

Italian philosophers and social media

Aim of this paper is to discuss some philosophical topics of the social aspects of cognition and computing relying on the writing of some recent Italian philosophers, who endeavoured to analyze these problems in depth.

In particular, we'll deal with the theories of Maurizio Ferraris and Roberto Casati.

Ferraris has shifted from a free and non scholarly adherence to Derridian deconstructionis to a form of new realism of half-analytic imprinting. He wrote a lot of books for implementing his refreshed views, in which he expounds his main tenets often in dialogue with Searle or other analytic philosophers.

We will stress upon his contrasting collective intentionality with the so-called concept of documentality. He maintains two main theses: for the first, in the present-day social world documents are produced that manifest the "will to record"; this phenomenon could be traced back to the earliest phases of the industrial society, but it has undergone an exponential growth thanks to the technological devices of the last decades, such as computers, tablets, and smartphones. According to the second, the centrality of documents leads to a conception of normativity (a concept of Habermasian origin) that makes human passive receptors of rules implemented through documents. This conception pushes away the strong intentional behaviour insofar as we are no more producers of values. These theory leads Ferraris to a strong critique of Searle's view about the construction of the social reality. For him, we can speak more properly of social dependence than of social reality.

The theory has some shortcomings, for both the notion of object involved and the one of act. Let's imagine that we assume a sheet of paper be valid as a banknote. If it is something easily accepted for such simple objects, it could not hold for more complex objects, e. g. a big extension of land: in fact, in order to consider a physical object as a social object, the collective intentionality could not be a sufficient criterion. For Ferraris we need something more, that is the so-called *inscription*, that supervenes on the social object, determining its true nature. As it were, the intentionality finds in the documentality its condition of possibility; it is a sort of transcendental theory, in the sense that the former presupposes the latter. In fact, Searle maintains that there is "a continuous line that goes from molecules and mountains to screwdrivers, levers, and beautiful sunsets and then to legislatures, money, and nation-states". He underpins his theory within the framework of a realistic ontology: for him, the higher levels of institutional reality are created thanks to a sort of iteration of the formula "X count as Y". We are confronted with iterated structures (from the marriage to the property), which are intertwined in multi-strata networks that allow any kind of human social behaviour. But if we consider negative entities, like, say, financial debts, we have some troubles in finding a physical object, which could count as a social object. It would be rather weird to claim that the corresponding physical object of the monetary indebtedness of Greece might be the Parthenon or the islands of the Aegean Sea. It is tantamount to say that intentionality does not apply in standard cases, and nevertheless it functions in non standards contexts (e. g. in the ready-made art by Duchamps, where any item of whatever stuff

could become a work of art). For Ferraris, anyway, we are faced with four main problems in Searle's theory:

- 1) the collective intentionality appears to be a sort of biological prius, which manifests itself in the social world, but would exist as a unexpressed function, even if it were in a latent state. But it collides with what Hegel would have called the objective mind (*objektiver Geist*).
- 2) the collective intentionality is often deemed as a bridge between the physical reality and the social world. But, apart from such a theory as the one of the mirror neurons, the collective intentionality seems to be something that resembles a *dues ex machina* or the pineal gland in which, according to Descartes, is to be found the "principal seat of the soul" (a true mystical concept).
- 3) the collective intentionality cannot explain any aspect of the social reality, especially a collective game like the football or the playing together both of a classical orchestra and of a jazz ensemble.
- 4) Where is the proper seat of the collective intentionality? Ferraris attacks Searle's thesis that it resides in our mental states, although of a different kind, qualitatively considered, from one you can find in an individual mind. But he finds this solution only partially convincing. Ferraris maintains that we have two sources for the origin of collective intentionality: persons' brains and inscribed or recorded texts.

He contrasts his solution with the one of Barry Smith, who puts forward to treat social objects like "quasi-representations". According to Smith, "social objects constitute a new dimension of being within the common-sense world, analogous to the level of persons proper". From this standpoint, institutions have their own lives and endure through time, even though they eventually acquire or lose their members; they exhibit their qualities and states, and their own ways of functioning in interaction with each other.

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