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Paul Ricœur's Recovery of Affectivity: Feeling at the Crossroads of Carnal Imagination and the Corporeal Condition*

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ABSTRACT. This article examines Paul Ricœur's conception of the relationship between the affective dimension of experience and imagination's reproductive force. Specifically, it focuses on Ricœur's recovery of the affective aspects of human being's incarnate existence and imagination modeled on representation of absent things based on our previous sensory experiences of the world, as dimensions playing a fundamental role in the generation of actions. Regarding Ricœur's early phenomenological analysis of the embodied nature of affectivity and imagination, developed in his work entitled Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary (1950/1960), I will first discuss his understanding of the unity of feeling, imagining, and thinking. More precisely, affectivity, imagination, and thought are mediated through the body's spontaneous experience as situated in time and space and as exercising a particular point of view about the world. Stemming from Ricœur's rejection of the naturalistic explanation of volition, these reflections will lead us to consider affectivity and imagination as inseparable from the corporeal limiting factors shaping our decisions. Therefore, the second part of this article will consider the

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affective and the imaginative components of our experience in the affirming spontaneity of the body in decision-making as involving the necessity to satisfy needs, the apprehension of motives, and the evaluation of objects in the world. The analysis of Ricœur's phenomenological account of affectivity and imagination will be enriched through the consideration of the resonances of his early ideas in his theory of imagination as presented in his recently published work Lectures on Imagination (1975/2024). Subjected to the rhythm of passivity and activity, closeness and openness, vulnerability and capability, affectivity and imagination configure the framework for our projects and actions, allowing us to foresee future possibilities.

Keywords: affectivity, imagination, embodiment, will, decision

Introduction: Paul Ricœur and the "Affective Turn"

"To feel is still to think."[1]
"Feeling expresses my belonging to this landscape that, in turn, is the sign and cipher of my inwardness."[2]

Paul Ricœur devoted considerable attention to the topic of affectivity in his writings. Convinced about the relevance of interdisciplinary discussion not only between philosophy and the humanities, but also with the natural sciences, to the point of becoming known as the philosopher of all dialogues,[3] Ricœur explored the phenomenon of affectivity from different perspectives, by using various methods and in reference to the themes shaping the evolution of his thinking, e.g., the will, the body, fallibility, language, narrative, identity, justice, memory, and recognition. To use the words of his two famous hermeneutic maxims, we can affirm that the issue of affectivity "gives rise to thought"[4] and that it requires to be explained more in order to be understood better.[5] Undoubtedly, Ricœur offers a detailed analysis of affectivity, attracting increasing attention from philosophers, psychoanalysts, psychologists, cognitive scientists, neuroscientists, sociologists, and anthropologists. From a multitude of methodological approaches, Ricœurian scholars have recognized Ricœur's study of affectivity as highly illuminating. Specifically, his insights on

1 Paul Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1966, p. 86.
2 Paul Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, New York, Fordham University Press, 1986 [1960], p. 89.
3 See Leovino Garcia, "On Paul Ricœur and the Translation-Interpretation of Cultures," *Thesis Eleven*, 94, no. 1, 2008, pp. 72-87.
4 Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1969, p. 352.
5 See Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative. Volume 1*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p. x.

affectivity have been extended in different fields, including affect theory (Stephanie Arel), religious studies (Christina Gschwandtner, Ruth Rebecca Tietjen), philosophy of action (Emmanuel Nal), psychological theory (Vinicio Busacchi), hermeneutical ethics (Beatriz Contreras Tasso, Patricio Mena), feminism (Annemie Halsema), enactivism (Geoffrey Dierckxsens), and musicology (Roger Savage). Further, in fields such as emotion theory (Giovanni Stanghellini, René Rosfort), psychotherapy (Del Loewenthal), theology (Beata Toth), and environmental philosophy (Marjolein Oele), Ricœur's reflections on affectivity have been considered as a source of inspiration for the development of new lines of investigation concerning the affective dimension of human life as marked by the rhythm of openness and closedness, capability and vulnerability, and as exposed both to joy and suffering in relation to the world. In short, although Ricœur cannot be considered as an affect theorist per se,[6] his work provides us with a fruitful philosophical framework for the analysis of affectivity and the role of affect in shaping human experience, allowing us to bridge continental and analytic traditions concerned with the affective aspects of human existence.

Originating from the Latin verb *affectum*, past participle of *adficere*, compounded of *ad* and *facere*, affectivity is an umbrella term encompassing inner states, e.g., passions, emotions, sensations, feelings, moods, impulses, preferences, desires, and evaluations. Ricœur's interest in the issue of affectivity emerged slightly before the "affective turn" or "emotion revolution" in philosophy, which arose during the 1960s and 1970s as a "reaction to the rational emphasis of the twentieth-century linguistic turn."[7] More precisely, the "affective turn" consists in a renewed academic interest in the role of affects "in the texts of Hellenistic philosophers, Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, and Kant"[8] and in the study of "the passions and emotions through developing phenomenological, psychoanalytic, and post-structural accounts of the affects."[9] The "affective turn" is the expression of "a new configuration of bodies, technologies and matter"[10] that occurred across the humanities and the social sciences. Affect theorists fundamentally challenge the dichotomy between body and mind, and in explaining the reciprocity between these two dimensions, they focus on what a human body can do. This problem leads them "to consider

[6] See Stephanie Arel, "Theorizing the Exchange between the Self and the World. Paul Ricœur, Affect Theory, and the Body," in Roger Savage (ed.), *Ricœur and the Lived Body*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2020, p. 63.

