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**Identity Within Constraints
Processes of Systemic Anthropology**

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Identity Within Constraints

Processes of Systemic Anthropology

Abstract

What makes the identity of a person at a time or through time has been an open question for philosophy since the very idea of the individual Self failed the scrutiny of Hume (A Treatise of Human Nature, 1739). If we accept Humean skepticism, we are forced to reject the strong confidence we have of being an individual, and if we refuse the denial made by Hume we must find reasons to support our view. Since traditional conceptual patterns explored by philosophers have proved unable to find any valuable answer to Hume's challenge, our first move is to introduce new concepts, better suited for this task. Human identity deserves any renewed comprehension efforts since what we think we are will not remain an academic exercise, but will strongly influence the way we behave in our community.

In this paper we focus upon identity according to System Thinking (Bertalanffy, 1967; Urbani Ulivi, ed. 2019 a; 2019 b), that drafts attention to whole entities and to their properties, and inclined the research to the concept of "system", which is valuably applied across the disciplines.

We also introduce the concept of "constraint" developed mainly in biology (Bizzarri, 2020) suggesting that identity is the result of an individual process moving within particular constraints. In this frame consciousness – intended as a conscious and explicit thought – can be interpreted as an emergence (or a systemic property) of continuous interactions between (stable) constraints and (fluid) processes, where unity is allowed by coherence, which maintains stability despite systemic perturbations. Hence identity can be framed into a new philosophical perspective, where traditional concepts, considered as worn and inadequate, are fully rewritten. In the light of this investigation it will be argued that 1) consciousness stimulates top-down changes on both the body and the tacit thought and 2) the enlargement of consciousness is highly encouraged to accomplish harmonic interactions among inferior/superior levels of the human beings. On this basis it will be possible to sketch some main traits of ethics as an emergent collective phenomenon.

Keywords: identity, process, constraints, system thinking, ethics

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Introduction

The general analytical and reductionist method still prevailing in our culture doesn't show any efficacy to cope with unitary, global and complex phenomena such as human identity. Seeking a perspective that focuses on whole entities we naturally turned to the concept of "system", a comprehension tool introduced in biology by Bertalanffy (Bertalanffy, 1950). The term met two elaboration destinies: it underwent a specific theorization – the so called "Sistemics" – and has been adopted in many disciplines – let's just think to chemistry, psychology, ecology, among many others - opening to inter- and trans- disciplinary well-grounded work. Bertalanffy says": "A system may be defined as a set of elements standing in interrelation among themselves and with the environment" (Bertalanffy, 1967: 90), hence the motto of Anderson "More is different" (Anderson, 1972).

Fifty years after Bertalanffy's definition, the concept of system has been enlarged by many contributions and changes, up to the nowadays stress upon coherence as the connection factor giving unity to a phenomenon. The stable cornerstone of systemic thinking is the concept of "emergence", that draws attention to properties and phenomena originated when a unitary set of interrelated elements is taken under observation. Emergence can be of many kinds, but we only focus in this essay upon "radical" or "creative" emergency as it is the type of emergency best suited to point to human identity as a phenomenon different and new with regard to its constituents.

It's fair to acknowledge systemic researches for a strong innovative power, that brought about a radical rethinking of many classical concepts, such as causality, abduction, objectivity, subject-object relationships, and also introducing previously unexpected ideas, such as logical openness, incompleteness, quasi-ness, identity through dynamics, emergence, constraints, and many others. In reason of its conceptual strength System thinking is expected to become a new paradigm and to support a System philosophy, thus answering the demand for "new ideas" requested in various fields. To better understand personal identity – the task of this essay – we shall take into account mainly two concepts, emergence and constraint, both the achievements of systemic and interdisciplinary work.

Premise

We must overcome the contradiction between our certainty of being an individual self and the lack of stable characteristics or properties that would prove such self.

In order to overcome this dichotomy we shall frame the problem into a new philosophical perspective, where traditional patterns, considered as worn and inadequate, are fully rewritten and new concepts are introduced to the philosophical scenery.

