

Franziska Thron, *Subjekt und Gegenstand. Zur Konstitution der Außenwelt im Anschluss an Husserl und Carnap*, Alber, 2013, pp. 208, € 32, ISBN 9783495486085

Simone Aurora, Università degli Studi di Padova

This book represents the publication of the doctoral dissertation defended by the author in 2012 at the Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Harald Seubert.

As the title clearly suggests and the author explicitly announces in the *Preface*, the aim of the volume is to provide a reflection on the relationship between subject and object on the basis of the philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Rudolf Carnap (p.9). Yet the author's approach is not only comparative (and not at all historical) but also shows a strongly theoretical and original mark. Its purpose, as the author defines it at the end of the brief *Introduction* (p.21), lies actually in the attempt to yield an independent contribution to the philosophical examination of the matter, namely the relationship between subject and object. The main feature of this examination consists in what the author portrays as a continuation of the lines of thought involved, with respect to this issue, in Husserl's and Carnap's works.

The links between the two different concepts – and therefore, according to Thron, between the general paradigms of phenomenology and logical positivism – are to be found, on one hand, in the adoption of that peculiar methodological suspension represented by the phenomenological “Epoché”, and, on the other hand, in the Carnapian reception of the Husserlian notion of “stream of experience” (*Erlebnisstrom*), on the other hand (p.11). Furthermore, the acquisition of such phenomenological concepts in the philosophy of Carnap represents, as the author stresses, a generally omitted topic within the research on Carnap and on logical positivism in general. Accordingly, the volume intends also to contribute to filling this gap.

The book is divided into four sections, namely a first section pertaining to Husserl, *Zur Gegenstandskonstitution aus phänomenologischer Sicht: Anknüpfungen an Husserl* (pp.22-93), a second section dealing with Carnap, *Die Gegenstandswelt als Begriffssystem – Reflexionen auf Carnaps Konstitutionsentwurf des logischen Weltbaus* (pp.93-169), a third section comparing the two different concepts, *Perspektiven eines Vergleichs: Husserl und Carnap* (pp.169-195), and a final

section, *Zusammenfassung* (pp.195-205), which aims to summarise the general train of thought and the critical observations made by the author. Every section is then divided into subsections and paragraphs.

In the first subsection (paragraphs 1-4), *Das Phänomenstruktur des Seinsglaubens und seine Enthaltung*, Thron deals with the Husserlian ambition of a philosophical ultimate foundation of knowledge (*philosophische Letztbegründung der Erkenntnis*). Consequently, she takes into consideration the emergence of the Husserlian notion of “phenomenological reduction” (*phenomenologische Reduktion*), on the one hand, and the principle of the intentionality of consciousness – which Husserl as it is well-known inherits from one of his master, Franz Brentano – on the other hand. On the basis of these two aspects, then, the author can claim that the phenomenological analysis of the object finds its starting point in the intentional consciousness, that is a consciousness always understood as “consciousness of something” (p.23). It is not the object, then, that constitutes the centre of the Husserlian reflection, but that something which lies in between the knowing subject and the known object, namely those acts of consciousness which give or present the object itself (p.25).

The second subsection (paragraphs 5-6), *Die Evidenzen der Cogito in der Fundierung der Objektivität*, deepens this line of reasoning, introduces the fundamental themes of external perception and evidence, and takes a stand in the long-standing, and nevertheless still open, controversy within the phenomenological tradition, concerning the question whether Husserl’s phenomenology represents a form of idealist or realist philosophy, advocating an anti-idealistic interpretation (p.43). Paragraphs 7-10, which are grouped under the title *Die Wesensschauung von Wahrnehmungen*, intend to undertake a clarification of the ontology of thing-perception (*Ontologie der Dingwahrnehmung*) (p.49) and focus, in this respect, on the conceptual couples “immanence-transcendence” and “essence-existence”.

The fourth subsection, *Zum Verhältniss von Intentionalität und Ontologie* (paragraphs 11-12), returns to the question of the alleged idealism of Husserl’s position (p.62) and shows the fundamentally ontological meaning of the principle of intentionality. A consciousness without an object standing in front of it, so reasons the author, could not be a subject; only the

object can make subject a subject and, conversely, only the subject can make object an object; what subject and object are beyond this relationship we can not know (p.61).

Finally, in the last paragraphs of this first part, *Das Raumhafte der Dingwahrnehmung* (paragraphs 13-15), the author sums up all the theoretical steps so far considered and addresses the concept of space. The perception of a thing, indeed, so argues Thron, always entails the perception of space (p.67). On the basis of this and of the whole line of reasoning, the author can then express and defend her fundamental criticism against Husserl's discussion of the relationship between subject and object and of the constitution of the outside world. The essence of space, she maintains, finds actually its fundamental characterization in the fact that this is always intended as being outside the consciousness, which perceives it. This "outside" can never be, in opposition to what Husserl said, suspended by the phenomenological epoché, because such a suspension would be simply unthinkable (p.89). As the author already affirmed in the *Introduction*, space represents the condition of possibility both of the thinkability of things and of experience in general (p.13).