[7] John Artos, *Hermeneutics After Ricœur*, London, Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 55.

[8] Marguerite La Caze, Henry Martyn Lloyd, "Editor's Introduction: Philosophy and the Affective Turn," in *Parrhesia*, 13, No. 1, 2011, p. 2.

[9] Ibidem.

[10] Patricia Ticineto Clough, "Introduction," in Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley (eds.), *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2007, 2.

how bodies are always thoroughly entangled processes and importantly defined by their capacities to affect and be affected. These capacities are mediated and afforded by practices and technologies."[11] Ricœur's analysis of affectivity meets the vectors that Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seighworth identify as the distinctive traits of the "affective turn"[12]: phenomenological and post-phenomenological theories of embodiment, non-Cartesian traditions in philosophy, aspects of psychological and psychoanalytic theory, a collection of attempts to react to the linguistic turn, and aspects of science and neurology.[13] I do not intend here to provide an exhaustive treatment of Ricœur's understanding of affectivity with reference to the essential features of the affective turn. Even a monograph would be not enough to reflect a comprehensive grasp and articulation of Ricœur's considerations on affectivity in the light of the affective turn in the humanities and social sciences. Instead, my article has the more modest aim of examining Ricœur's understanding of the affective dimension of human experience as related to the carnal roots of imagination and the corporeal boundaries of human existence. It is in his early phenomenological project on the human will entitled *Freedom and Nature: the Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950/1966) that Ricœur focuses on the relation between affectivity, imagination, and embodiment in the context of the phenomenological description of the structures of the will, i.e., the voluntary and the involuntary. For him, the dialectical interplay between these two dimensions implies "the recognition of the central problem of embodiment, of *le corps propre*."[14] Therefore, the interlacing between the affectivity and the imagination will be addressed with reference to Ricœur's conception of the lived body as the "affective medium,"[15] i.e., as "the mediator between the intimacy of the self and the externality of the world."[16] The lived body enables, then, our experience of the world, our encounters with others, and our reception of reality and projection of future possibilities.[17] I will also argue that Ricœur's phenomenological analysis of the relation between affectivity

[11] Lisa Blackman, Couze Venn, "Affect," in *Body and Society*, 16, No. 1, 2010, p. 9.

[12] Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Duram and London, Duke University Press, 2010.

[13] Ibidem, pp. 6-8. See also La Caze, Lloyd, op. cit., p. 2.

[14] Paul Ricœur, "From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language," in Charles E. Reagan, David Stewart (eds.), *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur. An Anthology of his Work*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1978, p. 87.

[15] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 122.

[16] Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1992, p. 322.

[17] See Richard Kearney, Brian Treanor, "Introduction. Carnal Hermeneutics from Head to Foot," Richard Kearney, Brian Treanor (eds.), *Carnal Hermeneutics*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2015, pp. 1-14.

and imagination on the basis of human embodiment continues to resonate in his *Lectures on Imagination* (1975/2024).[18] In these, he develops five course lectures on phenomenology dedicated to Husserl's and Sartre's treatment of imagination. In discussing Husserl's and Sartre's perspectives, Ricœur sheds new light on how affect, imagination, and embodiment operate together not only in our experience of reality but also in the possibility to transform it.

This article is divided into two parts. In the first part, I will focus on affectivity in its relation with imagination and embodiment by taking as a starting point Ricœur's critical consideration of Edmund Husserl's and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories on consciousness and perception as inspiring the development of his philosophy of the will. Then, I will consider Ricœur's rejection of pure naturalism of experimental sciences (e.g., mechanistic psychology, biology, etc.). For him, the naturalistic approach offers a reductive account of consciousness understood in terms of "causal explanations that are drawn from the natural world."[19] Criticizing the naturalistic claims, Ricœur's phenomenological description of the interplay between the voluntary and the involuntary structures of the human volition will lead us to discuss the dynamics of the affective openness and closeness between the body and the world, the continuum between affectivity and thinking, as well as the interplay between affectivity and imagination. In this context, the body is not reduced to an anonymous empirical object, but it is considered as "the source of the somatic, from where affects emerge,"[20] and thus as the primal viewpoint and mediator of our being in the world as passive and active agents, affected by the world and capable of initiating actions in it. In the second part, affectivity will be discussed with reference to the body understood as a "mediating bridge between (i) our flesh and blood existence and (ii) the 'thinking' order of interpretation, evaluation and understanding."[21] In doing so, I will further explore affectivity in its relation to imagination as involved in what Ricœur considers the first moment of willing, i.e., decision, which includes the study of needs, motives, and values. Affectivity will be presented as a vital force involved in building, maintaining, or changing our projects. The affective and the imaginative dimensions of our existence are tied up with the dialectical relationship between activity and

[18] Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2024.

[19] Scott Davidson, "Introduction: Freedom and Nature, Then and Now," in Scott Davidson (ed.), *A Companion to Ricœur's Freedom and Nature*, Lanham, Lexington Books, p. xi.

