

# Imagination, narrativity and embodied cognition: Exploring the possibilities of Paul Ricœur's hermeneutical phenomenology for enactivism

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to show that Paul Ricœur's hermeneutical phenomenology has significance for philosophy of mind, in particular for recent theories of enactivism, one of the most significant latest developments in cognitive theory. While philosophy of mind often finds its inspiration in hermeneutics and phenomenology, especially in Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's, the later development of hermeneutical phenomenology under the influence of Gadamer and Ricœur, as it evolved into the theory of the interpretation of narratives and lived existence, is often lost sight of in recent debates about embodied cognition. I defend the thesis, however, that combining Ricœur's phenomenology with enactivism shows that embodied cognition has an intrinsic ethico-political aspect. The central argument is that, if we take that imagination and narrative lie at the heart of basic embodied cognition as interaction with the world (planning, motor skills, coordination), as both recent theories of enactivism and Ricœur hold, then embodied cognition or the way in which we experience and gain knowledge in embodied cognitive relations with the world is ethically and politically significant in that it gets shaped by the ethical and political contexts in which these relations take place (e.g., cultural body images and morals in subcultures). These contexts contain ethical and political narratives and our imaginations are influenced by and work with these narratives in order to gain knowledge. This essay thus attempts to explore some of the possibilities of phenomenological hermeneutics for the philosophy of mind today.

**Keywords:** phenomenology, hermeneutics, philosophy of mind, embodied cognition, ethico-political world.

In this essay, I will explore how Paul Ricœur's hermeneutical phenomenology could contribute to understanding embodied cognition, in particular as conceived by enactivism. It might seem somewhat self-evident, especially today, to approach cognition from the point of view of hermeneutics. Indeed, many contemporary theories have already examined the possible contributions of hermeneutics, generally understood as the theory of the interpretation of lived existence and narratives, for illuminating aspects of (embodied) cognition (Wrathall and Malpas

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2000; Gallagher, 2004, 2017). These theories try to define how understanding humans as interpreting beings helps to explain cognitive states and functions, such as intentionality, action or intersubjectivity. Moreover, one of the latest developments in philosophy of mind – enactivism – finds its roots in hermeneutics and phenomenology and explains cognition, in general terms, as the interaction between the lived, interpreting body and the surrounding world of which we are conscious (e.g., O'Regan and Noë, 2001; Hutto and Myin, 2017). Understanding human cognition in line with hermeneutics and phenomenology, as an active process in which the body is affected by the surrounding physical world, which in turn leads to immediate experience and interpretation, is thus nothing new.

Yet, while many contemporary theories of mind find their inspiration in the early movements of phenomenology and hermeneutics, by drawing on the works of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, philosophers of mind and enactivists alike rarely discuss Husserl's successors, who put embodiment at center stage (Sartre, Henry, Ricœur).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, hermeneutics, as it evolved to a theory of the interpretation of *narratives* in historical and cultural contexts in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the influence of Gadamer and Ricœur, rarely is the inspiration for philosophy of mind or enactivism.

In my paper, I will aim to contribute to filling this lacuna in the secondary literature by focusing on Paul Ricœur's hermeneutics – in particular his narrative take on hermeneutics – in relation to recent theories of enactivism. Ricœur's philosophy, so this paper aims to show, has significance for philosophy of mind and the understanding of embodied/enactive cognition.

In order to show how this is the case, my paper will consist of three parts. In the first part, I will sketch, quite generally, how Ricœur offers a conception of the embodied consciousness that fits within a theoretical framework that matches with that of enactivism. Both Ricœur and enactivism, especially in its original version as conceived by Varela, Thompson and Rosch, draw on phenomenology, on Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's ideas of embodied consciousness in particular, and understand cognition as an interaction and a "mixture" between the involuntary (bodily functions, affections and needs) and the voluntary (creative adaptation, consent and action) (Varela *et al.*, 1991).

In the second part of this paper, I will suggest how Ricœur's conceptions of both *imagination* and *narrative* in particular could be understood in line with enactivism: as part of the creative embodied adaptation to the surrounding world (e.g., we use imagination to solve problems or we tell stories to understand situations).

In the final part of my paper, I will argue that Ricœur's ideas of imagination and narrative also contribute to recent

theories of enactivism and vice versa. While enactivists offer new insights from the cognitive sciences that can provide empirical knowledge about imagination and narrative, Ricœur highlights the crucial role of imagination and narrative for understanding the *ethico-political* aspect of embodied cognition (i.e., how aspects of cognition, for example the personal perception of our bodies, gets shaped by the ethical and political narratives that are part of human culture). These aspects of cognition are not simply ethically and politically neutral, because they should be understood within the framework of a phenomenological world, that is to say, a world that is not purely instrumental, but also expressive in that it has meaning through diverse aspects of history and culture.

