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An Eidetic Phenomenology of Emotions: Notes on the Chiasmatic Character of the Emotional Dimension of Existence

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ABSTRACT. This article critically examines Paul Ricœur's eidetic phenomenology of emotions. With reference to his early phenomenological analysis of the will, developed in his work entitled Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary (1950/1960), emotions will be understood as involuntary aspects involved in the essential structures of willing. My analysis will be divided into two parts. First, I will discuss Ricœur's conception of emotions as tied to his sustained attention to the theme of embodiment as entailing activity (e.g., wanting, moving, doing) and resistance (internal and external). In particular, emotions will be considered in relation to Ricœur's first two moments of willing: decision and voluntary movement. I will show that emotions are linked to needs, motives, and values, conceived as the body's involuntary dimensions correlated to decision, and I will explain their role as organs for effective action. In this context, I will stress the connection between emotions and imagination based on embodiment, as well as Ricœur's rejection of the opposition between emotionality and rationality. Then, the second part will focus on Ricœur's distinction between feelings and emotions and on his careful analysis of the difference between emotions and passions. These reflections will lead to Ricœur's study of wonder as the most basic emotional attitude. Ricœur's phenomenology of emotions offers rich insights for any philosophical reflection on the ubiquitous nature of emotions and emotional experiences.

Keywords: emotions, imagination, embodiment, feeling, passion

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Introduction: Delving into Paul Ricœur's Phenomenology of Emotions

"The true function of emotion [...] is to incline the will to action."[1]

"As soon as the passions inject themselves into emotion,
I am beside myself, not in the sense that I turn towards another thing,
but rather in the sense that I am deprived of myself."[2]

Emotions are complex dimensions playing an essential role in the development of our personal experiences and in the configuration of our collective life. In other words, emotions are at the core of human existence: individual identities, behaviors, and attitudes, as well as our group dynamics and social interactions, are constantly imbued with emotional tones. Emotions might be expressed in subtle, implicit, or indirect ways, which require the interpretation of non-verbal and contextual cues, or directly experienced through bodily reverberations (e.g., crying, trembling, sweating, etc.) and verbal statements referring to oneself, to objects, and situations, which provide quite precise information about the specific forms of emotions.[3] Yet, emotions can also be repressed, i.e., consciously or unconsciously, bottled up by the individual through various means. In the Western philosophical tradition, from ancient Greek (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, the Epicureans) and Medieval Christian philosophers (e.g., Augustine, Aquinas, Scotus), through Renaissance (e.g., Machiavelli, Montaigne, Campanella) and Modern thinkers (e.g., Descartes, Hobbes, Smith, Hume), up to the 19th and 20th century authors of the contemporary phenomenological tradition (e.g., Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty) and the current philosophical theories on the cognitive nature of emotions (e.g., Nussbaum, Salomon, Marks), the emotional sphere of human life has been investigated as a multifaceted and heterogeneous dimension, as reflecting aspects of physiology, cognition, psychology, and socio-cultural processes.[4] The broad and challenging territories of emotions continue to stimulate philosophical debates and interdisciplinary conversations not only within the humanities but also between these and the empirical sciences (e.g., neuroscience, cognitive science, evolutionary psychology). The study of the spectral nature of

[1] Paul Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1966, p. 260.

[2] Ibidem, p. 61.

[3] See Ani Stepanyan, "On the Verbal Expression of Emotions: Language and Emotion Interplays," in *Armenian Folia Anglistika*, no. 10, 1-2, 2014, pp. 96-101.

[4] See Andrea Scarantino (ed.), *Emotion Theory: The Routledge Comprehensive Guide: Volume I. History, Contemporary Theories, and Key Element*s, New York, Routledge, 2024.

emotions has led some authors to reject the oversimplified categorization of these as either positive or negative phenomena, as essentially good or bad, namely as having an intrinsic ethical nature.[5] Emotions have been defined in many different and sometimes contrasting ways: as embodied aspects blended with human nature, as forms of perception and proprioception, i.e., as related to the registration of changes in the body (e.g., tiredness, exhaustion, dizziness, etc.), as visceral reactions, as involving propositional attitudes and judgments, as rational or as having a rational structure going beyond bodily changes, as having narrative structures, or as associated to neurobiological properties and dynamics. Yet, philosophical studies about emotions have been recently extended beyond anthropology, giving rise to the examination of the emotional sphere in the fields of animal ethics (Midgley, Aaltola, Acampora),[6] environmental ethics (Candiotto, Beran, Forsberg),[7] ethics of artificial intelligence (Coeckelbergh),[8] and food philosophy (Kaplan),[9] to mention a few.

Acknowledging the richness of the vibrant tapestry of debates on the emotional realm of human life, this article aims at offering a critical examination of the contribution of Paul Ricœur's work to the contemporary philosophical analysis of emotions. We must recognize and confront the fact that Ricœur has been criticized for having left his theory of emotions undeveloped.[10] As Solomon writes, "Ricœur, unlike Descartes, has never bothered to write anything like a 'treatise on the passions,' [or developed] a theory of emotion, despite the fact that his entre philosophical enterprise is, in an important sense, supported by them."[11] Whereas, indeed, Ricœur does not provide us with a systematic account of emotions or with a work entirely dedicated to them, I disagree with Salomon's criticism according to

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5 See Giovanni Stanghellini, René Rosfort, *Emotions and Personhood: Exploring Fragility – Making Sense of Vulnerability*, 2013, p. 7.

