

Phenomenological Foundations of Ecological Responsibility. From Embodiment to Environmental Resilience with Paul Ricœur

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This article aims at discussing the phenomenological foundations of the notion of ecological responsibility with reference to Paul Ricœur's first major work entitled *Freedom and Nature: the Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950/1966). On the basis of Ricœur's phenomenology of embodiment, ecological responsibility will be understood as a practical dimension grounded on our embodied experience of the natural world. First, ecological responsibility will be analyzed in the context of the dialectic of resistance and mediation characterizing the bond between human beings and the world of nature as the space providing possibilities and limitations for the preservation of our life together with the life of all other living beings. Then, ecological responsibility will be discussed in relation with our incarnate freedom. Ricœur's phenomenological account of freedom, as governed and limited by the body and the contexts of its occurrence, will help us to understand the correlation between our being free and our being ecologically dependent upon the world of nature. These reflections will lead us to the reconsideration of our faithfulness to the natural world and to the necessity to follow an open process of reconciliation with it. In conclusion, as a pressing concern oriented towards the future integrity of the natural world, ecological responsibility will be considered as the core idea for the development of an ethics of ecological resilience.

Keywords: ecological responsibility, embodiment, freedom, resistance, mediation, reconciliation, resilience

Introduction. Enlarging the Scope of Responsibility

Responsibility is a polysemic notion emerging in a variety of ways within different contexts. As Ricœur observes, "a kind of vagueness invades the conceptual scene [...] the current proliferation and dispersion of uses of this term is puzzling, especially because they go well beyond the limits established for its juridical use"[1]. According to him, responsibility can be essentially defined as the capacity that the human being, conceived as an acting and suffering self, has to count on others and to be accountable by others for his or her actions as the author[2]. More precisely, linked to the conception of the human being as a vulnerable and capable self, having a durable identity over time, and living in "institutionalized sociocultural complexes"[3] in relation with others, at the individual level responsibility is understood as a practical dimension of the human being as an embodied self, who acts freely and intentionally, who can reflexively evaluate his or her actions and judge and be judged by others in the interpersonal sphere (direct relations of proximity, e.g., friendship) and in

that of institutional relations (indirect relations mediated by institutions). In the moral and legal perspectives, the concept of responsibility has been constantly associated with that of imputation, namely with the idea of “the ascription of an action to its agent under the condition of ethical and moral predicates that describe the action as good, dutiful, and wise”[4]. Therefore, “imputing would not only be placing an action under someone’s responsibility but would moreover be placing an action, as that which can come under the category permissible-impermissible, under the responsibility of someone who can be deemed culpable-inculpable”[5]. Already in his early phenomenological study of the will, Ricœur stresses that “the possibility of a principle of judgment passed on my action, of blame and approbation, in a world, of sanction, is imbedded in this legitimatization of my responsibility”[6]. In discussing the connection between individual accountability and collective agency, Ricœur addresses the distinction between moral responsibility, as pertaining to the actions of individual agents, and political responsibility, as dealing with the collective actions of the society[7]. Specifically, his approach to the issue of responsibility is inserted in his entire philosophical anthropology, spanning from his early phenomenological analysis of the structures of the will and human fallibility, up to his later writings on justice, memory, and recognition.