## The embodied mind: A "mixture" between the mental and the body

It might seem unusual to take Ricœur's hermeneutical phenomenology to be a contribution to the philosophy of mind. Indeed, while Ricœur is perhaps best known for his theory of narrative and of metaphor, one might argue that it makes more sense – at least in order to understand cognition – to look at a pure phenomenology of embodied consciousness, like Husserl's or Merleau-Ponty's, both of whom also explicitly engaged in a dialogue with the empirical sciences in order to define their ideas of embodied consciousness. Yet, Ricœur as well builds his entire hermeneutical phenomenology on a conception of embodied subjectivity. This is especially apparent in his first major work: *Freedom and Nature*.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, his method and scope, as announced in the Introduction, amount to analyzing consciousness, or mind, in relation to a scientific study of the body and empirical knowledge. Ricœur writes that the "body" is "an empirical object elaborated by the experimental sciences," and that "the structures of the subject constantly refer to empirical and scientific knowledge" (Ricœur, 2007a, p. 8, 19).

Furthermore, it is no exaggeration to say that *Freedom and Nature* is essentially a book about embodied cognition. In fact, many understand Ricœur's endeavor in this book as an approach that embeds the voluntary in the involuntary, that is to say, an approach to human knowledge, motivation and action as intertwined with human need, effort and desire (Żarowski, 2012; Kearney, 2016; Sautereau and Marcello, forthcoming). Moreover, while Ricœur himself is not an enactivist by name, his philosophy and enactivism have several aspects in common. Both are inspired by Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and emphasize the correlation between embodiment and the mental. Ricœur contends, like recent enactivist theorists, that embodied cognition gets

<sup>2</sup> One exception is Kathleen Wider's discussion of Sartre and enactivism (Wider, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> In a different context, I have related Ricœur's *Freedom and Nature* to enactivism (see, Dierckxsens 2018).

shaped by sociocultural contexts (Hutto and Myin, 2017). He also puts a particular focus on narrativity, like certain enactivists do, especially on how imagination plays a part in the reception of (literary) narratives and in cognition as a whole (Caracciolo, 2013).

When comparing Ricœur's program in *Freedom and Nature* with the enactivist program as originally formulated by Varela, Thompson and Rosch in *The Embodied Mind*, the similarities are striking. Indeed, Ricœur writes that "the method [of *Freedom and Nature*] [...] constantly refers to empirical and scientific knowledge [...], while [...] the unity of man [should be understood] by reference to [...] incarnate existence" (Ricœur, 2007a, p. 19). And Varela, Thompson and Rosch define their project as follows: "This book begins and ends with the conviction that the new sciences of mind need to enlarge their horizon to encompass both *lived human experience* and the possibilities for transformation inherent in human experience" (Varela *et al.*, 1990, p. xv).

Given the difference in both time and scientific context that separates these two projects (behaviorism in France in the 1950s (for *Freedom and Nature*) and the "philosophy of mind" debates of the 1990s (for *The Embodied Mind*)), they are in fact surprisingly similar. Both announce a descriptive analysis of consciousness and mind, which does not seek to be representational, but is rather based on our concrete lived existence. Both stress that consciousness and mind are embodied and therefore point out the necessity of a dialogue with the empirical sciences. And both refer explicitly to the influence of phenomenology. In essence, there is a close resemblance between the theoretical framework of *Freedom and Nature* and that of the original version of enactivism.

What is more, while the later Ricœur surely makes a shift toward what might be called "a hermeneutics of the narrative and of the text", in contrast to the early Ricœur who focusses in the first place on a phenomenological analysis of the voluntary and the involuntary, his idea of understanding subjectivity as embodied forms a leading thread throughout his writings and is the backbone of his hermeneutics. In *From Text to Action* – one of Ricœur's core texts in that it combines his earlier phenomenological insights with his later narrative theory and thoughts on ethico-political life – Ricœur argues for a hermeneutical phenomenology of interpretation that breaks with Husserl's early idealism and with its emphasis on a representational approach to intentionality (Ricœur, 2007b, p. 29 ff.). Intentionality means, for Ricœur, the phenomenological "belonging" to the world, which is the "*Lebenswelt*"; that is, the world of our immediate lived existence which *does not* imply pre-conditioned representational content, but results from embodied interpretation of what is experienced (Ricœur, 2007b, p. 30, 32).

