

Maybe The Biggest Metaphor!*

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Abstract

This paper introduces an innovative analogy between two conceptual trios: 'form, matter, substance' from Aristotelian hylomorphism, and the original 'metaphor, consciousness, emergence' trio, which, while inspired by contemporary philosophy of language, is a novel contribution not previously articulated in the literature. This exploration delves into the intricate interplay of these concepts, seeking to illuminate their profound interconnectedness and its implications for our understanding of reality. By redefining key terms and incorporating the overarching concept of 'thing', this study aims to unravel the complex interplay within these trios and its consequences, thereby challenging conventional interpretations and inviting a reevaluation of fundamental philosophical principles.

The analogy seeks not only to provide new perspectives for understanding the intricacies of these concepts but also to expand upon the definitions of the terms themselves. It endeavors to bridge the gap between metaphysical insights and linguistic theories, thereby offering a unique synthesis that contributes to both fields and enhances our conceptual vocabulary.

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Furthermore, the paper extends the discussion to monistic views of the universe, proposing a synthesis of diverse theories under a single, unifying reality. This approach offers fresh insights, especially in understanding the dynamic nature of consciousness and matter, as well as our perception of reality and creation. Just as Plato's allegory of the cave revealed truths about perception and reality, this paper attempts to uncover deeper metaphysical and linguistic connections. It posits that these connections offer a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of human cognition and the nature of existence.

This analogy represents a metaphorical journey itself, reflecting the continuous quest for deeper understanding in the vast and intricate landscape of philosophical thought. It invites readers to consider the multifaceted nature of reality and its profound impact in shaping our perceptions and understanding of the world.

Introduction

In the philosophical landscape, hylomorphism, as originally articulated by Aristotle, asserts that form and matter are the intrinsic constituents of every object. This enduring concept, reexamined in Kathrin Koslicki's 'Form, Matter, Substance' [1], provides a pivotal framework for our discourse.

In this paper, we introduce a newly conceptualized trio: 'metaphor', 'consciousness', and 'emergence'. This innovative trio, which is original to our study and not previously

articulated in the literature, sets the stage for our exploratory analogy. We embark on this exploration by aligning 'form' with 'metaphor', 'matter' with 'consciousness', and 'substance' with 'emergence'. This alignment is an endeavor to delve into the foundational abstractions of the universe through what might be perceived itself as the grandest of metaphors.

The exploration begins with an inquiry into the essence of 'form'. Is it an abstract construct or a tangible entity? This parallels our examination of 'metaphor'. Similarly, we align 'matter', in the hylomorphic sense, with the notion of 'consciousness', and the resultant 'substance' with the concept of 'emergence'. As David Chalmers eloquently states in "The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory" [2], conscious experience is both profoundly familiar and deeply mysterious, a sentiment that resonates with all the mentioned concepts. Emergence and substance, typically viewed as tangible, may also bear the cloak of mystery under closer scrutiny.

Contrary to a purely materialistic perspective on consciousness, as might be inferred from John Searle's biological comparisons [3], our approach embraces a broader interpretation of all the key terms under discussion. The analogy itself, mapping hylomorphism to our triad of metaphor, consciousness, and emergence, forms the crux of this paper. It is not only a method to grasp the complexities inherent in these concepts but also a novel means to interpret them, particularly in the context of metaphor and form. This approach is in line with, and seeks to contextualize, the foundational ideas presented by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in "Metaphors We Live By" [4]. Here, their assertion that our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical in nature, is not defended or expanded upon but

rather introduced as a key perspective, addressing potential counterarguments and enriching our understanding of metaphor's role in conceptual thought. In parallel, this paper aims to elucidate the role of 'form' in the context of creation, providing a new perspective on existence, creation, and reality, and thereby enhancing our metaphysical lexicon.

