

Embodied Autonomy and the Natural Environment: Thinking Ecological Autonomy

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“In the capacity for autonomy, morality, and transcendence, also the human being emerges from nature”
(Beat Sitter-Liver 1999, 471)

Abstract

Paul Ricoeur's philosophy of autonomy develops in an interdisciplinary conceptual framework. While much attention has been paid to the analysis and the application of his conception of autonomy to different research fields, the implications of Ricoeur's insights into this topic for environmental philosophy have not been yet sufficiently discussed. This essay aims at filling this lacuna by showing that Ricoeur's understanding of autonomy can provide valuable signposts that can orient the study of this notion from an eco-philosophical perspective. With reference to his phenomenological work entitled *Freedom and Nature; The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950/1966), this article explores the ecological foundations of autonomy through the consideration of human being's embodied interaction with the natural environment. As grounded upon our dynamic situatedness in the natural world, the development of autonomy will be first analyzed in relation to the fulfillment of vital needs as necessary to sustain the body's organic life. In this context, autonomy will be understood through the mediation operated by the will between the dependence of the body on the natural environment and our capacity of adaptation to it. Then, in continuity with the description of a human being's needful will, the ecological roots of autonomy will be considered as involved in the processes of the body's decentralization and affective immersion in the natural world. Autonomy will be approached here through the movement of interiorization and exteriorization with respect to bodily motivations and values. A Ricoeurian inspired theory of ecological autonomy enables us to rediscover ourselves as members of the broader ecological community.

Keywords: ecological autonomy, natural environment, embodiment, dependence/independence, decentralization

To Mother Earth...

An "All Too Human" Sense of Autonomy?

Autonomy has never ceased to be explored as a complex issue dealing with the individual and the collective aspects of human existence.¹ The continuity between the personal and the communal configuration of autonomy is at the core of Paul Ricœur's work. From his early phenomenological project of the will up to his mature thought on justice, memory, and recognition, Ricœur's entire oeuvre provides theoretical and practical lenses to understand autonomy as a polyphonic notion. According to him, autonomy is not just an ideal that has to be pursued for the sake of personal and social flourishing. Rather, autonomy is also a principle that must be constantly protected against all potential and effective threats by each individual (Ricœur 1992, p. 198) and the whole of society. By following a movement of detour and return, that is, a back-and-forth rhythm marked by contextual concerns and the commitment to interdisciplinary dialogue with the human and social sciences, Ricœur presents an evolving conception of autonomy, lending itself to different treatments and demanding constant questioning with regard to the variety of its applications. Consequently, his account of autonomy goes far beyond the boundaries of philosophical discourse, touching cognitive, linguistic, literary, ethical, and juridical fields. Not surprisingly, Ricœur's approach to this topic has received a growing interest from scholars, who have critically applied its resources to several research branches, including theology, literature and social theory, philosophy of technology and artificial intelligence, philosophy of mind, and bioethics.² However, the possibility to extend Ricœur's insights into autonomy to the field of environmental philosophy remains largely unexplored. In this chapter, I aim to show that Ricœur's analysis of autonomy can help us to readdress this concept in an environmental fashion, namely in terms of what one might call "ecological autonomy." Undoubtedly, in his overall philosophical anthropology, Ricœur's conceptualization of autonomy can be criticized as offering an "all too human" perspective, using Nietzsche's apt words (Nietzsche 1878). Nevertheless, I believe that in Ricœur's thought, we can find useful reflections that help us think of autonomy as originally dealing with the relationship

¹ I thank George H. Taylor (University of Pittsburgh) for his comments, invaluable encouragement, and careful reading of this chapter.

