

Solicitude, Emotions, and Narrative in Technology Design Ethics

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Abstract

The first objective of this paper is to recognize the role of emotion and feeling in Ricœur's "little ethics" and what they can further add to it, then to explore in more detail how solicitude as a virtue, and affective disposition more broadly, can contribute to a modern ethics of technology. Ultimately, emotions help us to understand technologies and technological ways of being today; Ricœur's "little ethics", along with his narrative theory, provide a framework for understanding the ethically salient aspects of technical practice, especially through the openness to the other demanded by solicitude, and essentially by emphasising emotion or feeling as a way of being in the world, and a mode of existence: one which is done with, if not sometimes because of, technology and technical practice.

Keywords: Emotion; Ethics; Technology; Narrative

Résumé

L'objectif de cet article est d'abord de reconnaître le rôle de l'émotion et du sentiment dans la « petite éthique » et d'examiner ce que peuvent être leurs apports complémentaires ; puis il explore plus en détail comment le concept de la sollicitude en tant que vertu, et, plus largement, la disposition émotionnelle, sont susceptibles de contribuer à une éthique moderne de la technologie. Il montre enfin que les émotions nous aident à comprendre les technologies et les modes d'existences technologiques aujourd'hui ; la « petite éthique » de Ricœur, ainsi que sa théorie narrative, offrent un cadre qui nous aide à comprendre les aspects éthiques le plus essentiels de la pratique technologique, en montrant en particulier l'ouverture à l'autre que requiert la sollicitude et en mettant fondamentalement l'accent sur l'émotion ou le sentiment comme manières d'être au monde, et comme modes d'exister : lesquels se réalisent avec, voire même parfois à cause de la technologie et de la pratique technologique.

Mots-clés : émotion ; éthique ; technologie ; récit

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I. Introduction

The philosophy and ethics of technology has become a discipline of growing importance, if not urgency, in the face of the rapid evolution of technological artefacts and practices that can expand and develop faster than policy-making and governance can respond¹. Today, innovations such as ChatGPT simultaneously capture the public's imagination and make clear to everyone the possibilities of artificial intelligence (AI) applications and the ethical dilemmas posed by generative AI systems more generally. The output of philosophy and ethics scholarship, along with legal and professional reflection, gets channelled into various well-known ethical principles and guidelines, which (while popular) are certainly not met with universal approval.²

In fact, there has been growing critique of (and discontentment with) the dominant approaches to AI ethics, the deontological or principled approaches (the "ethics" of practice as such³) typified by the large body of codes, guidelines and principles that set out to guide ethical conduct in the design and use of AI systems.⁴ Such discontent and critique is not levelled only at the field of AI ethics only. A variety of applied approaches to the ethics of technology have been subject to similar critique (for example, value sensitive design⁵), or the critiques of the former prove transferable to the latter. Such approaches often arguably fall into the category of "morality", the articulation of norms in Ricoeurian terms, as opposed to ethics per se, as the *eudaimonistic* mode of aiming at an accomplished life.⁶ Considered as such, these approaches are arguably incomplete. We might then consider the common

¹ This research was partly funded by the ADAPT Centre which is funded under the SFI Research Centres Programme (Grant 13/RC/2106_P2) and is co-funded under the European Regional Development Funds. This research was partly funded by EC funded H2020 SwafS Project EUT+ EXTRAS (#101035812). This research was partly funded by the EC funded HE MSCA SE project EpisTeaM (#101129655).

² Brent Mittelstadt, "Principles Alone Cannot Guarantee Ethical AI," *Nature Machine Intelligence*, vol. 1, no. 11 (November 2019), 501-7, online: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s42256-019-0114-4>; Anais Ressaygue and Rowena Rodrigues, "AI Ethics Should Not Remain Toothless! A Call to Bring Back the Teeth of Ethics," *Big Data & Society*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1 July 2020), online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720942541>; Luke Munn, "The Uselessness of AI Ethics," *AI and Ethics* (23 August 2022), online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-022-00209-w>.

³ Luciano Floridi and Mariarosaria Taddeo, "What Is Data Ethics?," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, vol. 374, no. 2083 (28 December 2016), online: <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2016.0360>.

⁴ A comprehensive inventory of such ethics guidelines can be found at: <https://inventory.algorithmwatch.org/>.

⁵ Wessel Reijers and Bert Gordijn, "Moving from Value Sensitive Design to Virtuous Practice Design," *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1 January 2019), 196-209, online: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JICES-10-2018-0080>.

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

contemporary approach as one which actually divorces ethics and morality, where the results are often abstract principles that are neither directly action-guiding nor informed by particular application contexts, and are frustrated by technosocial opacity which challenges the creation and application of effective deontological rules and so forth.⁷ A concerning feature of AI ethics (or any professional ethics efforts in technology within capitalist paradigms) is that ambiguous, meaningless rules are imposed from the top down, without necessarily being understood, adhered to or even making much of a difference to practitioner conduct, in an effort to deflect calls for regulation or to engage in a form of “ethics washing”.⁸ Some now call for a more radical turn away from the arguably misappropriated data and AI (or technology) “ethics” towards a supposedly different framework of “justice” (not to be confused with a “justice ethics”⁹).¹⁰ Others argue that the framework for an effective ethics of AI and technology already exists and fully supports more radical discourse and inclusion of concepts (argued by some to be absent from ethics discourse) such as “equity”, “co-liberation”, “reflexivity”, and “understanding history”, “culture”, and “context”¹¹ —and more specifically, that such concepts can be accommodated by a Ricœurian framework of “little ethics” that restores the relationship between ethics, morality, and political practice in the ethical intention of aiming at the good life, with and for others, in just institutions (and in the inclusion of political practice, endorsing the creation and enforcement of regulation —self-regulation is not sufficient).¹²

Two converging developments have been in progress in the ethics and philosophy of technology in recent years which, when taken together, promise a new way of looking at the (ethical and moral) relationship between human-being and technology. The first is a hermeneutic approach, itself following in the tradition of post-phenomenology,¹³ that focuses on interpretation and understanding of and with technical artefacts and processes of technological appropriation and being

⁷ Shannon Vallor, *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018; reprint edition); Paul Hayes, Noel Fitzpatrick and José Manuel Ferrández, “From Applied Ethics and Ethical Principles to Virtue and Narrative in AI Practices”, *AI and Ethics*, 2024, online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-024-00472-z>.