[20] Arel, "Theorizing the Exchange between the Self and the World. Paul Ricœur, Affect Theory, and the Body," p. 72.

[21] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur", in Scott Davidson, Marc-Antoine Vallée (eds.), *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricœur: Between Text and Phenomenon*, Cham, Spinger, 2016, p. 32.

intimate passivity, interiority and exteriority, present concerns and future horizons, and the capacity to act and the contingency of human life. In conclusion, affectivity and imagination accompany our will to "live, desire, and be in the world"[22] as embodied beings temporally and spatially situated with others.

1. Affectivity and Volition: the Unity of Feeling, Thinking, and Imagining

In his phenomenology of the will, Ricœur elaborates his first analyses on the topic of affectivity as "a key force that, emerging from the embodied self, influences both one's behavior and one's relationship with the world"[23] and with others. It is, then, in his early work entitled *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950/1966), that he began to pay great attention to the issue of affectivity, conceiving it as an embodied phenomenon linked to human volition. Ricœur's project to lay out a philosophy of the will, which was originally conceived to include an eidetics, an empirics, and a poetics of the will, stands in opposition to Edmund Husserl's phenomenological primacy of representation and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's primacy of perception. More precisely, Ricœur criticizes "the transcendental doctrine erected on the narrow base of the analysis of 'representations,' i.e., all the operations of consciousness whose primary type is perception."[24] In commenting on Husserl's theory of consciousness, Ricœur argues: "the question is to determine whether the analysis of noetic and noematic structures is still valid for the enormous affective and practical sector of consciousness."[25] Like Merleau-Ponty, Ricœur borrows from Husserl the eidetic method, i.e., his descriptive approach to "the formal or invariant structures that shape all possible experience."[26] However, contrary to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/1962),[27] Ricœur does not focus on perceptive experience, but on the practical dimension of human life, opening up a reflection concerning "the living experience of the incarnate Cogito."[28] For him, the incarnate Cogito is a subject who has a capability not only to perceive the world, but also "to make something happen or to react to what is going on. This capacity directly involves

[22] Arel, "Theorizing the Exchange between the Self and the World. Paul Ricœur, Affect Theory, and the Body," p. 65.
[23] Ibidem, p. 61.
[24] Ricœur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1967, p. 214.
[25] Ibidem, p. 213.
[26] Davidson, "Introduction: Freedom and Nature, Then and Now," p. xi.
[27] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962.
[28] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 87.

the body as well as a form of intentionality closely related to the aptitudes of our lived body."[29] Ricœur refers to this as "becoming receptive to Cogito's complete experience, including its most diffuse affective margins."[30] As he argues: "the reconquest of the Cogito must be total […] The integral experience of Cogito includes the I desire, I can, I live, and in general the existence as a body."[31] On the one hand, Ricœur acknowledges the validity of Husserl's phenomenological descriptive method for the study of the structures of the volitive and affective aspects of our practical life. On the other hand, though, arguing for an anti-Cartesian decentering of subjectivity, he criticizes Husserl's late phenomenological idealism and his notion of a transcendental ego as the total, transparent, and self-sufficient source of all meaning.[32] According to Ricœur, Husserl's disembodied, transcendental ego is a formal and empty subject. Following Gabriel Marcel, Ricœur seeks to explore "the mystery of incarnate Cogito"[33] as a subjectivity shaped by a constitutive tension between activity and passivity. It is necessary, then, to reconsider the relation between volition and embodiment in order to discuss through the lens of phenomenological inquiry "the opacity of our affects, the limitations of our abilities, and the definite nature of our habits."[34]

Breaking away from the Cogito's desire for self-transparency and self-sufficiency, Ricœur intends to conciliate freedom and necessity, namely the voluntary and the involuntary dimensions of the subject's volitive experience as including not only perceptual and perspectival aspects, but also the affective field. Indeed, the experience of an object in the world is "not merely a question of what I experience, but also how this object appears to me and how it affects me in my act of experiencing it."[35] We perceptively experience an object from the limited perspective of our body as the center of our orientations in the world, as the "here" for every "there." Yet, "we are always, more or less dramatically, touched and motivated by what we experience."[36] Otherwise put, we are at once prospectively and affectively situated in the context of the world of objects as a common space of limitations and possibilities

[29] Marc Antoine Vallée, "Paul Ricœur and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. From Perception to Action," in Scott Davidson (ed.), *A Companion to Ricœur's Freedom and Nature*, p. 7.

[30] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 8.

[31] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 9.

[32] See Ricœur, "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea," in Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (eds.), *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1978, 9.

[33] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 94.

[34] Dries Deewer, *Ricœur's Personalist Republicanism. On Personhood and Citizenship*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2017, p. 47.

[35] Giovanni Stanghellini, René Rosfort, *Emotions and Personhood. Exploring Fragility – Making Sense of Vulnerability*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 42.