Our first step is not to abandon our experience of being an individual self, while the second step is to go in search of a criterion that could highlight such an experience. Researching not only philosophy but also the sciences,¹ we find that it is possible to develop a new philosophical perspective according to the idea of 'system' first offered in General System Thinking (Bertalanffy, 1967) and successively introduced and developed in philosophy (Urbani Ulivi, 2019 a; 2019 b). In systemic perspective, the individual self – a complex and unitary phenomenon – is an emergence of continuous interactions between (stable) constraints and (fluid) processes, where unity is maintained by coherence, which supports stability despite inner and outer perturbations acting on the system.

Introducing the concepts of emergence, constraints, process, coherence, hierarchical levels, relationship, and many more developed in systemic thinking, objects are no more to be thought of as fixed compounds of properties, but as entities dynamically moving and changing in the world (Dupré, 2015). One could think that we are adopting the ancient perspective attributed to Heraclitus, but if we are to find noble ancestors, we would rather refer to Aristotle and to his idea of substance as “a principle of activity” and not a fixed set of unmovable properties – a current misunderstanding of Aristotelian concept of substance.

Personal identity is not a property nor a stable and identical group of properties, but an entity that changes through time and finely interacts with the environment at the light of incompleteness (Minati, 2019 b), giving rise to a narrativeness where the individual and conscious 'I' write his/her story. An irreversible, historical process within constraints, related to a plot of hierarchically, interrelated levels of interactions, the human being is the recipient of both individual (mind, language, feelings) and collective (morality, society, family, religion) emergences. In light of this investigation it will be argued that 1) consciousness stimulates top-down changes on the body and is influenced by bottom-up events 2) the enlargement of

¹ In regard to sciences we are going to adopt a pluralistic view, overcoming the distinction suggested by Dilthey between “natural” and “human” sciences (Dilthey, 1883) and also the use of mathematical language introduced by Galileo Galilei as the peculiar trait of natural sciences. We tolerantly admit that there are many different sciences, each having its own object, proper investigation methods and empirical tests to proof or disproof a related theory.

consciousness is highly encouraged to accomplish a harmonic interaction among inferior/superior levels of the human.

To avoid misunderstanding, we wish to make clear that we do not put forward the idea that systemic thinking is a universal key, good for any problem. We are introducing the systemic perspective as a valuable and appropriate conceptual toolkit to solve some – not all – traditional philosophical problems. In the next paragraphs our effort will be to show that, when identity issue is debated, the systemic point of view opens a new philosophical path.

Adapting comprehension tools to the specific characteristics of an object commits to a pluralistic perspective both in ontology (Urbani Ulivi, 2019 b) and in epistemology. According to this theoretical frame, subject and object are no more viewed as abstract and separate entities but as matching each other in the act of knowledge. Thus, in order to explore our multifaceted reality, we are expected to take advantage from many different methods properly adapted to our comprehension objectives. We follow the path opened by Aristotle for whom knowledge is the result of dialectical interaction between the proposer and the responder.² Aristotle's suggestion is nowadays supported by Gerald Edelman, whose neuroscientific research (Edelman, 2006) highlighted the selective activity which brain performs over objects of knowledge according to its preferences, choices and value systems.

Shaping Identity between Constraints and Processes

Personal identity, a much-debated issue, since it failed the scrutiny of Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), has witnessed renewed interest in recent years within neurosciences and the interdisciplinary approaches to Artificial Intelligence (AI). Although some valuable goals have been achieved, there is no a wide consensus among scholars about the core question that can be formulated as such: what gives the feeling of being a stable possessor of personal identity, at a time and through time?