Hence, when interacting with our environment, we understand this environment as a narrative, as if we are the "reader" of a "text", to use Ricœur's phrasing: the world makes sense in our immediate lived experience (Ricœur, 2007b, p. 32). And narrative should be understood here in the broad sense of stories, cultural, historical, political or other stories, that influence how we experience the lifeworld. For example, ideas of justice and responsibility are influenced by the political and cultural institutions in which we live. In this respect, Ricœur argues in *Oneself as Another*, where he elaborates on his theory of the self and his ethics, that the subject, the self, is foremost "body" and "flesh", which means that it is a physical body that also gets affected by the world, and that the moral decisions and actions of the self are influenced by the mores of historical and cultural communities (Ricœur, 1992, p. 319).<sup>4</sup> In short, there are not only parallels between the program of *Freedom and Nature* and that of *The Embodied Mind*, but Ricœur's hermeneutics, in focusing on the embodied aspects of interpretation and consciousness, appears to be particularly suitable to be brought into debate with enactivism.

It is questionable, however, whether and how Ricœur's project in *Freedom and Nature* stands out against more recent theories of enactivism that stress, more so than Varela *et al.* (1991), the necessity of a naturalistic approach to cognition. For example, how does Ricœur's hermeneutics stand out against Radical Enactivism (REC), that defends the importance of understanding cognition *without content*, i.e., as pure interaction of the organism with its environment, without any kind of specific correctness condition of the mind that needs to be the case in order to make cognition possible? Indeed, to what extent does Ricœur, who criticizes naturalism, that is at least the idea that the mental can be understood purely in terms of behavior without a proper phenomenological description of consciousness, presuppose an idea of consciousness that implies truth conditions? (For his critique of naturalism, see Ricœur, 2007a, p. 41 ff.).

These questions need to be examined carefully, and in the following sections of this paper I will go into a more detailed discussion with several more recent theories of enactivism. The aim of this section was simply to demonstrate that there does not need to be a "dialogue of the deaf" between Ricœur's philosophy and recent work on cognition in the philosophy of mind. Despite the obvious differences with enactivism, Ricœur's hermeneutical-phenomenological project and the general enactivism program thus point in the same direction as far as the general conception of cognition is concerned. They both understand cognition as the result of a process of *enactment* in which our bodily relation with the world is the basis on which we experience the world and

<sup>4</sup> Ricœur defines his own idea of the self as body and flesh by discussing Maine de Biran's and Husserl's theories of the flesh. Ricœur himself takes from these analyses the idea that the self is both a physical body among other bodies in the world and "flesh", i.e., that it is conscious of the world while being affected in an embodied relation with this world. This idea lies at the heart of his ontology of the self in *Oneself as Another*. When Ricœur develops his idea that the self has a narrative identity that interconnects with the different narratives of ethico-political communities, he does so on the basis of an idea of subjectivity that is essentially embodied.

on which we act. The concept of intentionality is key to understand this relation according to Ricœur. Yet, as several enactivists and analytical philosophers do, Ricœur questions the idea that cognition implies a Fregean sense-reference distinction (Ricœur, 2007b, p. 86).<sup>5</sup> We make sense of the world, for Ricœur, in an active way of understanding the different meanings we experience, without there being a priori representations. This reflects the idea of the hermeneutical circle, i.e., of an understanding that has a historical dimension (the history of how one's own life story has unfolded in relation to other stories), but is also creative and renewable over and over again. Sense results from interpretation, which amounts to knitting our experiences in the world into narratives.

## Imagination and narrative: Creative adaption to the textual world

In the first part of my paper, I argued that the general theoretical outlook of Ricœur's theory of cognition has significant overlap with enactivism, at least when very generally construed. In order to get a more precise grip on how Ricœur's insights could be of value for enactivism, what kind of enactivism this might be, and how this might open some avenues for a hermeneutical-phenomenological approach to recent discussions about cognition, it is helpful to focus particularly on two of Ricœur's concepts: *imagination and narrative*.

As has been noted by several scholars, imagination is a key concept in Ricœur's philosophy and one of the backbones of his entire work (e.g., Taylor, 2006; Amalric, 2013). However, despite the importance of imagination in Ricœur's thought, imagination is also a "scattered" concept in his writings. It does not appear in the titles of his main published writings and is only fully addressed in the unpublished *Lectures on Imagination* (forthcoming). For Ricœur, imagination relates to both embodied experience (Ricœur, 2007a) and to reading and recounting narratives (Ricœur, 1984, 1986b, 1990). It is both imagination in a practical and in a poetic sense (cf. Amalric, 2012), that is, both as the cognitive capacity to find patterns within or to simulate an experience *and* as the capacity to understand and to produce poetic meaning. And even though Ricœur has devoted a large part of his work specifically to narrative (Ricœur, 1984, 1986b, 1990), the same is true of his idea of narrative (for a detailed account of Ricœur's idea of narrative, see Kearney, 2016), at least insofar as he understands narrative in several senses throughout the different parts of his writings: as literary and historical narrative (e.g., Ricœur, 1990), as ethical and political narratives (e.g., Ricœur, 2007b), and as narrative identity (e.g., Ricœur, 1992).

