

Marcel and Ricoeur's Understanding of Being as Incarnate Existence: Against the Possible Contemporary Return of the Mind-body Dualism

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Abstract

In this article, we indicate some examples of the possible contemporary return of the mind-body dualism. Aspects of contemporary culture, like the influence of brain-computer interface (BCI) or brain-machine interface (BMI), neuroscience projects, and the popularity of sci-fi series and movies that visualise the separation of consciousness from our bodies, are discussed. Only a few of these examples are indicated as introductory to emphasise the need to think again about the importance of some of the strongest philosophical arguments against this dualism. It is in this regard that we will focus on the philosophies of Gabriel Marcel and Paul Ricoeur. Of specific concern for us in this article is Marcel's influence on Ricoeur in his fundamental rejection of the mind-body dualism. This article's unique contribution lies, then, in the fact that it analyses and reveals this influence of Marcel on Ricoeur, especially with regards to their shared understanding of embodied being, or incarnate existence, as opposed to a body-mind dualism. This investigation of how Marcel influenced Ricoeur provides a better understanding of: i) Ricoeur's account of embodied being; ii) Marcel's philosophy and concept of incarnate existence as being; and finally, iii) the importance of rejecting a mind-body dualism for our contemporary thought and living.

Keywords: Gabriel Marcel; Paul Ricoeur; mind-body dualism; incarnate existence; embodiment; being

Introduction

To speak of a contemporary return of the mind-body dualism sounds strange in a philosophical era 400 years after the life of the famous French philosopher of dualism,



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René Descartes (1596–1650). So many great philosophers have refuted the mind-body dualism through the ages that it seems absurd to think it can return. We live, however, in an age unimaginable before. The age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which builds on the third one of digital transformation (where electronics and information technology were used to automate production), introduces a “fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres” (Schwab 2016, 1). These technologies resulted from significant advances “in computational techniques and computational power ... in the biomedical sphere, and from the development of an increasing range of ‘smart’ objects and the integration of these, and thereby ourselves, into larger and larger digital and bio-digital systems” (Robertson 2021, 121). Is it possible that with all these advances, we started to move back to a mind-body divide?¹

We do not argue that this is unconditionally the case. Still, we only indicate some signs of our times that point in this direction: mind-body dualism’s seemingly continuous returning vicissitudes. Ricoeur references various forms of dualism: the ascetic dualism of the *Phaedo*, Descartes’s ontological dualism of the *Second Meditation*, and the unity of the person in the *Sixth Meditation* and in the *Treatise of the Passions*. Lastly, Kant’s struggles in *Critique of Practical Reason*. For Ricoeur (1978, 3), the great philosophies are caught in a “rhythmic cycle in which a defeat of dualism gives way to a victory over dualism.” We will mention only a few of these dualisms here as an introduction to emphasise the need to think again about the importance of some of the strongest philosophical arguments against this dualism. It is in this regard that we will focus on the philosophies of Gabriel Marcel and Paul Ricoeur. Marcel and Ricoeur are of importance here because some of the most compelling “embodied philosophies” of recent times are strongly influenced by these two philosophers’ work. For example, Merleau-Ponty, one of Marcel’s students, and Ricoeur’s influence on the work of Richard Kearney (2016), “Between Flesh and Text: Ricoeur’s Carnal Hermeneutics” and “The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics”) are distinctive.

Of concern for us in this article is Marcel’s influence on Ricoeur in his fundamental rejection of the mind-body dualism. Marcel and Ricoeur share, for example, an understanding of being as “incarnate existence.” The incarnate existence as the embodied unity of being is emphasised and convincingly demonstrated in Ricoeur’s first book (from where he consistently developed this idea), *Freedom and Nature* (Ricoeur 1966). Although some philosophers have acknowledged this influence of

1 The problems and dangers of a mind-body divide became visible in various ways in the history of humankind. It is often the mind (spirit or soul) that got prioritised with Socrates (who drank the cup of poison) and with the Christianity of the Middle Ages emphasis on the eternal soul. The body was regarded as not worthy, sinful, and care for others’ bodily existence was consequently neglected. This emphasis on the mind continued with Descartes and later Sartre and it is in reaction to these that Marcel and Ricoeur argue for the unity of mind and body. However, the body also received priority in this dualism, especially where the mind is understood in mere materialist terms. Human beings are then quickly reduced to their organs and bodily needs and functions.

Marcel on Ricoeur (and Ricoeur acknowledged it as well),² this article's unique contribution lies in the fact that it analyses and reveals this influence in much more detail, especially with regard to their shared understanding of embodied being, or incarnate existence, as opposed to a body-mind dualism.