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² The conference "Paul Ricœur and the Challenges of Autonomy," held at Bisla International School of Liberal Arts (BISLA), November 3-5, 2022, and the selected papers collected in this volume, testify the scholars' growing interdisciplinary interest in Ricœur's conception of autonomy.

between humanity and the natural environment. Indeed, in its most fundamental sense, autonomy relates to our embodied situatedness in the natural world, that is, to our dynamic implacement in it.³ Therefore, autonomy is not merely something individually or socially constructed, but it is fundamentally anchored, in an ontological way, in the natural world as a space shaped by a myriad of direct and indirect relations necessary for the accomplishment of our autonomous life in relation with all other living or natural entities. To put it differently, autonomy would remain an insufficiently grounded notion without the consideration of our common belonging, as embodied and needful subjects, within the natural environment. Who or what is, then, autonomous when we speak about “ecological autonomy”?

This chapter has an exploratory character, making what follows a matter of open discussion for further work. Specifically, it can be considered an introductory step into a Ricœurian inspired theory of ecological autonomy which can find resonance in environmental philosophy as a discipline concerned with the relationship between human beings and the various types of environments, including the natural one. My attempt to show the ecological implications of Ricœur’s conception of autonomy will be limited to the outline of an ecologically oriented interpretation of his early and scattered approach to this notion as presented in his first major work, *Freedom and Nature. The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (Ricœur, 1966). In doing so, I will describe autonomy in phenomenological terms as dealing with the lived body understood as the point of negotiation with the world. Autonomy arises, then, at the intersection between the space of our lived experience and the horizon of our embodied expectations related to needs, motives, and values. My investigation will consider the development of autonomy through the analysis of our corporeal involvement with the natural environment, and it will be divided into two parts. First, I will focus on the most basic level of autonomy, i.e., on autonomy as linked to the satisfaction of needs pertaining to the sphere of organic life. In this sense, autonomy will be understood as a dimension connected to the metabolism of the lived body, that is, to the satisfaction of vital needs, e.g., breathing, eating, sleeping, reproduction, etc., arising from the body’s demands. Ecological autonomy will be defined as a process of active adaptation in accordance with the play among our needs, our will, and the natural environment. The affirmation of autonomy will result, then, at the same time as inseparable from our dependence on the natural world and from our active participation in it. Thus, autonomy will be understood as a dependent independence. Then, I will operate a shift moving from the receptivity and the activity of the will in dealing with needs to the movement of decentralization as expressed in bodily motives

³ For the notion of “implacement” see Edward Casey (1993). I express my deepest gratitude to Jakub Čapek (Charles University, Prague) for inspiring discussions on this point.

and values. As decentered and decentralized beings, I will argue that autonomy emerges through the intertwining between interiority and exteriority. As such, autonomy deals with the movement of the lived body with our affective immersion in the natural environment. In conclusion, the discussion of the concept of ecological autonomy enables us to rethink human being's engagement with the natural world. The acknowledgment of the ecological groundings of autonomy opens up the possibility of reflection on the circular relation between human beings as members of the natural environment and the natural environment as part of ourselves as autonomous beings.

Ecological Autonomy and Organic Life: Needful Will and the Natural Environment

In the Western philosophical tradition, the notion of autonomy has been considered in its individual and collective sense as the state of self-determination of a person or groups, such as communities, municipalities, and nations. Oscillating between moral and socio-political discourse, autonomy has been prized as an essential dimension for human personal and communal realization. The idea of autonomy is shaped by the claim of alleged independence from others, might these be deities, individuals, collectivities, or territories. Marked by mental, physical, cultural, and geographical separations, autonomy has a fundamental relation with the space in which it is claimed, established, and preserved. In acknowledging the connection between spatiality and autonomy, philosophers have given most attention to the historical, political, and social spheres of human life rather than considering the relation between autonomy and the natural environment. This stands in line with the prevalent anthropocentric viewpoint in Western philosophy, in which human settings have been considered superior while the natural world has been treated as a subordinate space to be exploited in order to satisfy human needs. This viewpoint does not mean, though, that the importance of the bond between autonomy and the natural world has been completely ignored or that the natural environment has always been reduced to a context of instrumental utility offering merely a means for human ends. Indeed, figures such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Henry David Thoreau have presented an understanding of our autonomy as inseparable from the natural space.⁴ These authors do not put the accent on separation, but on human entanglement with the natural environment, i.e., on autonomy as related to our interdependence with nature. Contrary to the nature-culture divide and to a natureless conception of autonomy, I claim that Ricœur's work presents resources that can en-