Furthermore, there are already a number of publications on Ricœur's concepts of imagination and narrative (e.g., Amalric, 2013; Kearney, 2016). In recent years, Ricœur scholars have already done much work in order to map the scattered references to imagination and narrative in Ricœur's work and have examined the role of imagination and narrative in Ricœur's ethico-political work, and, in particular, the question how imagination and narrative allow for a critique and redesign of existing moral and political norms and standards (e.g., Taylor, 2012, 2013; Boublil, 2015). However, much work still has to be done on how Ricœur's idea of imagination can apply to several other philosophical domains, in particular with regard to epistemology. It is therefore interesting to examine more carefully, as I will do in the following, how these ideas could contribute to recent cognitive theories.

The cognitive aspect of Ricœur's notion of imagination is probably most evident in his first major work, *Freedom and Nature*, where he also first introduces this notion (Ricœur, 2007a, p. 95 ff.). Imagination is a key concept in the book, and it is on the basis of imagination that he builds his entire idea of voluntary action and embodied cognition. Furthermore, in "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination and Feeling," an article in which he explicitly relates the ideas of embodied cognition and imagination, he confirms that imagination is non-representational and should be understood in terms of an active relation with the world, a depicting that is a creation rather than a representation. He writes: "To imagine, then, is not to have a mental picture of something but to display relations" (Ricœur, 1978, p. 150). And these relations might include: "qualities, structures, localizations, situations, attitudes, or feelings" (Ricœur, 1978, p. 150). In other words, rather than on the basis of an inner model of the mind, we act in the physical world (e.g., searching for food, getting around obstacles, etc.) by creatively imagining the particular goal that is needed in a physical situation (e.g., the imagined food, the effort of getting around the obstacle, etc.).

Admittedly, however, as several scholars have pointed out, Ricœur's idea of imagination is also "Kantian," and Ricœur elaborately refers in his analyses of imagination to Kant's transcendental understanding of imagination as a synthesis of what is experienced and what remains unexperienced to a whole image (Taylor, 2006). This is perhaps especially the case in *Fallible Man*, more so than in *Freedom and Nature*, which remains closer to Husserl. In *Fallible Man*, Ricœur writes, that "the transcendental imagination [brings about] the synthesis [...] between understanding and sensibility (or in our terminology, between meaning and appearance, between speaking and looking) [...]" (Ricœur, 1986a, p. 45). Also, one has to admit that even in *Freedom and Nature* Ricœur still at times speaks, despite his critique of an idealist approach to subjectivity (cf. *supra*), about consciousness in

<sup>5</sup> In this regard, it is interesting to compare Ricœur's idea of intentionality with how Hutto and Myin define intentionality in what they understand as the Radical Enactive Cognition (REC) model: "to let go of the idea of a sense-reference distinction while retaining the idea of some kind of intentional directedness—is actually to go the REC way" (Hutto and Myin, 2017, p. 177; see also Hutto and Myin, 2013).

terms of representation, at least when he means consciousness as the explicit representation of an object (e.g., Ricœur, 2007a, p. 28, 44, 95, 104).

Yet, if we bracket Ricœur's own analyses of the history of phenomenology and, to some extent, his use of the concept "representation", which should without doubt also be understood within the context of its time, Ricœur's idea of imagination is still suitable to understand imagination "in the enactivist fashion", as a relation with the physical world that re-enacts certain experiences. In order to see this more clearly, consider his analysis of the experience of need in *Freedom and Nature*. Ricœur writes that it "tinges the imaginary with [the] corporeal" (Ricœur, 2007a, p. 98). He defines imagination as a means to go from the bodily affection that results from "needing something" to the desire of the needed object, and eventually to an enactment of the perception of the needed – as if the body already obtained the satisfaction of the needed – that moves the body towards it. Ricœur writes:

*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: what we commonly call the desire for, the wish for... If imagination can play such a role, it is because [...] it itself is an intentional design projected into absence, a product of consciousness within actual nothing and not a mental presence (Ricœur, 2007a, p. 97).*

In other words, it is not so much by representing objects in the world that we are motivated to obtain them, but in the first place by being affected by our bodies, by needing objects, by wanting them and by imagining or, one can add, by "enacting" the pleasure of obtaining them.