Should we correct such a feeling and include it among illusions, since nothing in the world helps to maintain it? Or could we support it through concepts and reasoning? We are facing the main challenge for philosophical anthropology, in order to provide a criterion that could highlight both the unity of consciousness and

² The authors are indebted to Frank Stowell for clarifying this point.

its radical changes. We ought to solve such *prima facie* tangled contradiction. It should be carefully explained where the 'I' and the perception of the self - on which individual consciousness is grounded – rests and how it can be integrated to the multiple, temporal changes that occur in personal life.

It is a general and common experience to feel structural modifications of emotional states, ideas, perspectives, points of view, that dynamically flow in the mobile texture of our world, but, quite paradoxically, we also experience that these Heraclitean intrinsic fluctuations happen to a person retaining its sameness through changes.

Given all this, we should develop an effective theoretical strategy that does not simply eliminate or correct the uncomfortable phenomenological data (for example by denying the ego or devaluing changes to mere epiphenomena) but could be sufficiently rich and profound to explain the several and varied facets of such a complex issue.

What we are looking for is, in other words, a principle of unification capable of adapting and responding to different historical demands, which is both stable and ductile, invariant and plastic at the same time. In the classical philosophical repertoire, the concept that best serves the purpose is provided by Aristotle's notion of *entelechy* (*De Anima*, II, 412, a27-b1), to be understood as the *principle of activity*, expressed by semantically almost equivalent terms, such as nature, essence, form, or even substance. Although promising and encouraging, *entelechy* is strongly sub-theoretical. It needs to be made explicit, to be developed and clarified. When poor conceptual availability is given in the context the philosopher is familiar with, a fruitful strategy is to shift the vision to other domains. In the case of identity, the concept of 'constraint' seems highly fruitful, because a constraint is not a property, but a principle which disciplines the behavior of an entity, putting a limit to its actions. Nevertheless, it is a topic studied in systemic and biological researches. Biologists have brought attention to such a containment factor to explain the reduction of possible biological choices in the production of new phenotypic variants. (Bizzarri, 2020: 1) Also in everyday experiences, constraint is a factor that limits or controls what one can do; it is a restrictive condition that puts a limit on actions, by preventing someone from doing something. It is worth noticing that constraint is not prescriptive of what one should do within such limits: it is not a criterion of choice, rather it is a limit of one's choices. Therefore, constraints tend to prohibit, not to prescribe: they are the stability factors of our dynamic answers to the world.

On a theoretical ground, processes and constraints are deeply interwoven and empirically experimented. Subjected to continuous change, processes of acquisition, loss and identity are nevertheless defined by synchronic and diachronic constraints. Within this frame, a human being is an entity who transforms himself/herself over time into a process (Dupré, 2012) due to the interactions with the internal and external environment, according to boundaries that guarantee stability or the sameness of a person. Hence the changes allowed by constraints are the basic factors of historical accuracy; they are the bounding factors of historical development.

This highly complex dynamic can be understood only by throwing light on the features that shape the human system, which are not explicit, nor can be inferred from observation. The opaque region of possibilities that belongs to it makes complete knowledge of the human being theoretically impossible. It therefore follows that the ‘sense of the self’ is primarily rooted in the compliance of bonds, and not in having certain properties and states, which on the contrary belong to the field of the unnecessary, floating and replaceable. Identity, thus, can be interpreted as an emerging second level or systemic level phenomenon of a human being shaped between constraints and processes. These insights can be grasped, the authors of the present paper argue, through a shift of paradigm introducing constraints, systems and emergence as conceptual comprehension tools in philosophical research.

Consciousness – intended as conscious and explicit thought – can be explained in terms of an emergence (or a systemic property) of continuous interactions between (stable or quasi-stable) constraints and (fluid) processes, where the unity of the process is framed exteriorly by constraints, while within the constraints is allowed by *coherence*, which maintains the connection recovered despite systemic perturbations (Minati&Pessa, 2018). Coherence is the object of study and debate in many fields, and we don’t enter here in the discussion. By “coherence” we primarily refer to the bonds that provide unity to a process linking it within structural dynamics, leaving apart its generative mechanism (Minati, 2019 c.).

