

# NATURE, MIND AND MODERN SCIENCE (MUIRHEAD LIBRARY OF PHILOSOPHY) pdf

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*Nature, Mind and Modern Science (Muirhead Library of Philosophy) (Volume 60) 1st Edition by Harris Errol E (Author).*

The following article appeared in *Process Studies*, pp. Today we face the need for a radical change in this dichotomy, a philosophy of nature where the metaphysical and physical be conjoined. Earlier, and until about two centuries ago, there had been a main field of inquiry known as *philosophia naturalis*, the philosophy of nature. Then this field of inquiry fairly abruptly ceased being pursued. It is interesting, and as I shall show, important to us today to determine how and why this happened. It is indeed not difficult to do so, and the main features of this history can be fairly quickly sketched. In the sixteenth century there occurred a considerable expansion of interest, especially among medical men who were leading scientists and thinkers of the day, in the philosophy of nature, which led to the momentous developments of the seventeenth century. Of particular importance in this process were the steps taken in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, for these had the consequence of the introduction of a new conception of nature, which appeared in a number of books about the year 1600, by Daniel Sennert in Germany, David van Goolle in Holland, Galileo in Italy, Francis Bacon in England, and most fully developed by the Frenchman Sebastian Basso in his *Philosophia Naturalis*. This new conception of nature was elaborated and fully explored in the course of the seventeenth century by thinkers such as Descartes, Gassendi, Thomas Hobbes, Robert Boyle, Leibniz and Newton, to name but a few of the most important. Gassendi, in a number of books, worked out the theory of material atomism. Thomas Hobbes explored an alternative in his *De Corpore*. Leibniz, in the next generation, critically and penetratingly examined the theories of his predecessors and developed his own alternative philosophy of nature in a series of monographs, articles, and letters. Although the work was mainly concerned with the "mathematical principles" of the philosophy of nature, it contained some highly significant philosophical sections, especially the "Rules of Reasoning" at the beginning of Book 3 and the General Scholium at the end of that book. To this must be added the "Queries" at the end of his *Opticks*. These writings on the philosophy of nature by these thinkers and others are among the most important works of the seventeenth century. Quite early Sebastian Basso had seen very clearly that basic to the new conception of nature was a new conception of matter. In this new view matter had come to be conceived as itself substance, in contrast to the previous conception in which matter was only the correlative of form in a substance. The consequence of the conception of matter as itself substance was an ineluctable metaphysical dualism, which had been explicitly accepted by Basso and Galileo and was then systematically developed by Descartes. The outcome of this was that the universe was divided into two, one part consisting of matter, constituting nature, and the other part consisting of mind or spirit. The fields of inquiry were divided accordingly: Thenceforth these two, science and philosophy, each went its own way, in separation from the other. In this division there was no place for the philosophy of nature. Its object had been nature, and this was now assigned to natural science. What remained to philosophy was only the epistemological and logical inquiry, which has natural science, but not nature, as its object -- today usually called the philosophy of science. Philosophy of nature as a field of inquiry ceased to exist. In our time, however, I wish to maintain, the situation has completely changed. The reason for this is to be found in the development of science in the past hundred years. This development has had the consequence that the conception of nature which had originated in the seventeenth century and thenceforward constituted the foundation for science down into this century has now been entirely destroyed. No other conception of nature has replaced it. Moreover, a new conception of nature is requisite for science itself. Adequately to comprehend the changed present-day situation and especially the necessity of a new conception of nature for science, we must have clearly in mind the scheme of concepts in terms of which nature had been understood. These concepts are matter, space, time, and motion. Central and basic was the concept of matter, for matter was the physical substance constituting the realm of nature and was thus the principle object of scientific inquiry. Matter was conceived by the philosophy of nature of the seventeenth century as fully "being," that is, as not