⁸ Ben Wagner, “Ethics As An Escape From Regulation. From ‘Ethics-Washing’ To Ethics-Shopping?,” in *Being Profiled: Cogitas Ergo Sum 10 Years of Profiling the European Citizen*, ed. Emre Bayamlioglu, Irina Baraliuc, Liisa Albertha Wilhelmina Janssens and Mirielle Hildebrandt (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), online: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048550180-016>.; Anna Jobin, Marcello Ienca and Effy Vayena, “The Global Landscape of AI Ethics Guidelines”, *Nature Machine Intelligence*, vol. 1, no. 9 (September 2019), 389-99, online: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s42256-019-0088-2>; Thilo Hagendorff, “The Ethics of AI Ethics: An Evaluation of Guidelines”, *Minds and Machines*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1 March 2020), 99-120, online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11023-020-09517-8>.

⁹ Hagendorff, “The Ethics of AI Ethics”.

¹⁰ Catherine D’ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, *Data Feminism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020); Munn, “The Uselessness of AI Ethics”.

¹¹ D’ignazio and Klein, *Data Feminism*, 60.

¹² Hayes, Fitzpatrick and Ferrández, “From Applied Ethics and Ethical Principles to Virtue and Narrative in AI Practices”.

¹³ Don Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Peter Paul Verbeek, “Toward a Theory of Technological Mediation A Program for Postphenomenological Research”, in *Technoscience and Postphenomenology: The Manhattan Papers*, ed. J.K. Berg, O. Friis and Robert C. Crease (London: Lexington Books, 2016), 189-204; Peter Paul Verbeek, “Cover story: Beyond Interaction: a short introduction to mediation theory”, *Interactions (ACM)*, vol. 22, no. 3 (2015), 26-31, online: <https://doi.org/10.1145/2751314>.

or becoming human in the technosphere.¹⁴ The second development is that of the application of virtue or *eudaimonistic* ethics (ethics concerning character traits and dispositions that lead to persons thinking, feeling and acting appropriately to ethical/moral situations in pursuit of the good or an accomplished life) to the questions of AI, technology and technical practices.¹⁵ Such developments have converged upon the narrative philosophy and ethics of Paul Ricœur (and also with significant regard to the work of Alasdair MacIntyre¹⁶), where his narrative philosophy and ethics both have inspired scholars to look at his own thoughts on technology as well as the relevance of his narrative theory and his *eudaimonistic* “little ethics” to the questions of the philosophy and ethics of technology.¹⁷ Notable developments of Ricœurian thought (again, also adapting MacIntyre’s work) have recently been pioneered by Wessel Reijers and Mark Coeckelbergh in their virtuous practice design (VPD; or alternately, narrative and technology ethics), which extends on Ricœur’s thought on narrative philosophy and his “little ethics” into the field of contemporary technical practice.¹⁸ Theirs is an approach to the philosophy and ethics of technology which focuses on how technologies narrate or co-narrate our actions, promoting inquiry into Ricœurian mimeses and understanding of the textuality, literacy, temporality, and distancing concerning features of technical artefacts to determine the relationship between human-being and

¹⁴ Hayes, Fitzpatrick and Ferrández, “From Applied Ethics and Ethical Principles to Virtue and Narrative in AI Practices”; Olya Kudina, “‘Alexa, Who Am I?’: Voice Assistants and Hermeneutic Lemniscate as the Technologically Mediated Sense-Making,” *Human Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2 (1 June 2021), 233-53, online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-021-09572-9>; Alberto Romele, Marta Severo and Paolo Furia, “Digital Hermeneutics: From Interpreting with Machines to Interpretational Machines,” *AI & SOCIETY*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1 March 2020): 73-86, online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-018-0856-2>; Noel Fitzpatrick, “Will the Real Quantified Self Please Stand Up?”, in *Interpreting Technology: Ricœur on Questions Concerning Ethics and Philosophy of Technology*, ed. Wessel Reijers, Alberto Romele, and Mark Coeckelbergh (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2021); Rafael Capurro, “Digital Hermeneutics: An Outline”, *AI & SOCIETY*, vol. 25, no. 1 (1 April 2010), 35-42, online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-009-0255-9>; Paul Hayes and Noel Fitzpatrick, “Narrativity and Responsible and Transparent Ai Practices”, *AI & SOCIETY* (25 February 2024), online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-024-01881-8>.

¹⁵ Hayes, Fitzpatrick and Ferrández, “From Applied Ethics and Ethical Principles to Virtue and Narrative in AI Practices”; Jan Peter Bergen and Zoë Robaey, “Designing in Times of Uncertainty: What Virtue Ethics Can Bring to Engineering Ethics in the Twenty-First Century”, in *Values for a Post-Pandemic Future*, ed. Matthew J. Dennis *et al.*, Philosophy of Engineering and Technology (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 163-83, online: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08424-9_9; Vallor, *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting*; Jiin-Yu Chen, “Virtue and the Scientist: Using Virtue Ethics to Examine Science’s Ethical and Moral Challenges”, *Science and Engineering Ethics*, vol. 21, no. 1 (1 February 2015), 75-94, online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-014-9522-3>; Hagendorff, “The Ethics of AI Ethics: An Evaluation of Guidelines”.

¹⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013; reprint edition).

¹⁷ David M. Kaplan, “Paul Ricœur and the Philosophy of Technology,” *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, vol. 16, no. 1/2 (26 January 2006), 42-56, online: <https://doi.org/10.5195/jffp.2006.182>; Ernst Wolff, “Ricœur’s Polysemy of Technology and Its Reception,” in *Interpreting Technology: Ricœur on Questions Concerning Ethics and Philosophy of Technology*, ed. Wessel Reijers, Alberto Romele and Mark Coeckelbergh (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2021), 3-23; Wessel Reijers, Alberto Romele and Mark Coeckelbergh (eds.), *Interpreting Technology: Ricœur on Questions Concerning Ethics and Philosophy of Technology* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2021); Wessel Reijers and Mark Coeckelbergh, *Narrative and Technology Ethics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020; first edition); Reijers and Gordijn, “Moving from Value Sensitive Design to Virtuous Practice Design”.