[36] Ibidem.

shared with other living beings by means and by reason of our bodies. Hence, our experience "never appears in isolation but always against a certain background and in context with other objects"[37] and subjects. As embodied beings we are, then, passively situated in the world and actively turned towards the things that we find in our relation to it. On the one hand, affectivity is intentionally directed towards an object, it "does not shut me up in my desiring self. It is openness and not closing that is revealed to me in affect."[38] Ricœur specifies: "I am not turned toward my affective perspective; on the contrary, it is out of it that things appear interesting to me; and it is upon these things that I grasp the lovable, the attractive, the hateful, the repulsive."[39] According to him, feelings have intentional structures: they designate "qualities felt on things, on persons, on the world."[40] In his *Lectures on Imagination*, Ricœur further argues that affectivity can't be associated with solipsism because "feelings too are intentional, that hatred is hatred of, that love is love of, that when we feel fear, the world appears as fearful."[41] On the other hand, affectivity relates to "an affection of the self."[42] In dealing with this back and forth movement between our embodied nature and the world, Ricœur speaks of "affective closing."[43] He concludes: "feeling expresses my belonging to this landscape that, in turn, is the sign and cipher of my inwardness."[44] Consequently, our affective openness and closeness are linked not only to our relations with others and the things in the world, but also to the discovery of our own individuality. As he writes, "with the affective closure, we recover the feeling of the original difference between myself and every other; feeling good or bad is feeling my singularity […] just as one's place cannot be shared, the affective situation in which I find myself and feel myself cannot be exchanged."[45]

Our affective relation to the world would not be possible apart from our capacity to think and to imagine, which are respectively defined by Ricœur as "the fundamental act of human existence"[46] and as "the power of affective presentation and implicit evaluation of pleasure-to-be."[47] Let us first address the connection

[37] Ibidem.
[38] Annemie Halsema, "Transcending the Duality of Body and Language: Ricœur's Notion of Narrative Identity," in Roger Savage (ed.), *Paul Ricœur and the Lived Body*, p. 10.
[39] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 78.
[40] Ibidem, p. 127.
[41] Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, p. 196.
[42] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 89.
[43] Ibidem, p. 55.
[44] Ibidem, p. 89.
[45] Ibidem, p. 85.
[46] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 444.
[47] Ibidem, p. 103.

between affectivity and thinking, and then the relation between affectivity and imagination, while acknowledging the inextricable unity of these dimensions of the volitional sphere of our life. Ricœur's explanation of the correlation of affectivity, thinking, and imagination is grounded on his rejection of the naturalistic account of conscious life. Although in his critique of naturalism he does not directly mention Husserl, Ricœur follows the German phenomenologist in considering naturalism as a form of objectivism which in its narrow sense "sees nothing but nature and first foremost physical nature."[48] Thus, from a naturalistic point of view, "everything that is is either itself physical, belonging to the unitary nexus of physical nature, or it is indeed something psychical, but then a variable that merely depends on the physical […] All beings are of a psychophysical nature, that is, univocally determined in accordance with firm laws."[49] In short, naturalism's final aspiration is to achieve "a unified and complete explanation of all aspects of human nature"[50] in terms of causal explanation in conformity with the methods of the natural sciences. Consciousness is considered by the naturalistic approach as an object of empirical investigation, i.e., as something that can be explained exclusively through the causal mechanisms related to the biological, psychological, and perceptual phenomena. In reducing consciousness to its physical properties and patterns, naturalism leaves aside the affective, the subjective, and the individual aspects of our experience. Turning his back on naturalism and all mental physics,[51] Ricœur points out that naturalism is a reductive objectifying account: it is an "invitation to deprive experience of the body of its personal traits and to treat it as an other object."[52] To resist "the temptation of naturalism to strip our experiences of our own bodies of their personal traits"[53] means for Ricœur to open up the discussion of the relation between the objective knowledge of the body and the living experience of the incarnate Cogito, i.e., between the understanding of the body "in terms of externality of the world"[54] and the experience of "the intimacy of the body from within."[55]

[48] Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," in *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, 2, No.1, 2002, pp. 253-254.

[49] Ibidem.

[50] Stanghellini, Rosfort, *Emotions and Personhood. Exploring Fragility – Making Sense of Vulnerability*, p. 31.

[51] See Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 41.

[52] Ibidem, p. 87.

[53] Roger Savage, "Feeling, Interiority, and the Musical Body," in Roger Savage (ed.), *Paul Ricœur and the Lived Body*, p. 83.

[54] Kearney, "Forward. The Swing Door of the Flesh," in Roger Savage (ed.), *Paul Ricœur and the Lived Body*, p. xii.

[55] Ibidem.

According to Ricœur, the body as an empirical object and the body as experienced are "two points of view of the same body considered alternately as a personal body inherent in its Cogito and as object-body, presented among other objects."[56] Specifically, Ricœur recognizes a diagnostic connection between the body as an object and the body as living flesh. He argues: "the diagnostic relation which conjoins objective knowledge with Cogito's apperception brings about a truly Copernican Revolution. No longer is consciousness a symptom of the object-body, but rather the object body is an indication of a personal body in which the Cogito shares as its very existence."[57] In this sense, "any moment of the Cogito can serve as an indicator of a moment of the object body – movement, secretion, etc. – and each moment of the object body is an indication of a moment of the body belonging to a subject, whether of its overall affectivity or of some particular function."[58] More directly, Ricœur is arguing that rationality and affectivity are essentially connected "by a tie of mutual inherence and adherence."[59] He defines affectivity as "the non-transparent aspect of the Cogito"[60] and as "a mode of thought in its widest sense."[61] As he puts it, "to feel is still to think, though feeling no longer represents objectivity, but rather reveals existence. Affectivity uncovers my bodily existence as the other pole of all the dense and heavy existence of the world. We can express it otherwise by saying that through feeling the personal body belongs to the subjectivity of the Cogito."[62] In his view, thinking is not a detached categorization of objects perceived in the world, because our affective dimension is always involved in our experience of it. Affectivity permeates, then, our experiences: "feelings reveal what the world is like for me, how the world touches me, and what it means to me to be a person embedded in the world."[63] In making my thoughts and experiences significant for me, "feeling interiorizes reason and show me that reason is my reason, for thought it I appropriate reason for myself […] feeling reveals the identity of existence and reason: it personalizes reason."[64]

