

The Concept of Mind and its Relationship with the Body and Consciousness: a Perspective from Severino's Indication

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Science conceives the mind as any object of reality to be studied and characterized and hence the age-old problem of the relationship with the body: the body-mind problem. According to a Severinian philosophical perspective, the mind is instead a meaning that appears and not only appears but constitutes itself the dimension in which things appear. The paper aims to clarify the body-mind relationship in the light of Severino's indication.

Keywords:

Severino, Transcendental Appearing, Mind, Consciousness, Body-Mind Problem.

The scientist works by assuming that all things he studies can be isolated from the surrounding reality and that, once isolated, he can quantify the cause-effect relationships between determinations (Severino, 1992).

This cognitive method does not change when the mind is the subject of his analysis: if you want to investigate what the mind is, its nature, you have to look at it and study it as you would all other things.

The mind to be investigated is thus for science one thing among things: on the one hand there is the dimension of mental meaning and on the other the dimension of natural meaning, i.e. the world as it presents itself in knowledge, and these two dimensions are compared in a relationship to be defined and characterized (Severino, 2016).

Mental meaning and natural meanings are therefore separated but every being is such because it is the same as itself and appears as such. If it does not appear with its own identity, it would not be. Therefore, mental and natural meanings share this appearance which is the presupposition and the original condition of their being.

Showing that appearing stands behind and includes the mental and the natural meaning emphasizes their phenomenological foundation. Appearing is a complex that is constituted not only in relation to the showing of the single thing (empirical appearing) but it is a being itself that appears in appearing, i.e. it has itself as its content, which is the same as saying that it has a transcendental nature (Severino, 1980).

Mental and natural meanings therefore appear as semantic volumes (empirical appearing of single things) on the background of what shows its very appearance (transcendental appearing) (Severino, 1980, 1982, 2006).

This appearing that transcends any partial dimension is the basis on which we can affirm everything that concretely manifests itself (mental and natural). Therefore, what manifests itself is a thought, in its most radical meaning, the mind, as actuality of the thoughts that appear, is this transcendental appearing that is the place where things, the body and its attributes primarily appear, and its fundamental trait is the persistence of

what manifests itself. And permanence does not become, it remains in fact, but this does not prevent its content from showing itself in successive and different forms.

The mind accepts the process of becoming since things, by becoming, enter and leave it, therefore the mind shows only a partiality of the being of things, therefore the mind is not the concrete appearing of beings, that is, it is not the infinite appearing, it's not the infinite self of destiny. Thus the mind is ultimately constituted in something original which is the original concreteness of being, the destiny of truth.

The appearance of the actual totality, the mental meaning is therefore also something formal, abstract, as part of the totality that proceeds towards its concreteness, that is, towards the fullness of its content; the mental, as the authentic awareness of meaning, is therefore the finite self of destiny (Severino, 1980; Stanzani Maserati, 2021). This mental position represents its limit, but it is also its opening as the maximum current manifestation of the surpassable reality, «horizon of the totality of what appears (and therefore as the horizon in which the determinations arrive and take leave of those that become)» (Severino, 1982, p. 98).

Now, those who keep sight of the conceptions that neurology and neuropsychology have of the mental are induced to wonder: if the mind is this all-encompassing and unsurpassable dimension of the appearance of things, then what is that mental that before I thought of as juxtaposed with the natural? And what is that natural whose nature is inseparable from the mental in which it appears?

The answer to these questions marks the radical distance from the analytical concepts of the mind and leads directly to the identification of the matter: the body-mind problem.

Mind is this actual appearing of the things that become and that appear as empirical singularities within this all-encompassing circle that is the mental. Therefore, all the appurtenances of the conscious, the subconscious, the unconscious, the body and its addictions belong to the mind.

The mental meaning, which is traditionally juxtaposed with the natural, is not the mind but the conscience, that is to say the conscious position of the mental, which is part of the mental itself. When we talk about part here, it is clear that we are not referring to a spatial concept but to a meaning that appears with the things themselves. The natural counterpart par excellence is the body, a perceptive opening on reality. On the one hand the conscience, on the other the body, both objects of the mental.

Finally, it is evident that even the body cannot be conceived as a mere,

albeit complicated, biological machine, i.e. a soma, a thing among things, but as a perceptive opening, living matter that relates to the psychic, conscious or unconscious. What makes this body originally conscious is in fact its meaning, that is its being.

Consciousness is therefore the conscious position of the meaning, that is, of the sense of the multiplicity of the individual things that appear and the body is this perceptive opening that, when conscious, appears as a conscious semantic opening, as immediate understanding of reality. For reality to be its true self, there must be perceptual openness to the world (body) and things of the world must show themselves consciously in their meaning (consciousness).