Definition of Key Terms

Before delving into our primary terms, it is essential to define the concept of 'thing' or 'شيء' in Arabic. This term holds significant breadth in its application, transcending the limitations of being merely a reference to physical objects. In the context of our discussion, 'thing' refers to a wide spectrum of entities. It encompasses:

- Physical Objects: Tangible entities that occupy physical space and have measurable properties.
- Theories: Systems of ideas intended to explain something, whether in the realm of mathematics, philosophy, or any other field of intellectual inquiry.
- Imaginations: Pictorial creations of the thought process, where entities may not have physical existence but hold a presence in our thoughts and conceptual understanding.

- Abstract Objects: Entities that do not have a physical presence but exist as ideas, concepts, or categories. These can include numbers, properties, relationships, and theoretical constructs.
- Formulations: Structured expressions or representations of concepts, which can be in the form of mathematical equations, philosophical arguments, or literary compositions.

In essence, 'thing' in our discourse is a versatile term that captures the entirety of existence, ranging from the concrete to the abstract. It's a foundational concept that allows us to discuss various elements in the universe, whether they are observable, theoretical, or conceptual.

Having established a broad and inclusive definition of 'thing' (شيء), which serves as a foundational concept for our discussion, we now turn our attention to the other crucial terms in our thesis. These terms – form, matter, substance, metaphor, consciousness, and emergence – each play a pivotal role in constructing the analogy central to "The Biggest Metaphor." Let's briefly outline their definitions to lay out the groundwork for our exploration:

Metaphor:

- Mainstream Definition: Traditionally, a metaphor is a figure of speech where a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable. It's a tool for comparison, allowing for a deeper understanding of a concept by relating it to something familiar.

- **Expanded Interpretation:** In our context, metaphor transcends its linguistic boundaries, becoming a structural framework through which, we comprehend and interact with the world. It's not just a tool for communication but a foundational element in shaping our perceptions and realities. Its basis is still a simile, in which one of the two parts is removed, therefore the counterpart is emerged. Mathematically speaking, it's a mapping between isomorphic structures, in not necessarily separate universes.

Form:

- **Mainstream Definition:** Form, according to the mainstream literature, is at most the defining essence or concept that gives objects their identity. It's not merely about physical shape but encompasses the qualities that make an entity what it fundamentally is. At the other extreme side of the spectrum, which might be popular in art literature, form refers to figures, very apparent figures.
- **Expanded Interpretation:** We think of form as the realm bounding the limits for every 'thing', in the broad sense. This thing can be any point in the continuum of abstraction. When it's about physical objects, it reduces to the boundaries of shapes and aligns with the interpretation of form in art. When it is super abstract, it defines the very essence of the existence of a 'thing', where nothing can even be properly named. In general, we refer to form as the realm bounding the limits in every layer of abstraction and existence of every object, concept, theory, etc.

Consciousness:

- **Mainstream Definition:** Consciousness is commonly defined as the state of being aware of and able to think about one's own existence, sensations, thoughts, surroundings, etc. It's a central topic in philosophy of mind, often debated in terms of its origins, nature, and processes.
- **Expanded Interpretation:** In this context, consciousness is perceived not simply as an awareness state or as a result of neural activities, but more expansively as cognition encompassing all existence layers of the human being. This vibrant and dynamic canvas serves as the foundation for our knowledge, imagination, interpretation, reasoning, and remembrance.

Matter:

- **Mainstream Definition:** Matter, in Aristotelian philosophy, is the substrate or potentiality that, when combined with form, becomes a distinct entity. It is the 'stuff' that is shaped and defined by form.
- **Expanded Interpretation:** We interpret matter at its extremity, viewing it as the absolute potential or the mother of all potentials.

Emergence:

- **Mainstream Definition:** Emergence refers to the phenomenon where larger entities, patterns, and regularities arise through interactions among smaller or simpler

entities that themselves do not exhibit such properties. It's a key concept in understanding complex systems.