In the first part of this article, we will focus on our time's trends and signs that hint at a recurring mind-body dualism. Aspects of contemporary culture like the influence of brain-computer interface (BCI) or brain-machine interface (BMI), neuroscience projects, and the popularity of sci-fi series and movies that visualise (and problematise as a critique on its possible, or likely, development) the separation of consciousness from our bodies will be discussed. This merits a discussion or article on its own, but the aim here is only to introduce this contemporary development to indicate the need to rethink arguments against the body-mind dualism as Ricoeur and Marcel offer.

In the second part, we will look at the arguments of Marcel and Ricoeur that run contra the possible body-mind dualism ideas of our time. Ricoeur's *Freedom and Nature* makes, for example, one of the most compelling arguments for the unity of our being. We will investigate how Marcel influenced this work of Ricoeur to get a better understanding of: i) Ricoeur's account of embodied being; ii) Marcel's philosophy and concept of incarnate existence as being; and finally, iii) to understand the importance of rejecting a mind-body dualism for our contemporary thought and living. The article will limit itself to these thinkers and will not be able to go into detail about the mind-body philosophical framework or history, the phenomenological debate about this dualism, or the debate within the neurophenomenological tradition. Discussions on these themes merit articles (books) on their own.

Contemporary Body-mind Dualism

In the introduction, we asked if the Fourth Industrial Revolution (amongst others) might cause us to return to a mind-body divide. This question is rooted in the development of so many recent technologies that blur the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres. Take, for example, the "Neuralink" project of Elon Musk, which is primarily a brain-machine interface (BMI), otherwise commonly referred to as brain-computer interface (BCI). Neuralink is, essentially, working towards designing a neural implant that will allow its host to control a computer, external or mobile device, primarily based on technology that harnesses micron-scale threads inserted into areas of the brain that control movement (Neuralink 2021a). Musk's company refers to this link as the "starting point of a new kind of brain interface" (Neuralink 2021b). The

2 In *Freedom and Nature*, Ricoeur included a dedication "à monsieur Gabriel Marcel, hommage respectueux" and made it clear that "meditation on Gabriel Marcel's work lies at the basis of the analyses in this book" (Ricoeur 1966, 15). Marcel and Ricoeur also published a joint work that discusses the points of convergence of their respective philosophies (*Entretiens Paul Ricoeur, Gabriel Marcel*, Ricoeur 1968), but the focus in this article is on specifically their shared understanding of incarnate existence.

forecast of Neuralink's BMI technology is to create increased levels of communication with the brain with the initial goal of treating a wide range of neurological disorders. Neuralink does not project any applications beyond medical treatment—at this moment—but the potential of creating novel avenues of communication does present itself with a possibility to enhance or control human cognitive abilities.³ BCI and BMI technologies within this context, therefore, hint strongly at some type of mind-body dualism, where the brain is situated in an incapacitated body, but can function with or through another (technological) body (i.e., computers or computer-mediated robotic limbs; and in the case of gaming a virtual body).

There might even be the option to transplant these abilities to a functional human body of, for example, a brain-dead patient. As it were, BCI technology is currently focused on a range of impairments like locked-in syndrome (LIS) and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) (Burwell, Sample, and Racine 2017; Coin, Mulder, and Dubljević 2020). Some forms of paralysis characterise both these diseases; however, sufferers still retain their consciousness. Here, the opportunity presents itself to discover novel means to measure the neurological transmissions that carry the data of movements. Friedrich et al. (2021), for instance, caution against the potential impact of human autonomy whereby these technologies could either enhance human autonomy or influence the faculties that guide “self-rule”, “self-governance” or “self-determination.” At this juncture, we are reminded of Cartesian dualism, especially the nature of the mind. Even though these technologies have a direct advantage for their users, we are faced with the implications of the Cartesian split.

Lee (2016, 30) claims that here, i.e., extending the mind beyond the confines of organic physiology, we are presented with a new context for analysing problems in the philosophy of the mind. At this point, it is too early to tell what the implications are for our understanding of the mind-body nexus. Yet, we can forecast a possible opening for transhuman developments. For example, BCI and BMI technologies present transhumanists with ground-breaking access to an unexplored domain of neural mapping. In this regard, Bostrom (2003, 5) claims that “technologies such as brain-computer interfaces and neuropharmacology could amplify human intelligence, increase emotional well-being”; we would also argue the amplification of transhuman physical capabilities. On the other hand, he warns that these technologies could cause great harm to humanity, possibly extinction. Bostrom possibly hints at the intensification of societal stratification.