The body-mind problem is therefore more properly called the body-consciousness problem as these are the two semantic references to which one turns in philosophical and scientific discussion. It should also be considered that this body and this consciousness are together individuality, becoming specification of an identity.

Consciousness and body therefore face each other juxtaposed in a relationship full of questions. Who causes whom? The problem here becomes thorny because the cause-effect principle referred to this system determines an irremediable separation between those – almost all thinkers and scientists – who believe that the body causes consciousness in some way and those who, vice versa, affirm the domination of consciousness over the body. Those who support the first thesis are prompted sooner or later to make their thinking more complex in order to avoid irreconcilable contradictions, but there is no doubt that the dominant thought in neuroscience assumes the causal determination of the body on consciousness.

So let's try to dispel the doubt. Every affirmation about the statehood of things is based on the things themselves, that is, on their being. Everything is first of all itself, identity, being that appears as such and also the body-consciousness problem is a unity that appears in its identity. I can recognize this identity immediately as a totality that is a subjective experience or mediatively, that is, following a cognitive investigation.

Specifically, everything is not only primarily itself as it immediately appears but can be further investigated by means of a cognitive investigation which is of a psychological type when it refers to the analysis of subjective-qualitative data, or of a naturalistic-scientific type when it refers to the analysis of objective-quantitative data, and therefore, in both cases, to the meaning of the part.

To put it even more formally: everything is at first something identical

to itself appearing in its phenomenological specificity (i.e. immediately), but it is also something that can be delineated on a cognitive level as quality and quantity, analysed according to an appropriate method of investigation, psychological and scientific (i.e. mediatively).

I have a coin in my hand that is immediately shown to me in its entirety but I can also analyse its two sides by specifically investigating its characteristics. The challenge of thinking is to keep these differences together by distinguishing them without separating them, that is, without conceiving them as opposed to each other with the need to add explanations without concrete meaning to the relationship that they already have with each other.

Let us now try to identify these concepts in the problem of the body-consciousness relationship. We have only one coin in our hands: one side is the subjectivity of experience, its phenomenology, the entirety of the conscious experience, the other is its objectivity, quantitative, biological but also psychic as it is co-present with the organic processes.

When neuroscience investigates and quantifies the biology of the nervous system, of the cerebral cortex with the whole procession of molecules that participate in cellular life, it defines the biological meaning of consciousness, that is, the mediated meaning, as well as psychology, in parallel, describes the psychic meaning of consciousness. The biological meaning and psychic meaning of consciousness are present together and are both on the same side of the coin, they are both revealed by a cognitive investigation.

Now, moving to the other side of the coin, the body also has an immediate meaning which is what presents itself as a conscious phenomenon and therefore subjectivity, a global meaning of the body (immediate conscious presence of my body).

Both these meanings, the two sides of the coin (immediate meaning and mediated meaning of the body-consciousness unity) are in turn included in the supramodal meaning of the identity of the body-consciousness unity so that indicating the conscious meaning of the body (what is immediately present to me of my body) or the corporeal-psychic meaning of consciousness (neurobiology of conscious experience), is to indicate the same thing in different semantic but not ontological respects (Stanzani Maserati, 2016, 2021).

What is most important to take into consideration here is that all this is possible only if the concept of mind is held firm as the actual appearing of beings. Otherwise, how could we speak of consciousness and body, con-

consciousness and unconscious and their respective relationships if they did not appear? The sides of the coin can be grasped in their unity only if there is a space of meaning within which they can show themselves: the mind.

The prominence of this conceptuality thus allows us to disregard the principle of cause-effect, that generates many aporias: in the act of investigating the consciousness-body system, the same is said whether it is spoken in phenomenological terms, that is, consciousness, or whether we speak in neurobiological and therefore strictly corporeal terms. Winning the challenge therefore consists in keeping the two elements together, under a single glance, without having to relate them to each other except for what they already are.

In conclusion, neuroscience should not look with suspicion at the philosophical discourse, which makes the scientist aware of what he is doing and the experimental datum concrete in terms of full meaning.

The path taken by neuroscience will contribute more and more to the clarification of the nature of consciousness and its relationship with the brain if, however, it always keeps in sight the context within which it operates, without disregarding that conceptual cognitive horizon that includes originally each of its new acquisitions. Finally, every work of the neuroscientist appears in a new light under the steady gaze that sees the standing of identity and the concrete constitution of the original mind.

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