In this regard, Ricœur's idea of imagination should be understood as the capacity for affective anticipation, rather than as representation. He calls it, in a "Sartrean" fashion, the "freedom which 'negates' the real" (Ricœur, 2007a, p. 259). In other words, imagination is the capacity to anticipate an experience that is not there yet, an "unreal" experience. Yet, there is also an immediate link here with his later idea of imagination as poetic production of new meaning (Ricœur, 1984, 1986b, 1990). Imagination implies fantasy, as in the creation of literary narratives, but thus also in experience itself. At the same time, imagination, for Ricœur, does not contradict knowledge, but presupposes it. For Ricœur, "every image is first of all a form of knowing: I can only imagine what I know [...]. At this point there intervene muscular attitudes and movements which designate and outline what is absent and feelings which grasp its affective nuances" (Ricœur, 2007a, p. 258). This is a very enactivist way of putting things, since it implies the idea that imagination amounts to an embodied relation with the world, "muscular attitudes", affection and sense, in which we associate different things we know through fantasy (e.g., we can imagine a splash when observing a tree branch falling in a river).

Ricœur's idea of imagination in *Freedom and Nature* thus not only highlights here how the involuntary lies at the heart of the voluntary. It also offers a view of basic cognition that fits in the enactivist agenda. In this view, cognition originates in an intentional relation with the world. This relation, however, does not imply pre-given mental representational content (as in a mental state that allows for the creation of mental images of objects in the world that enable desire, volition, anticipation, etc.). The intentional relation Ricœur has in mind rather refers to an openness to the world that makes sense by affecting the body. Sense is immediate experience here, which allows for interpretation. And this interpretation can rely on the narrative, in the broad sense of a spoken or written discourse. Embodied cognition amounts to an interaction between the body and the world that gets meaning through discourse, which extends the mere sense-reference schema (metaphors, stories, texts). This interaction builds on contentless organic interactions, but is also creative and non-representational.

Ricœur's theory of embodied cognition is therefore close to narrative accounts within the philosophy of mind. It meshes well, for instance, with George Lakoff's and Michael Johnson's theory of embodied cognition as based on metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999). According to Lakoff and Johnson, basic embodied experience and cognition is mediated by metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). We use metaphors, according to Lakoff and Johnson, in everyday language, when we, for example, refer to "arguing" in terms of war: we want to "win" an argument, we "attack" a position, arguments can be "weak", his opinion is "spot on target", etc. (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 3). Or we use metaphors concerning bodily motion in sentences that have more complex meanings, as is clear in the following example: "France fell into a recession and Germany pulled it out" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999, p. 60). Although developed before Varela's, Thompson's and Rosch's seminal work, Lakoff's and Johnson's position is interesting in that they provide a theory within the context of discussions of philosophy of mind that explains how images play a part in basic embodied cognition. This supports Ricœur's idea that cognition, even in its basic function, is infused by imagination and narrative.

Recent "narrative-based" theories of enactivism "back up" further Ricœur's theory of imaginative cognition and we might say that they frame this theory in a more up-to-date scientific context by bringing new empirical evidence and clear-cut conceptual work to the cognitive theory. Hutto and Myin, for example, argue that basic imaginings do not necessarily imply having representations of things, but rather imagination (Hutto and Myin, 2017, p. 322). They give the example of hominins of the Middle Paleolithic, who were, so empirical research shows, capable of complex toolmaking, which likely included basic kinds of imaginings, such as mental rehearsal and the use of models. Hutto and Myin argue that even given that these hominins would have had some kind of proto-language through which they would compare

objects, for instance, in order to sort out the right shape for toolmaking, they would have lacked more complex linguistic features and the “public representations of modern human society” (Hutto and Myin, 2017, p. 315).

Other theories that contribute to the idea that cognition is imaginative, which was already developed by Ricœur, are enactivist theories that explore basic types of imagination and storytelling in animals. Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei, for example, argues in “The Imagination of Animals” that if we understand imagination not merely as representational consciousness, but as “a constellation of activities rooted in embodied interaction” – like for example “pretense, play, metaphoric transfer or substitution, creative expression, [and] empathy” – we find these capacities also in certain non-human animals (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2017, p. 130). Gosetti-Ferencei refers to Koko, a gorilla that was capable of complex forms of pretending (she played being the queen of England after seeing a portrait of her). She was also able to understand 2,000 words in English and to sign 1,000 words herself (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2017, p. 139).

Yet, on the other hand, Ricœur contributes to these theories as well by offering a broad phenomenological conception of consciousness, rather than an analysis of the use of metaphoric language or of basic narrative cognition (only). Following Ricœur, we can now pinpoint more exactly the role hermeneutical phenomenology can play for the understanding of embodied cognition. Like enactivism, hermeneutical phenomenology shows that imagination is an essential part of the embodied consciousness. Imagination helps to make sense of the world that affects us. It influences how we perceive things, how we interact with them or how they have meaning for us in a particular context.