6 Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1983. Elisa Aaltola, *Varieties of Empathy: Moral Psychology and Animal Ethics*, London and New York, Rowman and Littlefield, 2018. Ralph Acampora, *Corporal Compassion: Animal Ethics and Philosophy of Body*, Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh University Press, 2006.

7 Ondřej Beran, Laura Candiotto, Niklas Forsberg, Antony Fredriksson, David Rozen (eds.), *The Philosophy of Environmental Emotions: Grief, Hope, and Beyond*, New York, Routledge, 2024.

8 Mark Coeckelbergh, "Moral Appearances: Emotions, Robots, and Human Morality," in *Ethics and Information Technology*, 12, no. 3, 2010, pp. 235-241.

9 David Kaplan, *Food Philosophy: An Introduction*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2019.

10 See Robert C. Solomon, "Paul Ricœur on Passion and Emotion (with a reply by Ricœur)," in Charles Reagan (ed.), *Studies in the Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1979, pp. 2-3. See Beata Toth, *The Heart has Its Reasons. Towards a Theological Anthropology of the Heart*, Eugene, Cascade Books, 2016, p. 54.

11 Solomon, "Paul Ricœur on Passion and Emotion (with a reply by Ricœur)," p. 2.

which Ricœur's analysis of emotions is deficient. On the contrary, scattered across his writings, Ricœur's philosophical account of emotions is rich, nuanced, and extensive, it is interlaced with the major debates concerning the conceptualization of emotions, and it also offers useful methodologies and resources that can be extended to the study of emotions as enmeshed with contemporary issues, e.g., the environmental crisis, the concern for animal treatment, the use of artificial intelligence, media and technology, etc. I do not intend to provide here an exhaustive treatment of Ricœur's understanding of emotions in his philosophical anthropology, to present a comprehensive study of his considerations on emotions in the light of the "affective turn" or "emotion revolution" in the humanities and social sciences,[12] or to prove the possibility to apply his work to the analysis of today's most pressing challenges in which emotions are involved. Rather, my article has the more modest goal of exploring Ricœur's early phenomenological study of emotions as affective phenomena involved in the structures of human volition. According to him, emotions cannot be understood outside the dialectical play between freedom and necessity, embodiment and cognition, and without paying attention to the reproductive and productive functions of imagination as mediating our interactions with the world. The analysis that I aim at developing stands in continuity with my recently published article "Paul Ricœur's Recovery of Affectivity: Feeling at the Crossroads of Carnal Imagination and the Corporeal Condition,"[13] whose scope was to discuss the relationship between the affective dimension of experience and imagination with reference to Ricœur's phenomenology of the will and its essential structures, i.e., the voluntary and the involuntary. It is in the context of his project of youth directed towards the development of the philosophy of the will, that Ricœur began his inquiry into the nature and the role of emotions in human life as marked by finitude and fallibility. More precisely, his theory of emotions is a constitutive part of his broader analysis of the will and affectivity, which is multifaceted and dispersed throughout his writings. Therefore, emotions are not examined by Ricœur exclusively in his mature ethics, in which he discusses the connection between the ethical conduct of life and the emotions of self-esteem, sympathy, and solicitude, or in his moral theory of judgment, in which he focuses on respect as an emotion expressing one's loyalty to the moral law. Thirty years before examining emotions in the practical fields of ethics and moral philosophy, which are referred respectively to the study of the teleological aim of

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

[13] Maria Cristina Clorinda Vendra, "Paul Ricœur's Recovery of Affectivity: Feeling at the Crossroads of Carnal Imagination and the Corporeal Condition," in *Studia UBB Philosophia*, 70, no. 1, 2025, pp. 63-81.

living a good life with and for others in just institutions and to the explanation of the deontological obligation to respect universal norms, i.e., to the Aristotelian and to the Kantian philosophical traditions,[14] Ricœur already started to articulate an account of emotions as embodied phenomena involved in the dynamics of human volition, in its practical and affective orientations towards the world.

It seems clear to me, then, that Ricœur's mature reflections on emotions as presented in his works on narrative theory,[15] selfhood,[16] recognition,[17] and memory,[18] would remain truncated outside of the reference to his early phenomenological writings. In his phenomenology of the will and human fallibility, as anticipating the hermeneutical examination of fault, emotions are discussed as involved into the structures of the dialectics of activity and passivity of the will, of effort and resistance, and as related to our affective fragility, i.e., to the disproportion of the human being in feeling and choosing between vital demands of pleasure and spiritual desires of happiness. Whereas in Ricœur's eidetic study of the will developed in *Freedom and Nature. The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950/1966), emotions are described as involuntary dimensions of actions, i.e., as interlaced with our decisions and our body's acts or motions, in his empirics of the will initiated in *Fallible Man* (1960/1965), emotions are explained in the context of the affective discrepancy between aspects of finitude and infinitude at the heart of human existence. In the empirical description of the will, emotional life is understood as "the site not only for feelings but also for all masks, dissimulations and mystifications,"[19] i.e., for passions as corruptions of the will in its concrete, historical expressions. One must acknowledge that in Ricœur's view, emotions are not essentially illusionary, harmful, or irrational dimensions from which we must take distance in order to live a fully rational, objective, and morally good life. As he explains, human affectivity is "the neutral fundamental keyboard upon which both innocence and fault may play."[20] Contrary to any opposition between reason and emotions, these are understood as modes of our existence as wounded beings,[21] i.e., as suffering and capable agents engaged with the world through thoughts and feelings. Emotions have a chiasmatic character as long as these are involved in

[14] See Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 169-296.