¹⁸ Reijers and Coeckelbergh, *Narrative and Technology Ethics*; Reijers and Gordijn, “Moving from Value Sensitive Design to Virtuous Practice Design”.

artefact and the artefact's configurative potential.¹⁹ It is a philosophy and ethics which moves from description to prescription as it reveals the agents, histories, stories, standards of excellence, virtues and so forth endemic in technical practices.²⁰ Such narrative thinking has also been applied to conceptualising artificial intelligence and its ethical qualities (that is, that AI is both process and narrative).²¹

The move towards a virtue-based or *eudaimonistic* ethics based principally on Ricœur's "little ethics" and narrative philosophy (i.e., virtuous practice design, or narrative and technology ethics) in the ethics and technology and AI field is a promising one which can potentially address deficiencies in the current mainstream approaches (such as by promoting attention to context for example).²² The purpose of this paper is not to restate the compelling arguments which can be found elsewhere, but to explore the significance of a particular feature of this *eudaimonistic* approach: the "feeling" or "emotion" aspect inherent in such theory which is often (though of course not always) at risk of being forgotten or marginalised in purely deontological theory or in principlism. Feeling and emotion help us to see things of value within our *eudaimonistic* scheme of goals and ends, and moreover, it is through empathy we can see and understand those things which are of value to others. Affect is significant in the ethics of technology because it plays a role in designing both with and for emotion and feeling for others (that is, artefacts and practices must be designed with appropriate feeling for the other by both designers and users of artefacts). At the heart of Ricœur's "little ethics" is the concept of solicitude, an affectively rich concept which captures the capacity of emotion and feeling to spur the recognition of the needs of the other. In this paper then, we will examine the possible contribution of solicitude in particular to a contemporary "little ethics" of technology, ultimately in its virtuous practice design form. This will be achieved with reference to Martha Nussbaum's work on emotion, compassion, and empathy, which supports further reflection and insight on Ricœur's solicitude, how we draw the other and their flourishing into our circle of concern, and indeed our own vision of the good life. Hence, we can say that designing technology with and for emotion and feeling is not only inherently important within a VPD framework, but more particularly, such a framework could be understood to emphasise the importance of design with and for solicitude, that is, design with and promoting the affective regard of the other's flourishing. To the extent that this paper explores the role of emotion and feeling in ethics, it answers to the arguable relative lack of emotion discourse in much of the mainstream approaches to technology ethics generally and the ethics of AI more specifically, and aims to demonstrate its useful role in supporting the development of *phronimoi* attentive to needs of the other.

The paper is structured as follows. Section II will provide exposition on a *eudaimonist* cognitive theory of emotion and explore how it complements Ricœur's ethical intention of living well, with and for the other, in just institutions. Section III will further explore the relationship between solicitude and the emotions, arguing that solicitude can be construed as an affective virtue. Finally, Section IV will

¹⁹ Reijers and Coeckelbergh, *Narrative and Technology Ethics*; Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative I*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990; new edition); Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative II*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990; new edition); Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative III*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990; new edition).

²⁰ Reijers and Coeckelbergh, *Narrative and Technology Ethics*.

²¹ Hayes and Fitzpatrick, "Narrativity and Responsible and Transparent AI Practices"; Mark Coeckelbergh, "Time Machines: Artificial Intelligence, Process, and Narrative", *Philosophy & Technology*, vol. 34, no. 4 (1 December 2021), 1623-38, online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-021-00479-y>.

²² Hayes, Fitzpatrick and Ferrández, "From Applied Ethics and Ethical Principles to Virtue and Narrative in AI Practices"; Reijers and Coeckelbergh, *Narrative and Technology Ethics*.

bring together insights from the preceding sections to the ethics of technology, arguing for the importance of using solicitude and emotion to understand the feelings of others as well as building technologies and technical practices that engage the emotions.

II. Emotions and Ethics

This section will present a basic explanation of emotion as well as its ethical import, and will focus in particular on Martha Nussbaum's neo-stoic and *eudaimonistic* account of emotions (with reference to Ricœur's own work on emotion throughout, of course) ahead of exploring how it might enrich Ricœur's "little ethics" and contemporary developments such as VPD in the sections that follow. The overall understanding of emotion endorsed here is primarily a cognitive theory, which is to say that emotions are evaluative judgments about some object at which they are directed (e.g., the person that one loves), whilst acknowledging in line with the literature that they are also arguably conative (e.g., they relate to desirable states of affairs regarding that object or one's possession of it),²³ affective and of course nevertheless embodied.

Sabine Roeser,²⁴ a prolific scholar in the ethical/moral nature of emotion, has adopted Robert C. Roberts' list²⁵ of paradigmatic aspects of emotions from the field of moral psychology, to provide a useful starting point that highlights many of emotions' arguable core features:

1. Emotions are paradigmatically felt.
2. Emotions are often accompanied by physiological changes (the feeling of which is not identical with, but is typically an aspect of the feeling of an emotion).
3. Emotions paradigmatically have objects.
4. The objects of emotions are typically situations *that can be told in a story* [emphasis added].
5. An emotion type is determined by defining leading concepts (e.g. anger about a culpable offence; fear of a threat etc.).
6. In paradigm cases, the subject believes the propositional content of her emotion.
7. Emotions typically have some non-propositional content.
8. Many emotions are motivational.
9. Emotions can be controllable but also uncontrollable.
10. Emotions come in degrees of intensity.
11. Expression of emotion can intensify and prolong an emotion but it can also cause it to subside.
12. Emotions are praiseworthy and blameworthy.

This list is debatable —much literature exists in the discussion around an appropriate conceptualisation of the emotions (including the degree to which they are physiological and

²³ Bennett W. Helm, "Emotions as Evaluative Feelings," *Emotion Review*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1 July 2009), 248-55, online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073909103593>.

²⁴ Sabine Roeser, *Risk, Technology, and Moral Emotions* (New York: Routledge, 2017; first edition), 67-8.

²⁵ Robert C. Roberts, *Emotion: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 60-4.

incorporate beliefs and desires).²⁶ In acknowledgment of that debate, we do not endorse this list so much as present it to capture the important elements in any discussion of emotion. It is not the purpose of this paper to propose a definitive account of emotion, so we proceed from the premise that they are intellectual and evaluative states that coincide with variable physiological states or changes and are marked by desire (such as to be with someone we love or to not be bitten by a dog we fear²⁷).

Building on Roberts' paradigmatic elements of emotion, Steinert and Roeser²⁸ clarify that emotions are object directed intentional states, i.e., they are directed at an object; they involve appraisals of objects and situations (e.g., again, love of one's partner or fear of a dangerous animal), which is concern based, and they are sometimes action motivating (e.g., we align our goals based on appraisals of objects of concern, such as protecting our loved ones). Sometimes, such emotions may not be fitting (such as fear of a harmless dog) or inappropriate (such as happiness at someone's misfortune).²⁹ They argue that emotional and physiological states, per point 2 above, should be kept separate to some degree since not all particular, experienced physiological states and changes are emotions; although they accompany the emotions, these states go beyond them due to the appraisals emotions entail.³⁰ Similarly, Martha Nussbaum³¹ refrains from ascribing particular physiological states as definitive or necessary elements of different emotions, without denying the experiential reality of those states and their correspondence with emotion. For Nussbaum the tumult of emotion occurs primarily in consciousness itself, and feeling as such is the "kinetic property" of the cognitive emotional experience (the judgement).³² Reflecting on the experience of grieving the loss of her mother for example, and the dynamic of thought and affect, Nussbaum writes:

When I grieve, I do not first of all coolly embrace the proposition, "My wonderful mother is dead," and then set about grieving. No, the real, full recognition of that terrible event (as many times as I recognize it) is the upheaval. It is as I described it: like putting a nail into your stomach. The appearance that she is dead sits there (as it sat before me during my plane ride) asking me what I am going to do with it. Perhaps, if I am still uncertain, the image of her restored to health sits there also. If I go up to embrace the death image, if I take it into myself as the way things are, it is at that very moment, in that cognitive act itself, that I am putting the world's nail into my own insides. That is not preparation for upheaval, that is upheaval itself. That very act of assent

²⁶ Joel Marks, "A Theory of Emotion," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, vol. 42, no. 2 (1982), 227-42; Robert C. Solomon, "Emotions, Thoughts, and Feelings: Emotions as Engagements with the World," in *Thinking About Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions*, ed. Robert C. Solomon (Oxford University Press, 2004), 1-18; Helm, "Emotions as Evaluative Feelings".