Furthermore, hermeneutical phenomenology highlights that narrative is a mediator of this imaginative, embodied interaction with the world. “Narrative” should be understood here in a double sense. (i) Narrative designates our capacity to make a life story out of our experiences (cf. Ricœur’s idea of narrative identity [Ricœur 1992, p. 113 ff.]). For example, whether we decide to wear a hat or a baseball cap depends on the particular image or character we want to be. (ii) Narrative also refers to stories told by others in a broad sense – individual or collective – that might influence the way we are conscious of our bodies in the world (e.g., fashion images shape our perception of our bodies or political stories influence our behavior in society). In this regard, narrative “speaks to the imagination” in both a receptive and a productive sense. Existing narratives influence our bodily interaction with the world (e.g., the power of political discourse), and we are capable of creating narratives in this interaction (e.g., the capacity to play a character). In that regard, hermeneutical phenomenology can be a fruitful method to include in debates on enactivism in that it not only explains basic cognitive relations or even linguistic-narrative relations, as does philosophy of mind, but also helps to understand the ethical and political depth of cognitive relations.

Again, Ricœur’s idea of narrative only turns up in his later works, while *Freedom and Nature* and *Fallible Man* still focus on a more “pure” phenomenological analysis. However, Ricœur’s later idea that imagination amounts to the understanding and the creation of meaning through narratives, possibly “ethico-political” narratives as I will show in the next section, does not contradict his earlier idea that imagination lies at the heart of embodied cognition, because his later works presuppose the idea of the mind as being imaginative and embodied. Indeed, both in *From Text to Action* and in *Oneself as Another* Ricœur returns to his critique of idealism, but builds on it the idea that consciousness is also narrative, in the sense that we are capable of telling our own life stories throughout the different experiences we have in our existences and in the sense that those stories get influenced by the different existing stories available in the cultural and historical frameworks in which these existences take place (Ricœur, 1992, p. 10 ff.; 2007b, p. 25 ff.). By bringing together Ricœur’s idea of narrativity and his earlier conception of imagination as part of embodied cognition, it becomes clear, so I have argued in this section, that narratives essentially influence embodied and enactive cognitive relations.

There might of course be interactions with the surrounding world that occur more impulsively, without the mediation of ethico-political narratives or even without imagination, like avoiding an obstacle on the street. Yet, the point I am getting at here and that I will develop further in the next section is that, at least in a culturally signifying world, embodied cognition is infused by imagination as a human capacity and mediated by narratives in *both* basic and complex ways. The physical world is also a cultural and ethico-political world, which is a “textual” – or better “discursive” – world. This is what hermeneutical phenomenology can bring to the theory of mind.

## Imagination, narrativity and the ethico-political aspects of embodied cognition

If we take Ricœur’s hermeneutical phenomenology and hold it against the backdrop of recent theories of enactivism, it enables us to understand certain unexplored aspects of embodied/enactive cognition, so is the wager of this article. One of these aspects is, so I suggested above, the ethico-political side of embodied/enactive cognition. Indeed, if we agree, with recent theories of enactivism and with Ricœur’s phenomenology, that embodied cognition is essentially narrative, then this is clearly not only in a purely instrumental way, but also in a more expressive, non-instrumental sense. We gain knowledge by imaginatively interacting with our bodies in the world not only in order to find solutions to practical problems (toolmaking, planning, getting around obstacles, etc.), but the knowledge we gain of the world and our bodies gets colored in different ways by our imaginations, which are influenced

by diverse narratives (experimenting with our bodies, playing with objects, creating art, cultural and political ideas about embodiment etc.).

Key here is Ricœur's idea of metaphoric language as a means for creative imagination: "a metaphor may be seen as a model for changing our way of looking at things, of perceiving the world" (Ricœur, 1978, p. 152). This is obviously true in the purely linguistic sense, as Lakoff and Johnson's example of "argument is war" attests. Yet it is also true when we move our bodies (the sun is inviting to go and swim in it), when we experience things in a new way (this tree looks like a rock), and when we decide on things (I decide to take a swim because the water seems gentle). And it is moreover also true when designing or simply understanding more complex cultural and ethico-political ideas. For example, the color "red" is not merely a physical color, but has all kinds of metaphorical connotations that are often ethico-politically significant: it might symbolize passion or fire, but it is also linked with socialism. It is also telling, in this regard, that different cultures perceive colors differently. In Russian culture, for instance, there is no one single concept for the color blue, as English speakers use it, but two different concepts that designate light blue ("goluboy") and dark blue ("siniy"). This also implies that Russian-speaking people are generally more capable than English-speaking people of recognizing different shades of blue (Hopkins, 2007). Our embodied relation with the world is thus imaginative and narrative through and through – creating types of cognition that go from basic to more complex forms – and "imagination" is in that sense "carnal" (Ricœur, 2007a, p. 110).