3 Although Neuralink is focusing their efforts on medical advancements, the basic technology (i.e., BMI, BCI) will inevitably extend to other domains. Tallman (2020, 142) points to a range of possibilities through Electroencephalography (EEG) technology, which includes gaming, media controls, navigating operating systems, driving, restoring motor functions of paraplegics, visual prosthesis and health fitness. Essentially, BMI/BCI could both enhance existing and restore neural connections. As with the former, we are particularly concerned with the end result of these developments and hope for deep consideration of the ontological and ethical consequences.

To this end, science fiction writers and moviemakers have explored transhumanism and BCI/BMI technologies. The first example is the film *Transcendence* (2014), where the protagonist's consciousness is merged with a quantum computer (i.e., a representation of singularity) which ultimately infiltrates all humanity's technological systems and attempts to reshape the world according to its own logic. Interestingly, the singular consciousness acts contrary to its previous nature. Secondly, in the *Black Mirror* episode "White Christmas" (2014), we encounter BCI/BMI technology whereby, along the lines of visual prosthesis and consciousness storage, strikingly, one aspect of the technology is able to copy consciousness whereby it is simulated in a virtual environment. Within this virtual environment, a murder suspect could be "tricked" into confession or could be forced to become a virtual assistant (or a slave portrayed in the series). The following two examples were chosen for further discussion due to their extensive narrative developments and cosmologies. Most importantly, they point to the ultimate dangers of a transhuman society. Below we take a closer look at the Netflix series *Altered Carbon* (2018), based on Richard Morgan's Takeshi Kovacs cyberpunk novels (2003–2005) and *The Matrix* (1999), written by then known Larry and Andy Wachowski.⁴

A fascinating depiction of the intersections of BCI-like technology and Cartesian dualism is explored by Richard Morgan in his Takeshi Kovacs cyberpunk novels. Morgan ties the storylines of Takeshi Kovacs around digital human freight (DHF) technology, shortly referred to as stacks or cortical stacks. These cortical stacks are implanted at a young age to digitise human consciousness. The digitalisation of consciousness allows for re-sleeving, which means that bodies are either harvested or cultivated to await a new consciousness to be downloaded. Far more advanced, but possibly a projection of future BCI technologies, stack technology provides the possibility of immortality to the wealthy, as starkly portrayed in his works. Morgan's Meths, considered demi-gods, can afford to live centuries, and accumulate immense wealth, political influence, and knowledge. As a result, there is a great class divide regarding economic status and overall intelligence. Another implication of the virtually unlimited power of the Meths is that the proletariat becomes disposable and reliant on stack technology to ensure survival. Here, stack technology—which is synonymous with the mind—becomes the essence of survival. Similarly, due to their fragile nature, stacks can be easily destroyed. Humans, in Morgan's universe, are confronted with a different form of lived experience than we are in reality.

Another issue explored by Morgan is re-sleeving—particularly how stacks interact with their new sleeves and lived experience. As Kovacs was re-sleeved, he noticed "a tightness in the lungs that suggested a nicotine habit" at the beginning of the novel *Altered Carbon* he asserts to himself, "the little twinges and snags catch up with you later on, and if you're wise, you just live with them. Every sleeve has a history" (Morgan

4 Larry and Andy Wachowski now identify as trans women named Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski.

2003, 13). It appears that consciousness must deal with the “new host’s” incarnate existence, i.e., history and identity. Another striking example is that, upon release, Kovacs notices that the others that were re-sleeved with him had to face a surreal experience in their new bodies. Kovacs (Morgan 2001, 17) observes: “These people wouldn’t recognise their loved ones in their new sleeves; recognition would be left to the home comers, and for those who awaited them, the anticipation of reunion would be tempered with a cool dread at what face and body they might have to learn to love.” In this context, re-sleeving might pose new challenges for our understanding of being-in-the-world.

On the other hand, *The Matrix* depicts a grim future for BCI technology. In this film, the machines rose and placed humans in *The Matrix* to use them as a biological power source. *The Matrix* is a simulated virtual reality construct created by the machines to serve the function of an illusory reality to enslave in a suspended conscious state to keep humans alive. To this end, there were multiple versions of *The Matrix* with different variations to ensure human survival. The first was the Paradise Matrix, in which Agent Smith declares to Morpheus and Neo: “Some believe we lacked the programming language to describe your perfect world. But I believe that, as a species, human beings define their reality through suffering and misery. ... The perfect world was a dream that your primitive cerebrum kept trying to wake up from, which is why the Matrix was re-designed to this: the peak of your civilization” (IMDb 2002).