²⁷ Steffen Steinert and Sabine Roeser, "Emotions, Values and Technology: Illuminating the Blind Spots", *Journal of Responsible Innovation*, vol. 7, no. 3 (1 September 2020), 298-319, online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23299460.2020.1738024>.

²⁸ Steinert and Roeser, "Emotions, Values and Technology: Illuminating the Blind Spots", 299.

²⁹ Steinert and Roeser, "Emotions, Values and Technology: Illuminating the Blind Spots".

³⁰ Steinert and Roeser, "Emotions, Values and Technology: Illuminating the Blind Spots".

³¹ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; first edition), 58-60.

³² Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 44-60.

is itself a tearing of my self-sufficient condition. Knowing can be violent, given the truths that are there to be known.³³

Nussbaum's view somewhat recalls Jean-Paul Sartre's work on emotion, who recognised the embodiment of emotion but also acknowledged that:

[...] to understand the emotional process as it proceeds from consciousness, we must remember the dual nature of the body, which on the one hand is an object in the world and on the other is immediately *lived* by the consciousness.³⁴

For Nussbaum, it seems physiological changes that often correspond with emotions may simply be felt perceptions or judgments that factor into emotion, but there is far too much variability in human physical, social and cultural conditions for any of them to be necessary conditions of a given emotion, even if some bodily experiences might be common. Ultimately, body and mind are in some way in synthesis at the height of emotion: as Sartre suggests, the body in the world is lived by consciousness, and bodily disturbance is “[...] belief lived by the consciousness [...]”.³⁵ Perhaps in between Sartre and Nussbaum sits Ricœur himself, who has contributed significant thought to the phenomenon of emotion and feeling. Ricœur arguably emphasises more the organic element of emotion and its physiological disturbances, i.e., the accent is placed on body rather than mind.³⁶ Yet fundamentally for Ricœur,³⁷ in emotion body and mind are in a circular relationship; he argues that “[...] our description leads us to *understand* emotion in the context of a general reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary and, more precisely, as a circular phenomenon of thought and adjacent bodily agitation”. Consider Ricœur on the emotion of joy to illustrate this stance better:

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.³⁸

The element of appraisal figures heavily into definitions of emotion —again they are cognitively significant, or as Sartre wrote, “[e]motion is a specific manner of apprehending the world”.³⁹ For Sabine Roeser, emotions are fallible *felt value judgments* about objects of value, judgments which reflect basic moral beliefs.⁴⁰ Roeser believes that (cognitive) moral emotions help us see and understand ethically salient features in ethical situations, that they help us access ethical truths therein.⁴¹ Moral experience initially takes place through sympathy for others, which “[...] enables us to capture the meaning of events in people's lives and to determine what would be appropriate to do

³³ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 45.

³⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (London: Routledge, 2001; second edition), 50-1.

³⁵ Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, 52.

³⁶ Paul Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006; reprint edition).

³⁷ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, 276.

³⁸ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, 262.

³⁹ Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, 35.

⁴⁰ Roeser, *Risk, Technology, and Moral Emotions*, 91-2.

⁴¹ Sabine Roeser, *Moral Emotions and Intuitions* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2011), online: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230302457>; Roeser, *Risk, Technology, and Moral Emotions*.

to others in their concrete circumstances”, and moreover, “[e]motions such as sympathy, empathy and compassion let us share in the perspectives of others, and let us care for their well-being”.⁴² Ricœur himself does not subscribe fully to emotions as evaluative judgments.⁴³ For him a judgment is made before emotion proper. However, as body and mind are in a circular relationship in emotion, the emotion amplifies the judgment or belief —the body “prepares” the fully developed judgment so the emotion is not the judgment itself, yet it is inseparable from the judgment and nevertheless points to the great value of its object.

Furthermore, it is the conative element of emotion, *desire*, which arguably gives emotion its motivational character.⁴⁴ When we care about something or someone, we are likely to act upon our emotions (such as helping a sick friend for whom we feel worried), meaning desire (and emotion itself) is arguably a “mode of caring”.⁴⁵ As Bennett W. Helm argues:

For something to have import to you —for you to *care* about it— is (roughly) for it to be worthy of attention and action. In part this means you must be reliably *vigilant* for circumstances affecting it favorably or adversely and be *prepared to act* on its behalf.⁴⁶

On that point, we may once again return to Ricœur, for whom emotion and desire (itself an emotion that complements the anticipation of other emotions such as love) incline our very will towards action in pursuit of the good. Desire is a motive and motor in this process — “[d]esire is the initial thrust, body and soul, towards the object. This is why the full weight of ethics bears in the last instance of desire and on the means of controlling it”.⁴⁷ For Ricœur, sentiments were of great motivational character, where desires for possession, domination, and worth lead to positive but corruptible quests.⁴⁸

To draw the relevance of emotion back to virtue ethics and ultimately Ricœur’s “little ethics”, let us now consider the work of Martha Nussbaum in more detail. Nussbaum presents a *eudaimonist* theory of emotion, which will somewhat help us relate it even more closely with the “little ethics” of Ricœur and sets it up for flexible exploration in a VPD framework. Nussbaum makes it clear why the object of an emotion is a source of value also within this *eudaimonist* light, arguing that:

[...] emotions are forms of evaluative judgment that ascribe to certain things and persons outside a person’s own control great importance for the person’s own flourishing. Emotions are thus, in effect, acknowledgments of neediness and lack of self-sufficiency.⁴⁹

Nussbaum’s account of emotions is cognitive-evaluative. The *eudaimonist* account proposes that what is emotionally important to us is (initially) localised and relates to the individual conception of the good life and life plans before it expands outwards.⁵⁰ The *eudaimonist* account helps to explain

⁴² Roeser, *Moral Emotions and Intuitions*, 137, 152.

⁴³ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, 257.

