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Book Review

The mind-body problem in the history of philosophy of language

by John E. Joseph, Cambridge University Press, 2018

A great part of current philosophy of language is testing some ideas borrowed from the recent “distributed” approaches to cognition (extended/embodied/situated cognition, etc...) in order to solve the classical mind-body problem. John E. Joseph’s book, titled *Language, Mind and Body, A Conceptual History* and edited by Cambridge University Press, is a very interesting contribution to such question, putting together historical and contemporary concerns. The book runs through the historical attempts to answer a specific question: what is language and where is it located? In line with modern cognitive sciences, the author addresses the issue through an interdisciplinary perspective that encompasses philosophy of language, linguistics, medicine, psychology and literature.

The book consists of ten chapters. The first one starts *in medias res*, focusing on the decline of the consensus on Chomskyan innatism. The author explains this failure in light of Bruno Latour’s concept of *hybrids*. Against the

background of the decreasing enthusiasm for Chomsky's perspective, the author highlights the absence of any form of academic consensus on the mind-body problem.

In the second chapter, the issue is framed within the modern embodied and distributed models of cognition. Specifically, the author puts forward new definitions of *mind*, *body* and *cognition* and introduces concepts that are new to philosophy of language, such as *Embodied*, *Extended*, *Distributed* and *Situated* mind.

From chapter 3 to chapter 8, Joseph reflects on the history of the relationship between language and the mind-body system. More specifically, the third chapter gets into the details of Greek philosophy, deepening Plato's, Aristotle's and Epicurus' standpoints and dealing with the medical tradition started with the Alexandrian School of medicine. The fourth chapter is focused on the conception of language developed by the philosophy of Middle Ages; great attention is here paid to St. Augustine and Gregory the Great. In this chapter there is also a big section dedicated to medicine, and specifically to its relationship with the concept of *Mind*. The fifth chapter is about Renaissance, and explains how medicine and literature dealt with the mind-body problem over this historical period.

This part of the book focuses on the intuitions and the philosophy of Shakespeare, before exploring the different positions of Descartes, Gassendi and Locke on the relationship between language and mind. The sixth chapter is dedicated to the Eighteenth Century and deeply analyse the positions of Condillac, Rousseau and Reid. The seventh chapter is about the birth of the cerebral Localizationism of mental functions, Phrenology, first studies on aphasia, Associationism, Modern Linguistics.

These studies involved some of the foremost scholars of the century, such as Victor Egger – who was the first to talk about the “inner speech” - and Ferdinand De Saussure. In the eight chapter, which is the last of the historical section, the author describes the features of “Modernism” and Behaviourism, and then presents some of the most important contributions to the overcoming of the mind-body problem, such as the debate between Piaget and Vygotsky

on the ontogenetic development of language, the reflections of Jakobson and Merleau-Ponty, Chomskyan Biolinguistics and the birth of the *Embodied Cognition* paradigm.

The ninth chapter is an attempt to solve the question of concrete and abstract language, raised at the beginning of the book; with this in mind, the author resorts to a lot of the notions described in the previous chapters.

In the final chapter the author extends the implications of his analysis to Linguistic Theory and Applied Linguistics.

Paola Pennisi
PhD St. (COSPECS)
University of Messina, Italy