Although the Wachowskis’ main goal with *The Matrix* was to portray the possibility of a simulated reality, there are stark examples of the issues related to Cartesian dualism. This is illustrated in The Resistance, when the humans rejected *The Matrix*. These humans would tap into *The Matrix* and find other individuals to join The Resistance. To get others to join The Resistance, they would lure them and offer them the red pill, which would cause an algorithmic anomaly with the means to effectuate a rejection by the machines. For the first time, people would experience their natural embodied selves outside of the simulated reality.

Both these examples from science fiction deal with different forms of Cartesian dualism; however, significant challenges arise from the split created by technology in these examples. As will be explored below, human consciousness is inextricably linked to embodied existence, i.e., incarnate existence; when consciousness is separated from the body, it does not function within the confines of human perception. In other words, it changes the shape and nature of consciousness. There is no way of telling whether the enhancements will solve humanity’s crises of inequality. Our examples discussed above depict a stark reality between those that can control consciousness and those that are fortunate to extend their conscious existence. Curiously, our examples portray a dystopian future linked to this split.

Yet, science fiction is often mistakably understood as futurology; however, it serves the function of portraying a distorted human nature and the imminent threats that cutting-

edge technologies might bring to existence. Bioethicists (Burwell et al. 2017; Coin et al. 2020) have raised ethical concerns with regard to BCI technology, such as user safety, humanity and personhood, autonomy, stigma and normality, privacy and security, research ethics and informed consent, responsibility, regulation, and lastly justice. These issues, coupled with the examples above, indicate the perception, or at least longing and visualisation, that the mind (consciousness) can be separated from the body. The underlying assumption is body-mind dualism. Considering this, we want to revisit the arguments of Marcel and Ricoeur about the unity of our being.

Before moving on to the substantiation of Marcel and Ricoeur's formulation of incarnate existence, it is worth mentioning a significant contribution of Ricoeur in discussion with Jean-Pierre Changeux, a French neuroscientist. Ricoeur argues, in the chapter "Body and Mind: In Search of a Common Discourse" (Changeux and Ricoeur 2002), that the conception of the brain as a projective system can be understood neuronally or phenomenologically. He stresses that the "discourse of the mental includes the neuronal and not the other way around" (Changeux and Ricoeur 2002, 44). This is an approach consistently followed by Ricoeur in understanding the unity of mind and body.

Marcel's Notion of Being as Incarnate Existence

The aim of the discussion of Marcel's philosophy is twofold. It describes Marcel's theory of "being and having" (incarnate existence) and highlights aspects that influenced Ricoeur's philosophy, especially his first major book, *Freedom and Nature* (Ricoeur 1966). The significance of *Freedom and Nature* cannot be overstated because it initiates Ricoeur's methodological instrument to describe humans' being-in-the-world in a systematic philosophy (Kohák 1966, xiii). This project of Ricoeur was primarily inspired by the classic mind-body problem introduced by Descartes's *Cogito*. Ricoeur's key to addressing this problem was to frame the question as one between freedom (i.e., one's free or voluntary will) and nature (i.e., one's embodiment as a physical being and all the involuntary consequences therein) (Simms 2003, 10). By doing this, Ricoeur sought a pathway to "revitalise the classical problem of relations between [human] 'freedom' and 'nature,' by proposing between them a practical mediation" (Ricoeur 1978, 3). This links closely to Marcel's pursuit concerning the mystery of being, or incarnate existence, as a practical mediation, but Ricoeur chose to describe this through a phenomenological method to address Marcel's incoherencies (Ricoeur, Azouvi, and De Launay 1998, 24–25; Spiegelberg 1965, 575). But what does Marcel's "being and having" or "incarnate existence" entail?

Marcel's "being and having" is tied to his idea of the "spirit of abstraction." The term abstraction is used by Marcel (1952, 102) to explain the cognitive task to "make a preliminary clearing of the ground, and of course, this clearing of the ground can appear the strictly reasonable thing to do." According to Marcel, the mind must retain some preciseness (or abstraction as objectifying thought; instrumental reason) to reach some sort of goal. Yet, Marcel argues that this method of abstraction tends to become the

prevailing method for all inquiry. He calls this the “spirit of abstraction” and likens it to a “spirit”—a mode of interpreting reality and all the phenomena that are contained in it.

Such a spirit of abstraction implies that this mode of thinking or interpreting reality is suited for everything in the world. However, the problem for Marcel is that the spirit of abstraction is not suited for questions regarding ontology or being. Marcel (1952, 103) says that “as soon as we accord to any category, isolated from all other categories, an arbitrary primacy, we are victims of the spirit of abstraction” (Marcel 1952, 103). That said, the issue with the spirit of abstraction is when interpreting being through this mode, we tend to disengage with the subject (ourselves and other selves) and nature as if these things are instruments and a means to an end. Put otherwise: we objectify. Yet, although abstraction is required to make scientific work possible, the problem arises when applied to ontology. Marcel argues that it leads to the objectification of being with no chance of reconciling it again with the totality of its experience—leading to a loss of being.