⁴⁴ Helm, “Emotions as Evaluative Feelings”.

⁴⁵ Helm, “Emotions as Evaluative Feelings”, 250.

⁴⁶ Helm, “Emotions as Evaluative Feelings”, 250.

⁴⁷ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, 266.

⁴⁸ Wolff, “Ricœur’s Polysemy of Technology and Its Reception”.

⁴⁹ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 22.

⁵⁰ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*.

why sympathy and compassion are necessary and effective parts of moral development —we first acquire our own projects and goals, then we might relate to the “similar possibilities” for suffering of others in ourselves whom could experience such suffering due to the (comparable, if not universal) instability of our own projects and goals.⁵¹ To this extent, ethical experience does not necessarily begin with sympathy but, contra Roeser, with establishing what is important for oneself and maturing through sympathy (and compassion).

Emotions pertain to objects of direct importance to those experiencing them and reflect the instability of the object in the world —for example, “[...] in fear, one sees oneself or what one loves as seriously threatened”.⁵² In Nussbaum’s words, localised emotions “take their stand in my own life, and focus on the transition between light and darkness there, rather than on general distribution of light and darkness in the universe as a whole”.⁵³ The specific objects to which emotions are directed are constituent parts of *eudaimonia*: they are valued for their place in an agent’s scheme of what is necessary for the good life and factor into their plans and goals. By insisting on their importance, “they also embody the person’s own commitment to the object as part of her scheme or end”.⁵⁴ Emotions then can arguably be seen to have their place within Ricœur’s triadic structure of the ethical intention —they are evaluative judgments incorporating beliefs about the value of the objects to which they are directed, understood as being necessary for oneself to live well and have an accomplished life. Such objects of emotion can be people, virtues, life plans, distant ideals and even practices and internal goods themselves.

Emotions can take two forms upon the recognition of importance of an object:

1. Background emotions, where it is acknowledged that the well-being of the object necessary for one’s flourishing is not completely under one’s control, and which persist (these are judgments which persist across situations).
2. Situational emotions, where background emotions are summoned in particular contexts or the background emotion meets a specific judgment “[...] that situates the emotion’s object in a concrete way in some actual (or imagined) past for future context”.⁵⁵

As eloquently put by Nussbaum, “[t]he background emotion acknowledges dependence on or need for some ungovernable element in the world; the situational emotion responds to the way in which the world meets or does not meet one’s needs”.⁵⁶

Having identified the emotional journey as starting with *living well*, we can continue to draw from Nussbaum to demonstrate its maturing through to *with and for others*. This movement from *living well* to *with and for others* occurs when one incorporates the well-being of others (and distant others) into their *eudaimonistic* vision, i.e., they include their well-being as an important end in itself in the good life. There are multiple modes (contingent and not necessary) through which one may extend their conception of the good life to include the other, which may act as an epistemic aid in reaching this ethical maturity and can culminate into the beneficent and particularly motivational emotion of compassion. Nussbaum describes compassion as “[...] a painful emotion occasioned by the awareness

⁵¹ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*.

⁵² Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 28.

⁵³ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 31.

⁵⁴ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 32-3.

⁵⁵ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 69-74.

⁵⁶ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 74-5.

of another person's undeserved misfortune", and one which is synonymous with sympathy, although the latter term may refer to instances where the emotion is less intense (but nevertheless recognises that the suffering of the other is wrong).⁵⁷ The three modes by which one can come to factor the well-being of others into their *eudaimonist* conception, or to embrace them within their "circle of concern", are "similarity of possibilities", empathy and wonder, which may be summarised as:

1. *Similarity of possibilities*: Nussbaum refers to this as:

"[...] part of a construct that bridges the gap between the child's existing goals and the eudaimonistic judgment that others (even distant others) are an important part of one's one scheme of goals and projects, important as ends in their own right."⁵⁸

When one has a general conception of flourishing, they observe that the suffering of others deprived of various goods is a suffering that could befall them too, and recognising their shared vulnerability leads them to consider principles that might "[...] raise society's floor".⁵⁹

2. *Empathy*: empathy engages a significant cognitive feature of emotion, which is imagination, and in this case it is the reconstructive act of imagining or re-enacting the experience of another, whilst maintaining a two-fold attention, that is, the recognition that oneself and other remain separate individuals. This may reinforce reflection on similarity of possibilities, where one relates the prospects of the other to their own.⁶⁰
3. *Wonder*: this is a non-*eudaimonistic* recognition of the value or beauty of something, that is not strictly thought of in a way that links to one's projects and goals, but can nevertheless shape conceptions of *eudaimonia*.⁶¹ It is important to note that for Ricœur, wonder is not only an emotion itself but a principle of emotion that truly recognises 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.⁶²

When one has included others in their circle of concern, they can properly experience compassion (which may be accompanied by the previous three concepts, most especially empathy), which is defined by three cognitive features: judgment of size (that something serious has happened to someone); judgment of non-desert (that they were undeserving of that thing); and the necessary *eudaimonistic* judgment (the person fits into one's goals and schemes).⁶³ Through compassion, the onlooker makes a judgment about what is happening to these others in their circle of concern — even if that judgment differs from that of the other — and one may defer to the expert judgment of those who have suffered more than one might understand in their privilege.⁶⁴ This compassion can motivate us to help the other to whom we extend our concern, whose good is a part of our goals and projects, and

⁵⁷ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 301.

⁵⁸ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 320.

⁵⁹ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 320-1.

⁶⁰ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 301, 331.

⁶¹ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*.

⁶² Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*.

⁶³ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 321.

⁶⁴ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 309-11.

as Roeser argues, helps us understand what to do in their concrete circumstances (through listening and empathy).⁶⁵ Compassion then is a core feature of the *with others* aspect of the ethical intention, drawing the other into the circle of concern of oneself, potentially through recognition of shared vulnerability, and usually, entailing acts of empathy and implications of care, whereby we attend to our responsibilities with regards to our potential positions of power and privilege over the other.