Aligning himself with the contemporary continental and analytical traditions, Ricœur’s account of responsibility is developed through the intersection of the different perspectives that characterize his overall philosophical trajectory (e.g., phenomenology, hermeneutics, semantics, action theory, narrative, ethics, social and political philosophy), and nurtured by the dialogue with classical philosophy, mainly Aristotle and Kant, as well as with contemporary thinkers, e.g., Hart, Aron, Weber, Rawls, Levinas, and Jonas. This variety of methods and interlocutors allows him to discuss the multiple meanings of the notion of responsibility, especially its personal, social, political, juridical, and bioethical connotations. What is missing in his work, though, is a systematic treatment of ecological responsibility[8]. This is in line with the fact that Ricœur’s philosophical anthropology focuses almost exclusively on the social, historical, cultural, and political sphere of human existence, on the urban environment “in terms of a building or a complex of buildings”[9], rather than on the relationship between humanity and the natural world[10]. However, to acknowledge this lack does not mean to affirm that Ricœur completely ignored the urgency to think human being’s individual and collective responsible practices towards the natural environment. Notwithstanding his recognition of the contemporary environmental crisis and its related challenges, he gave to ecological issues just fleeting attention. My aim is to show that even if Ricœur did not develop any extensive study of the concept of ecological responsibility, he provides us significant insights for thinking about this notion. My attempt to discuss how Ricœur’s oeuvre can inspire a reflection on ecological responsibility will draw upon his early phenomenology of embodiment. I will then limit my attention to his first major work entitled *Freedom and Nature: the Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950/1966) as providing us with what can be considered as the phenomenological foundations of ecological responsibility.

The article is divided into two parts. First, by following Ricœur’s study of the body, I will focus on the spatial roots of ecological responsibility through the analysis of our embodied-organic engagement with the natural world. Borrowing Bruno Latour’s terminology, I will argue that Ricœur enables us to think ecological responsibility as a dimension linked to the rediscovery of ourselves as “earthbounds”[11], i.e., as embodied and humble beings whose life depends on the dynamic bond between the body and the Earth as our household. Rather than seeking to transcend or dominate the world of nature, we can recognize our belonging to it through the reconsideration of our spontaneous experience of it as arising from our body. More precisely, I will explain ecological responsibility as grounded on our embodied relationship with the natural world as the space of possibilities and limitations for our survival. The bond between us and the world of nature will be understood here as characterized by a productive dialectic of resistance and mediation. Then, I will

consider the connection between our embodied freedom and our ecological responsibility. With reference to Ricœur's critique of modern subjectivity and anthropological dualisms, I will discuss the connection between the natural world, as a vulnerable space, and the striving for life, as a concern that human beings share with all other living organisms. These reflections will lead us to understand the continuity between our being-free and our being ecologically dependent upon the natural world. Since our fundamental bond with the natural world has been subverted or even destroyed, ecological responsibility calls us to move in the direction of a process of reconciliation with the Earth. Finally, ecological responsibility will be considered as the core concept for a phenomenological ethics of ecological resilience dealing with our embodied situatedness in the natural world and concerned with interspecies survival and wellbeing.