Combining enactivism with Ricœur's phenomenology shows that the embodied self is sensitive to contexts, which makes it sensible to complex forms of cognition, including ethical and political forms of cognition. The subject's experiences are influenced by others and vice versa, as well as by the cultural and historical contexts that we share with these others: these contexts influence how we are motivated and act in the world, as embodied beings. These historical and cultural contexts are loaded with ethical and political meaning, which then shapes our relations to our bodies and the relations between our bodies and the world. We can think for example of the violence inherent to racist narratives, which stigmatize the embodied relation of others with the world. In the case of racism, certain bodily aspects, and how they interact in a cultural and historical framework, are picked out, stigmatized and woven into violent, often ideological, narratives. This example of violent narrative forming highlights that embodied cognition, how we gain knowledge and act in the world, does not occur in an ethico-politically neutral way. Our cognitive capacities include the ethical and political responsibility to be aware of the potential violence within embodied cognitive relations. Yet, this idea that embodied knowledge is sensitive to contexts also challenges the supposedly universal character of cognition. A theory of cognition should take into account the awareness of the influence of stories and contexts on the

process of gaining knowledge, and not only the cognitive capacities humans have in common. Hermeneutics can aid here insofar it is sensible to this awareness.

Ricœur's hermeneutics, in particular his idea of ethical and political life as related to narratives and imagination, supports the idea that cognition has ethical and political meaning. More exactly, we find implications for cognitive theory in Ricœur's idea that ethical and political life should be understood not only on the basis of a formal moral theory, but in the first place in relation to the mores of historical communities that contain "a narrative and symbolic identity" (Ricœur, 2007b, p. 330). Thus, ethico-political meaning is not only part of an abstract moral theory or even an institutionalized juridical system. It is also rooted in historical communities, in their narratives, and in that sense influences our imaginations, perceptions of the world and embodied cognitive relations. Therefore, the ethico-political sphere should also be examined by cognitive theory.

The idea that cognitive relations have ethico-political significance is more exactly reflected both in Ricœur's theory of ideology and utopia as well as in his theory of the self as moral agent. The ethico-political potential of cognitive relations is first reflected in Ricœur's notion of ideology. In *From Text to Action* Ricœur defines ideology "as the inverted image of reality" (Ricœur, 2007b, p. 310). Ideologies of certain cultures, communities or institutions are, in other words, "images" in the sense of imaginations of ideas that represent society. The images are connected to the power of the political system that defends the ideology. Further, one of the essential features of ideological images is that they are designed to the social "sentiment" (Ricœur, 2007b, p. 316). There are many historical examples of ideologies stimulating negative body images, racial discrimination, or even social hatred. It is thus easy to see how ideology influences cognitive relations, potentially in a violent fashion, in particular body images and the perception of social classes. Even though Ricœur himself does not engage explicitly with cognitive theory in his writings on ideology, his idea of consciousness as embodied is implied (e.g., he develops it at the beginning of *From Text and Action*), and in that sense there is also not a disruption, but rather a continuity between his earlier and later work. From his notion of ideology it follows that embodied cognitive relations have ethico-political significance, because they get shaped by ideologies.

At the same time, we are, of course, not merely the victims of ideologies, ethico-political stories and contexts, but are capable of designing novel ethical and political ideas. In opposition to ruling ideologies, Ricœur understands the idea of *utopia* as the possibility of the imagination to design novel ethico-political narratives that aim to change ruling ideologies. Here also lies the basis of political dissent. Ricœur thus not only understand utopia in the sense of the literary genre, but also as part of "social imagination" (Ricœur, 2007b, p. 323). Utopia is "the imaginary project of another kind of society, of another reality, another world" (Ricœur, 2007b,

p. 319). Utopia, in other words, designates for Ricœur the possibilities of social groups to imagine and defend a novel socio-political order, and, we may add, a new way of perceiving the world: body images, social relations, embodied cognitive relations.

