

trassegna il compimento, nonché il suo essere proteso al bene altrui. Se per la Grecità il dissidio vede contrapposti razionalità e istintualità, laddove la volontà sopraggiunge come istanza unitaria e dirimente, nel Cristianesimo – esemplare è a tal riguardo la posizione di Agostino – la conflittualità si svolge su un piano tutto interno alla volontà. La relazione con se stessi si declina non tanto come dialogo, quanto come contrasto tra diverse e contrapposte pulsioni volontarie che eccede la contrapposizione tra lo spirito e la carne. La volontà è attraversata da una fondamentale scissione, perché l'anima stessa è abitata da un'alterità che la costituisce e determina in essa una frattura tra l'istanza da cui promana il comando e quella a cui il comando stesso è destinato. In Agostino la volontà non si limita a svolgere un ruolo arbitrale, ma sopravanza la ragione e il desiderio come una facoltà autonoma a cui soltanto è demandato in ultima analisi il potere di affermare e negare, laddove memoria e intelletto, le due specificazioni del pensiero, non sono che facoltà passive e contemplative. È la volontà a dirigere l'intera vita delle mente abilitandola all'esercizio selettivo delle sue capacità attentive e a sancire così il passaggio all'azione, ed è l'amore incondizionato per l'altro a risolvere le contraddizioni in cui la volontà finisce con l'impaniarsi, e a indirizzarla al di là di quanto è caduco verso ciò che è permanente e non diletta una volta che sia stato conseguito, come nel mero desiderio di possesso. «Ciò che l'amore produce è durata, un perdurare di cui la mente si direbbe altrimenti incapace»².

(Edoardo Fugali)

THOMAS FUCHS, *Ecology of the Brain: The Phenomenology and Biology of the Embodied Mind*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 370 (ISBN: 9780199646883).

The book is based on a previous German volume entitled *Das Gehirn – ein Beziehungsorgan*, recently appeared in its fifth edition (Fuchs, 2016). His continued success has encouraged the author to make it

² Ivi, p. 423.

available to the international public, albeit in a completely revised and extended form.

The new title, *Ecology of the Brain*, refers to the importance of the *Umwelt* in order to understand the human brain as a relational organ that constantly resonates and interacts with the body, the environment, as well as within social and cultural contexts. «The brain is primarily an organ of the living being, not of the mind» (p. v), which embodies and enacts processes intentionally directed inward and outward. This book reformulates the mind-brain dualism by presenting it as a «*dual aspect of the living beings*» (p. v), which can be achieved only with reference to ecological biology and the philosophy of life. Furthermore, the author argues, «*the primary locus of self-awareness is the body itself*» (p. vi).

This book develops an account of the brain as a mediating and transforming organ. The living organism is conceived as bearing *circular causality* in all its dimensions. The ecological approach to the brain applies to the cultural and social environment in which it is embedded, which leads to an intersubjective account of the embodied brain. Finally, this book explores two further branches of the science of the psyche: *psychiatry* and *psychological medicine*. The account of the brain as a relational organ serves at the basis of a holistic approach, in which subjectivity and intersubjectivity are regarded as crucial factors in order to understand diagnosis, etiology, and treatment of mental disorders. Ultimately, the brain «mediates our bodily, emotional, and mental relations to the world. [...] It is not the brain but the living human being who feels, thinks, and acts» (p. vii).

Current neurobiologists attempt to 'naturalize' human consciousness and subjectivity, which points to a conception of human beings comprised of mechanisms of neural information. This, however, leaves little room for our free will and opens up the way to perceive us as reductionist machines. Since the era of Galilei and Descartes, a division was established between mind and body, as well as between mind and world. In such context, the subjective and qualitative colors of our lives were ruled out almost completely. As opposed to this concept, the author proposes a view where the subject is not to be found in the

brain, but where the brain is the organ that mediates our relationship with ourselves, the environment, and other people. In short, the brain is «an *organ of interrelations*» (p. xviii).

The author develops «an *ecological conception of the living organism* as an autopoietic system related to its environment» (p. xix). He further explains the concept of *circular causality* as a process in which living beings become the causes of their own conscious enactment of life. As opposed to the reductionist approach of current neurobiology, the author emphasizes the enactive character of perception, which is always connected to bodily processes. Furthermore, in contrast to reductionism, in which subjectivity is regarded as a mere epiphenomenon of neuronal processes, the author contends that subjectivity cannot be reduced to physical brain processes. Reciprocal relations, as well as circular processes, define instead the brain as a living being in its environment. The phenomenology of bodily existence lies at the core of the understanding of the concept of embodied subjectivity.