Coherence also supports the unitary and integrated response of the system to disturbances/perturbations, avoiding isolation or the independent organization of some parts or functions. System thinking also highlights the field of possibilities that a natural entity can achieve reacting to the environments, within a frame where structural incompleteness is a condition of the process.

Objectivity and Subjectivity of Constraints

The constraints on which identity is built are effective; however in many cases they remain opaque to direct observation: they are indirectly derived from the behavior of a system. This strong theoretical limitation can be overcome by abduction, the cognitive tool provided by the inferences that work in contexts where the information is not all specified. Abduction is our main cognitive instrument when we move from the observable to the unobservable, that's to say when we introduce a theory that over-determines the observable data in order to explain available and often contradictory data.

Opacity, originally a physical property of matter, is a keyword of systemic thinking because it outlines the vast region of interactions (Vitiello, 2019) and secondarily it brings to the surface some cognitive activities: precisely the inferences that the mind operates in order to explain observed phenomena through laws, principles and other phenomena of which it does not have direct knowledge. For a better understanding of this passage, we can think of the surface of metal being hit by a beam of light (Minati, 2019 a). This event gives rise to a series of feedbacks that operate at a very inaccessible level, invisible, microscopic of matter. This area is the core of a transformative process that occurs between an observable level of description (processes of personal identity) and an invisible one (the domain of constraints), between input (the beam of light) and output (the matter's response). Despite its invisibility, this ground provides a certain degree of understanding to physical observation; it allows a hypothesis whose credibility is granted by the verifiability (Vitiello, 2019: 45) of predictions taken from two visible regions of the process: input/output, both observable

Our proposal for introducing some new concepts not only gives a better understanding of personal identity, it also fruitfully helps to clarify or solve many other philosophical problems.

From objectivity of constraints, for example, the objectivity of values can easily be traced: they differ in ages and from culture to culture, but not for this reason they are only subjective (ethical subjectivism or ethical emotivism) or do not exist (relativism in ethics). Values are both objective and subjective, in different respect: they are objective as long as they can exert effective action in the human world, prescribing what to do. And they are also subjective because they can be effective if and only if they are subjectively accepted and shared by the members of a culture or a society.

It can be said that values are not objective *per se*, but in virtue of their relation to the constraints: they can evolve over time, depending on cultural layouts, but their evolution is limited by constraints.

The Emergence of the “I” between Constraints and Processes

How can we account for the particular character of the ‘I’? This paragraph will focus on the interrelation of constraints and dynamics that belongs to the phenomenon of self-identity as an emergence of the human person.

Through the lens of System Thinking, ‘emergence’ is the key word for describing complex issues that cannot be thought in terms of linear thinking. This concept, or an explicatory tool, especially fits for those phenomena which result from dynamic interplay. For its implication with several intertwining factors (body, emotions, feelings, culture, languages, environments et.) the “I” properly dwells within this conceptual region.

Hence identity may be included within the ‘emergent phenomena’ of the personal condition that gives rise to an articulated dynamic, whose profile is close to the experience of art (Barrow, 1995). What does it mean? A dance, a symphony, a portrait of Leonardo can immediately refer to the very idea of a *process* that *emerges* from several other processes working together as a whole. This reference allows us to move deeper to the very heart of personal identity as a fluid, dynamic phenomenon embodied into a set of limits only partially coming to each person’s subjective experience.

Thinking of the human being, we have to consider species-specific boundaries (a human individual has no gills, which belong properly to a fish) and cultural limitations (a Muslim believer is allowed by his faith to marry up to four women, a Christian person can have only one spouse). These – and many other- limits, allow the emergence of a performance that depends on the interaction between the constraints and the fluidity of interactions. An example of how constraints are linked to processes comes from the Ten Commandments of the Bible, which prescribes to people what is not due (boundaries) and, at the same time, leaves the individual the possibility of doing several things respecting the limits of the prohibition itself (Libet, 2004). Take for instance “Thou Shalt not Steal”. It refers to a wide number of actions, from robbing private property to human trafficking. Until these possibilities remain unexplored, the seventh commandment, like the others, plays the role of a veto, not an order. Each culture has its constraints that

explicitly, but also implicitly, shape the behavior of individuals. We would suggest that to be a culture is to canalize individuals' behavior within the limits of specific and proper constraints.