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[56] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 88.

[57] Ibidem, pp. 87-88.

[58] Ibidem, p. 13.

[59] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur," in Scott Davidson, Marc-Antoine Vallée (eds.), *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricœur: Between Text and Phenomenon*, p. 32.

[60] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 86.

[61] Ibidem.

[62] Ibidem.

[63] Stanghellini, Rosfort, *Emotions and Personhood. Exploring Fragility – Making Sense of Vulnerability*, p. 2.

[64] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, pp. 102-103.

In his phenomenological approach to human willing, Ricœur describes affectivity as closely tied not only to thought but also to imagination. According to him, imagination "is undoubtedly not completely exhausted by a function of evasion and denial within the world. Imagination is also, and perhaps primarily, a militant power in the service of a diffuse sense of the future by which we anticipate the actual-to-be, as an absent actual at the basis of the world."[65] Thus, imagination does not depict "a pure negation of the present, but rather an anticipated and still absent presence of things from whose lack we suffer."[66] More precisely, in *Freedom and Nature* Ricœur presents a positive reconsideration of the role of imagination. Specifically, imagination enables the anticipation of something absent as well as of sensations of pain and pleasure on the basis of our previous experiences of the world. The expectation of a pleasant or painful experience is based on an analogy with past experiences in which the affective memory of a past feeling serves as "the *analogon* (or whatever you wish to call it) of future pleasure."[67] Imagination consists, then, in a representation of something that we have already met as embodied beings by means of our sense perception. As such, Ricœur argues that imagination "in terms of its matter is itself carnal."[68] In other words, linked to our embodied and embedded nature, imagination accompanies the reading of the affective signs of the sensible qualities of things in the world[69], and it mobilizes our desires and our capacity to discern between good and bad ways to realize our projects so "that our life itself can be evaluated."[70] Later in his 1975 *Lectures on Imagination*, Ricœur once again emphasizes that imagination and images are not shadows or residues of a reality.[71] Otherwise put, imagination is a product of language and it is "an act through which the reality of our perception is multiplied, enriched and transformed."[72] Whereas visual perception is more reproductive, we can ascertain by means of affectivity some productive dimensions as we refigure the experience. Considered in this context, an image "does more than intend the absent object or value generally – it endows it with a quasi-presence."[73] Intertwined with the affective moment, Ricœur claims an image is not a faded version of external reality, it is "an intention toward but embodied in an

[65] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 97.
[66] Ibidem, p. 98.
[67] Ibidem, p. 101.
[68] Ibidem, p. 110.
[69] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur," p. 33.
[70] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 99.
[71] See Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, p. 7.
[72] Delia Popa, "Affective Imagination: the Shared Awareness of our Dreams," in *Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Interpretationes. Studia Philosophca Europeanea*, 10, No. 2, 2020, p. 81.
[73] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 258.

affective-kinesthetic presence."[74] Following Ricœur, imagination is a constitutive dimension of human being's experience and its affective tones. Imagination has itself an affective function as long as it works "with immediate impressions and contingent reactions, with sudden changes and newly born emotions […] producing long-lasting feelings that can be revisited and reflexively explored."[75] Finally, we can see that for Ricœur imagination can't be understood "in terms of having mental representations (representing the world in the mind), but instead as the imagination of experiences (as in the imagination of the satisfaction of needs)."[76] Contrary to the representionalist account of imagination, Ricœur's understanding of imagination as "the (re-enactment of (past) experiences that are familiar and that make sense of the world through embodied interaction with it"[77] shares substantial common ground with the enactive theory of imagination in cognitive science (Varela, Colombetti, Thompson, Rosch).[78] Affectivity typically does not simply replicate – as it would in the rarer case, say, of immediate pain from physical injury – but includes a symbolic dimension. We react to experiences affectively in different ways. We refigure the experience somatically. As such, Ricœur's work provides significant insights for thinking the interrelation of the affective and carnal with the symbolic and imaginative. In considering imagination as involved in our capacity to act and interact, Ricœur discusses the implications of imagination in the affective entanglement established between the body and the world. To explain this important point in further detail, in the next part of the article we will turn our attention to the continuum of affectivity and imagination in what Ricœur conceives as the first moment of the cycle of willing, i.e., decision or project.