1. Ecologically Responsible Earthbounds: Resistance and Mediation

Ricœur's phenomenological study of the body understood as the center of gravity of our being in the world and as a living combination of passivity and activity, can bring new perspectives to discussion in environmental philosophy. More precisely, I argue that Ricœur's description of the interaction between the body and the world can offer resources for reconfiguring the meaning of some of the major categories at the heart of the Western tradition, e.g., autonomy, freedom, and imagination, within the current philosophical debates concerning the natural world. The notion of responsibility can be innovatively interrogated within this framework. In Western philosophy, the prevalent anthropocentric viewpoint according to which human settings are superior to the natural world, has led to justify the vision of the natural world as the object of study of the natural sciences or as a subordinate dimension to be unlimitedly used in order to satisfy human being's pressing demands. In his postscript to *Le Temps de la responsabilité*, Ricœur observes that contrary to the Greek polis in which "human action was unfolded as protected by nature recognized as invulnerable [...] in the age of modern technologies [...] nature, from which the human being has lived protected up to our times, finds itself threatened at the level of the major balances that have allowed life to unfold and the human being to appear, to subsist, and to develop his/her own history"[12]. Our technological power "in view of its scale of the irreversible character of certain of its consequences, which today extend over several thousand years and affect an incalculable number of living beings, no longer has any common measure with the technology of our ancestors"[13]. When technology becomes more important than all other purposes, we turn away from the world of nature, moved by the belief that mastering the natural space would increasingly improve the quality of our lives. This vision of science and technology has led to promote "a utilitarian utopia - a happy and peaceful world free of violence, disease and want"[14]. On the contrary, the conception of our ontological primacy over nature and the progressive development of human capabilities to manipulate it through the use of science and technology, have resulted in an imbalance between us and the natural world. As Eric Pommier observes, "the human being has freed himself from the natural necessity thanks to the power of machines; he must now free himself from the quasi-mechanical necessity thanks to an ethics, which will give him back the freedom he has lost by trying to gain it against the burden of nature"[15]. The excess of "our power to act over our power to foresee and to evaluate and judge"[16], has led the human being as *Homo Faber* to the alteration of the natural world, threatening its integrity. In other words, through the use of science and technological powers, human beings have become "capable of doing damage to the Earth and its capacity to serve as a decent human habitat"[17]. The immutability of the natural sphere can no longer be taken for granted: Sophocles's terms "deathless" and "unwearied" as the key features to describe the Earth have lost their ancient validity. Whereas in the past the exploitation of the natural world "seemed to be insignificant in comparison to the immeasurable might of nature"[18], in the contemporary age the consequences of human actions on the natural world have achieved a disproportioned impact endangering the very possibility of life on the planet. If instrumental reason has turned us away from appreciating our belonging to the community of the land[19], confronted with today's ecological challenges our practical reason urges us to "go back to Earth itself"[20], namely to reconsider the

validity of our spontaneous experience of belonging to the world of nature. Otherwise put, we have to return to our earthly home-place (*oikos*) as embodied and responsible beings, as ecological citizens having ecological duties and aiming at holding “the earth as a trust for the sake of future generations”[21].

I argue that a Ricœurian inspired approach to ecological responsibility finds its roots in his conception of the human being’s living corporeality and in the renewed understanding of the human space of actions “in which the Other and the Same, identity and difference, are brought together”[22]. Ricœur conceives the human being as anchored in the world of nature by means of the body, which determines the structures of our experience. As he puts it, “corporeal space is immediately linked with the surrounding space of the environment, some fragment of inhabitable land”[23]. By condemning the idea of the Cartesian cogito as a primary certainty “that stands above the body, positioned to master and possess nature by its own rational ingenuity”[24], Ricœur seeks “to move beyond the narrow viewpoint of the reflective subject to think in terms of an openness to the world”[25]. Therefore, in striking contrast to modern rationalism and dualism, in his phenomenology of the will, Ricœur affirms that his aim was the reconquest of “the Cogito’s experience, taken as a whole”[26], i.e., as including “‘I desire,’ ‘I can,’ ‘I intend,’ and, in a general way, my existence as a body”[27]. In his view, the world-open and body-mediated character of human existence constitutes the “field of freedom through which the phenomenon of moral responsibility germinates”[28]. Confronted with the question of our ontological status, Ricœur conceives the human being as committed and exposed to the world by means of the body. By locating us in the world, the body is the physical ground of all our initiatives and movements. As Ricœur puts it, the body is “the here for every there”[29], i.e., the point from which spatial direction and temporal distances are linked. As such, the body is involved in every “worldly dealing, act of cognition or concern”[30]. Between the body and the world there is a relation of circularity from our interiority to the exteriority of the world and vice-versa. To use Bruno Latour’s terminology, we can argue that our body situates us within the natural world as “earthbounds”[31], that is, as earthly beings living together with all other living organisms and natural entities, and depending on them for the preservation of our life as individuals and as a species. In this perspective, the body is seen as the site of our responsibility. Indeed, as Ricœur argues: “I have not chosen my body, I have not chosen my historical situation, but both the one and the other are the locus of my responsibility”[32]. Our ecological responsibility arises from our embodied ways of acting and inhabiting the natural world as embodied and needful beings. Our relationship with the natural world is characterized by a rhythm of resistance, as the attestation of “the mutual dwelling of various bodies in space and place”[33], and mediation, as an integrated interdependence to the web of life. In this context, responsibility cannot be identified “with a self-positing of consciousness” or be limited to the form of our thoughts[34]. As Ricœur carefully observes, “an ethics of responsibility and involvement end in a reconciled meditation of the incoercible exigences of our bodily and terrestrial condition”[35]. “Human rootedness on this earth”[36] consists in the fact that in order to keep ourselves alive we need a constant exchange with the natural world as one’s other space of possibilities and limitations. Therefore, “one cannot think of oneself without the other of nature”[37] that calls us for protection as long as it ensures the possibility of all life. We have, then, to assume responsibility for the world of nature as a network of life to which we belong and in which we actively participate.