The second section of the volume concerns the Carnapian idea of a constitutive system of objects and considers, from this point of view, the general issue that the author deals with. Unlike the investigation of Husserl's philosophy undertaken in the first section, which considered Husserl's work as a whole, the analysis of Carnap's theory rests mostly on the text published in 1928 with the title *Der logische Aufbau der Welt*.

With the first subsection, *Perspektiven der Erkenntnisleistung des Carnapschen Systems* (paragraphs 16-20), the author provides a general presentation of the meaning and the inner workings of Carnap's constitutive system, which aims to deduce from a set of fundamental concepts the system of the whole science (*System der gesamten Wissenschaft*). Besides, as shown by a quotation from the text of 1928, this is a matter of "a step-by-step ordering of objects in such a way that the objects of each level are constructed from those of the lower level" (p.93). In these paragraphs, moreover, Thron considers the Carnapian definition of object as "anything about which a statement can be made" (p.100) and the alleged neutrality –strongly criticized by the author – of Carnap's notion of constitution (*Konstitution*) within the already mentioned philosophical controversy about

idealism-realism (pp.112-113).

What is at stake in the second subsection, *Die Entmaterialisierung der Wirklichkeit* (paragraphs 21-24), is the role of the notion of relation. As the author actually explains, the main feature of Carnap's interpretation of the object lies in the idea that every object can be represented by means of pure structural properties of relation (p.115) and therefore, according to Carnap, the real fundamental concepts of the system are not represented by elements (*Grundbegriffe*) but by relations (*Grundbeziehungen*) (p.118).

In the third subsection, *Die erkenntnismäßigen Beziehungen zwischen den verschiedenen Gegenstandsarten* (paragraphs 25-28), the author explains and considers critically Carnap's idea – according to which one must discern, within the system, between the cognitive order and the logical-constitutive order of the objects (p.143) – by observing that the activity of logical structuring is always necessarily undertaken by a knowing subject and that logical connections need to be known prior to be shown (p.147).

The fourth subsection, *Der Rückgang auf das Erlebnis* (paragraphs 29-32), deals with the Carnapian acquisition of the Husserlian “stream of experience” and the radicalization of the phenomenological epoché, and it raises the problem of how scientific knowledge can be possible, if every object is constituted on the basis of the stream of experience of an individual subject (p.150). Carnap's answer is that every object of knowledge can be represented through structural patterns so that, in this way, it becomes possible to constitute objectivity taking the individual stream of experience as a starting point (p.151).

The last two brief subsections, finally, *Die Grenzen des Konstitutionssystem und die Aufdeckung des Versteckten Erkenntnissubjektes* (paragraphs 33-34) and *Carnaps Ansätze einer nachrationalisierenden Raumkonstitution* (paragraphs 35-36), address the Carnapian approach to the problem of space constitution – Thron harks back mostly to Carnap's 1922 book *Der Raum: Ein Beitrag zur Wissenschaftslehre* – and present the critical remarks of the author, which can be mostly summarized in the observation that the experience (*Erlebnis*), which presents and gives the object, cannot be, despite what Carnap may think, reduced to a formalized structure and, consequently, cannot be grasped by the system itself (p.161). This is what Thron calls the

“material rest” of Carnap’s constitutive system.

The third section, *Perspektiven eines Vergleichs: Husserl und Carnap* (paragraphs 37-42), intends to offer a comparison between the two different philosophical positions in the light of the results achieved in the first two parts. As a first consideration, the author notes that in both Husserl and Carnap the critical analysis of the relationship between subject and object leads to the question of how space constitutes itself for a subject (p.169). Therefore, the author analyses the different possible meanings of the concept of space, which she, on the basis of the already mentioned Carnap’s book of 1922, divides in three different space types, namely the formal space of mathematics, the physical space of physics and the intuitive space (*Anschauungsraum*) of philosophy (p.171). Eventually, she focuses on the different examination of this issue within the two distinct theoretical frames. Finally, in the last paragraph, *Die intersubjektivität: der andere und die Außenwelt*, the author provides a brief outline of the influence of the theme of intersubjectivity for a reflection on the question of space and of the constitution of the outside world.

The volume ends with a summary, *Zusammenfassung* (pp.195-205), in which the author sums up the basic features of her line of reasoning and the criticisms directed to both Husserl (subsection *Ad Husserl* pp. 198-200) and Carnap (subsection *Ad Carnap* pp.200-204) and a bibliography.

The main value of the book lies certainly in its theoretical mark. Although her starting point is represented by the philosophies of Husserl and Carnap, Thron nevertheless offers an original consideration of the issues dealt with and does not skimp on even radical criticisms toward the two philosophers. However the analysis of Husserl’s and Carnap’s works is not always thorough and rigorous and the references to the related critical bibliography are quite few. This, unfortunately, does not help to appreciate the value and the role of this research within the philosophical debate on the issues considered and, moreover, does not take account of different viewpoints on the matter.

Websites

http://www.verlag-alber.de/vorschau/details_html?k_tnr=48608&k_onl_struktur=712809