subject to "becoming"; in other words, matter is, always, and is always what it is. This means that matter is completely without any capability of internal change, either by itself or of being changed by anything else. Matter in itself is entirely unchangeable. With this conception of matter there is only one possibility for there to be change at all in the realm of nature, and this is that matter is capable of undergoing change of place. But this change of place has nothing whatever to do with matter per se, either in the sense that such change affects matter internally in any way or in the sense that matter could move itself from one place to another. In the modern philosophy of nature this change of place constituted "motion" or "movement. But in this new philosophy locomotion was not necessitated by matter; matter in itself does not need to change place; per se it is completely indifferent to such change. Matter, as Newton explicitly recognized, is movable, but it is incapable of moving itself. This means that the concept of motion is not entailed by the concept of matter and cannot be derived from it. Accordingly in this philosophy motion is a completely independent fundamental concept. Equally independent are the concepts of space and time. They are not derivative from the concept of matter, since matter per se does not require either space or time. In respect to time this is relatively easy to see, since matter simply "is. Space and time are required, not by matter per se, but because the new science of physics in the seventeenth century was a mechanics, that is, a mathematical investigation of the locomotion of pieces of matter. For this measurability was requisite, which meant that places and velocity had to be capable of determination. It is this which was provided by space and time, for they, as Newton said in his famous Scholium, are essentially places: All things are placed in time as to order of succession; and in space as to order of situation. It is of their essence or nature that they are places; and that the primary places of things should be movable, is absurd. In the philosophy of nature which was generally accepted by scientists after the end of the seventeenth century, the concepts of matter, substance, and body were identified. Even before the end of the seventeenth century it was becoming clear that some revision of this scheme of matter, space, time, and motion was necessary. To Leibniz and Newton it was clear that a pure kinetics, as attempted by Huygens, as well as a phoronomy, as held by Descartes, were untenable. Leibniz and Newton both introduced the concept of force, and in the eighteenth century physics became a dynamics. This entailed that the concept of force take the place of motion in the scheme; motion could be conceived as derivative from force. The concept of force led to the conception of the interaction of bodies and the attempt to conceive force as derivative from bodies, an attempt to which the notion of gravitational force presented grave difficulties, as Newton had long before clearly seen. In a letter to Bentley he wrote: It is inconceivable, that inanimate brute matter, should, without the mediation of something else, which is not material, operate upon and affect other matter without mutual contact, as it must be, if gravitation, in the sense of Epicurus, be essential and inherent in it. And this is one reason why I desire you would not ascribe innate gravity to me. That gravity should be innate, inherent, and essential to matter, so that one body may act upon another at a distance through a vacuum, without the mediation of any thing else, by and through which their action and force may be conveyed from one to another, is to me so great an absurdity, that I believe no man, who has in philosophical matters a competent faculty of thinking, can ever fall into it. A most important development was that the concept of force led to the field concept in the nineteenth century. I shall quote C. The field concept was the product of a study of forces active between bodies, under the influence of a wish to surmount the dualism of body and force. Forces acting at a distance seemed to be rigidly and unchangeably attached to bodies. Faraday maintained the doctrine of a field as a reality independent of bodies, equipped with its own inner dynamic. This was wrecked by the special theory of relativity. In addition the concrete structure of electrodynamics remained dualistic in its distinction between "ponderable matter" and the "electromagnetic field. EN , my translation If we then consider the general theory of relativity, it becomes clear how very far contemporary physics is from the basic concepts of the eighteenth century. The general theory of relativity was developed from the physics of fields and knows no action at a distance. Through its fusing of the field of force with space it has turned space into a physical object in the full sense of exercising action and suffering effects. Consistently with this Einstein sought to resolve the remaining dualism of matter and space by conceiving matter as an attribute of space, the particles

