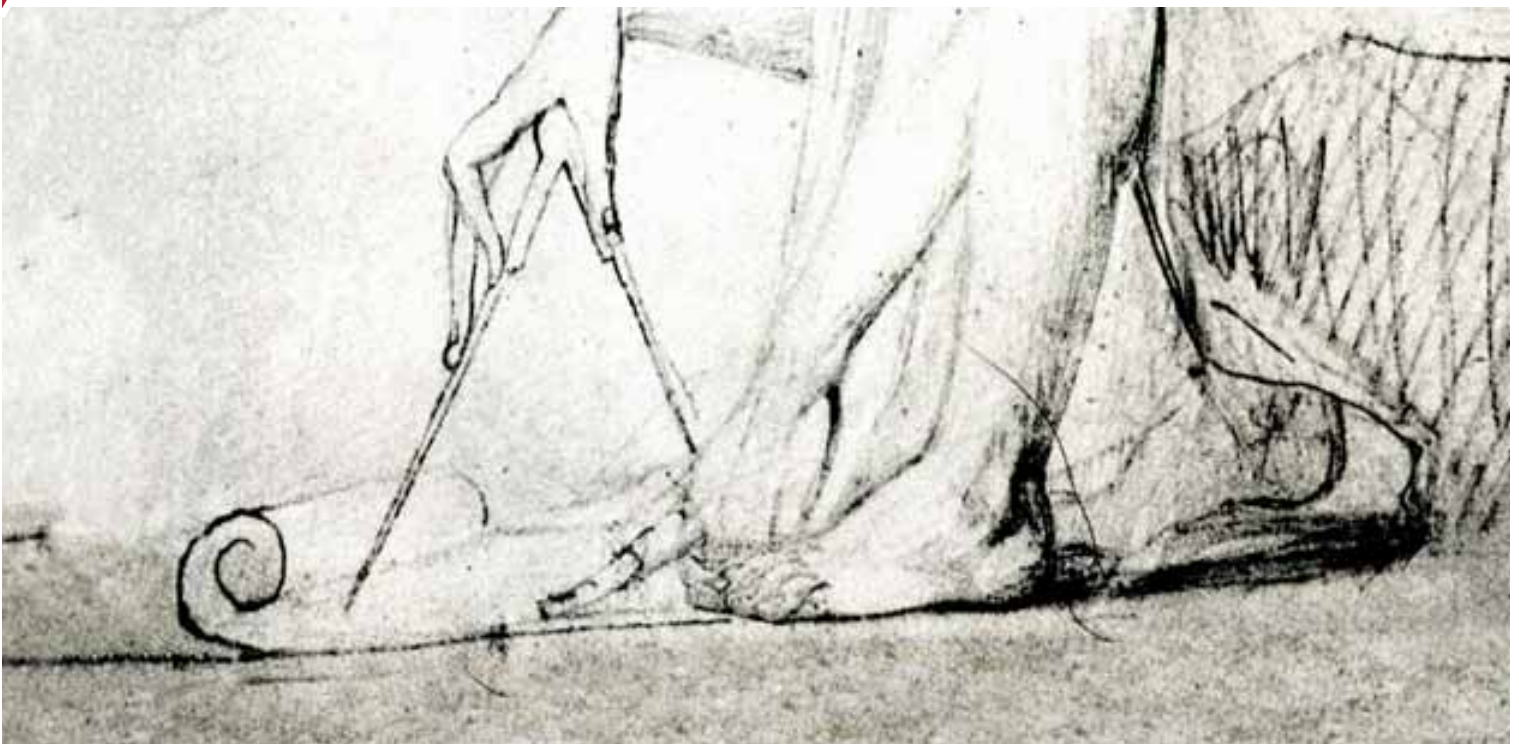


Understanding Matter

Volume 1

Perspectives in Modern Philosophy

Edited by Andrea Le Moli and Angelo Ciatello



NEW
DIGITAL
FRONTIERS

Nodi

Collana di Storia della Filosofia



Nodi. Collana di Storia della filosofia

ISSN: 2421-6844 (cartaceo) - 2464-868X (online)

Direttore: Andrea Le Moli

Segretari: Pietro Giuffrida, Gabriele Schimmenti, Michele Tutone

Comitato scientifico internazionale: Markus Gabriel (Universität Bonn), Helen Lang (Villanova University), Jean-Marc Narbonne (Université Laval), Dmitri Nikulin (New School for Social Research), Luigi Ruggiu (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia), Leonardo Samonà (Università degli Studi di Palermo), Andreas Urs Sommer (Albert-Ludwigs Universität Freiburg), Franco Trabattoni (Università degli Studi di Milano)

N. 1 - Settembre 2015

Understanding Matter

Vol. 1. Perspectives in Modern Philosophy

Edited by Andrea Le Moli and Angelo Ciatello

© Copyright 2015 New Digital Frontiers srl

Viale delle Scienze, Edificio 16 (c/o ARCA)

90128 Palermo

www.newdigitalfrontiers.com

ISBN (a stampa): 978-88-99487-01-0

ISBN (online): 978-88-99487-04-01

Pubblicazione realizzata con il contributo del
CRF - Centro Internazionale per la Ricerca Filosofica
www.ricercafilosofica.it

Le opere pubblicate sono sottoposte a processo di peer-review a doppio cieco

UNDERSTANDING MATTER

VOLUME 1

PERSPECTIVES IN MODERN PHILOSOPHY

Edited by Andrea Le Moli and Angelo Ciatello

This volume includes contributions on History of Modern Philosophy originally presented as individual papers at CRF 1st International Conference «Understanding Matter», Palermo (Italy), 10th-13th April 2014.