Furthermore, we can also think of the Slalom, an alpine skiing discipline that results from the interaction between technical constraints and the fluidity of the skier's movements. The skier has to move with precision within a course made by alternating pairs of red and blue poles; he/she can take a direct line, or knock the poles out of the way as he/she passes (blocking technique), or going around the gate with the upper body well inclined (cross-blocking technique). When the ski racer commits what is commonly known as the 'fork' of the poles, allowing the passage of a ski inside the pole instead of outside, it costs the direct elimination from the race. In other words, when the skier does not take into account the veto, the slalom has no longer its proper identity and thus, for him/her the race must be ended. This example sheds light on a very crucial aspect of the systemic interaction of constraints and processes that consists in the generative power of their polarization. Only the interplay among poles, the structure of the course and the skier give rise to the entity as known as Slalom. Not the singular component of the race, nor the race in itself are enough to make that particular competition. What we aim to highlight is a further process, which can be grasped – in some way – but not understood in detail, because it is theoretically impossible to express it in formal terms or to reduce it to a linear inference.

The opaque region inhabited by constraints makes unattainable any complete knowledge of the human being, dooming to failure any attempt to reach it. The awareness of such theoretical limitation is a precious guide for searching within the boundaries of what we can attain. It is now clear that we can aim at a general comprehension of ourselves as humans, not to a detailed, complete one, and that for this kind of knowledge we must discard a large set of concepts such as explicit, complete, linear, analytic, deductive and efficient cause. We are bound to introduce some new conceptual categories (Minati, 2013: 318-321) forged to understand open and complex phenomena: quasi-ness, implicit, opaque, abductive, interaction, top-down bottom-up meso-level causes, and many others related to these.

A Brief Focus on Coherence

A twofold question arises at this point of the paper, after having briefly sketched the interrelation between constraints and processes.

How can identity emerge and in virtue of what kind of operation does this dynamic work?

A brief focus on coherence is due, for it is what supports any emergence process. In the biological condition of an individual, for instance, health is the state of maximum coherence; conversely, any disease gives rise to the isolation of a part, or function, or property of the whole system from the systemic unitary and general coherence. The loss of coherence is one of the possible reasons why a process of emergence may be extinguished as the consequence of an inconsistent organization. For a living entity, death is the acquisition of a perfect equilibrium, which is nothing but the incapacity to acquire a new temporary state. It is worth noting that coherence relaunches into the systemic processes the idea that overcoming contradictions results in philosophy in coherent reasoning (Minati, 2019 c: 15).

A concept belonging to the domain of physics (optics), coherence is also historically rooted in philosophy for the role Thomas Aquinas assigned to ‘integrity’ in his doctrine about beauty (*Opusculum De pulchro et bono*). The notion of integrity (*integritas*) presents a strong affinity with coherence, (even if nowadays coherence and integrity have acquired slightly different meanings) and we would like to suggest that it can be assumed to be the antecedent of that systemic notion. A constituent trait of beauty, integrity gives rise – in an entity – to the light that is the very trait of perfection of each being. The idea of integrity, in fact, pertains to a certain «resplendentia formae super partes materiae proportionatas», where form is properly the organizational principle of the parts that provides unity (coherence) to the object of beauty. Therefore, in the Medieval philosophical domain integrity was the instrument needed to express what we nowadays theorize as coherence, the very unity of an entity/object that resounds in phase or that vibrates in the oscillations of life (Eco, 1988: 118-119). No surprise that Aquinas also included proportion or consonance (*proportio sive consonantia*) among the properties of wholeness, besides *integritas* or perfection (*integritas sive perfectio*) and clarity (*Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 19, art. 8).