- **Expanded Interpretation and Interplay:** In our thesis, emergence is the capturing of any type of creation in any abstraction layer, as a culmination of the interplay of 'things'. It represents the tangible and intangible phenomena that are conceptualized when metaphorical constructs are applied to the conscious experience.

Substance:

- **Mainstream Definition:** Substance, in Aristotle's view, is the combination of form and matter, resulting in a concrete, individual entity that exists in reality.
- **Expanded Interpretation and Interplay:** Substance is mirrored by our concept of emergence. It is the actualized phenomenon which is not necessarily physical. Akin to the definition of 'thing', the realized potential that springs from the interplay of matter and form.

With this grounding, we aim to draw a parallel between the hylomorphic constituents (form, matter, substance) and our trio of concepts (metaphor, consciousness, emergence). In this analogy, metaphor (form) shapes consciousness (matter), leading to the phenomenon of emergence (substance) as will be discussed in the next sections. This interplay offers a fresh perspective on understanding the dynamics of consciousness and the genesis of complex phenomena as well as the dynamics of absolute potential (matter) and substance ('thing').

It's important to clarify that matter and substance, though related, do not share identical qualities. The realized potential embodied by substance is significantly distinct from the absolute potential represented by matter. We will explore their aspects as different and separate entities. Absolute potential can be conceptualized as something without any specific instance or manifestation, unlike substance, which necessarily exists as a distinct instance. This relationship is paralleled in the concepts of consciousness and emergence. Consciousness, in its entirety, cannot be confined to any specific manifestation, unlike emergence, which must manifest in specific instances.

Main Metaphor Analysis and Comparison

The focus of our analogy lies in the interplay between the trios of 'form, matter, substance' and 'metaphor, consciousness, emergence'. Their structural similarity and interplay are at the heart of our discussion. We concentrate on drawing parallels between these two sets of concepts, that would partially explain potential interpretations of the individual pairs.

Consider the literary concept of metaphor as akin to a simile where one part is omitted, resulting in a word or phrase that is not literally applicable to the concept. In such instances, comprehension heavily relies on the consciousness of the underlying meaning. To elucidate, take the example of Hafez of Shiraz in his poetry, where he speaks of kissing the precious stone 'العل' (la'l), noted for its redness. Here, he likely alludes to the lips. This metaphor requires the reader to be aware of the hidden relationship between 'la'l' and lips

- their color similarity, allure, and value. Such an awareness is crucial for grasping Hafez's intended message. As we have defined, this process - where the reader discerns something beyond the literal words - is the creation of a new concept through the interaction of different 'things', and thus can be identified as emergence. This example illustrates how the trio of metaphor, consciousness, and emergence operates in literature. Comprehending a metaphor involves not only recognizing the literal meaning but also understanding the deeper connections implied. This understanding, or emergence, stems from the conscious interaction with the metaphor. Additionally, the use of metaphor is often driven by a second-order awareness, where both the creator and the audience of the metaphor share an intrinsic understanding of its deeper significance. This shared understanding underpins the effective application of metaphors in communication.

The discussion in the previous paragraph mirrors our analysis of 'form, matter, and substance'. Consider the truth or essence of a physical object - the most generalized yet specific definition that distinguishes it from others. As previously defined, the real of bounding limits of the most abstract layer of an object's existence represents form, from which its truth emanates. In the absence of matter, this form lacks physical manifestation. Matter, representing potential, actualizes the form, allowing us to perceive and interact with it physically. This interaction results in substance, akin to the emergence in our metaphor analogy. The 'emergence' of substance, as discussed, may itself provide intuitive clues to the inherent analogy between emergence and substance, suggesting a deep-seated correlation within their interactions.

In the case of Hafez's metaphor, the metaphor acts as the form, which, when engaged by our consciousness, leads to emergence—akin to an insightful realization. This is analogous to the interaction in the hylomorphic trio, where form, without matter, is incomplete; matter actualizes form, resulting in substance. The structural parallel is clear: just as form requires matter to produce substance, the metaphor requires consciousness to elicit emergence. This pattern of realization underscores a shared framework within our analogy, where an abstract concept, through absolute conscious or absolute potential, culminates into a realized entity, be it emergence or substance.