Ecological responsibility deals with the natural world as a fragile space that has been entrusted to us for its preservation. Ricœur writes that “there is no authentic responsibility without the awareness of a mission confided in me by a legitimate power through a delegation which can even remain virtual (on part of my country, of a community, of all mankind)”[38]. He stresses that “what is perishable through natural weakness and what is threatened under the blows of historical violence”[39] relies on our help and demands our care. Ecological responsibility concerns not only the protection of human beings as vulnerable beings, but the natural world as a space including

biotics and abiotics components. Indeed, life cannot exist or be preserved without the maintenance of natural elements, namely of inanimate matters. In considering the organic level of our existence, Ricœur argues that it is through the experience of needs, motives, and values, i.e., of what he calls the “corporeal involuntary”[40], that we participate to the natural world through a creative adaptation of our intentions, choices, and acts to its rhythms[41]. In describing needs not as automatisms or reflexes, but as behaviors linked to our conscious acts directed towards the world, Ricœur observes: “to feed myself is to place myself on the level of reality of the objects on which I depend [...] they drag me to the level of objects and make me a part of the great natural cycles”[42]. In other words, our responsibility in relation to other living beings and natural entities is engaged each time we eat: “eating connects us to other beings, human and non-human, to the circuits of production and of exchange, to the means of transportation”[43]. The fulfillment of our needs would not be possible outside the natural world and without the preservation of its internal equilibrium. We are held, then, responsible to carefully use natural resources to satisfy our needs without disturbing the whole natural balance. Our body is not only the source of organic needs, but also of primordial motivations deriving from the spontaneous demands of life. Indeed, our being situated into the natural world is indissociable from our actions. As Ricœur argues, we are in the world “in order to act in it. It is the essence of all situations which affect me to pose a question to my activity”[44]. He states that responsibility is understood “within the limits of the apparent good, that is, in proportion to the intentional form of my motives. Within these limits, my responsibility has no degrees and is, for me, only the question whether I have used as much as possible the free choice which had been the pledge of generosity”[45]. Since motives are always connected to the unfolding of our decisions, they accompany the development of our sense of responsibility. For Ricœur, to decide means “first of all to project a practical possibility of an action which depends on me, secondly to impute myself as the author responsible for the project, and finally to motivate my project by reasons and variables”[46]. From this perspective, ecological responsibility can be understood as concerning the agent’s motives and the power to act within the world of nature. Therefore, ecological responsibility is shaped at “the point of articulation of the power to act which is ours and of the course of things which belongs to the world order”[47]. As Ricœur writes, “I am responsible lies between the judgment which depends on me and the external good which does not”[48]. Our motivations can be directed towards the engagement of environmentally responsible behaviors such as reducing energy and water consumption, recycling and reusing items, purchase environmentally friendly products, etc. Human being’s practical involvement into the world leads Ricœur to the discussion of organic values. As he puts it, the body is “the mark of all existents, it is what first reveals values”[49]. Thus, he explains that since the body is the source of organic values, all other values are elaborated in relation to it. Even though we can actualize organic values in different ways, we need to attend them in some balanced fashion as necessary conditions for the preservation of our life. In his analysis of organic values Ricœur indirectly suggests that these sets of competing demands must not be reduced to subjective assessments or utilitarian claims. The experience of the organic values is “a question of coming to terms with our animality and vitality, of facing the fact that our vitality is as much a part of us as our rationality and that therefore we are not ‘above’ the ecosystem but are living members of it”[50]. Values related to our capacity of initiative are connected to our sense of responsibility in which “the feeling of potency and the feeling of valuing become conjoined”[51]. As Ricœur puts it, “I can thus be responsible to..., it is in this the first place because my sovereignty is measured by an order of values which have motivated it or which ought to motivate it”[52]. In short, our ecological responsibility is rooted in our embodied projects and decisions as shaped by our needs, motives, and values[53]. Contrary to all other living beings, which are pictured by Ricœur in a reductive anthropocentric fashion as problems “resolved by life”[54], namely as beings having no aims, no responsibility, no freedom, the human being is capable of taking responsibility for his or her actions remaining an open task for himself or herself. Therefore, concludes that “life is not only a lower part of my self over which I rule. I am alive as a whole, alive in my very freedom. I have to be alive in order to be responsible for my life”[55].

