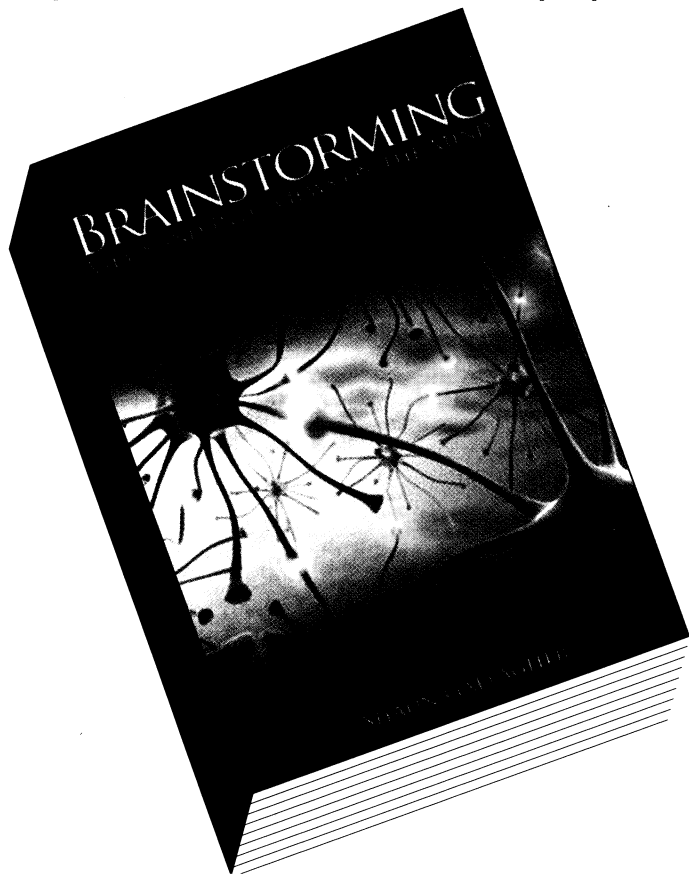


Mirror image of our inner selves

Chris McManus enjoys a set of interviews with those who try to make sense of our mental 'perplexities'



Brainstorming: Views and Interviews on the Mind
By Shaun Gallagher
Imprint Academic
250pp, £40.00 and £17.95
ISBN 978145401474 and 400231
Published 1 June 2008

"I did not write this book, I constructed it," says Shaun Gallagher in the opening words of this unusual and unexpectedly enthralling book. Unexpected because it is not the pedestrian, cut-and-paste job of a lazy journalist that the publisher's blurb leads one to expect. Yes, there are interesting interviews with distinguished neuroscientists, but the book is really about Gallagher, the serious and well-informed philosopher, getting to grips with what, as he says, the Greeks called the *aporiai* (the perplexities) of the mind. In a philosophical journey, Gallagher explores our understanding of how thoughts, actions and mental states

can be generated by brains, and the ways philosophy, neuroscience and cognitive science collaborate in making sense of it all.

The interviews effectively emphasise the differences between the pompous circumlocutions and technical complexities characterising so many formal scientific papers, and the disarmingly everyday ways that scientists really talk when off their guard. This is the coffee room, rather than the lecture hall or the journal. Philosophers are perhaps no different, as Gallagher shows in other transcripts he has gathered. His journalist's eye for the revealing quote is well seen in the transcript of a philosophical meeting held outside Paris in 1960, which also demonstrates quite how much philosophy has changed. Gilbert Ryle, discussing phenomenology and philosophical method with A. J. Ayer, Willard Quine and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, dogmatically rejected any

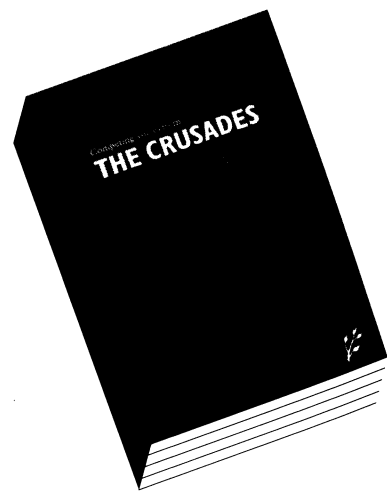
role in philosophy for science ("research of fact", as he put it): "One will never say that so and so is a better philosopher than so and so because so and so knows facts of which the other is ignorant." Neurophilosophy changed all that, and neuroscience and cognitive science now inform much philosophising (although perhaps one shouldn't forget Jerry Fodor's Marxian quip that "in intellectual history, everything happens twice, first as philosophy and then as cognitive science").

Gallagher's account of studying the mind, which eventually considers action, consciousness, intersubjectivity, emotion, empathy, language, self-consciousness, free will and moral responsibility, begins with what he himself admits is a strange choice of topic: movement, a subject relatively neglected by philosophers, psychologists and cognitive scientists. In the Sixties, cognitive science was about symbolic representations derived from computer models and Turing machines. By its second wave, it concerned itself mainly with neural networks. Only with its third wave was there a realisation that minds and brains are *embodied*, and those bodies themselves are socially and culturally emplaced. At last, emotion, feeling, empathy and the myriad other components of psychological life that have been called "the phenomenology of lived experience" came back into neuroscience, not least because the emerging technology of brain scanning allowed living brains to be observed while actually having experiences.

A particular interest in this fascinating and insightful book is Gallagher's attitude to mirror neurons, cells first found in the macaque monkey. Gallagher heard of them in a 1998 lecture by Vittorio Gallese that "more or less knocked me off my seat", making him immediately join the "over-enthusiastic [mirror neuron] fan club". Despite the hype – Vilayanur Ramachandran predicted mirror neurons would provide for psychology what DNA did for biology – a decade later Gallagher is "not convinced that [mirror neurons] can explain everything". Although they are undoubtedly important, Gallagher now sees the mirror system as more akin to a sensory or perceptual input – "It's not something that I do; it's something that happens to me" – rather than

the locus of thoughts themselves. Gallagher once punningly subtitled an article on mirror neurons "A speculative account", from "*speculum*", the Latin for a mirror. His book is speculative in all the right ways, mirroring minds and thoughts, and the ways of science itself.

Chris McManus is professor of psychology and medical education, University College London.



Competing Voices from the Crusades: Fighting Words
Edited by Andrew Holt and James Muldoon
Greenwood World Publishing
328pp, £30.00
ISBN 9781846450112
Published 30 June 2008

This book is an interesting and ambitious concept, aiming to present Latin Christian, Muslim and Byzantine voices from the Crusades and, to quote the editors, to allow readers "to determine for themselves how such events were interpreted and understood by the participants". A number of these extracts have appeared elsewhere, but often in specifically Crusading or Muslim-centred collections; to bring them together is a sensible move.

At times the results are particularly effective; most notably the section on Frederick II's controversial recovery of Jerusalem in 1229. Notwithstanding his status as an excommunicate, Frederick achieved by diplomatic means what great warriors such as Richard the Lionheart had failed to accomplish. The triumphant emperor revelled in God's apparent blessing of his cause while his political opponents deplored the fact that he had left some areas of Jerusalem, such as the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque (collectively