2. Affectivity and Decision: Crossing Corporeal Boundaries

We are affectively, cognitively, and practically situated in the world by means and by reason of the body, which underlies our feeling, reasoning, conceptualization, and symbolic expressions of lived experience. Specifically, in Ricœur phenomenological analysis of the will, the body is seen as the mode of our

[74] Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, p. 198.

[75] Popa, "Affective Imagination: the Shared Awareness of our Dreams," p. 74.

[76] Geoffrey Dierckxsens, "Making Sense of (Moral) Things: Fallible Man in Relation to Enactivism," in Scott Davidson (ed.), A Companion to Ricœur's Fallible Man, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2019, p. 107.

[77] Ibidem, p. 101. See Sean Gallager, *Enactivist Interventions. Rethinking the Mind*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017.

[78] See Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1991. See Giovanna Colombetti, *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2014.

incarnation in the world, namely as "a receiver and a translator of environmental triggers and cues."[79] As such, the body places us in the world, enabling us to learn and to understand it. The body is not only "a source, a site, and a place"[80] of knowledge, but also and at the same time a source of affects as we are enmeshed in the world and its challenges. As we have already mentioned, the body is both an "object and subject in the world: the source of the self and the place to which the self returns after its numerous hermeneutic detours."[81] Following Ricœur, the relation between human embodied condition and the world as a space of possibilities and limitations can be described in phenomenological terms as a circular bond characterized by a detour from the body to the world and a retour from the world to the body. Influenced by Maine de Biran's analysis of touch, effort, and resistance, by Husserl's idea of "hylé," referring to sensory raw material as one of the ingredients of actual empirical experience, and by Michel Henry's philosophy of incarnation, Ricœur understands the body as both part of the material world, i.e., as a physical body, and yet also as a willing, living, subject of experience. He stresses that through active "touch, in which our effort is extended, […] things attest their existence as indubitably as our own."[82] It is in the structural tension between materiality and spirituality, passivity and activity, that "one's own body is revealed to be the mediator between the intimacy of the self and the externality of the world."[83] In other words, the lived body is "the place where we exist in the world as both suffering and acting, pathos and praxis, resistance and effort."[84] Not only we are affected by the external world in which we meet things that matter to us, but we have also the capacity to affect the world through our acts and interactions with objects and with others. In short, the body is "capable of initiative, of inaugurating something new, even while the body is made possible and constituted by its material and cultural situation."[85] Ricœur will further develop his phenomenological account of the relation between the body and the world, between being-affected and affecting, in his mature works. Indeed, in *Oneself as Another* (1990/1992), in the tenth study dealing with the ontological notion of flesh, he argues that the lived body is "the origin of alteration of ownness."[86]

[79] Arel, "Theorizing the Exchange between the Self and the World. Paul Ricœur, Affect Theory, and the Body," p. 62.
[80] Ibidem, p. 64.
[81] Ibidem, p. 63.
[82] Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 322.
[83] Ibidem.
[84] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur," p. 35.
[85] Arel, "Theorizing the Exchange between the Self and the World. Paul Ricœur, Affect Theory, and the Body," p. 68.
[86] Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 324.

The lived body "marks the condition of sensible relations between the self and the outside world, that is, with the sensible world 'outside' the body: in every contact with the exterior world, the body is affected in a particular way."[87] Hence, our mode of relation with the world is essentially one of affective immersion and participation. It is from our corporeal situatedness that we can affectively experience the world as the space providing us with opportunities for our actions and as a context of limitations to our powers. As we argued in the previous part of this article, imagination plays a fundamental role in the configuration of the affective relation between the body and the world. In order to understand this point more fully, in what follows we will now focus on the connection between affectivity and imagination with reference to the experience of our vital needs, motives, and values, arising from the body. Otherwise put, we will describe how affectivity and imagination are intertwined with the lived body as a source of felt necessities expressed by our lacks, motivations, and related evaluations. Ricœur understands these three as dimensions of the corporeal involuntary, i.e., as circumstances that provide contents to our voluntary decisions, choices, and actions, while imposing limitations on them. In short, willing and acting, i.e., "the affective and the volitive subject processes,"[88] are understood as a combination of freedom and necessity.

In discussing the involuntary dimension of experience, Ricœur focuses on the relation between affectivity and imagination in his description of the experience of the involuntary needs of the body. Needs are not revealed to the subject of experience as mechanisms of stimulus-response, i.e., as reflex sensations "translating an organic defect in the form of a motor reaction."[89] Contrary to the naturalistic account of needs as physiological reactions, Ricœur considers them as "something to be phenomenologically experienced not as a natural event from without, but as a lived experience from within."[90] As he explains, need is not a "re-action but a pre-action,"[91] i.e., an action towards something lacking and desired as long as recognized as good on the basis of our previous experiences. As such, needs are expressions of our conscious lack of something and pre-actions preceding "all sensations of fulfillment and satisfaction."[92] For Ricœur, we are inclined but not compelled by our spontaneous needs to act in a certain way. In other words, we are capable of

[87] Dierckxsens, *Paul Ricœur's Moral Anthropology. Singularity, Responsibility, and Justice*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2018, p. 131.

[88] Ricœur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, 213.

[89] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur," p. 32.

[90] Ibidem, p. 31.

[91] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 91.