Before continuing it would be remiss not to note a final point on Ricœur's work on emotion. Ricœur makes an interesting distinction between feeling (or poetic feeling) and emotion, recognising feelings as being of a more cognitive character, with a second-order intentional structure (e.g., "[f]eeling is not contrary to thought. It is thought made ours") whilst in emotions we are "[...] under the spell of our body, we are delivered to mental states with little intentionality, as though in emotion we 'lived' our body in a more intense way".⁶⁶ It appears that for Ricœur, feeling is a phenomenon that has transcended emotions as their "metamorphosis", and in contrast to emotion the accent is more on mind than body.⁶⁷ Ricœur places great importance on the cognitive aspect of feeling, arguing in favour of Heidegger that they are ways of "being-there" and "'finding' ourselves", i.e., they are ways of engaging with the world, and arguably responding to its value.⁶⁸ Here Ricœur's thoughts on feeling also appear to recall Sartre to some degree, who argued that "[e]motion is not an accident, it is a mode of our conscious existence, one of the ways in which consciousness understands (in Heidegger's sense of *Verstehen*) its Being-in-the-World".⁶⁹

Ricœur provides a nuanced account of emotions, where emotions are a mental and bodily disordering or disturbance, and feelings seem to be of more settled character — whereas others arguably collapse these two phenomena into the singular phenomenon of emotion and perhaps with some inelegance in so doing. Both emotion and feeling nevertheless engage the world of affect — they reflect the affective recognition of the good and evil in our minds or bodies and minds. The continued discussion will not adopt a complete and definitive account of emotion and feeling, which is unnecessary to understand that emotion and feeling are ethically salient ways of recognising goodness in the world and the importance of these things in our projects and moving us towards them (or away from the bad). For now, it is sufficient that characteristics of emotion have been sketched and their ethical significance explained. In the following section, we will apply some of our conclusions to understand the relationship between emotion and solicitude.

III. Solicitude and Emotions

The preceding discussion on emotion and ethics helps us to acquire further insight into Ricœur's "little ethics", where emotion (or feeling in Ricœur's terms) can find a home in solicitude, that other-regarding vehicle revealed in the recognition of shared vulnerability with the other, which likewise reveals the summons to responsibility. Solicitude has a great motivational power in the ethical intention of living well with and for others, and even in just institutions, a motivation stoked by affect, as argued in some detail by Ricœur:

⁶⁵ Roeser, *Moral Emotions and Intuitions*.

⁶⁶ Paul Ricœur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling", *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1978), 156.

⁶⁷ Ricœur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling", 155-6.

⁶⁸ Ricœur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling", 158.

⁶⁹ Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, 61.

On the phenomenological level, where we are now situated, feelings are to be considered as affects incorporated into the course of motivation on the level designated by Aristotle with the term “disposition”, a term that will return under another guise — *Gesinnung*— in Kant himself. Let us confine ourselves here to emphasizing the role played by *feelings* — which in the last analysis, are affects— in solicitude. For it is indeed feelings that are revealed in the self by other’s suffering, as well as by the moral injunction coming from the other, feelings spontaneously directed towards others. This intimate union between the ethical aim of solicitude and the affective flesh of feelings seems to me to justify the choice of the term “solicitude”.⁷⁰

We see within Ricœur’s solicitude much that reflects discussions raised by Nussbaum. Self-esteem, as the reflexive moment of the wish for the good life inherent in the ethical intention of living well, is the root of the *eudaimonistic* conception, but self-esteem is not complete without the recognition that one is another among others, so the *eudaimonist* conception is not complete without incorporation of the value of others into one’s goals and projects. It is in solicitude that the importance of the other is revealed and expressed, where the other is valued as another self, and self-esteem is complete in this recognition of the other. Through her description of epistemic aids to compassion, Nussbaum illustrates in great detail some modes by which solicitude can materialise up to and including through compassion. It is in the judgment of *similar possibilities* that the suffering of the other can be related to the suffering of oneself, wherein one discovers that the instability of goods experienced as suffering by others reveals to us the fragility and instability of our own circumstances, as well as the possible inequality with which we stand in relation to the other. In this judgment of similar possibilities, we see similitude and shared vulnerability.

It is through the act of *empathy*, the imaginative reconstruction or re-enactment of the suffering of the other,⁷¹ that one can feel that suffering within oneself and make more concrete the judgment of similar possibilities, which may spur the outpouring of those feelings as sympathy towards the other. At the same time, through two-fold attention, one recognises the “singularity” and perhaps indeed the “irreplaceability” of the other.⁷² *Wonder*, though *non-eudaimonistic*, may have a role to play where oneself recognises the other as another self, which could be construed as a moment of awe and wonder in the moment of appreciation of sameness and singularity. The summons to responsibility inherent in the notion of solicitude, that which potentially makes the other “master of justice”,⁷³ is the moment of compassion, which is truly representative of the moment of “benevolent spontaneity”, where one judges that the suffering of the other is serious and undeserved⁷⁴; that they therefore hold a place in one’s goals and projects; and further, due to relations of inequality between oneself and other, that their suffering should be relieved.

Although solicitude, epistemic aids of compassion and compassion itself are not synonymous, they are a family of connected concepts that help us better understand solicitude itself and its place

⁷⁰ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 191-2, online: <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/O/bo3647498.html>.

⁷¹ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*.

⁷² Eoin Carney, “Depending on Practice: Paul Ricœur and the Ethics of Care”, *Les Ateliers de l’éthique/The Ethics Forum*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2015), 29-48, online: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1037650ar>.

⁷³ Ellen Van Stichel, “Love and Justice’s Dialectical Relationship: Ricœur’s Contribution on the Relationship between Care and Justice within Care Ethics”, *Medicine, Health Care, and Philosophy*, vol. 17, no. 4 (November 2014), 503, online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11019-013-9536-7>.

⁷⁴ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*.

within an ethical framework. Reijers and Coeckelbergh refer to care (the virtue) as a variant of solicitude, implying that solicitude itself is a virtue.⁷⁵ We tend to agree that solicitude is itself a virtue, and as a virtue, depending on context and individual factors, it implies 1) the skilful other-regarding extension to others with whom we bear some potentially asymmetrical relation into our circle of concern, 2) a keen desire to understand their needs supported by empathy and inclusion, and 3) the will and capability to act upon those needs compassionately in order to relieve their suffering or any foreseeable suffering they may endure. Solicitude is an openness to the other, a recognition of the import of their well-being to one's own projects and goals, and is as a rich affective state and mode of caring as Helm might argue.⁷⁶ Solicitude entails a caring disposition and can subsume the content of Shannon Vallor's care as a virtue and move beyond it by folding into it empathy (to which we will return shortly),⁷⁷ whilst also bearing consideration for the ideals of an ethic of care and allowing fruitful dialogue with this approach. Solicitude is a virtue because it is a disposition that can be learned and mastered through practice, by thinking about others who may rely upon us (and ultimately upon whom we rely) and acting to respond to their needs through proper feeling with and for them.