[15] See Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative. Volume 1*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984. Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative. Volume 2*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1985. Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative. Volume 3*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988.

[16] See Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*.

[17] See Paul Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2005.

[18] See Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004.

[19] Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricœur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, London, Continuum, 2009, p. 110.

[20] Paul Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, Chicago, Henry Regnery, 1967, p. xvi.

[21] See Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970, p. 439.

the connection between thinking, feeling, and experiencing, on the basis of our embodied existence. Without denying the implications of Ricœur's shift from the eidetic level of description of the structures of the will to his empirical account of the will in terms of disproportion and fallibility on the development of his phenomenological understanding of emotions, I will limit my analysis to the descriptive stage of his phenomenology.

To offer a finely articulated analysis of Ricœur's eidetic phenomenology of emotions, this article will be divided into two parts. First, I will examine Ricœur's understanding of emotions as tied to his sustained attention to the theme of embodiment as entailing activity (e.g., wanting, moving, doing) and resistance (internal and external). In particular, Ricœur touches upon the topic of emotions, albeit rather summarily, in the context of his study of the body's involuntary dimensions correlated to decision seen as the first moment of willing, i.e., in his account of organic needs, bodily motives, and vital values. Then, in the consideration of the second moment of the will, that of voluntary movement or effective action, Ricœur extends his preceding analysis of emotions, defining them as involuntary dimensions, as organs of willing. By eliciting and motivating movement, emotions are complementary to reproductive imagination, as modeled on the representation of an absent original previously experienced, and to productive imagination, as engendering transformation and realization of new contexts. For Ricœur, emotions are intertwined with thoughts, beliefs, and imaginative representations. Following his line of thought, in the second part I will draw on the distinction between emotion and feeling, and on the difference between emotion and passion. Although these phenomena are all part of the affective dimension of our existence, there are significant differences that must be addressed to avoid the conceptual confusion that often attends theories of emotions. Moreover, I will analyze what Ricœur conceives as the most basic emotional attitude: wonder. This elemental emotion is accompanied by the work of imagination as supporting the affective anticipations of goods and evils. The representations of good and evil offered by imagination awaken desire, which once appropriated by the will, "inclines without compelling"[22] animating the body's directional experience and exchange with the world. These reflections will lead us to consider the ubiquitous nature of emotions and emotional experiences, opening up the path from eidetic description to the empirical investigation of the will.

[22] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 130.

1. Emotions as Organs of the Will: Emotions through Imagination, Motivation, and Movement

It is in his first major work entitled *Freedom and Nature. The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950/1966), that Ricœur develops his phenomenological account of emotions as dimensions related to the structures of the will, the voluntary and the involuntary. Broadly speaking, emotions are intertwined with the body and the involuntary that singles out of it, and with the voluntary as functioning in relation to the involuntary aspects of experience. Involved in the process of realization of our projects, which are shaped by the three essential moments of the will – decision, movement, and consent – emotions are conceived by Ricœur as involuntary correlates of voluntary actions. By proposing an existential extension of eidetic phenomenology Ricœur puts into question Husserl's analysis of consciousness and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological study of perception as long as these theories remain faithful to the phenomenological primacy of representation. On the one hand, Ricœur appreciates the rigor of Husserl's phenomenological method and his analysis concerning the intentionality of consciousness as directed towards the world. On the other hand, he follows Merleau-Ponty's resolute refusal of the idealistic tendencies of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as presented in his later works, including *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1935-8/1970).[24] Certainly, Ricœur relies on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception and to his conception of freedom as limited by our embodied existence in the world. Freedom is incarnate in the sense that it is "a freedom appropriating a body and a world,"[25] and it is limited by the contexts of its occurrence. Hence, "freedom is not a pure act, it is, in each of its moments, activity and receptivity. It constitutes itself by receiving what it does no produce: values, capacities, and sheer nature. In this our freedom is *only* human."[26] However, rather than focusing on perception, Ricœur uses descriptive phenomenology to examine the structures of the human will, thereby leading to an understanding of the affective and practical dimensions of experience. He claims that "even in the obscure forest of emotions, even in the course of the blood stream, phenomenology gambles on the possibility of thinking and naming."[27] More precisely, Ricœur's eidetics of the volitional domain aims at discussing the total experience of the Cogito as including affectivity and its processes. As he argues, "the reconquest of the Cogito must be complete: we can only discover the

[24] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1970.

[25] Erazim Kohák, "Translator's Introduction: The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur," in Paul Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. xxii.

[26] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 484.