⁴ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1790) and Henry David Thoreau (1854).

able us to interrogate afresh the relationship between this concept and the natural environment. Specifically, in order to develop this argument and to outline the features of the notion of ecological autonomy, I will refer to his first major work titled *Freedom and Nature. The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950/1966). In this oeuvre, Ricœur depicts our freedom as a finite and situated dimension, namely as “an only human freedom” committed to the world (Ricœur 1966, 482). In dealing with the structures of the will, Ricœur gives us powerful tools with which to discuss phenomenologically the notion of autonomy through the equilibrium between the voluntary power of action and the limits imposed by the very conditions of our existence. More precisely, Ricœur focuses his attention on the relationship between human will and nature broadly understood in terms of necessity. As long as human existence is embodied and engaged in the world, the development of our autonomy cannot be understood as separated from our involvement in it. It cannot be detached from the natural environment just as much as it cannot be detached from the dynamism of our social, cultural, political, and historical belonging to a given society. Moreover, in Ricœur’s phenomenological perspective, the distinction between the organic and the social spheres of human life does not imply a sharp division between these levels. Although Ricœur does not provide a direct analysis of the relationship between the development of our autonomy and the natural environment, we can observe that in his phenomenological study of the will, especially in his diagnostics of the lived body, he introduces issues that can enable us to think about the bond between our becoming autonomous and the natural space. More precisely, it is in the analysis of what he calls “the corporeal involuntary” that, in discussing the topics of need, motives, and values, Ricœur offers us a reliable access to the most basic level of autonomy as implying an essential encounter with the natural environment. Against the conception of a total indifference of nature to human being⁵ or the idea of an unshakeable equilibrium between humanity and the natural environment, ecological autonomy arises as a challenge linked to our productive adaptation to nature’s rhythms, metamorphoses, and unexpected threats. Considered in these terms, our adaptation is not mechanical, but it involves freedom and the power of choice. Opposed to any form of automatism, autonomy relates to “the double movement of corporeal spontaneity and voluntary control” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 136) in the interaction with the natural environment.⁶ Autonomy deals, then, with the enactive participation of human beings with the natural world. Therefore, before being taken up in moral reflection, autonomy requires a phenom-

⁵ See Emmanuel Levinas (1969; 1998).

⁶ For a detailed analysis on this point as connected to enactivism, see Geoffrey Direckxsens (2018).

enological investigation concerning the dynamic connection between the experience of body and the natural space.

To understand the ecological groundings of autonomy from a Ricœurian perspective, we first have to consider his phenomenological description of needs as dimensions involved in the enactive interaction between our body and the world in which we participate. In other words, ecological autonomy unfolds as connected with the space we inhabit by means of the body, the body's competing vital demands, and the possibility of their satisfaction. As Ricœur observes, "my body appears to me not even as an anonymous mask of an alien force but as *the autonomy of a person* with its own intentions and its own initiative [...] My relation to myself is like that of a younger and an older brother: I respond for my part like an other who listens, imitates, obeys" (Ricœur, 1966, p. 47). Ricœur understands the body as the source of needs "in the sense that they arise from the body as lived" (Arel 2020, 63). Organic needs, as well as motives and vital values, are expressions of the corporeal involuntary, which provides the foundation for the exercise of all voluntary acts. Ricœur's approach to needs provides a set of resources useful for thinking autonomy ecologically, namely as inseparable from the body's primary organic life and its situatedness in the natural world. Following his line of thought, we can describe the ecological quality of autonomy by taking into account the dynamic connection between human being's "needful will" and its bond to the environment, broadly understood as a web of relationships.⁷ Among the different configurations that the environment takes, e.g., urban, social, cultural, economic, technological, etc., the natural environment is the most basic one since it is our life support system that can address and accommodate the resolution of our primary needs. The natural environment and all other environments featuring human existence are, at one and the same time, different and intertwined. It is precisely in the organic configuration of human life that ecological autonomy is originally shaped through the ongoing relations between our will and the processes of productive adaptation to the natural world.⁸ More precisely, the fulfilment of needs is not an automatism escaping from any voluntary act. Indeed, according to Ricœur, needs cannot be understood through the stimulus-response model. Rather, needs reveal human being's "life gaping as appetite for the other" (Ricœur, 1966, p. 92). Contrary to any naturalistic and deterministic perspective in which need is seen as "a sensation translating an organic defect and followed by a motor reaction" (Ricœur, 1966, p. 91), Ricœur conceives it as a "lack of..." as a "pre-action" intentionally directed towards something