Yet Ricœur points to the ethico-political significance of embodied cognitive relations not only on the social-institutional level, but also on the intersubjective level. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricœur connects the idea of narrative and imagination, on the one hand, to his conception of ethical and political life, on the other. He defines narrative as “the great laboratory of the imaginary”, as the “explorations in the realm of good and evil” (Ricœur, 1992, p. 164). For Ricœur, ethical and political action implies having a narrative identity, telling one’s own life story, which is also based on already existing stories from which we can learn and with which we can experiment. Ricœur moreover connects his idea of the moral subject to that of the “flesh” (Ricœur, 1992, p. 319). Ethical and political significance is not only influenced by narratives, but also by a direct affective relation with the world. We are affected by others and narratives that influence ethical decisions, how we perceive the world, right and wrong, and body images. This supports the idea that embodied and enactive cognitive relations, resulting from a bodily interaction with the world, are deeply influenced by narratives and the imagination, which gives these relations the essential potential for containing ethico-political meaning.

We “write” the stories of how our bodies interact with the world. For example, social customs influence how we imagine ourselves, but at the same time we are not merely the product of those customs. We can create to a certain extent a personal image that we would like others to see by acting according to this image – enacting this image – in the world. Furthermore, not only on the personal level, but also in a collective sense, we are capable of creating narratives that reflect our embodied relation with the world. We can think of subcultures which express their ideas in their bodily interactions with the world: hair style, tattoos, piercings, but also gestures, slang, and body language. Not seldom subcultures incorporate a moral ideal, which reflects embodiment. The awareness of how various forms of cognition relate to embodiment within a cultural-historical framework is therefore of importance for ethical and political theory and for the policies of societies regarding its various subcultures (cf. the relations with diverse indigenous communities in Brazil and in other parts of Latin America). One important question then is how to incorporate such embodied moral ideals into a larger, formal, moral and political framework, or, to put it in another way, to define intercultural ethical and political meaning on an institutional level. Obviously, ethical and political body images are not without danger. Defining the conditions of a formal ethical and political framework, however, would extend the task of cognitive theory.

Ricœur’s hermeneutical phenomenology combined with enactivism grants access to a non-representational ap-

proach to cognition that takes into account the fact that the ethical-political potential is often overlooked by cognitive theories, which tend to focus on the basic functioning of the embodied mind in its natural environment. Yet my point is not that Ricœur shows something that enactivism would be unable to show. My point is rather that, if we take an enactivist point of view as the starting point of the understanding of cognition (and thus understand cognition as embodied interaction influenced by imagination and narratives), then Ricœur’s phenomenology can offer some useful insights that would enrich this understanding by highlighting the ethico-political aspect of cognition.

Rather than referring to public representational language systems in order to explain complex ethical and political meaning or referring to ethical and political life in terms of a formal set of rules only, I am arguing that embodiment, cognition *and* ethical-political life should be understood together. The specific contribution of Ricœur’s hermeneutical phenomenology to cognitive theory is not to reinstate a phenomenological conception of consciousness (with an emphasis on ethical and political life) *instead of* enactivist theories of cognition. Its contribution consists of simply highlighting that understanding how cognition works benefits from the interpretation of how narratives work and that the interpretation of different narratives can reveal different types of cognition.

The possible contribution of Ricœur’s hermeneutic phenomenology to enactivism might become clear from a different perspective as well, when taking into account his idea of *world*. According to Ricœur, the lived world is intertwined with what he calls “the world of the text” (Ricœur, 2007b, p. 86). This means that our experiences, which are influenced by different narratives, ethical and political narratives included, not only result from an embodied interaction with the physical world, but also imply a “fictional” world that shapes how we make sense of things within the context of a culturally mediated world. Ricœur’s hermeneutical phenomenology proposes to see intentionality in relation to the idea of a life-world, i.e., consciousness as a broader narrative process of belonging to a world with stories, rather than as a dynamic relation between an organism and its surroundings only. Rather than a naturalized world, this is a hermeneutical and a phenomenological world. Ricœur demonstrates what Varela, Thompson and Rosch originally intended, namely that enactivism can and does find much inspiration in phenomenology. Yet, it might be time to reconsider the role hermeneutics and phenomenology can play in relation to enactivism, not so much in order to replace it, but rather in order to deepen the understanding of the complexity of cognition.

Holding Ricœur’s account of cognition against the contemporary scene of enactivism provides an example of how hermeneutical phenomenology could contribute to philosophical problems today. Differently from the naturalistic approach to cognitive theory, hermeneutics provides an analysis and interpretation of lived existence, imagination, and narrative, which might help fleshing out the enactivist framework.

This is not to say, again, that hermeneutics should replace the other methods that are used by enactivists. More simply, it is to suggest that hermeneutics can contribute to the richness of enactivist approaches that already exist today. For these reasons, I think we should “phenomenalize” enactivism again, or further, return to its original intention, by bringing hermeneutical phenomenology into enactivism.

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