using may be old - the relevant questions he asks, the streng way of his thought, his clear and fluent writing-style make the book a must read for anyone having interest in mind-body relation and in the metaphysical issue of liberty. I'll always remember and meditate the book's last sentence : "L'esprit emprunte à la matière les perceptions d'où il tire sa nourriture, et les lui rend sous forme de mouvement, où il a imprimé sa liberté."

Giorgio Majer says

One of the best books in my life.

I-kai says

After many many years, finally finished this book on the umpteenth try. Bergson is not monumentally difficult to read, don't know why I could never get past chapter one before. There is a lot to be said about his

valuable views on memory, and the freedom-necessity relation...

Alex Lee says

Bergson takes the immanent image of a thing and centralizes it to perception and memory. He calibrates thought and action around the image of memory -- both constructed from matter and an arrangement of matter (they are the same thing). This is a somewhat difficult book to read, but Bergson is successful in presenting his case. Most of the book is about realigning understanding so as to clear a space for this deep insight.

With this, human beings become understood as walking sheets of memory. We are imprints of matter whose experience is the resolution and collection of those imprints.

Bergson is not wrong; he often cannot be proven wrong. What he is good at, is the presentation of alternate arrangements of the familiar. This book is the most successful because here, he realigns the very nature of how we can conceive of consciousness. Not as a field, or some kind of metaphysics of presence or some kind of magical substance, but rather as a relation of the piece that has the most in common with everything -- memory. It is through the torsions of the images in memory that Bergson is able to trace out the different movements inherent with human sense-reasoning.

If you want another perspective, an immanent perspective on another way to consider the familiar structure of thought, reason, action and perception, here is a rare look at one.

Jacob says

Worth reading if you're into reevaluating how you view Time, Space, and Self.

Jonathan says

Read as part of my 2015 Modernists project.

"But Time, unfortunately, though it makes animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality, has no such simple effect upon the mind of man. The mind of man, moreover, works with equal strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second. This extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation." - Virginia Woolf - Orlando

I could have chosen countless other quotes to illustrate a point made by countless others: Bergson's philosophy was a vital influence upon, and is a vital tool for understanding, Modernist literature.

Memory and Time. Perception and Duration. The Body.

He says things like:

"we extend to the series of memories, in time, that obligation of containing and being contained which applies only to the collection of bodies instantaneously perceived in space. The fundamental illusion consists in transferring to duration itself, in its continuous flow, the form of the instantaneous sections which we make in it."

and

" In reality there is no one rhythm of duration ; it is possible to imagine many different rhythms which, slower or faster, measure the degree of tension or relaxation of different kinds of consciousness, and thereby fix their respective places in the scale of being. To conceive of durations of different tensions is perhaps both difficult and strange to our mind, because we have acquired the useful habit of substituting for the true duration, lived by consciousness, an homogeneous and independent Time ; but, in the first place, it is easy, as we have shown, to detect the illusion which renders such a thought foreign to us, and, secondly, this idea has in its favour, at bottom, the tacit agreement of our consciousness. Do we not sometimes perceive in ourselves, in sleep, two contemporaneous and distinct persons of whom one sleeps a few minutes, while the other's dream fills days and weeks ? And would not the whole of history be contained in a very short time for a consciousness at a higher degree of tension than our own, which should watch the development of humanity while contracting it, so to speak, into the great phases of its evolution ? In short, then, to perceive consists in condensing enormous periods of an infinitely diluted existence into a few more differentiated moments of an intenser life, and in thus summing up a very long history. To perceive means to immobilize. To say this is to say that we seize, in the act of perception, something which outruns perception itself, although the material universe is not essentially different or distinct from the representation which we have of it. In one sense, my perception is indeed truly within me, since it contracts into a single moment of my duration that which, taken in itself, spreads over an incalculable number of moments. But, if you abolish my consciousness, the material universe subsists exactly as it was; only, since you have removed that particular rhythm of duration which was the condition of my action upon things, these things draw back into themselves, mark as many moments in their own existence as science distinguishes in it ; and sensible qualities, without vanishing, are spread and diluted in an incomparably more divided duration. Matter thus resolves itself into numberless vibrations, all linked together in uninterrupted continuity, all bound up with each other, and travelling in every direction like shivers through an immense body. In short, try first to connect together the discontinuous objects of daily experience ; then resolve the motionless continuity of their qualities into vibrations on the spot ; finally fix your attention on these movements, by abstracting from the divisible space which underlies them and considering only their mobility that undivided act which our consciousness becomes aware of in our own movements): you will thus obtain a vision of matter, fatiguing perhaps for your imagination, but pure, and freed from all that the exigencies of life compel you to add to it in external perception. -Now bring back consciousness, and with it the exigencies of life: at long, very long, intervals, and by as many leaps over enormous periods of the inner history of things, quasi-instantaneous views will be taken, views which this time are bound to be pictorial, and of which the more vivid colours will condense an infinity of elementary repetitions and changes. In just the same way the multitudinous successive positions of a runner are contracted into a single symbolic attitude, which our eyes perceive, which art reproduces, and which becomes for us all the image of a man running. The glance which falls at any moment on the things about us only takes in the effects of a multiplicity of inner repetitions and evolutions, effects which are, for that very reason, discontinuous, and into which we bring back continuity by the relative movements that we attribute to 'objects' in space. The change is everywhere, but inward; we localize it here and there, but outwardly; and thus we constitute bodies which are both stable as to their qualities and mobile as to their positions, a mere change of place summing up in itself, to our eyes, the universal transformation."