A loss of being was of gravest concern for Marcel, and therefore he developed an alternative approach to understanding being. He argues that being is “at a level beneath all objectivity. But one would be guilty of serious confusion if he, therefore, concluded that being is *on the side of the subject*, for that would be just another way, completely fallacious, of localising being in a separate region of the world of things” (Marcel 1987, 275). Marcel has thus a fundamental problem with “being” objectified, in which way ever, but he also does not understand it as only something subjective. He proposes instead that being is beneath all objectivity. With being equated to an object and being studied in an objective way—in the spirit of abstraction—something of being will be lost, and Marcel wants to keep the mystery (or fullness) of being in play. Therefore, Marcel’s mystery of being brings one to one of the essential elements of Marcel’s work, namely the distinction between problems and mystery.

Marcel argues against the spirit of abstraction that phenomena can be differentiated by either a problem or a mystery. This distinction is made concerning the one differentiating, namely the subject. Marcel (1950, 117) explains that a *problem* is something that is placed before me as the subject. I have no direct association with it, and therefore it is something that I analyse before me. On the other hand, Marcel (1950, 117) explains that a *mystery* is something that I am involved in myself. There is no apparent distinction between what is before me or what I participate in. Put differently; a problem is objectified before the self, whereas a mystery involves the self. Therefore, Marcel (as cited by Keen 1967, 19) describes mystery as a “problem that encroaches on its own data.” Hence, to problematise something is to subject it to an analysis that removes the involvement of the self and to treat the problem as an independent reality. Marcel has no objections towards problematisation as such, except that it should not be applied to questions relating to ontology. Marcel, thus, proposes that when addressing the question of ontology, we need to approach it as a mystery. It would entail an approach of being, which is at a level beneath or above all objectivity. But what does this mean?

Marcel introduces the word “hypoproblematic” as a method to study the mystery of being. Hypoproblematicity concerning being, infers that “we are *beneath* the level where problems have their place” (Marcel 1987, 275). Being is not defined as hypoproblematic, but it provides clues for studying it, such as the directionality of interpreting ontology. Marcel introduces a complementary term, namely “hyperproblematic” (Busch 1987, 265). While hypoproblematic refers to *beneath* the problem, hyperproblematic refers to *above* the problem.

Regarding being, the hypoproblematic signals being as grounded in life, or immanence. Being in this sense refers to embodiment as incarnate existence. On the other hand, hyperproblematic refers to ontological exigence, i.e., the transcendence of my situation, which denotes fulfilment and plenitude. One can argue that it refers to the mystery of being in terms of the activities of the mind or free will (as Ricoeur will formulate it). The important thing to note here is that Marcel argues for a mediation, or middle ground, between the hypoproblematic and hyperproblematic to understand ontological mystery. He does not choose one of them but argues for an “and”—both in tension. A tension (daresay attention) is essential to keep the fullness or mystery of being intact. This “mediation” will also be crucial for Ricoeur’s dialectical understanding of our being’s freedom (will) AND nature (embodiment). But how does Marcel combine these two in mediation in contrast to the mind-body dualism?

We need to turn to Marcel’s theory of “being and having” to answer this question. We have seen that being cannot be problematised for Marcel and that it is instead a mystery. Mystery implies that being participates in existence, and this participation is contingent upon a body (note: this mystery must not be mistaken for the incomprehensible). Marcel argues for a complete embodied (incarnated existence), which stands opposed to the idea that “I have a body.” He notices that if we say we “have” a body, our bodies become possessions (cultivating ideas of an ontological dualism of being). Thus, when we say that we “have a body” we consequently objectify our bodies. Marcel counters this idea by proposing the notion of “being and having.” Here we find an interplay between the idea of being and the notion of possession. Marcel thereby sharply critiques the “I have a body” notion and argues that being without the body is non-being. For Marcel, the body cannot “be” body without a mind. His notion of “being AND having” is thus crucial, and Treanor (2006, 61) describes this notion of Marcel as follows: “insofar it is *my* body, is both something I have and something that I am, and it cannot be fully accounted for using either of these descriptions alone.” Marcel stresses, thus, the intrinsic relation between being *and* having. These two cannot be separated from one another—the one actualises the other.