⁷ The idea of "needful willing" is inspired by Hans Jonas's concept of "needful freedom" as developed in his ontology of living organisms. For a clarification of "needful freedom" and its various dimensions, see Jonas (1966).

⁸ For the difference between human being's and animals' adaptation to the environment see Ricœur (1966, 95).

(Ricœur, 1966, p. 91). Hence, “need is not self-explanatory,” but it acquires “definitive direction only as appropriated by a will” (Kohák, 1966, p. xix). Therefore, since need is always directed towards something, it pertains to the appetite “as an indigence and an exigence, an experienced lack of ... and an impulse directed towards ...” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 89). Through the description of the circular relation between body and willing, Ricœur observes that “I do not know need from the outside, as a natural event, but from within, as a lived need” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 87). In short, needs are neither inner sensations nor components of a stimulus-response pattern, but transcending behaviors linked to our voluntary acts as intentionally directed towards the world. The flourishing of autonomy is grounded in our belonging to ecological systems, which enable the satisfaction of our needs and the preservation of our own life. Ricœur points out: the “autonomy of life consists here in the maintaining of internal bonds of the organism, certain exchanges with the environment being presupposed. But we can consider the whole of the relations of the organism with its environment as a structural problem whose balance will be constantly redefined and in process” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 417). In his view, adaptation is not the result of biological evolution, that is, of a biological heredity and of a predetermined destiny. Our adaptation to the natural environment is a product of our capacity to choose and to act. As Ricœur observes, “it is always possible to include psychology of conduct within a vast structural problematic, to bring the balance between the organism and its geographic environment into a total structural system” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 417). Hence, it is at the organic level of our life that autonomy begins to develop before extending to the perceptual and intellectual contexts. At this level, ecological autonomy can be defined as the active self-organization of a human being as an organism able to actively keep himself or herself alive through a constant exchange with the natural environment. Yet, the organic level has to be considered as a logical priority. Indeed, autonomy has to be understood with reference to the whole human being (Ricœur 1986, 4), namely through the acknowledgment of the unity among the “diverse capacities and incapacities that make human beings acting and suffering beings” (Ricœur, 1997, p. xxxix).

In considering ecological autonomy, we find that there is no opposition between freedom and dependence, self-legislation and heteronomy, interiority and exteriority. As Ricœur argues, “we should form an absolutely false idea of the Cogito if we conceived of it as a positing of the self by itself: the self as *radical autonomy*, not only moral but ontological, is precisely the fault” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 29). In its most basic form, autonomy deals with our embodied relationships within the complex network of living organisms and natural elements, e.g., air, water, soil, organic matter, etc., which together maintain the flow of energy necessary for the preservation of life.