What solicitude also implies is a consideration of the objects of emotion to which people direct their emotions. It is necessary to understand the importance assigned to different things from different perspectives and what those things mean to them (including obtaining or losing them), which can take place during empathic exercises. By understanding the value attached to an object as felt by others, we can reveal some form of truth (albeit contestable) about the world, and it allows, for example, reflection on considered convictions and appropriate responses to culturally situated emotions relating to certain objects (as well as reflection on their fittingness and appropriateness).⁷⁸ For example, borrowing an analogy from Reijers and Coeckelbergh relating to cultural ascriptions of male gender to artefacts like airport border control checkpoints (or AI), we can use empathy to put ourselves in the shoes of a female traveller from a particular cultural background who might, due to considered convictions, feel that their dignity is being undermined having been scrutinised by such a system, with associated emotions such as fear or shame.⁷⁹ As suggested by Reijers and Coeckelbergh, instead of conducting the scan using the tool, the practice can be designed to allow override and facilitate a security check by a female human employee.⁸⁰ In this case, the norm of security comes into conflict with the ethical aim and the general norm is subordinated to considerations of solicitude. To bring the discussion back to technology, we can also use solicitude to, for example, try to imagine the feelings of alienation a non-binary or genderfluid person may experience when met with binary gender options when signing up to an AI supported dating app. In this case, the good of romantic partnership is threatened by a design feature, itself a very important good internal to the practice of online dating. A solicitous agent (for example, the app's designer) can try to understand their emotions, and in doing so, change the sign-up features and app functionality to better reflect the diversity of self-identification in society.

From the latter example we see the bearing of solicitude in the practical realm, in a technical practice. It is in practice and practical relations where respect for the particular needs of the other are

⁷⁵ Reijers and Coeckelbergh, *Narrative and Technology Ethics*.

⁷⁶ Helm, "Emotions as Evaluative Feelings".

⁷⁷ Vallor, *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting*.

⁷⁸ Steinert and Roeser, "Emotions, Values and Technology: Illuminating the Blind Spots"; Reijers and Coeckelbergh, *Narrative and Technology Ethics*.

⁷⁹ Reijers and Coeckelbergh, *Narrative and Technology Ethics*.

⁸⁰ Reijers and Coeckelbergh, *Narrative and Technology Ethics*.

required (targeted respect), in order to value the diversity of needs of different people.⁸¹ We must “[...] seek out and discern the singular other in practical situations [...]”.⁸² By responding to the other’s needs through solicitude, we can reveal what constituting parts of a practice affect the things they *care* about and *need* in their pursuit of the good life. Through critical reflection, we can start to see the need to change constitutive rules of practices, standards of excellence, and ultimately norms to support others in these practices — they can be modified for inclusion and the flourishing of the other, and so that they can benefit from the goods internal to those practices. Sympathetic and empathetic considerations themselves point towards deontological considerations, as suggested by Roeser,⁸³ such as the general moral norm of respect for persons, and the engagement with the particular circumstances of the case supply the moral norm with content, which, as we have seen, was envisioned by both Ricœur and Nussbaum.

Empathy has featured heavily in discussion so far, and one is reminded of Vallor’s classification of it as a virtue, and Reijers’ and Coeckelbergh’s denial of this.⁸⁴ We tend to agree that empathy is not a virtue, and even less so an emotion in-and-of-itself. Coeckelbergh had earlier tackled this issue rather comprehensively, arguing that whilst empathy is necessary for moral excellence, it was insufficient for it.⁸⁵ As an imaginative capacity for feeling with others, it leans towards neutrality; as both Nussbaum and Coeckelbergh argue, the same imaginative capacity can be used for deriving pleasure from others’ pain (e.g., an empathetic torturer). Contra Roeser, using a cognitive theory of emotion, empathy cannot be conceived as an emotion itself as a mirror of the experience of another — it is not a belief about an object until it is incorporated into one’s own beliefs, since it is merely a belief about another’s belief about an object that has not yet necessarily been assimilated as one’s own belief. For these reasons, we believe that empathy is neither a virtue nor an emotion, but is a vital skill itself to be utilised within the frame of solicitude.

Thus far, we have spoken of solicitude, which is a key aspect in interpersonal relations outside of the institutional context. Recall that solicitude is carried towards justice, where it finds the homologous concept of equality. Solicitude and justice are both virtues which complement each other, where the former can shine light guiding the latter which operates on a wider plane. It is through justice and institutions that solicitude is carried towards the distant other, which requires building structures of compassion, as Nussbaum argued,⁸⁶ into institutions, a belief shared by Ricœur, who argued:

I would even say that the tenacious incorporation, step by step, of a supplementary degree of compassion and generosity in all of our codes — including our penal codes and our codes of

⁸¹ Carney, “Depending on Practice: Paul Ricœur and the Ethics of Care”.

⁸² Carney, “Depending on Practice: Paul Ricœur and the Ethics of Care”, 37.

⁸³ Roeser, *Moral Emotions and Intuitions*.

⁸⁴ Reijers and Coeckelbergh, *Narrative and Technology Ethics*; Vallor, *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting*.

⁸⁵ Mark Coeckelbergh, *Imagination and Principles: An Essay on the Role of Imagination in Moral Reasoning* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007).

⁸⁶ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*; Martha C. Nussbaum, “The Literary Imagination in Public Life”, *New Literary History*, vol. 22, no. 4 (1991), 877-910, online: <https://doi.org/10.2307/469070>; Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015; reprint edition).

social justice— constitutes a perfectly reasonable task, however difficult and interminable it may be.⁸⁷

As pointed to by Ernst Wolff, people appropriate technology through institutions, therefore we can argue that crises of technology can ultimately only be meaningfully mitigated where compassion, love, and generosity are suffused throughout the institutions and their values.⁸⁸ We will not linger on that point, which exceeds the scope of this paper, but point to an area warranting further reflection in future work.

IV. Refocusing Emotion in Technology and Technical Practice Design

We can now bring discussion back to technology and technical practice design, VPD in particular, where emotion is hardly discussed in the most notable works on this framework,⁸⁹ but which nonetheless presents fruitful lines of inquiry for the framework and the continued development of Ricoeur's "little ethics" in different directions, for which it poses some interesting implications. The question of technology and technical practice design are questions for all of society to deliberate on, but in the interest of limiting our scope, we are most interested here in what ethics, emotion, and solicitude mean more directly for the developers and designers of technical and AI artefacts in particular.

Emotions are intentional states which are directed at figures within stories. A narrative can reveal the things that people care about and why they care about them, and can therefore act as an empathetic interface between two people in whatever shape that narrative takes. When telling stories about a technology from different perspectives, we can see the hopes and fears people have about them or can themselves imagine. Such stories reveal how emotions themselves are configured in technical practices, how being stopped at a border pass may cause fear in a member of an ethnic minority, a fear which reflects their evaluative judgment that freedom is an unstable *eudaimonistic* good and the palpable prospect of it being lost causes anxiety and suffering.