To explain this notion of “being and having” further, we must note that: “I can look at my body in a dissociated manner and see it instrumentally. However, in doing so, in distancing myself from it to grasp it qua object qua something that I have, it ceases to be ‘my’ body” (Treanor 2006, 61). The consequence of objectification of the body is problematisation, which inevitably leads to the destruction of the subject (and the

fullness or mystery of being). However, as soon as one reflects upon one's being, the body becomes aware of itself. The awareness of our bodies opens an awareness of our being. In other words, as soon as the subject becomes aware of its body, it becomes aware of its incarnate existence. Therefore, Marcel (as cited by Treanor 2006, 61) says about the body that "... it can no longer be something that I have pure and simple—the body is also me, it is what I am." However, the thinking of my body as being, already creates this tension between "thinking" and "body"—with the mind-body dualism looming. Ricoeur also notices this when he says: "I notice the organ of acting and as soon as the acting reflects upon itself in effort, I have already relapsed into a nascent dualism" (Ricoeur 1978, 8). For Ricoeur, this "split" is not an ontological one, but rather one of "what I want" (freedom; voluntary) and "what is possible" (nature; involuntary). It is a case of "having and being" (Marcel) and "freedom and nature" (Ricoeur) that is mediated (Marcel) and in dialectical tension (Ricoeur) that underlies our being as a mystery.

Marcel is essentially saying that if we treat the body as something that holds us (as if separated from the body) back, then we inevitably objectify the body. This will create the mind-body dualism again. Marcel instead proposes that we think about our bodies as incarnated existence—that which makes existence possible. To think about life is to think about all the existential experiences through our bodies. It is not something that holds us back, but that which enables existence. If we do not think about our existence in such "incarnate existential" terms, we will sadly continue to try and conquer our bodies with the mind. Marcel acknowledges that this "nascent dualism" (in Ricoeur's words) will always form part of the way we experience being. Still, he emphasises that we should work towards a vision of the totality of being. To think of the body and mind as a totality, is what "having and being" does. Without such a reflection upon the totality of our being, we will reduce existence to its parts, i.e., mind or body.

Marcel ultimately argues against approaches like the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, and Ricoeur follows Marcel's approach. He finds, however, new ways and concepts to describe this "mystery of being"—but this with the same focus on incarnate existence.

Ricoeur's Notion of Being as Incarnate Existence

Ricoeur shares an important interest with Marcel to evade the objectification of being. However, one major difference is that Ricoeur takes the core of Marcel's idea of the "mystery of being" and transforms the theme into a systematic description. Ricoeur seeks structure to describe the same themes (or at least qualitatively similar) of Marcel. Ricoeur accepts, for example, Marcel's idea of "being and having" as the primary theme of embodiment. He agrees with Marcel's formulation of "I am my body, I have a body," as not separated. Ricoeur describes this idea in different terminology: being as embodiment (I am my body) gets formulated as the "nature" or involuntary part of our existence, and the "having of a body," the thinking about it, is described by Ricoeur as the will or voluntary aspect of being. None is, however, separated from the body.

Neither the mind nor the body is objectified into two independent realities. The voluntary (freedom; will) and the involuntary (nature) motions are identified with both mind and body. There is a reciprocity between them that creates the mystery of being as one distinct reality. Thus, the body is both something that I have and which I am.

Although Ricoeur addresses the same concerns as Marcel (clearly influenced by Marcel), he differs in his method by providing a systematic phenomenological description, especially in *Freedom and Nature*. One can argue that Ricoeur's ontological description through a phenomenological approach actualises Marcel's mystery of being. It is a methodology that is described as a "systematic philosophy of man's [*sic*] being in the world" (Kohák 1966, xiii), and Ricoeur immediately addresses the challenges posed by dualism head-on. Ricoeur recognises that dualism—regardless of its end—is inherently disruptive because of its reductionist nature. A philosophy that emphasises one or the other is not conducive to a holistic understanding of being.

Ricoeur's alternative approach has led to the recasting of ontology as one not only mediated between having and being (as Marcel formulates it) but one that entails a dialectical tension between freedom (i.e., one's free or voluntary will) and nature (i.e., one's embodiment as a physical being and all of the involuntary consequences therein). By framing being in such an embodied way, Ricoeur could have discovered a pathway to "revitalise the classical problem of relations between 'freedom' and 'nature', by proposing between them a 'practical' mediation" (Ricoeur 1978, 3). Ricoeur thereby steers away from terms that polarise being into two distinct entities and describe two modes of being instead. Each one has integrative essences, which are then further developed by Ricoeur.

Ricoeur divides the essences of lived experience into two categories: those we have complete control over and those we have no control over. Ricoeur considers, here, life as experienced through body and mind. There is a clear struggle between what one wants to do and what one can do. For example, one might want to exercise but is too tired. Put differently, if I want to exercise, I would have to take control of my body. This is one of the core problems the nascent dualism creates, which Marcel also discusses.