Autoconscience as Narrativeness of the I

The ‘I’ emerging as a process within constraints allows the most crucial operation of identity: the capacity to understand ourselves as a part of the environment to which we continuously relate. This passage of the investigation is highly relevant

to explain the role of the 'I' in the frame of the systemic anthropology, as an emergent phenomenon that results from several factors (coherence, interaction among causalities top-down, bottom-up etc.).

According to them, the sense of being a self is strictly dependent on the capacity of thinking of ourselves as part of a scenery that can be described. (Damasio, 1994) The narrativeness of the 'I' will, thus, emerge as one of the conditions for grounding self-objectification, allowing human beings to write their own story at the light of incompleteness (Minati, 2019 b). An irreversible, historical process within constraints, related to a plot of hierarchically, interrelated levels of interactions, the human being is the recipient of both individual (mind, language, feelings) and collective (morality, society, family, religion) emergences.

The human person is like an intertwining of hierarchies of different levels - lower, but also higher - that come together in an ideal unification of action, emotions and thought. To witness this process a narrating ego is needed. (Jaynes, 1976) It should be capable of both 1) understanding and describing its development over time, and 2) observing itself and the other selves in action, as they change. Narrativeness of the 'I', is a historical process through which the ego knows how to write its own history.

Only with the objectification of oneself and the world can history, sciences and philosophy (the thought of what one thinks) be born. The constraints define the space of the objectives that human beings can possess (even in a non-explicit way) and that can then be given (in an explicit, conscious, propositional way). The human being is an irreversible process framed within objective constraints, able to tell his/hers own history thanks to the extraordinary capacity of taking him/herself as an object of investigation and reflection and viewing him/herself as playing a part in the process while observing it. Both human being and the world are incessantly involved in a constant state of change, but changes can only occur within constraints. Nevertheless constraints too can change, but they cannot be eliminated at all: no constraints, no behavior.

Collective Phenomena of the Individuals: the Texture of Ethics

Besides the well-known individual and subjective aspects, the human being also has collective and shared ones. It is impossible to neatly separate subjective aspects from collective ones because they are interlaced and reciprocally effective. Nevertheless, we can say with a close approximation that what characterizes the

human is a set of phenomena and emergent properties, special and specific, which entail a twofold trait, individual/subjective and collective/shared. To the domain of the prevailing individual phenomena belong 1) conscious and unconscious mind, explicated by thinking activity; 2) feelings, intended as private moods; 3) the feeling of the body (Damasio, 2010); 4) the perception of being a subject with a self.

On the other hand, any individual subject wishes to share a rich and complex life with other humans, in a family, in the society, in culture and in many other sub social groups that are domains where collective phenomena are observed, such as 1) language; 2) ethics; 3) religion; 4) arts. Each domain is studied by dedicated disciplines; in this context, we only want to point out that they are collective phenomena and that studying them for their subjective aspect would strongly limit their comprehension.

Let us consider ethics, a domain of which the potential is still waiting to be exploited through the lens of System Thinking (Urbani Ulivi, 2019 b). We'll just sketch some relevant traits of it that could be further investigated, namely: the processual texture of ethics; responsibility as an emergence of processes within constraints; good and bad as systemic tensions within an interacting environment. Our proposal of personal identity, and its consequences on human conduct, it is important to underline, is expected to strengthen traditional ethics. In other words, this theoretical frame prescind from any absolute presumption. A systemic approach to human agency has the power to make ethics valuable and objective not in absolute terms, but in the specific contexts where it is applied or, coming back to the phenomenon of personal identity, within particular constraints.

In a systemic view ethics is a *dynamics*, according to the dialectic between constraints and processes discussed in the previous paragraphs. It cannot be limited to the study of «the concepts involved in practical reasoning» (Blackburn, 1994: 126). In classical theories of ethics, a set of duties prescribes specific acts which one must do and, thus, limit the possibilities of the human agency. If we consider personal identity as an emergent phenomenon, ethics should be regarded as a process where continuous adjustments are needed. In other words, we ought to suggest the idea of a less regimented ethical life, as it depends on the adaptation of moral perspective to the occurring of specific circumstances.