On the one hand, between our organic needs and the natural environment, there is a relation of dependence. As Ricœur puts it, “to feed myself is to place myself on the level of reality of the objects on which I depend. While I transform them into myself, they drag me to the level of objects and make me a part of the great natural cycles—the cycles of water, carbon, nitrogen, etc.” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 87). The vital needs originating from our corporality make us encounter the natural environment as a space of possibilities for our autonomous survival and as a context of limitations on our acting power. On the other hand, though, dependence is not determinism or constriction, since we are capable of choosing not only how to satisfy our needs but also whether to do so. As Ricœur writes, “non-satisfaction of needs can be not only accepted, but can even be systematically chosen” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 93). Yet, as he puts it, “given over to my body, subjected to the rhythm of my needs, I nonetheless do not cease to be a self which takes a stand, evaluates its life, exercises its control” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 93). Related to the connection between our vital needs and the natural environment, our ecological autonomy emerges as a dependent independence. In analyzing the experience of our needs, we are led to consider our autonomy from our situatedness in the natural environment as needy beings originally related to all other living creatures and elements through passive and active interactions. As such, ecological autonomy is shaped by relationships of interdependence with the natural space and all its components. In acknowledging our belongingness to the natural environment, we can observe that “we are neither purely autonomous nor purely heteronomous; we can act in ways not determined by nature, but there are other senses in which we are still determined by nature: one cannot, for example, plant a garden without earth, water, seeds, and so on. Our most basic sustenance is dependent upon nature” (Romanyshyn, 2018, p. 314). The consideration of the ecological quality of our autonomy through the experience of needs allows us to understand ourselves as ecological beings, that is, as members of the larger Earth’s biotic community on which we depend (Leopold 1949), in which we are interdependent, and where we can actualize our choices. Since the configuration of our autonomy is not possible without our participative belonging to the natural environment, the issue of autonomy cannot be restricted to the problem of how to treat humanity, for it must include a concern for the treatment of the natural environment as it provides us resources for the development of our autonomous existence as well as for that of all other living beings.

*Ecological Autonomy and Affective Immersion:
Motivation, Evaluation, and the Natural Environment*

Ricœur's analysis of the corporeal involuntary has led us to acknowledge that our autonomy has ecological foundations. We have seen that in its most basic form, autonomy emerges from the interaction between organic needs arising from the body's spontaneity and the natural world as providing the conditions for these needs' satisfaction. Our autonomy is grounded, then, in the interrelation between our embodied will as needful and the heteronomy of the ecological systems in which we are situated. More precisely, the study of needs opens up the possibility of discussing the configuration of our autonomy in connection with the natural environment as involving our dependence, as well as our participation and affective immersion. Contrary to the opposition between "a heartless reason and an irrational heart" (Kohák, 2003, p. 19), Ricœur presents an alternative phenomenological approach to rationality which helps us to construct a renewed vision of autonomy as inseparable from the natural space. In order to explain this point in more detail, we have to consider that for Ricœur, the body manifests not only the total field of needs, but also that of motives and values underlying all voluntary decisions.⁹ Indeed, needs relate "to pleasure in terms of various 'motivating values and tendencies'—evaluative discriminations that are not imposed by consciousness or reason but are already operative in our most basic affective relations" (Kearney, 2016, p. 32). As the way one exercises the capacity of decision, autonomy is concerned with the bodily principles and values that orient our choices. Bodily motivations and judgments relate to the natural environment as a space of opportunities and limitations that enable us to satisfy our vital needs, as well as all other needs, such as those of feeling free, capable of acting, and related to others. Thus, motives and values cannot be reduced to our intellectual activity as a dimension detached from the affective interactions we entertain with the world. Rather, we develop our autonomy through the intertwining of our mind, our body, and the space in which we are dynamically placed. Therefore, autonomy is shaped through the fulfillment of needs, the connected power of motivations, and by means of value judgments, as modes of one's embodied engagement with the natural environment as the first source of life.