Ricoeur approaches the problem from a different angle. He questions whether the human will can be free. By examining the possibility of freedom, he looks beyond what mind and body are and instead studies how these two elements are meshed in existence, especially concerning freedom. He argues that it is evident that there is some sort of reciprocity between what was commonly called mind and body; the reciprocity between what he then calls voluntary and involuntary needs to be understood to understand the nature of being. The voluntary should not be equated entirely with the mind or the involuntary with the body. The various moments or modes of the will (decision, movement, and consent) are actualised through the self's voluntary and involuntary motions, manoeuvring one in the world. In this approach, he readily uses insights from psychology and biology because "the body is better known as an empirical object

elaborated by experimental sciences” (Ricoeur 1966, 8). His aim with this approach is to uncover “intentional structures embodied in empirical descriptions” (Ricoeur 1966, 8) and to demonstrate how the *Cogito* becomes actual within the world.

Ricoeur identifies three integrative aspects of willing: to decide, to move, and to consent. Importantly, these aspects (or modes) do not function in consecutive order but rather in a reciprocal interplay. In Ricoeur’s terms, the will is equated with a project, a movement with intent or directed action, which is capacitated in my being (Ricoeur 1966, 7). To say, “I will” means “I decide” (choice and motivation), “I move, or not move, my body” (which sets the voluntary body into motion), and “I consent” (to necessities which are not dependant on us) (Ricoeur 1966, 7). At first, the project, which is the action and perceived willingness performed by the subject, has not manifested but is potential. The project only becomes real through voluntary movement, whether I decide to do it or not.

These three modes of willing, freedom and nature are ultimately reconciled in paradox or practical mediation. Therefore, freedom can be understood through three modes bound by this paradox: freedom of choice, freedom of movement, and freedom of consent (Simms 2003, 14). The paradox manifests as its involuntary correlate binds freedom, and the voluntary correlate binds nature. Firstly, freedom to choose is guided or negated by motive. Secondly, freedom to move is facilitated or negated by corporeal existence, for example, physical or emotional capacity. Then lastly, consenting is “the voluntary act of surrendering freedom” (Simms 2003, 14). Ricoeur (1966, 486) asserts that “these limited concepts have no other function here than to help us understand, by contrast, the condition of a will which is reciprocal with an involuntary.”

These findings have far-reaching implications. Taken together, the modes of willing provide another pathway to understanding how body and mind (will; consciousness) are seen as one. One cannot understand consciousness without knowing how the body influences its existence, and vice versa; when we will, we intend. Intent potentially shifts towards motivation, which activates movement. However, movement is governed by absolute consent. By implication, to say “I” means “I am my body.” Existence is always incarnated (as Marcel argues). It is embodied. Being cannot be described in a “spirit of abstraction” but remains a “mystery” in the complicated unity of body and mind.

Marcel uses “being and having” to describe the unity, embodied, or incarnated existence, of being. Ricoeur follows the same line of thought but uses different terms. Ricoeur uses the terms *voluntary* and *involuntary* to describe the essential nature of *willing*, an integrative part of human existence. Ricoeur then elaborates on the integrative phenomenon of willing through three modes: decision that is actualised in movement; then consent that fulfils the former. In the mode of willing, these three moments are always present in a state of tension between the voluntary and the involuntary. Through this description, Ricoeur demonstrates convincingly that mind and body cannot be taken apart. Yes, to an extent, they can be described apart, but they are

to be described together to describe being. They form a mysterious whole as incarnated existence. The practical mediation gives rise to the mystery of being because there is no way to determine how these aspects function together and why they cannot function apart. Marcel carefully develops this theme, and Ricoeur carries it through.⁵

Concluding Thoughts

As Fourth Industrial technologies (like BCI and BMI) are introduced, we are again faced to a certain extent with a possible Cartesian dualism, but now with carnal duality new to the human civilisation. Human limitations bound the recurring theme of dualism throughout history, but now we face dualism with the inherent capabilities to augment our abilities as rational beings. For now, scientists are attempting feats of neurological breakthroughs that can cure previously incurable diseases. At the cutting edge of neuroscience, minds can be freed (or at least increasingly) from the confines of their despondent embodied existences. Confined minds plagued with meaninglessness can then reconquest their lived experience and may again face existence with a sense of value. If this could be (perhaps prematurely) taken as a metaphor for human existence, one might ask if this offers humanity a renewed vision of life—a Promethean act, if you will. Can scientists alter the fundamental nature of human existence? Can humans break free from the absurdity of existence? If this is the case, philosophers are tasked with exploring the full view of the issue at hand and arguments against this body-mind dualism (like those of Ricoeur and Marcel) should be reinterpreted in this context.