2. Embodied Freedom: Ecological Responsibility and Reconciliation

Ricœur's early phenomenology of embodiment is set within the analysis of the reciprocity between the voluntary and the involuntary structures of the will. As we have just seen, the body is understood as the involuntary that "gives motives and capacities, its foundations, and even limits" to the will[56]. In rejecting the dualism between the necessities imposed by nature and the subject's capacity to act, Ricœur argues that „the voluntary is by reason of the involuntary while the involuntary is for the voluntary”[57]. Otherwise put, “while nature makes freedom actual, freedom makes nature meaningful, and neither can ultimately be separated from the other”[58]. Contrary to Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of freedom, Ricœur considers freedom as a practical dimension correlated to the necessities and vulnerabilities arising from our embodied condition, to our dependency and ephemerality. Specifically, freedom occurs in three stages corresponding to what Ricœur conceives as the components of every act of the will: deciding, moving, and consenting. More precisely, he understands “freedom as responsibility for decision, action, and consent”[59]. In these moments the body is understood respectively as the basic source of needs, motives, values, as the organ of willing, and as the basis of character, unconscious, and life. There are, then, three different and connected forms of freedom related to choice, movement, and consent. In each of them, freedom is limited by the necessities of having a body and being situated in the world. Hence, the experience of responsibility is not “annulled but rather ramified by bondage and by transcendent inspiration”[60]. As long as willing is manifest through the body, “no body to will equals no willing at all”[61]. Therefore, Ricœur stresses that human being is neither “an essentially passive victim of a radically alien nature”[62] nor he or she can “assert freedom in a spasm of Promethean defiance which rejects nature altogether”[63]. Freedom is linked to our condition of being contextually constrained by the conditions of our embodied existence as inseparable from the world of nature. Freedom operates, then, “within the context of a larger world – one that binds us to nature, and to other”[64]. If we extend Ricœur's reflections to the consideration of the organic level of our existence, we can observe that human beings are at the same time free and needful beings, namely they are intentional being, capable of choice and responsible for their actions, and organic-biological beings, belonging and dwelling in systems of ecological conditions and processes. Our existence as free and intentional beings is always accompanied by our structural dependence upon the natural surroundings for air, water, food, warmth, etc.