From a materialistic perspective (as discussed by philosophers like John Searle in "Mind: A Brief Introduction" - [3]), the consciousness of any entity requires substance. This substance, in turn, is shaped by potential. Our viewpoint posits that there is no potential without matter, suggesting that matter is a requisite for consciousness. Delving deeper, as soon as we imagine the notion of absolute potential, an instance of it emerges in our imagination, all of which are predicated on consciousness. In this sense, the absolute potential, or matter, necessitates consciousness. Although this may not be an exhaustive or strictly logical exposition, it provides an intuitive understanding of the relationship between matter and consciousness, suggesting a reciprocal framework where consciousness not only arises from but also gives rise to matter, in a perpetual cycle of potential and realization.

Importance and Implications

In this analogy, the expanded definitions are crucial as they offer clarity on the interpretation of 'form'. Given that the concept of form is intrinsically ambiguous, any perspective that enhances our understanding of it is valuable. The interpretation of form, as Aristotle envisioned it, often diverges from a significant portion of modern scholarly interpretations, a discrepancy that we find unsettling. We believe that viewing form in the light of this analogy aligns with the philosophical approaches of mathematicians like Hilbert and Grothendieck, yet it also introduces a novel perspective. We suggest that form can be seen as akin to a metaphor, a mapping that traverses all levels of abstraction. Unlike the static notion often found in literature, form, in our interpretation, is inherently dynamic. This movement within form is a concept not extensively explored previously, leading to the idea that any representation of form at a given moment or any layer of abstraction is merely a snapshot, not capturing its essence in entirety as form transcends both constraints (and perhaps any other constraints as well).

At the conclusion of the aforementioned discourse, it is pertinent to acknowledge that our perspective on form reconciles the seemingly divergent extremes found within art literature and certain mathematical philosophies. On one hand, some interpretations perceive form as a distinctly visible 'thing' or the observable boundaries of shapes. On the other hand, there are those who consider form to be abstract at its highest. Our analysis resolves this dichotomy by positing that these varying viewpoints, in fact, discuss the same fundamental 'thing' from different layers of abstraction. Thus, our analogy serves as a

bridge between the tangible and the abstract, offering a unified view of form that honors both.

A further implication emerges from the parallels drawn between consciousness and matter. When we map the basic attributes required for understanding our universe onto the notion of absolute potential, it evokes the concept of talent. Talent can be seen as a manifestation of both consciousness and absolute potential at a more tangible level. In the context of 'objects', talent could be analogous to matter, representing a less abstract form of absolute potential. Conversely, when considering 'human beings', talent aligns with consciousness, embodying a specific, accessible expression of awareness and understanding. In this discourse, we can conceptualize the existence of two distinct yet interrelated universes: the macrocosm, which is the external world around us, and the microcosm, the internal world within each individual. The concepts discussed in this paragraph demonstrate an instance where the same underlying principle manifests in both the macrocosm and microcosm. Essentially, we are examining the concept of 'thing' as it is expressed in both the broader universe and within the personal realm of human consciousness and experience. This exploration underscores the monistic view, suggesting a mirrored reflection of absolute potential, consciousness and talent, all under name of 'thing', across these two planes of existence.

This work lends support to monistic views of the universe, advocating for a unification of traditionally distinct theories. The monistic outlook holds that there is an underlying reality, a foundational truth, from which diverse universes emerge as reflections or varied manifestations. Our analogy underscores this concept, suggesting that a myriad of

phenomena, regardless of their apparent differences, may actually be diverse expressions of a single, underlying reality. In addition, by incorporating the concept of 'thing' into our discussion, we approached the problem in an innovative way, supporting the monistic principle of unity amid diversity. This approach proposes that the universe, in all its multifaceted complexity, represents a continuum of existence. It transcends traditional dualistic notions, hinting at an interconnectedness that spans the spectrum containing both tangible and abstract entities.