Contents

The Notion of Matter and the Reformation of Metaphysics ANDREA LE MOLI	7
Understanding Matter ANGELO CICALLO	11
Materia, attualità, dimensionabilità: Plotino e Averroè nel <i>De la causa</i> di Giordano Bruno MONICA MARCHETTO	15
Materia invisibile: la dottrina degli effluvi in Campanella, Gilbert, Boyle SILVIA PARIGI	27
From Extension to Individual Bodies. Descartes' Complex Theory of Matter FABRIZIO BALDASSARRI	57
<i>Extensio, Materia</i> and <i>Corpus</i> in Spinoza's Philosophy FEDERICA DE FELICE	71
Matter and primary Matter in Leibniz ADRIAN NITA	85
Living in a Material World. Hylas' Matter in George Berkeley's <i>Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous</i> MICHAEL MENDYKA	97

Providing Matter for Immaterial Objects. Ideas, Symbols and Experience in § 55 – 62 of Kant's <i>Critique of Judgment</i> LUIGI FILIERI	109
Materia e metamorfosi. A partire dalla morfologia goethiana ROSA MARIA LUPO	125
Material Potencies: An Investigation into the Matter of Predication DIANA KHAMIS	143
Matter as Ground for Aesthetic Activity in Schelling MAHMOUD RASMI	157
The Difference Between Schelling's and Hegel's Conceptions of Matter BENJAMIN BERGER	169
Bibliography	187

The Notion of Matter and the Reformation of Metaphysics

ANDREA LE MOLI

How do we experience matter? Does it present itself to the senses? Or is it only an empty substratum that cannot be grasped if deprived of all sensible qualities? Is it perceived as a continuum, or rather intellectually reconstructed through mental and logical forms? Or is it that the very idea of a continuum is itself the outcome of mental abstraction? And what about the status of matter in light of contemporary subatomic physics? Is matter an unpredictable flux of pure energy or an organised cosmos of even more basic elements?

The nature of matter has been a central issue for philosophy since its inception. Over the course of centuries of debate, a wide variety of theoretical solutions have been proposed. Indeed, all major historical shifts of thought have prompted fundamental re-thinking of the nature of matter. For instance, the rise of the importance of mathematics in the natural sciences helped shape the transition from positing a 'philosophy of nature' to concentrating on the empirical sciences. Debates about matter were intimately connected with the polemical rejections of materialism and dogmatism in the 18th and 19th centuries. Most recently, contemporary physics has called for a fundamental re-orientation of the traditional paradigm, excluding all cognitive approaches to matter except those which are based on an encounter with matter's physical instances. It is this rather restricted notion of matter which is said to define the breadth of the experience we are said to be able to have of reality in general, and in doing so it defines our experience, as well, of other human beings, thoughts and theories. It is a closed circle which is not often broken.

Despite all this, after a closer look, it must be recognised that the notion of matter has never ceased to be a topic of interest in a variety

of philosophical discussions. Even here and now, within what we may call the perspective of a 'reformed metaphysics', the notion of matter plays a very central role, also determining the way in which science and philosophy do not cease to intertwine.

To cite an example: in the attempt to answer the question, «What would have existed if no man or subject has ever existed to testify to it?», hard sciences are used to evoke precisely the notion of matter as the sum of all the qualities/properties which are independent from perception and experience. So, when we ask, «What of the Moon would still exist even if no man had ever existed to watch it rise and set?» we are asking, which part of the complex experience we summarise under the term 'Moon' would remain if transferred to a domain with no man, that is, into a world completely lacking experience.

To such questions, 'matter', intended as the whole of physical properties of an object, comes as a very common - and apparently correct - answer.

And yet, science can hardly admit what the reason is for the correctness of these assertions. Even in making these statements, science has already entered the realm of metaphysics, compromising its methodological purity and unwittingly adopting that very spirit of inquiry that animates classical philosophy.

As a matter of fact, metaphysics may also be defined as the hypothetical gaze directed at an object deprived of all its contingency and boundness to a particular perspective or point of view. It is the radical shifting of the subject from the vantage of the individual gaze, with the aim of conceiving of things by distinguishing what human thought or perception brings to the experience from what could never have been a result of human activity. In this sense, physics is always meta-physics.

But metaphysics is more than an appendix, attached to something which pretends nonetheless to be different in structure and scope. Metaphysics goes beyond physics by formulating that reality as a whole would not be properly conceived if one referred to the Whole exclusively in physical terms, that is, as the sum of all the independent qualities which pertain to things in themselves.

But a reformed metaphysics also would not dare to think the 'Whole' appeared only under the form of pure thought.

The Notion of Matter and the Reformation of Metaphysics

Indeed, what metaphysics bears within itself as the proof of its genuine reformation is the intuition of what the notion of *meta* contains; that is, a special relation to the Whole as such.

Accordingly, the Whole can be conceived only as the unity of the Whole and what seems to resist to be included within it. A higher-order Whole which doesn't own the structure of a self-imposing Totality. This higher Whole appears only as the radical unit of the unifying principle and the issue of resistance generated in it. In this sense, that is within the perspective of a metaphysics which relieves the issue of violence, 'matter' is no longer the Whole of reality/experience, nor a principle radically opposed to the unifying function of spirit. Rather, it is the condition for recognising always more comprehensive forms of unity and harmony by preserving its power to resist every closure of the Whole to a 'mere' Totality.

It is, thus, very exciting to follow the various perspectives described in this book in their historical development, and to discover how much the notion of matter has progressively got rid of the prevalence of aesthetic aspects in favour of pure conceptualisation at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This new dimension, though deeply rooted in the past, arises anew in the transition from English to German Philosophy, so paving the way for the 'revolutions' which will enliven the Contemporary Age.