[27] Paul Ricœur, "Methods and Tasks of a Phenomenology of the Will" [1952], in *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1967, p. 216.

body and the involuntary which it sustains in the context of the Cogito itself. The Cogito's experience, taken as a whole, includes 'I desire,' 'I can,' 'I intend,' and in a general way, my existence as a body. A common subjectivity is the basis for the homogeneity of voluntary and involuntary structures."[29] In the capacity to decide and to project actions, human beings are not absolutely free, but they are confronted by constraints which circumscribes our choices, projects, and actions. Thus, in Ricœur's view, the human being is not a self-grounded being, i.e., a supreme statement of thought and reason (*homo cogitans*), but a humble and earth-bound willing being (*homo volens*) who has the power to do act while dealing with the possibilities and the limitations of the incarnate existence. For him, our actions are shaped by the reciprocity between the voluntary and involuntary dimensions of the will, i.e., between the exercise of our freedom and the limits imposed by our ontological constitution and the resistance of the external world. As embodied beings, when we decide, choose, or act, we are at the same time passively situated in the world and actively participating to it. As Ricœur observes, the body is linked to the will which at once "submits to it and govern it."[31] The world in which we are situated as observers and actors, is not a neutral space of perception of objects as things objectively described by means of unbiased physical qualities, e.g., length, weight, width, etc. In other words, human life is not "a dry exercise of churning out projects that are merely willed by, me, but my joyous, desiring, wondering engagement with the world."[32] Inscribed in "the texture of the world"[33] as a place inhabited, interpreted, and affectively shared with others, we are carnally involved with what surrounds us and we are capable to give meanings to it. Our experiences are constantly permeated by affects, emotions, and desires. As such, "my experience of an object is not merely a question of *what* I experience, but also *how* this object appears to me and *how* it affects me in my act of experiencing it."[34] Otherwise put, "experiences are always qualified in some way or another. They matter to the experiencing subject; we are always, more or less dramatically, touched and motivated by what we experience."[35] It is in dealing with the qualitative character of experience that Ricœur sketches his phenomenological view of emotions, which lend "an affective coloring and vibration to my encounter with the world, helping to bridge the distance between perception and action."[36]

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[29] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 9.
[31] Ibidem, p. 10.
[32] James L. Marsh, "Ricœur's Phenomenology of Freedom as an Answer to Sartre," in David Kaplan (ed.), *Reading Ricœur*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2008, p. 20.
[33] Kohák, "Translator's Introduction: The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur," p. xx.
[34] Stanghellini, Rosfort, *Emotions and Personhood: Exploring Fragility – Making Sense of Vulnerability*, p. 42.
[35] Ibidem.
[36] Kohák, "Translator's Introduction: The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur," p. xxi.

In Ricœur's view, emotions are involuntary dimensions of actions, rooted in our corporeal existence and linked to the primordial spontaneity of the body. Like other involuntary aspects of willing, emotions "acquire a complete significance only in relation to a will, which they solicit, dispose, and generally affect, and which in turn determines their significance, that is, determines them by its choice, motives them by its effort, and adopt them by its consent."[37] It is in the description of the act of deciding as connected to our "primordial *in esse*,"[38] i.e., to the original experience of our being and belonging to the world as embodied beings, that Ricœur discusses the theme of emotions with reference to the body's involuntary dimensions of vital needs, bodily motives, and organic values. *Needs* are not understood as impulses, inner sensations, instincts or reflexes, but as lacks that are appropriated and directed by the will. Needs are urges involved into the realization of a project and related to the emotional experiences of fulfillment and happiness, lack and pain, etc. Prospective emotions connected to needs are made possible on the basis of the link between our previous experiences and the work of imagination. As Ricœur observes, "we are led to seek the crossroads of need and willing in the imagination – the imagination of the absent thing and of the action directed toward the thing"[40] as something laden with value. More precisely, "we cannot imagine a pleasure as absent and not as given without having a foretaste of it in the form of motive emotional sketches, of an affective reliving which is some sense makes it present and given […] The present feeling is the "affective image," the representative, the *analogon* […] of future pleasure."[41] With reference to Pradines's work *Traité de la psychologie Générale* (1943),[42] Ricœur concludes that "the feelings derouted by emotion are complex affections tied to imaginative anticipations of pleasure and pain. They are not themselves pleasure or pain, but manifest them affectively."[43] Imaginative representations give emotions "a vitality, flesh, and a quasi-presence."[44] Our needs are connected to *motives*. Motivation is not conceived by Ricœur "as explanation, as a process of reasoning,"[45] but as an "inner move (from the Latin *movere*), in the sense of emotional movement"[46] emerging from the body. Although there is a continuity between bodily motives and emotions, as "indicative of the connection

[37] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 4.
[38] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 103.
[40] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 95.
[41] Ibidem, p. 101.
[42] Maurice Pradine, *Traité de la psychologie Générale*, Paris, PUF, 1946.
[43] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 252.
[44] Ibidem, p. 313.
[45] Vinicio Busacchi, *Habermas and Ricœur's Depth Hermeneutics: From Psychoanalysis to a Critical Human Science*, Cham, Springer, 2016, p. 62.
[46] Ibidem.