[92] Saulius Geniusas, *Phenomenology of Productive Imagination: Embodiment, Language, Subjectivity*, Stuttgart, Ibidem-Verlag, 2022, p. 273.

suspending our needs to the point that "there are men who prefer to die of hunger than betray their friends."[93] Needs drive us towards overcoming the frustration felt at the absence of something vitally important, i.e., they lead us to act in the direction of something, on the basis of the connection between our former experiences of the world and the power of imagination to cultivate images drawn from sensory experiences. Let us consider the example of the experience of being thirsty and the associated vital need to drink water. This example does not rely on visual perception alone. Senses of taste and bodily replenishment are also involved. The affective is broader than the visual, and once again imagination is not a reproduction but a production, a set of anticipatory responses. When I feel thirsty, I am urged to satisfy this need by drinking, sooner or later, some water. My body requires water to work properly: if I will not fulfil the need to drink water in a day or slightly more I will not survive. Imagining to drink a glass of water implies not only "knowing what it is like to drink water, or in other words, re-enacting past experiences of drinking water, of needing it and enjoying it".[94] In other words, the experience is not simply one of reenactment, but of a new inhabiting the experience itself. Thus, as Ricœur puts it, "we are led to seek the crossroads of need and willing in the imagination – the imagination of the absent thing and of the action directed toward the thing."[95] It is from "a prior, affective bond established between my body and the world"[96] that, linked to sensory perception, imagination elaborates the representation of something already felt as desirable for satisfying a vital need. When a need is coupled with the image of an object meant to be potentially satisfactory, it is transformed into a desire. According to Ricœur, a desire can be defined as "the present experience of need as lack and as urge, extended by the representation of the absent object by anticipation of pleasure"[97] which gives to the object its affective force. It is in this sense, that "we may speak with some caution, in a very conjectural way, of an emotional representative of the absent thing."[98] In describing human beings as needy beings who are capable of experiencing pleasure and of anticipating it by imagining desired objects, Ricœur affirms that to feed oneself is to interrelate with "the level of reality of the objects" [99] on which we depend; we are " part of the great natural cycles."[100]

[93] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 93.
[94] Dierckxsens, "Making Sense of (Moral) Things: Fallible Man in Relation to Enactivism," p. 107.
[95] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 95.
[96] Scott Davidson, "From the Carnal Imagination to a Carnal Theory of Symbols," in Roger Savage, *Paul Ricœur and the Lived Body*, p. 113.
[97] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 101.
[98] Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, p. 197.
[99] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 87.
[100] Ibidem.

More precisely, we can't satisfy our needs outside of the world of human interaction and, even more fundamentally, outside of our affective immersion in the natural world and our participation to it as offering us possibilities for and limitations on our survival. On the one hand, these reflections lead Ricœur to implicitly stress the evolutionary continuity between humans and animals in their relation to the world. Like other animals, we seek to fulfill basic biological needs. Yet, at least in common with the higher species, we develop various forms of imagination.[101] On the other hand, Ricoeur stresses also the difference between us and other animals because it is only in the framework of human existence that imagination shapes not only our immediate, sensible experience, but also the conceptual frameworks of our relation to things around us and to the world.

The unity between affectivity and imagination is further explained in Ricœur's analysis of the field of motivation as playing a fundamental role in constituting, affecting, and orienting our actions. As he writes, "it is because the impetus of need is not an automatic reflex that it can become a motive which inclines without compelling."[102] Specifically, the "fundamental affective motive presented by the body to willing is need, extended by the imagination of its object, its program, its pleasure, and its satisfaction."[103] Connected to our needs, motives arise from the body as their "affective medium,"[104] they incline us to decide for something "in order to" as well as "because of."[105] In short, behind decisions, all motives are of intentions and they work as justifications for our actions. Contrary to the naturalistic perspective of psychological determinism, for Ricœur motives are not causes followed by effects.[106] Rather than causing our decisions, motives depend on the will which can invoke and receive them as sources of legitimation for our projects. As Ricœur stresses, the analysis of motives leads us to understand that there is no theoretical or practical opposition between voluntary decision and the background of involuntary needs and their connected motivations. As he puts it, "the circular relation of motive to project demands that I recognize my body as body-for-my-willing, and my willing as project-based-(in part)-on my body."[107] The role of imagination is to give "common form"[108] to motives. Indeed, by offering us an image of something absent, imagination allow us also to anticipate some affect linked to

[101] See Annabelle Dufourcq, *The Imaginary of Animals*, London, Routledge, 2021.
[102] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 93.
[103] Ibidem, p. 97.
[104] Ibidem, p. 122.
[105] Ibidem, p. 142.
[106] See Ibidem, p. 71.
[107] Ibidem, p. 85.
[108] Ibidem, p. 105.

an absent object seen as a source of pleasure or pain, joy or suffering. In this way, imagination generates a movement of affective attraction or repulsion, contributing to the configuration of motivations and accompanying the reasons for acting in order to get or to avoid something. Whereas pleasure is desired, pain is feared. We are, then, affectively tied to imagined objects by desire, love, and hatred and so on.[109] Therefore, the affective image of something is like an "advance emissary" for its presence, involving "all the affective tones of things that attract of repel me."[110] In this sense, imagination is not an escape from reality, but it is defined as "a militant power in the service of a diffuse sense of the future by which we anticipate the actual-to-be, as an absent actual at the basis of the world."[111]