According to Ricœur, need can be "a motive on which willing can base itself in determining itself" (Ricœur, 1966, p. 93). Otherwise put, needs are the matter of motives and these form our needs into reasons directed towards decisions. Motivation is an intentional stream that inclines the will to decide for something "in order to" as well as "because of." Every motive is,

⁹ See Ricœur (1966, 85–86).

then, a motive for a decision that inclines the will towards the realization of its projects. Although motivation is associated with the question “why?”, Ricœur stresses that motives are not causes since “a cause is complete prior to the effect, while a motive exists only in relation to a choice” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 142). Consequently, there is an irreducible difference between the unfolding of our autonomous motivations and all psychological determinism. As such, “motive is not what causes a decision but what legitimates it” (Amalric, 2018, p. 28). Ricœur argues that “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” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 85). Originating from the corporeal dimension, motivation is not understood here as a process of reasoning, but “in the sense of the inner move (from the Latin *movere*), in the sense of emotional movement, emerging from the deepest realm, of the emotional and non-rational of the individual” (Busacchi, 2016, p. 62). Following this internal movement, human beings discover themselves as decentered and intentionally directed outside of themselves towards the world. The development of the subject’s autonomy lies in the circularity between the manifestation of motives and their fulfillment in the world through the body. Thus, the bond between human being and the natural environment can be described in phenomenological terms as a detour from the body to the natural world and as a return from the natural world to the body. Involved in the circular movement between our lived body and the world, autonomy is linked to our embodied desire to exist, i.e., to what, in Spinoza’s terms, is called *conatus vitae* (Spinoza, 1677). It is in this context that imagination plays an essential role. As Ricœur points out, “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” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 97). It is through imagination as bridging needs and will that a need can be raised “to the dignity of a motive for possible willing” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 95). In short, motivation deals with something affectively anticipated as desired. Imagination and motivation accompany our reasons for acting in order to achieve something. The unfolding of our ecological autonomy relates, then, to the use of the representative function of imagination as a mediation between the body and the world on the basis of previous perceptive experiences. For this reason, we can speak about the ecological configuration of autonomy as coupled with what one can call a “carnal eco-imagination” a function dealing with our affective participation, as acting and suffering being, in the natural environment.¹⁰ Ecological autonomy develops, then, through the use of our practical power to act in connection with the natural sphere. More precisely, ecological autonomy emerges through the dynamic con-

¹⁰ For the carnal as the site of meaning see Kearney (2015).

nection between our bodily needs, motives, and willful actions within the boundaries of the natural world. Since we are in the world in order to act in it, the development of our autonomy is, at the same time, “a matter of feeling, valuing, doing” (Kearney, 2015, p. 181).

Following Ricœur’s line of thought, vital values appear as involved in the motivation of our projects and as connected to our vital needs. As he argues, “the first non-deducible is the body as existing, life as value. The mark of all existents, it is what first reveals values” (Ricœur, 1966, p. 94). Given that the body is the fundamental source of organic values pertaining to the preservation of life, all other values are elaborated in relation to it. In this sense, we have an immediate apprehension of values founded on the felt experience of the body. Organic values are heterogeneous and concern, for example, assimilation, security, exercise, rest, etc. The realization of our autonomy depends on a balanced attainment of vital values which allow for our well-being. Consequently, we can observe that the value of body integrity is essential for our autonomy. As such, our body is not just a means for inhabiting the world, but the immediate bearer of values enabling our own self-realization. Vital values emerging from our body’s spontaneity are effectively realized through our involvement in the natural environment as a dimension nurturing our integrity. Since the realization of organic values requires an active exchange between the body and the natural sphere, the configuration of our ecological autonomy necessarily has spatial and material bases. On the one hand, the value of bodily integrity is shared with all other living beings. On the other hand, our own bodily integrity cannot be just biological since it is “always embedded in a certain ideology of wholeness” (Slatman, 2012, p. 283). The explanation about how autonomy, bodily integrity, and ideology interact would require a further development of the phenomenological description of ecological autonomy in the direction of a normative theory. Drawing out these connections further is beyond the scope of this paper. The important point here is that autonomy develops through the value judgments connecting the feeling of our body’s interiority and the felt exteriority of the world through the body. Ricœur indirectly suggests that vital values, which are sets of competing demands, must not be reduced to subjective assessments or to utilitarian dimensions. The reduction of organic values to utility standards has as a consequence the misrecognition of the bond between ourselves and natural environment. If we do not acknowledge the primordial bond between ourselves and the natural environment, we risk being led to “an inner devastation by which one distances oneself from one’s own animality and bodiliness, a distancing that cannot but surely inhabit and/or distort the basic source of our vital value experience—our bodies—and, with it, the perception of ecological values” (White, 2007, p. 186). Hence, the experience of organic values is a question of coming to terms with our animality and vitality; we are not superior crea-