between the body's visceral disturbances and the will's inclination to act,"[47] Ricœur draws a clear distinction between these two dimensions. Whereas motives offer goals , emotions do not "contribute to any ends that do not already make themselves felt in needs and quasi-needs."[49] As he puts it, emotion involves motivation and "gives the ends that are already present before consciousness a certain physical prestige whose efficacy is partly of the order of nascent movement."[51] Imagination is implicated in the figuration of different elements that can contribute to the development of our motives, it "creates a realm for comparison and evaluation of the various elements that act as motivating forces."[52] Imagination is a necessary dimension for the dynamism of acting to the point that, as Ricœur stresses, "without imagination there is no action."[53] Yet, involved in the dynamics of decision, emotions are linked to the *organic value*s of life arising from the body's spontaneity and essentially directed towards one's preservation of life and wellbeing. Ricœur specifies that "all other values assume a serious, dramatic significance through a comparison with the values that enter history through my body."[54] As he puts it, "emotion gives to all valuation pertaining to other levels of value an organic echo, so that all sensibility can gradually adopt, by analogy or by resonance, the language of pleasure and pain."[55] Emotions amplify in the body valuation and judgment: "only a world about which I care, in which I intend, can shock me."[56] However, Ricœur does not embrace the view of emotions as evaluative judgments, because he considers that even though emotions and judgments are inseparable, "a judgment is made before emotion proper."[57] With reference to Scheler's theory of the emotional a priori, according to which our relation to things and to ourselves is not primarily cognitive, but rather emotional, Ricœur observes that "there exists a certain emotional revelation of values in a given situation."[58] Nonetheless, contrary to Scheler's view, Ricœur argues that the emotional intuition is dependent of "the

[47] Roger Savage, *Paul Ricœur's Philosophical Anthropology as Hermeneutics of Liberation. Freedom, Justice, and the Power of Imagination*, New York, Routledge, 2020, p. 46.
[49] Ibidem, p. 251.
[51] Ibidem.
[52] David M. Kaplan, *Ricœur's Critical Theory*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2003, p. 81.
[53] Paul Ricœur, "Imagination in Discourse and in Action," in *From Text to Action*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1991, p. 177.
[54] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 85.
[55] Ibidem, p. 111.
[56] Kohák, "Translator's Introduction: The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur," p. xxi.
[57] See Ricœur, Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary, p. 257. See also Paul Hayes, Noel Fitzpatrick, "Solicitude, Emotions, and Narrative in Technology Design Ethics," *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2024, p. 133.
[58] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 74.

thrust of my dedication, that is, of a project in act."[59] . In this sense, emotional intuition and the emotional revelation of values are always "in relation to an eventual project, which means that values only appear to me in a historical qualified situation within which I orient myself and seek to motivate my action."[60] In sum, "emotions play a fundamental role in the generation of the values that make up and orient our lives as human persons."[61] As such, Ricœur succinctly concludes that "emotion is rarely cerebral: it generally affects our body, social, intellectual, spiritual, and other interests. Hope, fear, worry, rage, or ambition trouble us only in terms of an anticipated or represented good or evil."[62]

Ricœur extends his phenomenological analysis of emotions to the second moment of willing, that of voluntary motion, which he defines as "the acid test of a philosophy of the will."[63] Shaped by the involuntary correlates arising from the body, i.e., needs, motives, and values, a project is realized only through effective action, i.e., through the muscular effort and the capacity to maintain control of the body. More precisely, emotion is defined as an involuntary function of movement that, as well as preformed skills and habits, "sustains voluntary action, […] serves it in preceding and limiting it."[64] For Ricœur, movement is a voluntary act which can be freely initiated, but it is always related to involuntary bodily aspects, including emotions. He discusses, then, emotion as involuntary dimensions involved in the process of realizing our projects in the world. As he argues, emotions stimulate actions and are "brought to thematic awareness in effort, that is, in will's need to overcome bodily inertia in acting and, more intimately still, in the Cogito's need to subdue the body sufficiently to make thought possible."[65] This means that emotions are not reflex-mechanisms, but they are made intelligible only in relation to a will that appropriates and guides them. Otherwise put, in our voluntary decisions and actions "the involuntary is an involuntary for a will, yet willing is possible only by reason of the involuntary organ it appropriates."[66] As embodied intentional correlates to actions, emotions are meaningful only in relation to a will, which is neither enslaved nor it can fully master them. Conceived as "the epitome of incarnate freedom,"[68] voluntary effort uses the "docile aspects of the involuntary."[69] Moreover, emotions show the

[59] Ibidem, p. 75.
[60] Ibidem.
[61] Stanghellini, Rosfort, *Emotions and Personhood: Exploring Fragility – Making Sense of Vulnerability*, p. 101.
[62] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 256.
[63] Ibidem, p. 308.
[64] Ibidem, p. 251.
[65] Kohák, "Translator's Introduction: The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur," p. xx.
[66] Ibidem, p. xxii.
[68] Ibidem.
[69] Ibidem.