Following Ricœur's account of the relation between freedom and necessity, it emerges that our will and our organismicity, our being-free and our being-ecologically dependent upon the natural world, are not opposed dimensions. Rather, these are both constitutive of the human being and his or her freedom paradoxically defined in terms of dependence-independence. Our being-ecological arises from life-sustaining environmental relationships[65]. We are at the same time members of the biotic community, i.e., ecological beings as air-breathers and food-eaters, and free beings who realizes themselves through reasoning, choosing, valuing, feeling, and performing actions. As ecological beings we are conditioned by the rhythms of nature, but as free beings we can figure out how to adapt ourselves to the natural world. I believe that Ricœur's phenomenological description of freedom as connected to the facticity of human existence is particularly useful for understanding the constitutive dialectic between our being-ecological and our being-free as correlated to the idea of ecological responsibility. According to Ricœur, the actualization of our incarnate freedom, which is marked by the dialectic of “bondage and inspiration”[66], grounds our experience of responsibility. For him, responsibility is a dimension linked to our capacity to execute voluntary acts, i.e., decision, action, and consent, which are always accompanied by the corresponding involuntary counterpart that can be relative (e.g., motives, needs, values, pre-formative abilities, habits, emotions) or absolute (e.g., character, unconscious, life). A responsible being is “a being who commits himself in the project of an action which he at the same time recognizes as his determining oneself is still one with determining his gesture in the world”[67]. Our being-free is linked to our structural dependence upon the natural world as organic beings. From this perspective, the world of nature “is

not just inert material stuff that we are free to do what we please"[68], but a space towards which we are responsible since all life, including ours, depends on the maintenance of its integrity. Ecological responsibility can be here defined as an embodied dimension dealing with the flourishing of our life as involved in a network of interconnectedness with the life of all other living beings as well as with the presence of inorganic matter (e.g., air, water, soil, minerals, etc.).

As free beings we make choices which determine the constant shaping of who we are. As Ricœur writes, "I make myself responsible. It carries the double emphasis of myself and of the project. He who is responsible is prepared to respond for his acts, because he posits an equation of the will"[69]. We do not exist as isolated individuals or only in relation to other beings of our species. Rather, as earthbounds our life takes place with and among all other earthly biotic and abiotic forms on this planet. The fact that we are bound to the Earth through our body means that our existence participates to the "full record of Being, in which life must take pride of place"[70]. Moreover, it is "in virtue of the mediating function of the body as one's own in the structure of being in the world, the feature of selfhood belonging to corporality is extended to that of the world as it is inhabited corporeally"[71]. In his description of the act of consent as the highest acceptance of life, Ricœur emblematically argues: "the road of the self as freedom to itself as necessity lies in a consideration of the totality of the world [...] I become reunited with my body through love of the Earth"[72]. Similarly to Martin Heidegger's approach to the relation between the Dasein and the environing world, Ricœur conceives the Earth as "something different, and something more, than a planet: it is the mythical name of our corporeal anchoring in the world"[73]. The Earth has, then, an existential meaning. In this context Ricœur takes up the problem of our being faithful to the Earth. Against the modern call to conquer and dominate nature, Ricœur refers to Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of loyalty to the Earth[74]. Although he does not discuss this point in greater details, our faithfulness to temporality and terrestriality are connected to the positive belief to preserve life recognized as the highest value of our existence. Contrary to human beings, "animals are naturally faithful to the earth, the natural earth, even where this proves fatal to them"[75]. Consequently, human being's faithfulness is of a virtuous kind. Being faithful to the earth is the voluntary accepted precondition that underlies the development of our ecological responsibility. Ricœur's approach to these issues leads us to overcome the boundaries and separations between ourselves and the natural world. The necessity of renewed bond with the world of nature allowing for living at "peace with nature and with one another"[76] is a central idea in the contemporary environmental thinking. This hoped reconciliation "would bring balance, harmony, and peace: both ecological and social harmony. Failing that, it is possible that we are headed for serious and unprecedented disasters: droughts, famines, a changing climate, mass extinctions, resource wars, inequality, and the pernicious and militarized use of biotechnology"[77]. However, the open process of reconciliation does not consist in the pretention to restore the bond between our embodied condition and the world of nature in its original state, i.e., as it was before its widespread crisis. Rather, as residents of what we might call with the American environmentalist Bill MacKibben the "Earth 2.0"[78], reconciliation has to be understood as "a more intentional and creative 'melding' of human communities with nature"[79]. The process of reconciliation can begin from the consideration of the validity of our spontaneous experience of the world, i.e., from our embodied involvement into the natural cycles as organic, embodied, and intentional beings, who are not just participants but partners in relationship with nature, relational members of natural community and not merely its users.