tures situated in the natural environment but equal members of it having our own features.

Conclusion: Watering the Roots of Ecological Autonomy

In this article, I have explored the ecological roots of the notion of autonomy with reference to Ricœur's early phenomenology. In order to show that autonomy is shaped through our situatedness in the natural world, I have discussed the structural interrelation between the experience of our lived body and the natural environment. Specifically, by following Ricœur's diagnostic of the body, I have introduced the notion of ecological autonomy through the analysis of the involuntary correlates of decision: organic needs, bodily motives, and strong values. Contrary to the alternative between total freedom or total determinism, Ricœur's study of the will invites us to think of the development of our autonomy as "always already engaged in concrete situations in which different possibilities take form and make sense with respect to our objectives" (Vallée, 2018, p. 12). Our becoming autonomous depends on the opportunities and the limitations that we meet in our relation with the natural environment. Let me offer some concluding remarks.

Ricœur's phenomenological description of the corporeal involuntary leads us to think autonomy as a dimension linked to the different spaces we inhabit, including the natural space. As embodied and needful subjects, our autonomy has ecological roots, and it is configured through the dynamic tension between the voluntary and the involuntary, finitude and infinitude, activity and passivity, capability and vulnerability, interiority and exteriority. In experiencing our living body situated in the world, the development of our autonomy is inseparable from the place we occupy in the natural environment as a primordial source of life. On the one hand, we depend on the natural environment for our very existence and for the realization of our autonomous life. On the other hand, unlike other animals, we are intentional beings able to exert certain control over the natural space in order to make our "social life together safer and more predictable" (Sutton, 2007, p. 9). It does not mean, though, that we are masters of nature. As members of the natural environment, our autonomy develops through passive and active interactions within it.

In considering the development of the autonomy of the human being in relation to the natural environment, we have seen that this relationship configures as one of dependence (e.g., for food, air, water, etc.) rather than of autonomy understood in the classical sense of ability to live on one's own.

Therefore, these reflections lead us to consider whether our relation to the natural world requires a rethinking of the very meaning of autonomy or its availability. Indeed, rather than conceiving autonomy as self-determination, this chapter considers autonomy more in terms of self-governance. An expanded notion of autonomy would require respect for the autonomy of the natural environment itself. Indeed, autonomy does not offer respect for the natural world only because it serves as a human resource. Further considerations of these arguments must await future development.

The phenomenological analysis of the ecological groundings of our autonomy through the description of organic needs, motives, and vital values, entails an essential ethical character. Our autonomy is challenged by the natural environment conceived as an otherness in which our life takes place, but also as an otherness that is part of who we are. The challenge of autonomy is not merely an experience of passivity in the encounter with the natural environment. In his phenomenological analysis of the body Ricœur shows that the “desire of autonomy can only be satisfied through the otherness that I am, that is, my body, the world” (Rosfort, 2019, p. 981). Therefore, Ricœur can help us to establish an ethics of ecological autonomy, revolving around the concepts of dignity, integrity, respect, and responsibility, grounded in the principles of the phenomenology of embodiment. Not only do we have to rethink the ecological roots of autonomy, but we have to water these roots if we want to move towards an environmentally sustainable future.

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