homogeneity of thought and movement, of mind and body, they have an enactive character, and it is in them that "consciousness encounters the amiable, the detestable, the joyful, the sad, etc."[70] For example, when I meet a friend after a long time, I feel joy and excitement, i.e., I feel emotions that prove our strong bond and that animate physical and embodied forms of communication (e.g., hugs, handshakes, tears, etc.). Ricœur goes, then, "against the rationalist tendency of the West to see emotions as somewhat inferior, related more to the body than the mind, and even being a threat to rationality."[71] Contrary to Sartre's perspective presented in his work *Existentialism and Human Emotion* (1957),[72] Ricœur does not consider emotions as ruses of consciousness, i.e., as necessarily misleading our conscious experiences, but in terms of organs of the voluntary motion. He does not deny, though, that human beings can use emotions as irrational manipulative tools or that these can turn us towards the pathological, but these are not the most basic functions of emotions. In Ricœur's words, emotions are placed among the organs of willing. Consisting in functional states that "motivate and may produce movements,"[73] emotions do not subdue the voluntary and their significance "depends on the effort which determines whether the will uses them or yields to them."[74] As mentioned above in explaining the dialectic of needs, motives, and images, in the discussion of emotions as related to movement Ricœur specifies once again that emotions offer means to the will and that they are not masters or motives of it. Emotions incline the mobilization of the will by giving to it some ends. As already stated, emotions are linked not only with thought and action, i.e., with cognition and motion, but also with imaginative representations and future anticipations towards which we orient our projects and their realizations. As such, emotions are seen as "protentional states in the sense that they project the person into the future, providing a felt readiness for action."[76] In conclusion, drawing in particular on Spinoza, for Ricœur emotions are involuntary functions of movement that sustain voluntary action in serving means that precede and bound it. Thus, in first place, emotions do not drive us out of control. Rather, they stimulate action by drawing us out of bodily inertia in spontaneous ways.

[70] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 379.
[71] Dan Stiver, *Ricœur and Theology*, London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2016, p. 96.
[72] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotion*, New York, Wisdom Library, 1957.
[73] Stanghellini, Rosfort, *Emotions and Personhood: Exploring Fragility – Making Sense of Vulnerability*, p. 153.
[74] Kohák, "Translator's Introduction: The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur," p. xxii.
[76] Stanghellini, Rosfort, *Emotions and Personhood: Exploring Fragility – Making Sense of Vulnerability*, p. 5 and p. 153.

2. Emotions: on Feelings, Passions, and Wonder

In his phenomenological analysis of the will, Ricœur carefully clarifies the meanings of emotion, feeling, and passion. Let us turn to examine Ricœur's terminological distinction between emotions and feelings, and between emotions and passions, as useful to avoid conceptual confusion in emotion theory. As Kohák writes in his introduction to the English translation of *Freedom and Nature. The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, "*l'émotion* (esp. in Part II, Chap. 2, 2) seems at first sight to be an equivalent of English "feeling." However, Ricœur's analysis (page 252 below), clearly indicates that "emotion" is the more accurate rendering."[79] It does not mean, though, that feelings and emotions are opposed. Rather, these are different and related. Feeling has an intentional structure, i.e., it is always referred to something, it is "the manifestation of a relation to the world that constantly restores our complicity with it, our inherence and belonging in it, something more profound than all polarity and duality."[80] By means of its intentional structure, feeling "ties qualities felt on things to the self's inward affection."[81] More exactly, feeling designates "qualities felt on things, on persons, on the world […] (feeling) manifests and reveals the way in which the self is affected."[82] In other words, feeling consists in the projection of the world as an affective correlate, "not a world of objects but a quality of these objects."[83] Feelings are expressions of a dynamic circularity between oneself and the world as long as "the way in which I am affected, my love and my hate, although [they] manifest in only through the lovable and the hateful meant on the thing, on the person, and on the world."[84] In short, feelings relate to the "affective nuances"[85] of love, hope, joy, hate, fear, etc., registered on things. In revealing the "*élans* of our being,"[86] feeling is related to emotion. However, culminating in the incitation of desire as a motor that inclines to act, emotion as a corporeal disturbance differs from feeling, "echoing and amplifying in the body a rapid, implicit value judgment"[87] concerning the affective and motive anticipation of good and evil.

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[79] Kohák, "Translator's Introduction: The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur," p. xxv.

[80] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 129.

[81] Roger Savage, "Feeling, Interiority, and the Musical Body," in Roger Savage (ed.), *Paul Ricœur and the Lived Body*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2020, p. 90.

[82] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 84.

[83] Mabiala Justin-Robert Kenzo, *Dialectic of Sedimentation and Innovation*. *Paul Ricœur on Creativity after the Subject*, New York, Peter Lang, 2009, p. 71.

[84] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 85.

[85] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 252 and p. 257.

[86] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 86.

[87] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 256.

Not only is emotion irreducible to feeling, but it must be carefully differentiated from passion. Ricœur writes:

> passions are a distortion both of the involuntary and the voluntary. It is customary to include them with emotions of which they are said to be a more complex, more enduring, and more systematic form. In Descartes, the assimilation of passions to emotion is so complete that the treatise, *Concerning the Passions of the Soul*, is in fact a treatise of basic emotions and of their complications in the form of passions. It is certainly true that our emotions are the seed of passions and that in a general way all the involuntary is a point of entry, an occasion for passions, and, as Gabriel Marcel says, an invitation to betrayal.[88]