Conclusions: Towards Ecological Resilience

In this article I have explored the phenomenological foundations of the notion of ecological responsibility with reference to Ricœur's phenomenology of the lived body and the related conception of freedom as paradoxically dependent on limitations arising from our embodied situatedness. Although Ricœur in his early phenomenology does not refer to the ecological qualification of our responsibility, limiting himself to a descriptive analysis of this notion as

connected to the intertwining of the structures of the will, i.e., the voluntary and the involuntary, he provides us with tools and arguments to discuss responsibility as a dimension directed towards the natural world as our household. Let me offer now a few concluding remarks which remains open for further research.

Inserted into the contemporary retrieval of ethics and the ethical[80], namely of what situates us “in the position of having to choose norms or values”[81], Ricœur’s perspective on responsibility is characterized by an extension of the horizons of space and time, moving from the ethical concern about the here and now, towards the inclusion of the far and the future. Whereas in his mature works Ricœur principally focuses on the problem of the temporal character of responsibility as implying three different relationships to the other as someone belonging to the past, living in the present or who will live in the future[82], in his phenomenology of the will he offers resources for interrogating the spatial dimension of responsibility. Indeed, Ricœur almost never broached the topic of space in a thematic way and “his work could be (and in fact has been) considered a perfect example of the temporal bias that has characterized both philosophical thought and the human sciences”[83]. Responsibility arises, then, as a practical dimension directed towards other and involved not only in temporal, but in spatial relationships with them. In its ecological qualification, responsibility deals with the world of nature as the network of all life demanding for our protection. As I have stressed, to preserve life means at the same time to take care of the natural elements, i.e., of inanimate matter since without it life cannot exist.

Ricœur’s critique of the technological and scientific hubris is connected to rejection of the modern conception of the subject as destined to master and possess nature. According to the modern view, “what is, in its entirety, is now taken in such a way that it first is in being and only is in being to the extent that it is set up by man, who represents and sets forth”[84]. In promoting the unlimited exploitation of the natural world reduced to a set of material resources to be used exclusively for the benefit of the human being as the only being who own knowledge, modernity has led humanity to “the post-Enlightenment usurpation of the biosphere – a usurpation that was and continues to be simultaneously representational and physical”[85]. Contrary to the modern conception of the human being as a self-proclaimed authority over the natural realm, Ricœur’s phenomenological approach to what he calls the Cogito’s complete experience retrieves our existence as incarnate[86], as always and already situated within the world of nature through a rhythm of resistance and mediation. It is from the spontaneous experience of our dynamic situatedness in the natural world that our feeling of ecological responsibility is developed. As such, ecological responsibility is grounded on our openness towards the world, i.e., on our embodied experience of dependency upon the network of life shaping the natural realm. In his phenomenological study, Ricœur seems to embrace a moderate anthropocentric worldview: he does not exclude our ontological interconnectedness with other living beings, including other than human beings, but he still wants to accord a certain superiority to the human being seen as the only being who can experience existence and make life a task.

Our Ricœurian inspired analysis of the phenomenological foundations of the notion of ecological responsibility can be useful for the development of an ethics of ecological resilience. Following Ricœur’s line of thought, our bond with the natural world is not limited to the experiences of resistance and mediation between our bodies and their surroundings. Rather, the embodied experience of the natural world leads us to the necessity to rediscover our participative belonging and faithfulness to it. Ecological responsibility is not just an imperative of pure reason, but it is involved in our embodied capacity to feel, to evaluate, and to imagine new ways of living in the natural world and together with its biotic and abiotic components. Ecological responsibility can be conceived as the core concept for an ethics of ecological resilience as directed towards environmental and biodiversity conservation, natural resource management and sustainable development.

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