The *organizational tension* of conduct could be seen not as a straight inclination to a final end, as Aquinas theorized (Brock, 1992), but mainly as an orientation amid

internal and external boundaries, within «an ordered totality of parts, endowed with properties», the proper “finalism” of any system (Agazzi, 2019: xvi). These limitations or constraints are yes, objective in the sense explained before, but at the same time they are essential constituents for the individual identity. Through this perspective, the very idea of a ‘due’ is going to change. A due is not a prescribed act that is owed for its ‘essential’, ‘supernatural’ or ‘universal’ content, but primarily in virtue of the role it is expected to play in the process for the sake of humanity and its living environment.

The ‘respect for the other’, for example, which has been considered a standpoint of Western ethics (Ricoeur, 1990), through a systemic perspective is what guarantees the possibility of any interaction with the world of life as-a-whole. According to this, any being and any aspect of global environment should be respected for life to flourish. The increasing attention we are asked to pay towards the planet’s care is definitely a part of the process that is going to change, the collective ethics of contemporary societies (duties, rules and values).

As argued before, only an ‘I’ who is capable of thinking of himself/herself as an emerging process within constraints gives rise to an anthropology that fits for the increasing complexity of the contemporary world, filled with phenomena so globally interacting. Looking at this conceptual frame, it becomes clearer also the idea of what the ‘narrativeness of the I’ concretely is. Individual identity – within the ethical environment – gives rise to an adaptive link with the environment (social, cultural, political and economic) through a practical reasoning irreducible to structured standpoints (duties, rules and laws), always creative and open to changes. The very objective ground of this processual frame stands on individual as well collective constraints by leaving room for the exercise of free will, under the conditions opened by constraints.

Some contemporary debated issues about the human condition, like for instance the discussion about the end of life, brings to surface the intertwined texture of any ethical problem and, on the other hand, the incapacity of ‘linear ethics’ to cope with them. These issues cannot be solved according to a prescriptive, frustrating solution, as it generally happens – where tribunals or high court of law are called to draw the line (see the Charlie Gard’s case in UK, 2016 or the Eluana Englaro’s one in Italy, 2007) – but in virtue of a wider understanding of the individual case, at the light of several factors and environmental dynamics. And so, what is required, is an enlargement of paradigm.

Personal identity as a fluid subjective/objective emergence shaped by multiple constraints recalls a notion of responsibility that does not only belong to the individual self-domain and cannot be separated by the processes from which it emerges. System Thinking focuses on the role played by the environment as an ethical infrastructure that ‘naturally’ and fluidly interacts with the human subject as well as with other animated beings or interconnected entities according to Artificial Intelligence, in the ICT domain. An infrastructure – a bridge, a road, a railway – is basically a path that connects and facilitates and, for it, is never neutral (Floridi, 2017). Coming back to our subject matter, personal identity, far from being an isolated entity, moves itself between multiple paths of the environment, giving rise to a twofold activity: it shapes itself and the world as well, being shaped at the same time by multiple constraints. An interesting consequence of this feature is the progressive abandon of the ideal of certainty in favor of an ideal interrelation – the best possible under given conditions – that links, as it happens in a dance, the human subject to the relevant environment relevant in those circumstances.