The author argues for the existence of a «*dual aspect of the living person* as a dialectical unity of the “subjective body” and the “physical body”» (p. 69). According to an ecological conception of the living organism, the mind-body problem must be described as the «subjective body-physical body problem» (ibid.). The living being’s self-organization goes hand in hand with its relationship with the environment: «*in the same measure as subjectivity is necessarily embodied, so too, a suitable organized, living body is necessarily subjective*» (p. 93). The continuous resonance between brain and organism gives rise to what the author calls a «*feeling of being alive*» (p. 107), which is the foundation of our conscious experience. The relationship between organism, brain, and environment is possible by means of the «*functional cycle of perception and movements*» (ibid.). *Transformation* is then the process through which specific inputs become neuronal patterns, which in turn are oriented toward *gestaltic* perception in what Hegel would have called *mediated immediacy*.

Implicit memory develops in early childhood in the interactions between mother and child. The author discusses implicit memory in the context of the neurological basis of development as well as within the

framework of the social resonance system (mirror neurons system). In turn, secondary intersubjectivity develops toward the end of the first year of life, along with the development of joint attention. The author examines language acquisition as the anchoring of an embodied interpersonal practice, which is connected to the mirror neurons processes. In the philosophy of mind, an alternative of the separation between the mental and the physical is to be found in the unity and interaction between the living organism and its enactment of life. The notion of integral causality sets the framework for a discussion of the primacy of holistic functions over their components, as well as the reciprocity of upward and downward causation. The author further discusses the role and function of the consciousness within the framework of the whole organism-environment interaction: «the brain assimilates biographical experiences as a “matrix” that serves as a basis for a person’s mental capacities, thus enabling their integral causality» (p. 209).

Against many experiments studying free will, which have attempted to eradicate the notion of freedom from common sense, the author argues for an interpretation of this concept that is «linked to a time-spanning *process of decision-making* that cannot be broken down into arbitrarily short time episodes» (p. 237). In this view, the unique human capacity for free will rests upon a particular qualification of the structure of our decision-making processes. The ultimate spontaneity of free will is assured by our ever-open possibility to choose from different courses of action, whereas a bifurcation of the course of events always exists. Finally, that author proposes that human beings exist and can be fully accounted for by the consideration of the relationship with the social and cultural environment. In regards to psychiatric illnesses, according to the author, they can only be understood as circular processes; as the author points out, «an orientation toward subjectivity is shown to be indispensable for psychopathology and psychological medicine» (p. 251).

Ultimately, «the brain is primarily an organ of mediation, transformation, and modulation, being embedded in the human organism’s relationships, acting as their carrier and facilitator, without producing

them of its own accord» (p. 279). On the other hand, the brain is endowed with great plasticity, which allows for it being a matrix for human experiences that find room in the memory as the basis of human capacities. The brain facilitates the acquisition of all capacities of human beings, and is comprised of all characteristics of each specific individual – according to the author, the brain could be called the «organ of potentialities» (ibid.), which only a human *being* can actually actualize. The brain does not *live* without a mind, a body, and an environment, but is instead the *organ* of the living individual.

The brain does not feel, sense, or perceive – only a *human person* does. Essential for human beings is finding themselves in relational contexts where intentional relationships make up their world. To be sure, the brain allows human beings to perform their action in the world. However, «human persons have brains, but they are not brains» (ibid.). Participation in a *shared life form*, as well as participation in a *shared mental world*, is what makes such a human person. «We are not the figments of our brains, but human persons in the flesh» (p. 291). The entrenchment of the living being with its own world is a «dia-logue» (ibid.), i.e. something that exists *for both*. For the human person, this is the ancestral phenomenon, which shows itself at every manifestation of the relationship with the environment.

(Selene Mezzalira)

PIETRO PERCONTI, *Filosofia della mente*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2017, pp. 160 (ISBN: 9788815265487).

In questo volume Perconti affronta la questione dell'attività *mentale* dalla prospettiva della filosofia della mente e della scienza cognitiva contemporanea; egli presenta un approccio critico, che al tempo stesso si impegna ad informare il lettore sulle più rilevanti posizioni teoriche contemporanee intorno ai temi affrontati. Il 'mentale', afferma l'A., è evidentemente la condizione di possibilità dell'esperienza di sé e dell'altro. Eppure il suo statuto ontologico è oggi in una fase di profon-