Now, whether or not I think he is **right** is sort of beside the point here, what is interesting for me is how clearly all this provides a philosophical underpinning for what Woolf, Richardson, Joyce etc were trying to do.

Yann says

Mnémosyne, la mère des Muses

Matière et Mémoire est un essai écrit par Henri Bergson un professeur de philosophie français de la troisième république. Il s'agit de trouver une explication vraisemblable à l'articulation entre le corps et l'esprit, dans l'hypothèse dualiste. Il écarte les visions monistes, qu'elles soient matérialistes ou idéalistes, comme celle de Berkeley (Trois dialogues entre Hylas et Philonous, Principes de la connaissance humaine). Pour ce faire, il problématise une fonction capitale de l'entendement, et que Kant avait un peu négligé dans ses critiques, la mémoire. Pour appuyer le plus fortement possible sa conviction dualiste, il va scinder la mémoire en deux types, l'une matérielle, mécanique, basée sur l'apprentissage, la répétition, et l'autre plus spirituelle, qui en le souvenir de chaque événement ponctuel de notre vie, et dont le retour à notre conscience n'intervient que par association. Il corrobore son système par des observations cliniques de troubles psychiques intrigants et remarquables, ce qui lui sert à montrer que la mémoire de ces événements ne se situe jamais en une zone précise du cerveau, et donc réside vraisemblablement hors du corps. Il établit donc une différence de nature entre les perceptions, venues du monde extérieur, et les affections, qui viennent de l'intérieur.

Cette partition des facultés de la mémoire en deux essences distinctes il faut les réconcilier en rendant notre perception dépendante de nos souvenirs par un processus d'actions réciproques et interdépendantes qu'il illustre par un joli schéma géométrique. En gros, après avoir identifié dans le monde matériel la mémoire mécanique et l'action réflexe, il identifie de la même manière la mémoire spirituelle et métaphysique comme une sorte d'entonnoir qui injecte la liberté (c'est à dire une perturbation des lois déterministes du monde matériel) par nos actions spontanées.

Il conclue ainsi par l'existence du libre-arbitre. Je suppose qu'il pense comme tant d'autres que sans lui, il n'y a point de morale. C'est un livre intéressant, même si comme tous les livres traitant de métaphysique, il est en quelque sorte contraint de poser des hypostases par-ci par-là, et pour les faire accepter plus aisément au lecteur engoncé dans la torpeur de ses certitudes, d'user des vieilles ficelles des philosophes: traiter de "vulgaire" les opinions contraires, jargonner par moment, écrire en italique, utiliser des néologismes, caricaturer deux extrêmes pour se poser en juste milieu, et enfin la plus efficace des figures rhétoriques: l'affirmation! Mais ces petites ruses inévitables restent toutefois assez discrètes, et la lecture en reste plaisante, et sa théorie vraisemblable. A défaut d'être plus instruit, on aura bien rêvé, et passé un bon moment à mettre sa cervelle à l'alambic. Il paraît qu'il était lié avec Proust. Je me demande si ses ratiocinations ont influencé l'écrivain?