The affective bond between the body and the world leads to the discussion of organic values. As Ricœur argues, the body is not only the source of needs and the organ of movement, but it is "the mark of all existents, it is what first reveals values."[112] More precisely, the body's organic values are "a first rank of values which I have not engendered."[113] These basic values must all be attended in some balanced fashion as necessary conditions for the preservation of our life, which is considered to be the first value. Rooted in the body, organic values inform and orient the human being's effort to exist as an "affirmation of being in the lack of being."[114] This original affirmation binds the desire to be to the ways through which human beings seek fulfillment at the levels of historical, social, and cultural belonging-together with others. Therefore, "all other values assume a serious, dramatic significance through a comparison with the values which enter history through my body."[115] Ricœur introduces an analogical connection between organic values and social values, which in turn evinces two levels of experience: the instinctive or organic plane of life and the social or human level, thereby showing that there is a "hierarchy of levels or degrees of being in which the human order is linked to the vital order depending on it, in a double relation of dependence and emergence."[116] There is, then, a formal resemblance between organic and social values: "though affectivity related to collective representation differs 'materially'

[109] See Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, p. 197.
[110] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 81.
[111] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 97.
[112] Ibidem, p. 94.
[113] Ibidem.
[114] Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1974, p. 341.
[115] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 86.
[116] Ibidem, p. 423.

from affectivity on the organic level, it resembles it 'formally' as motive of."[117] In short, decisions include needs, motives, and values (organic, social, cultural, etc.) emerging from the affective experience of one's own body as mediating our understanding and acting in the world. Shaping and influencing our decisions, values are not abstract or universal truths, but they emerge from the lived context of action. In discussing values, Ricœur observes that imagination as a power "to fascinate, to dupe, and to deceive […] has to be understood by starting from this function of affective anticipation and of latent valuation."[118] Imagination plays, then, an essential role in the formulation of conventional value judgments emerging over time through the assimilation of the experience of past actions. Otherwise put, imagination "is not just about projecting possibilities from within,"[119] but it is involved in "a diagnostics in which primal judgments become both affective and effective."[120] More simply, in anticipating some positive or negative affect by means of affective images related to something experienced in the world, imagination is involved in evaluation as long as it helps us to anticipate some values whether good or bad. Ricœur writes: "values emerge without my having posited them in my act-generating role: bread is good, wine is good. Before I will it, a value already appeals to me solely because I exist in flesh; it is already a reality in the world, a reality which reveals itself to me through the lack."[121] Values are meaningful in relation to our affective experience as embodied beings who are capable to reproduce images based on previous experiences and to anticipate future possibilities. Affectivity and imagination are reflected in our primordial will to live, seeking pleasure and escaping pain and sorrow as much as possible. In this sense, "affects are, in essence, the literal, biological source of energy, the beginning of the "to be" in the "I am," surging forth to be the foundation of being and having an ontological status."[122] The drive to engage with the world and others is the spring of the affective interesse that at the level of social interactions comprises the field of self-other relationships. Affectivity and imagination delineate "the field where self, other, and the world meet."[123]

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[117] Ibidem, p. 125.

[118] Ibidem, p. 102.

[119] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur," p. 33.

[120] Ibidem.

[121] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 94.

[122] Arel, "Theorizing the Exchange between the Self and the World. Paul Ricœur, Affect Theory, and the Body," p. 66.

[123] Roger Savage, "Introduction. Paul Ricœur, the Lived Body, and an Ontology of the Flesh," in Roger Savage (ed.), *Paul Ricœur and the Lived Body*, p. xxvi.

Conclusion

In this article I discussed the significance of the bond between affectivity and imagination in shaping human decision with reference to Ricœur's phenomenological analysis of volition and his theory of imagination. In their involvement in our embodied condition, affectivity and imagination shape not only our perceptive experience of the world but also our active engagement with it, i.e., our capacity to act in it. Our affective and imaginative openness to the world is always inserted within the limits of our embodied existence, our fallibility and finitude. In experiencing the world, we develop our conscious awareness of our bodily condition as marked both by passivity, i.e., as affected by external resistances, and by activity, i.e., as shaped by our capacity of wanting, moving, doing, and imagining new possibilities.

Affectivity is an intentional state of awareness directed towards the world and nourished by the work of imagination. The internal realm of affective experience and imagination, and the external objects and circumstances of the world are conjoined. Affectivity and imagination ground the development of our understanding and of our cognitive-conceptual knowledge of the world. Following Ricœur, affectivity and imagination are understood not as disinterested dimensions, but in terms of disclosure, discernment, and involvement with reality.

All decisions are animated by an affective and imaginative charge. Therefore, affectivity and imagination are essential not only for our interest in knowing the world and its object, but also for acting in it. Indeed, by balancing needs, motivations, values, constraints, expectations and consequences, affectivity and imagination are involved in the schematization of means and ends connected to the practical possibilities of actions. Therefore, affectivity and imagination are directed towards the production of effective actions in the world. Inseparable from our practical power to act in the world, affectively imagining "the world in the flesh is a matter of feeling, valuing, and doing."[124]

[124] Kearney, "Thinking the Flesh with Paul Ricœur," p. 33.