At the end, we have characterized emergence as the juncture at which any form of creation, across various levels of abstraction, is captured. It is the culmination of the interaction of diverse 'things', embodying both tangible and intangible phenomena that materialize when metaphorical constructs intersect with conscious experience. This concept can be illustratively applied to the classic debate between Aristotle and Plato regarding the nature of theatre. In this debate, Aristotle's notion of catharsis - the purgation of emotions through the experience of theatre - is particularly relevant. Theatre, in this context, serves as a metaphor engaging the audience's consciousness to bring about an emergence, an awakening of dual emotions that can lead to catharsis. In Aristotle's view of theater, the intense feelings we experience during a play, like empathy and relief, are like signs pointing us to deeper truths. This dual feeling happens because we are conscious that we can imagine being the characters while also knowing we're not. Theater itself acts as a metaphor. The emergence would be the purgation of emotions which is called catharsis. Similarly, when an audience claps, it might be a shared response to the play or just following others' cues. Clapping becomes a shared action, much like how different experiences combine to create a joint reaction. Exploring this in terms of form, matter, and

substance could show us new ways these elements come together in everyday experiences. The phenomenon of audience clapping serves as another metaphorical instance. While some audience members clap out of a genuine reaction to the performance, others may clap because they recognize it as a social cue, even if they did not experience the performance's crux. Thus, clapping becomes a metaphor for collective understanding and response, a visible manifestation of an intangible shared experience. This metaphor parallels the abstract dynamics of form, matter, and substance, where the form (the performance) and the matter (the audience's individual experiences and understanding) interact to create the substance (the collective applause). This area offers a fertile ground for research into the physical manifestations of such abstract interactions.

Objections and Rebuttals

A potential criticism may target the ontological disparity between metaphors, viewed primarily as linguistic constructs, and entities with a more tangible presence, such as physical phenomena, consciousness, or emergent properties. This critique questions the appropriateness of comparing a concept rooted in language to those in physical or metaphysical realms. However, our approach in the paper, particularly in the 'Definition of Key Terms' section, preempts such concerns. In that section, not only did we introduce the term 'thing' to create a more inclusive framework, but we also provided expanded definitions for each key term, including 'metaphor'. These expanded definitions deliberately transcend conventional boundaries, allowing metaphors to be considered in a

broader, more ontologically versatile context. This dual strategy – the introduction of 'thing' and the expansion of traditional definitions – equips us to draw parallels between metaphors and more tangible concepts, addressing the ontological differences by redefining the scope of our analysis.

Critics might suggest that metaphors, with their inherent ambiguity and openness to interpretation, could obscure rather than clarify the understanding of complex phenomena like consciousness or emergence. However, this view misses the central aim of our analogy. By drawing parallels between 'form, matter, substance' and 'metaphor, consciousness, emergence', our intention is to elucidate these intricate concepts, much like the purpose of a metaphor in literature. The title "The Biggest Metaphor" reflects this goal, seeking to make the ambiguities of these concepts more comprehensible. It's crucial to recognize that the interpretative nature of metaphors parallels the philosophical discourse on form, matter, and substance. These concepts are inherently complex and have invited diverse interpretations. The essence of our approach is to utilize the clarity within an aspect of one trio to illuminate the same aspect in the other, harnessing the straightforward aspects of both to make sense of the corresponding, yet seemingly complex, aspect of the other. Therefore, the ambiguity in metaphors should be seen as a mirror to the complexity in the concepts they parallel, aligning with our objective to demystify these philosophical ideas.

At the same time, while our analogy could be perceived as oversimplifying consciousness and emergence, such a view overlooks its underlying purpose. The analogy is not intended to reduce the complexity of these concepts but to offer a new perspective on understanding them. It serves as an alternative approach, aiming to enrich our comprehension and

appreciation of the subtleties and intricacies inherent in consciousness and emergence, as well as their counterparts, matter and substance.