being singularities of the metrical field. EN Little indeed remains in this of the former scheme. Although the words matter, space, time, and motion continue to be used, they now have completely different meanings. Take the concept of space. If it means "the object of physics," then this is not anything new or special, for space has, since the seventeenth century, always been an "object" of physics. That is to say, in this theory space has become the physical existent or substance. Einstein himself saw how close this position is to that of Descartes with his one *res extensa*. In the philosophy of Newton, however, space was definitely no substance; for Newton there was only one substance, matter. In Einstein's theory, on the contrary, space has become substance, and not only one substance among others, but the true physical substance, from which matter is derivative. To see how Einstein has arrived at this position it is necessary to take into consideration a particular development after Newton. In the eighteenth century space was conceived by increasing numbers as some kind of existent, a conception which Kant correctly completely rejected as an "Unding. One important reason for this is that after Kant there no longer existed the discipline, the philosophy of nature, to subject this conception to critical scrutiny. Thus it has come to be possible for Einstein in this century to conceive space not simply as a substance but as the true physical substance. Certainly his physical existent or substance is extended, but not everything which is extended is to be identified with space. Further, in the classical eighteenth century doctrine of space, space was conceived as a container, in which the physical material substances exist and move, itself, however, neither affecting the substances nor being affected by them. But this conception of space has been completely abolished by Einstein. With that complete difference in conception, how appropriate is it to continue to use the term "space" in the contemporary theory, and can it be done without danger of confusion? It seems to me that much confusion has indeed ensued. In the latter conception, as we have noted, matter was a full being, in itself unchangeable. It is clear that in the contemporary theory we do not find the concept of matter as formerly understood. More precisely stated, nothing of the previous conception of matter remains in contemporary physics; every feature of matter as formerly understood has been completely abandoned. To continue to refer to these entities as "matter," as "particles" i. I shall take only one example, but it is an important one. We have noted that in the earlier philosophy of nature the concepts of matter and body were equivalent. Macroscopic bodies are composites of a mass of material particles which, right down to the smallest atomic indivisible particles, are still bodies. Consequently in classical physics it was completely indifferent whether, in experiments concerning the laws of motion, bodies of say 10 kilograms, or 1 kilogram, or 1 milligram are used. The laws of motion hold for all bodies, however large or small. Consequently, although the laws of motion are not empirically verifiable with individual atoms, it is consistent to assume the laws, empirically verified with compound bodies, as equally applying to the final constituent bodies, the atoms, and therefore that the routes of individual atoms in motion are exactly determinable.

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I lectured on his philosophy very enjoyably at City University in on the recommendation of Dr Alfons Grieder, the greatest, most obscure and unproductive philosopher. I do not want to climb this mountain of thought but just admire it from a distance. Only recently have I come to integrate a Hegelian perspective into my own life properly. Here is an example of mine of Hegel inspired writing. Thinking, in Kantian terms, is neither content sense nor form concept. Thinking is the presupposition of both. Thinking embraces contradictions more readily than knowledge. Knowledge seeks the singularity of light. Thinking embraces light and dark at the same time in bi-unity. Knowledge is like a thought. Thinking is like a subject and a thought together. Thinking is like a flower and the sun. Thinking is like the sun in the sky. Thinking is like two people in the world at the same time even separated. A thinking as opposed to knowledge: A thinking that affirms and negates in one motion. This proves the non-bodily and ironic nature of consciousness. The body cannot do this since it deals with only one thing after another. Only consciousness can say "yes" and "no" at the same time. This shows that consciousness and the body are not the same. The judge only thinks of his own thinking in one undivided, outgoing sweep. Love is a pure letting go, two openness making one space, a simple identity. The truth about personal identity can be thought of as: If a person is free is he open or self-contained or both? Pontifex If, on the other hand, he is simply an openness without a centre, who or what is free? Freedom in itself does not make sense, it must belong to someone. Even Buddhist nirvana is not a purely abstract state, not a state of total non-self anatman but is the property of someone, a self. Freedom may be an ideal but even this ideal exists within the reach of the thought of the soul. Ideals are like things seen in dreams which are given not monotonously but from perspectives which admit of more and less. There are degrees of closeness to ideals even though they exist within. The inner world is not a blank surface but has nuances and structures. Within the space of consciousness there is great variety. Maybe true freedom involves being a definite self that is open to the possibility of unboundedness. Being definite allows for independence, being open allows for unrestrictedness. I see in this the teaching of the Maharishi about point and infinity. The point is this:

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