In a footnote, Ricœur further explains that, whereas for Descartes passions are opposed to actions, we must carefully acknowledge that there are two forms of passivity related to the soul: "the spontaneity of its body, according to which it receives its motives, its powers, and its necessary conditions in diverse ways, and its own passivity in its corrupt state, according to which it submits to the bondage it imposes on itself."[89] Simply put, whereas emotions are modes of human being's nature in an originally morally neutral sense, passions are fallen forms, distortions of emotions associated with excessive possession (having), domination (power), and valuation (worth). According to Ricœur emotions belongs to our fundamental nature, whereas passions are "detrimental for a wholesome emotionality and an ultimately free will."[91] Contrary to emotions as corporeal forms of the involuntary, i.e., as arising out of the body, passions emerge from the soul and gain their hold through the power of the will that binds itself as a "prisoner of imaginary evils, a captive of Nothing, or better, of Vanity."[92] As Ricœur puts it, "reproach, suspicion, concupiscence, envy, hurt, and grief are various names for chasing after the wind."[93] Hence, passions are "passionate forms of willing,"[94] they introduce their principle of vertigo and bondage "which the will imposes on itself."[95] In his assessment of passions in terms of the will's captivity, Ricœur conceives them in the specific narrow sense of an obsessed desires. Hence, passions are bondages and lies as denounced by moralists (e.g. La Rochefoucauld).[96] In order to develop an analysis of passions, Ricœur acknowledges

[88] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 20.
[89] Ibidem.
[91] Toth, *The Heart has Its Reasons. Towards a Theological Anthropology of the Heart*, p. 55.
[92] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 277.
[93] Ibidem, p. 23. .
[94] Ibidem, p. 21.
[95] Kohák, "Translator's Introduction: The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur," p. xxi.
[96] See Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 374.

that the eidetic method, i.e., descriptive phenomenology, is insufficient. The eidetics of the will has to be extended by an empirics of the will, dealing with the experience of the "effects and vicissitudes of particular actual existence,"[97] as including "the fact of existential distortion and the hope of reconciliation,"[98] namely of fault and Transcendence. Consequently, Ricœur points out that "deciphering the passions demands that we study man through the usages of life and ordinary discourse. This is why the study which will ultimately be devoted to the fault, to passions, and the law, will proceed by an entirely different method of convergence of concrete symptoms."[99]

Contrary to Heidegger's, Sartre's, Camus' perspectives mainly focused on emotions in negative terms, e.g., on existential anguish, anxiety, dread, in the face of death, Ricœur does not follow what he calls their "black existentialism"[100] as a necessary consequence of our ontological nature as finite and fallible beings. For him, the dark vision of these thinkers "is perhaps only a disappointed idealism and the suffering of a consciousness which thought itself divine and which become aware of itself as fallen. Thus, the irritated and in some sense maddened refusal assumes the posture of defiance and scorn."[101] Consequently, rather than existential distress, Ricœur places great emphasis on our desire to be, on the affirmation of life, reinstating the primacy of being over death and nothingness. In contrast to the existentialism of negation, Ricœur embraces a hopeful existentialism, emphasizing the projection of possibilities while acknowledging that human existence, marked by finitude and fallibility, is the primary source of gratitude. As he famously proclaims: "man is the Joy of Yes in the sadness of the finite."[102] The analysis of our effort to exist despite contingency, i.e., the will to live while accepting our limitations, leads Ricœur to consider wonder as the most basic emotional attitude. According to him, wonder is a fundamental emotion and it is an expression of the basic circularity between thinking and the lived experience of the body. As such, wonder or awe is "the most elemental, a kind of primordial unifying emotion which supports an initial unity of bodily and voluntary impulses."[104] Ricœur agrees with Descartes' conception of wonder as a primitive phenomenon. As he puts it, "while modern psychology derives emotion from a *shock* and describes it as a *crisis*, Descartes derives it from wonder and describes it as an

[97] Kohák, "Translator's Introduction: The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur," p. xiv.
[98] Ibidem, p. xviii.
[99] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 24.
[100] Ibidem, p. 466.
[101] Ibidem.
[102] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 140.
[104] David Rasmussen, *Mythic-Symbolic Language and Philosophical Anthropology: A Constructive Interpretation of the Thought of Paul Ricœur*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1971, p. 59.

incitation to action in accordance with the vivid representations which engender wonder."[105] Like Descartes, for Ricœur wonder is not an automatic response to external situations, it is not a reflex or a physiological foreign body reaction. Rather, wonder consists in "an impact of knowledge and a disturbance of the body or, better, a shock of knowledge in a disturbance of the body."[106] Nevertheless, contrary to Descartes, Ricœur considers thought as inseparable from the body, its processes, and its resistance. There is, then, no opposition between thinking and feeling, as Ricœur argues, "to feel is still to think, though feeling no longer represents objectivity, but rather reveals existence."[107] He further holds that "feeling interiorizes reason and shows me that reason is my reason […] feeling reveals the identity of existence and reason: it personalizes reason."[108] On the one hand, wonder concerns the mind as it strikes regularity, causing "a disorder in the course of thought; all we think, feel, and will is generally brought to a halt."[109] In doing so, wonder leads us to an evaluation of something new, to the perception of some level of novelty On the other hand, like other emotions, wonder deals with our body that "amplifies and magnifies the moment of thought by giving it the time of bodily impression as the substance of duration."[111] As Ricœur argues, wonder is "nourished by bodily repercussions; the shock of knowledge affects the flow of disturbance and bodily inertia to thought,"[112] awakening anew our will to judge and to act. Criticizing Descartes' understanding of wonder in terms of passion, for Ricœur wonder is not a spiritual power, but an emotion, namely it is a form of the involuntary providing us with "means rather than ends – the means of effective action."[114] Wonder is not a master of the voluntary, but an organ of the involuntary that is appropriated and made intelligible by the voluntary.