The role of metaphor in cognitive processes can spark significant debate. On one hand, scholars like Lakoff and Johnson assert that metaphors are integral to human thought, suggesting a deep-rooted influence on our cognitive framework. On the other hand, some may argue that metaphors serve more as tools for communication and understanding, questioning their foundational role in the structure of consciousness. However, it's important to recognize that the influence of metaphors extends beyond mere linguistic function. While they may not constitute the fundamental structure of consciousness, metaphors significantly shape our thought and perception. This shaping is pivotal in how we comprehend and interact with our surroundings, thereby indirectly influencing our understanding of concepts like consciousness and emergence. Metaphors facilitate the formation of connections and associations in our minds, playing a key role in the way we conceptualize and process information. Therefore, even if they are not the core structure of consciousness, their impact on shaping our cognitive landscape is undeniable and profound.

It is a valid challenge to differentiate between metaphorical and literal (related for forms) truths, particularly in philosophical discourse where precision and direct representation of empirical reality are crucial. Metaphors excel in illustrating complex or abstract ideas, yet they do not serve as direct representations of empirical facts. This distinction is particularly significant when discussing profound concepts like consciousness or the nature of existence. However, the primary goal of our analogy was not to equate these two

interpretations of truth, but rather to draw parallels in their structural forms. Even if we accept that the relationship between metaphorical and literal truths may not be directly analogous, the similarity in the structure of the trios – 'form, matter, substance' and 'metaphor, consciousness, emergence' – can still offer fresh insights. By using the expanded definitions established at the outset, these pairings open up new perspectives and interpretations of these terms.

Furthermore, considering the objection that metaphors are not representations of empirical reality, one might revisit the example of theater. Theater, as a metaphor, engages the audience's consciousness to evoke real emotions and thoughts. Shouldn't acts of imagining, thinking, perceiving, reasoning, and feeling be regarded as part of empirical reality? If these aspects of human experience are excluded, what constitutes empirical reality?

The critique regarding a potential category mistake, due to merging metaphysical and linguistic concepts, is acknowledged. However, the synthesis of ideas from different philosophical domains in this thesis is intentional and methodical. It aims to transcend traditional boundaries to uncover deeper insights into complex structures. This interdisciplinary approach is not about conflating disciplines but about exploring how their intersection can enhance our understanding, thereby contributing innovatively to philosophical discourse.

While metaphors and metaphysical concepts like form, matter, and substance serve different epistemological functions—metaphors for explanation and metaphysics to describe reality's nature—this distinction can be contextualized through the lens of the

macrocosm and microcosm. This concept, rooted in philosophical traditions, suggests a unified underlying universe where these distinct functions coexist and interrelate. We readily admit that our argument addressing this objection has its limitations. This very admission serves as a 'metaphor' for the realms of knowledge that remain uncharted. We are 'conscious' that such an honest confession may evoke a mix of empathy, laughter, and conviction as 'emergent' responses in the listener!

Conclusion

In summarizing, this paper has ventured to bridge ancient philosophical principles with modern linguistic and cognitive theories, presenting a novel analogy between metaphysical and linguistic concepts. By expanding the definitions of key terms, exploring their interrelations, and trying to accommodate them under the term 'thing', the thesis offers a unique perspective on the complexities of consciousness, emergence, and the role of metaphor, as well as form, matter and substance. The discussion acknowledges the epistemological differences between metaphors and metaphysical concepts while suggesting their coexistence within a unified conceptual framework. The paper also addresses potential criticisms, underscoring the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in philosophical inquiry. Ultimately, this study serves as a metaphorical journey itself, representing the continuous quest for deeper understanding in the vast and intricate landscape of philosophical thought. It invites readers to consider the multifaceted nature of reality.

References

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