Henri Bergson

SirriCan says

plan yapmay?n plan tutmaz bergsonculukta

Julian Mathews says

As part of the books I'm reading to get me ready to tackle Difference and Repetition, I was taken aback at just how much of Deleuze's ideas harken back to Bergson. Deceptively simple, yet very accessible.

the gift says

this is a much later addition: rather than read this again, or read about it- i have decided to read 'creative evolution' as the last of his big books. the u library does not have much bergson, as i think the teaching focus is here primarily analytic. such does not encourage me in thought as much as rereading the first chapter here...

first review: this is 3rd book i have read by the man himself, published first in 1896. i think it would be better as a study text rather than attempting to read it like any work of fiction...

because, of course, this is not fiction but philosophy. even in translation from french, this has some beautiful writing, and i can certainly see how it could be widely read, admired, worked on, and how it could have such affect on merleau-ponty. have not read it, but apparently deleuze wrote a book that started reappraisal of bergson, so something to get...

yes beautiful writing, but it took me several readings to get through, rereading his longer sentences heavy with clauses and subclauses, with qualifications, with determinations not only negative but positive. the theme seems to be that scientific reasoning and ontology is not the best way to understand human experience of living, how materialism and idealism are both self-defeating, indeed contradicting themselves, and he does refer to some philosophers of common reading- berkeley, kant- but insists all their attempts to surpass the endemic problems are doomed to failure, simply because they operate of a metaphysics of space and not time...

yes beautiful writing, yes helpful i had read those several books on bergson before this- i had read the first 77 pages one long flight, but when i landed i did not read on and when i returned home i did not resume. so here, a year later, i reread the 77 pages, then went on. i do not know if this is the right way to read philosophy but it helped with bergson, because i could now sense how time is the nature of in-extensive thought, how memory works...

but this is all in subjective discovery, as i thought of time, thought of bergson's arguments, how pure perception is misunderstood as being only a difference of degree, from memory, from thought, where the perceived is out in the objective world, how time is misunderstood on the common model of space, how time is heterogeneous and space, of any conception, is homogenous. he has answers for zeno's paradoxes of movement such as achilles and the turtle, such as the arrow in flight, for these are examples of misunderstanding time as a succession of infinitely divisible, atomistic, points, rather than of duration...

yes at the moment- at this duration- i am interested in time, and wonder how this might persist and change when no longer hostage to an essential dualism of physical and psychical, this third conception of the world that exceeds our physical perception but not therefore considered beyond reality because it is beyond that hill- so how can we say these moments- these durations- are not real also despite being beyond our perception? science gives us an infinite space, does this also mean infinite time? well this precedes einstein so i do not know...

yes there are questions- but do i read philosophy for something like answers complete or absolute, or

answers leading to further questions? i think of my 3 times rule for all aesthetic experiences: 1- the first time any pleasure is heightened by novelty, 2- any pleasure pales in memory of the first time, 3- pleasure now abstracted from novelty or jadedness, now independent of time...

yes there is great thought in here. i think it would be easy to read, to understand, but then i have read a lot of philosophy and on him- bergson- in particular, so maybe i am wrong. maybe trying to write an essay might clarify my difficulties with full grasp of his arguments, but it is enough that i will go on to read more of bergson...

ralowe says

i come away from this with an outline or notion that deleuze's desiring machines are connected to bergson's ideas of images and perception. our brains process objects in the world as multiple images in a fashion similar to how desiring machines proliferate. i used that to try to follow this, but i could be entirely wrong. i could believe that i was led to bergson through deleuze by kara keeling, who referenced bergson's idea of the sensori-motor to talk about how films move us. i wonder if i should read deleuze's bergsonism or stuff on film theory. i liked how bergson talks about memory being in the body and connected to action, or conditioned responses. that made sense with keeling's witch's flight on the affective labor of investment and responses to cinema. the writing kept throwing me off because i don't read philosophy but i appreciate its place in a larger conversation!