Finally, we want to highlight on good and bad, the leading poles within the set of moral principles that affect human conduct and any ethical discourse. Good, according to the systemic toolkit presented above, can be suggested as a coherent strength of aggregation, connections and a powerful source of energy. From this point of view, we are allowed to think of good as ‘something’ for its generative capacity/activity to give rise to entities. Evil, on the other hand, recalls a negative activity. Precisely, it presides a dissipation of energy, a process well known by systemic interactions that consists of «the stability of dissipative structures is due to their ability to transfer a large amount of entropy to their environment» (Minati, 2019 a: 23). On a systemic ground, dissipation is an event/activity among others (auto-organization, emergence, equivalence, balance, etc.) that allows the surge of emergences, or properties that cannot be reduced to any singular component of the constellation. For evil is not ‘something’ intended as a coherent aggregation of parts (it is the opposite), nevertheless the fact of being a process brings it to take a part (not generative but destructive) in the transformation of reality. Its spreading all over as a fungus refers to evil’s blurred profile, between being and not-being, which cannot reveal itself (it’s nothing, indeed) but always throws light on the coherence of being (the depth of good/being as positive, a *datum*). In this way evil belongs to the living domain without being an entity. As a dissipative process it is not productive in se nor has it consistence; however it stimulates the response of the environment in reason of entropy. Surprisingly, but not paradoxically, the loss of being corresponds to the growth of new properties: the more evils spreads, the

more the positive aspects of life can be experimented. A relevant ontological asymmetry should be noticed between good and evil, as good shapes the evil issues by giving them a form, while evil only performs the negative ability to increase entropy, mainly destroying the forms that pertain to entities.

Conclusions

We have moved from the explanatory difficulties posed by some relevant data in the philosophical-anthropological field: personal identity is regarded as indispensable, but at the same time it is not supported by any visible data. Indeed, we observe a continuous change in what we recognize as ‘ours’, as part of us: we notice that ideas, emotions, choices, evaluation systems and knowledge undergo constant changes. We set ourselves the goal of explaining these conflicting data, concerning the problem of personal identity in philosophy.

The problem is one of the most discussed and controversial within the philosophical debate, but it has not yet produced any satisfactory result. We asked ourselves if this was due to the use of inadequate or weak or insufficient concepts to deal with the issue and we went in search of further suggestions and ideas in other domains of knowledge (mainly systemic, biology, neuroscience and physics). Furthermore, we investigated the topic not disregarding some philosophical indications: 1) the ego as a principle of activity (Aristotle), and 2) the ego as a process (Dupré, 2015). This investigation allowed us to import and use some concepts according to which our *prima facie* contradictory observations on the human being, including our self-observations, can be explained without correcting or eliminating them. Among these concepts the main ones are: constraint, process, system, emergency, consistency, opaque and observable.

Let’s take another look at them briefly: the sense of stability of personal identity is guaranteed by the constraints, which define the space of possible achievable activities, excluding the unattainable ones. Within the constraints, identity is processual, for being characterized by continuous dynamics within the different environments (internal and external *milieu*) to which it reacts as we gain experience of “our” world.

A system is an organization of related parts to which belong properties that its parts do not have. These properties are called ‘emergent’ and are observable, or even reachable through abductive inferential processes.

Coherence, as the ‘phase resonance’ (Del Giudice, 2010) of the process, supports at the same time identity and the process-oriented dynamic of the system, which maintains a homeo-dynamic balance, continuously abandoned and recovered. Within this frame, the inclusion of opaque phenomena (theoretically and objectively opaque) is given as an ontological and epistemological support of explicit, directly and instrumentally observable phenomena. In the domain of the human, this association refers – for instance – to the unconscious mind next to the conscious one, or the unspoken present, implicitly and effectively included in what is explicitly expressed. This different and more updated understanding of humans opens up to overcoming historically crystallized problems, affected by insuperable theoretical difficulties. We have the tools to rethink freedom (within constraints); morality (collective emergency); the dynamic between conscious and unconscious; history; the relationship between subject and object.

Inspired by a pioneering spirit, this work is aimed at introducing new concepts and ideas in the philosophical scenery. The authors are well aware that their proposal will greatly benefit from any suggestion emerging in the debate, in order to enhance a challenging issue concerning philosophical anthropology. We are therefore grateful to the readers who, through a helpful criticism, will enable us to significantly improve the content of the present investigation.

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