We focused, thus, in this article on Ricoeur and Marcel’s understanding of incarnate existence. With the guidance of Marcel in his thinking of incarnate existence, Ricoeur offers us a starting point to follow the developments of this newly found technology from his more systematic understanding of ontology (than Marcel). Don Ihde (1971, 8) asserts that it was primarily Marcel’s mystery of being (along with the underlying themes) that influenced *Freedom and Nature* and its strong emphasis on the unity of being. Ihde (1971, 8) further indicates that Ricoeur’s early work closely followed the Marcellian teaching concerning *incarnate existence* (“I am my body”) but “diverged from it to a degree in that he considered it a premature solution to the philosophical problem of the body.” Ihde denotes that Ricoeur felt that Marcel’s approach was too broad and should be dealt with systematically. Therefore, Ricoeur developed Marcel’s theme of incarnate existence more extensively in three volumes, i.e., *Philosophy of the Will*. First, *Freedom and Nature* through the means of a pure phenomenology (bracketing Fault and Transcendence, which Marcel sporadically addressed) allowed for an understanding of the fundamental possibilities of being. Following *Freedom and Nature* was *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil*, where Fault and Transcendence are placed in brackets. These two volumes prepared the way for Ricoeur’s “linguistic

5 Where Marcel ends with mystery of being, Ricoeur carries on to the theme of fallibility. This is where *Fallible Man* finds its roots: the instability of the self not being able to act in pure volition creates an environment for fallibility.

turn.”⁶ Here, Ricoeur becomes so fascinated by symbols and language because of their significance for interpreting existence that he feels it is only through an understanding of language that we can adequately understand being qua incarnate existence. However, the scope of this article focuses on *Freedom and Nature*, the main proponent of Ricoeur’s theory of embodiment; research to follow will focus on how BCI and BMI are to be viewed from the perspective of Fault and Transcendence.

Being, for Ricoeur, is actualised and is comprehensible through voluntary (freedom) and involuntary (nature). Carnal existence, commonly perceived as mind-body, is a conglomeration of voluntary and involuntary essences manifested in three modes of willing, which blur the lines between mind and body. The will, the actualised *Cogito*, is characterised by its ability to decide, move, and consent—each characterised by voluntary and involuntary qualities. Therefore, the will cannot function when voluntary and involuntary are separated. If, and whenever, these are separated, human existence will take on such a new form that it will not be recognisable. In Ricoeur’s emphasis on the will here, the influence of Husserl’s eidetic phenomenological approach becomes clear. It is in this phenomenological analysis towards an integral experience of the *Cogito* that Ricoeur eventually aims to overcome the body-mind dualism. The influence of Marcel in this process was, however, the main focus of this article.

As mentioned above, BCI and BMI technology now offers the possibility of splitting or detaching the voluntary and involuntary with the end goal of freedom. In the case of LIS and ALS, it is a wonderful opportunity to present the imprisoned mind with a fuller life, but what will be the case if this technology is extended to feed the human need for evolution? Will humanity be free from its inefficient human existence? Will humanity be able to expand its cognitive capabilities beyond what the organic mind could facilitate? Both *Altered Carbon* and *The Matrix* have explored the implication of technology. Bodies become disposable, knowledge comes without effort, and eventually, inequality rises. From Ricoeur’s perspective, human freedom is freedom with limits; limitations set by its very embodied nature. Along these lines, we argue that enhancing one (or more) aspect/s of being will inevitably lead to a distorted ontology—unless these technologies are equally distributed and developed according to strict internationally agreed upon regulation.

We argued, however, against such mind-body dualism by considering Marcel and Ricoeur’s work. In their “incarnate existence” we found, for example, a more holistic notion of freedom as relational, and not only situated in the mind or body. Verhoef and Visser state, for example: “Freedom, as the ability to make decisions, movement and give consent—in Ricoeur’s scheme—fundamentally entails bodily aspects like imagination, the affective, language, and human needs (desire, pain and fear), skills and habits” (Verhoef and Visser 2020, 33). While they explore the importance of body-mind

6 Kearney (2015, 15) argues that after Ricoeur investigates the flesh in *Freedom and Nature* and *Fallible Man* his interest moves towards hermeneutics of the symbol and its subsequent development towards the hermeneutics of the text, the so-called “linguistic turn.”

unity by looking at the experiences of sex trafficking victims, this could be applied to various other aspects of society, and it indicates the importance of rejecting a mind-body dualism for our contemporary thought and living. In our contemporary age, the mind-body dualism's seemingly continuous (and increasingly?) returning vicissitudes make this a project of huge importance and extremely relevant.

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