Conclusion

This article has endeavored to reconstruct the key features of Ricœur's eidetic phenomenology of emotions as relevant to current discussions in philosophy concerning the emotional realm of human life. I proposed, then, a systematic exploration of Ricœur's descriptive phenomenological account of emotions by examining their

[105] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 252.
[106] Ibidem, p. 254.
[107] Ibidem, p. 86.
[108] Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 102.
[109] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 254.
[111] Ibidem, p. 255.
[112] Ibidem, p. 254.
[114] Kohák, "Translator's Introduction: The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur," p. xxi.

place and role within the dialectics of the voluntary and the involuntary, of activity and passivity, which determine the essence of the human will. Therefore, rather than discussing emotions with reference to their empirical expressions in actions and practices, I followed Ricœur's lead in stressing the essential nature of emotion in the context of the neutral – but existentially invested – description of "being willing and able."[115] By adopting Husserl's epoché, i.e., the methodological "bracketing of all presuppositions in an attempt to discover things 'as they really are'," [116] in his eidetics Ricœur defines emotions as organs of actions. The phenomenological analysis of emotions as modes of our being has been developed through the study of Ricœur's perspective on decision and movement seen as two essential aspects or moments of the voluntary which is always in some respect inseparable from the involuntary conditions of our existence. Then, I turned my attention to Ricœur's distinction between feelings and emotions as modes of being in the world. According to his perspective, feelings have a more cognitive character as well as "a second-order intentional structure,"[117] whereas emotions deliver us to "mental states with little intentionality, as though in emotion we 'lived' our body in a more intense way."[118] Yet, I showed that in his descriptive analysis of the world of affect, Ricœur carefully distinguishes between emotions and passions as distortions or obsessed desires which "promote the servitude of the free will and generate a never-ending pursuit that leads towards a 'bad' infinite of meaningless quest."[119] Finally, I drew on Ricœur's account of wonder as "a principle of emotion that truly recognizes with awe the good of something, and then proceeds through other emotions (like love) towards desire in a process of moving towards anticipation and towards the grasp of the object of emotion."[120] We can note the following two final remarks, which remain open to further debate and discussion.

First, Ricœur's phenomenology of emotions breaks down the traditional opposition between the realms of emotions and that of reason. In his phenomenological description of the will, he redefines the connection between emotional sensibility and rationality. As he puts it, "our description leads us to understand emotion in the context of a general reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary and, more

[115] Timo Helenius, "The Will, the Body, and Sexuality," in Roger Savage (ed.), *Paul Ricœur in the Age of Hermeneutical Reason. Poetics, Praxis, and Critique*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2015, p. 200.

[116] James Carter, *Ricœur on Moral Religion: A Hermeneutics of Ethical Life*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 117.

[117] Paul Hayes, Noel Fitzpatrick, "Solicitude, Emotions, and Narrative in Technology Design Ethics," p. 136.

[118] Paul Ricœur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling", in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1978, p. 158.

[119] Toth, *The Heart has Its Reasons. Towards a Theological Anthropology of the Heart*, p. 55.

[120] Paul Hayes, Noel Fitzpatrick, "Solicitude, Emotions, and Narrative in Technology Design Ethics," p. 135.

precisely, as a circular phenomenon of thought and adjacent bodily agitation."[121] In describing the emotion of joy, Ricœur argues: "there are not two joys, a bodily joy and a spiritual joy: in reality all joy is intellectual, at least in a confused way, and corporeal, at least as an attempt and as it inscribes into the body the possession of goods and evils normally foreign to any usefulness for the body."[122] By focusing on the intertwining of mind, body, and the world, in Ricœur's account of embodiment emotions are discussed as essential ingredients of human action and as linked to judgment. For these reasons, Ricœur's eidetics of emotions can be viewed as a precursor theory to recent enactive and cognitive accounts of emotions.

Second, in his phenomenological study of the will, Ricœur describes emotions as intertwined with imagination in its reproductive and productive forms. On the one hand, emotions can be evoked through the imagination of anticipated satisfaction, frustration, or indifference, based on previous experiences associated with pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral frameworks. As such, linked to the reproductive aspect of imagination, emotions are related to images of absent things as representations of something already perceived. Resting upon our embodied existence, emotions rely on memory of past or known experiences, showing a continuum of past, present, and future orientations. On the other hand, emotions are in a circular relation with the generativity of productive imagination. Emotions are integrated in imaginative processes, sustaining creativity and novelty, enhancing our abilities to realize ideas and to overcome obstacles. In turn, the exercise of productive imagination accompanies our emotional regulation, stimulating new possibilities in which emotions can find a renewed order. Although Ricœur can be criticized for presenting an underdeveloped phenomenology of productive imagination[123] in his early analysis of the will as well as in his later *Lectures on Imagination*,[124] his scattered theoretical insights prove to be highly significant for the consideration of the relation between imagination and emotion, creativity and emotionality, along with rationality and technical capacities. Despite the rapidly growing body of secondary literature on Ricœur's thought, much work still remains to be done on the interlacing of his theory of imagination and his conception of emotions.

[121] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*: *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 276.
[122] Ibidem, p. 262.
[123] Saulius Geniusas, *Phenomenology of Productive Imagination: Embodiment, Language, Subjectivity*, Stuttgart, Ibidem Verlag, 2022, p. 253.
[124] Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2024.