This demonstrates the importance of collecting narratives before new technical practices are engaged in or old ones are refigured by new technologies. Stakeholder narratives should be sought about their analogous and expected experiences, particularly those who stand to be marginalised by a technical practice —background and situational emotional experiences should be collected through collaborative and participatory exercises. Such exercises can, as Roeser⁹⁰ has essentially argued, show what really matters and what should draw our attention in technical practices, and where sources of risk might lie. And as both Roeser and Nussbaum have argued, narratives can be a key to illuminating ethically important elements of a situation, and through supporting moral development (as empathetic interfaces). Narratives that are collected can be real or even fictitious, past and present, as a developer or designer attempts to understand sources of fear and suffering, and why they are or might be

⁸⁷ Paul Ricoeur, "Love and Justice", *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 21, no. 5/6 (1 September 1995), 37, online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453795021005-604>.

⁸⁸ Wolff, "Ricoeur's Polysemy of Technology and Its Reception".

⁸⁹ Reijers and Gordijn, "Moving from Value Sensitive Design to Virtuous Practice Design"; Reijers and Coeckelbergh, *Narrative and Technology Ethics*.

⁹⁰ Roeser, *Risk, Technology, and Moral Emotions*; Steinert and Roeser, "Emotions, Values and Technology: Illuminating the Blind Spots".

experienced, and can help illuminate whether such fears are well founded or “fitting”,⁹¹ through prefigured, configured and refigured understandings of technological practice, considering the history of the practice, the changes proposed, and through monitoring a practice which has been changed by technology. Such narratives are a locus of emotion, and such emotions are evaluative judgments about the value of something which must be reflected on both in the design of technical practices (e.g., what elements of this practice incite fear?) and in the technical practices themselves (e.g., can I abort a process that causes suffering?).

Emotions, then, are reflected in narratives (stories about practices and those involved) and are configured in real-time by technological emplotment (e.g., a practice causing fear and suffering). By searching for sources of emotion in historical accounts of practices and involving the voices of others in participatory ways, the stage can be set for solicitous reflection through co-feeling and recognition of the vulnerability of stakeholders or through deliberation and open discussion on the fittingness of emotions in relation to technological tools and their risks. Participation is continuous throughout VPD, from inception of a technology and its inclusion in technical practices. The perspective of the other is a valuable asset: they are the experts in their experiences, so their emotions are valuable guides in identifying problematic practices, how they threaten their move towards the good life, and how norms conflict with those conceptions.⁹² Pluralism should thread every aspect of a technical practice throughout technology design, implementation and deployment.

Methods in participatory design can support the technology developer or designer in their attention to the other, and indeed by bringing the face and the stories and histories of the other to the technology designer or developer. Recently, advances in participatory design have notably turned towards decolonial design practices that embrace alternative epistemologies and aim away from universalist design principles in support of pluriversal futures.⁹³ Such practices allow developers to seek narratives that are counter-positioned to hegemonic capitalist ones; to relate to and feel with potentially marginalised groups who are often overlooked in the process of technology design and deployment; and to empathically use their feelings and emotions to help them understand alternative perspectives and to open up dialogue around design choices and the kinds of futures technologies and technical practices can be used to work towards in a so-called pluriverse, “[...] a world where many worlds fit [...]”.⁹⁴ With the feedback and input if not leadership of a plurality of actors in development and design, it may be possible to craft technologies not only through a solicitude that is the openness to their voices, but also through practices that, under the guidance of the other, further enable or support solicitude, e.g., practices which allow human operators to intervene in automated processes that can cause harm to others, allowing them to see and understand potentially in the moment their

⁹¹ Roeser, *Risk, Technology, and Moral Emotions*; Steinert and Roeser, “Emotions, Values and Technology: Illuminating the Blind Spots”.

⁹² D’Ignazio and Klein, *Data Feminism*.

⁹³ Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds, New Ecologies for the Twenty-First Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Asnath Paula Kambunga *et al.*, “Decolonial Design Practices: Creating Safe Spaces for Plural Voices on Contested Pasts, Presents, and Futures”, *Design Studies*, vol. 86 (1 May 2023), 101170, online: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2023.101170>; Adriana Alvarado Garcia *et al.*, “Decolonial Pathways: Our Manifesto for a Decolonizing Agenda in HCI Research and Design”, in *Extended Abstracts of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, CHI EA ’21 (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2021), 1-9, online: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3411763.3450365>.

⁹⁴ Ashish Kothari *et al.* (eds.), *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2019), XXVIII.

pain and make a moral judgment guided by solicitude. Participatory processes allow many voices to come together and work collaboratively across ethically unstable terrain without clear answers. Participation in design represents the first opportunity, although one before full-fledged political participation, for collective decisions in morally relevant matters.⁹⁵

In examining the emotional implications of an existing or proposed technical practice, a developer or designer can use the lenses of textuality, literacy, temporality, and distancing. Textuality may indicate how a given technology organises events of emotional significance; literacy should indicate whom to look at as emotional stakeholders in a technical practice and how they relate to a technology; temporality may indicate the state of someone's emotions as configured by time in an event (how an event might configure intensities of emotion); and distancing can help indicate whether a practitioner is capable of solicitude, or, seeing or otherwise understanding the consequences of a practice for an individual through emotional engagement.

Again, the implication is that practices should be designed to allow persons of authority to be solicitous in a practice, to see the face of the other and to be able to understand their position and to take action that may go against a particular norm (consider the example of a border guard being able to override a machine decision and discuss the specifics of a case with an asylum seeker⁹⁶). Emotion responds to and reflects right and wrong, and human contact and autonomy support right action through solicitude as a co-feeling and responsibility signalling and motivating disposition. Moreover, when considering emotion in VPD, it should be noted that technologies themselves can support emotive technical practices, even emotive narrative technical practices as described in great detail by D'Ignazio and Klein, who reject emotionally detached rationality in data science, but instead champion the use of emotion in data science and visualisation.⁹⁷ They give the example of a data visualisation of shootings in the United States, by Perisopic,⁹⁸ of which they say:

When you load the project's webpage, you first see a single orange line that arcs up from the x-axis on the left-hand side of the screen. Then, the color abruptly changes to white. A small dot drops down, and you see the phrase "Alexander Lipkins, killed at 29" [...]. The line continues to arc up across the screen and then down, coming back to rest on the x-axis, where a second phrase appears: "Could have lived to be 93." Then, a second line appears — the arc of another life. The animation speeds up and the arcs multiply. A counter at the top right displays how many years of life have been "stolen" from these victims of gun violence. After several excruciating minutes, the visualization completes its count for the year: 11,419 people killed, totaling 502,025 stolen years [...]

[...] Perisopic's work is framed around an emotion: loss. People are dying; their remaining time on earth has been stolen from them. These people have names and ages. They have parents and partners and children who suffer from that loss as well.⁹⁹

What this exemplifies is the explicit integration of narrative into a data technology that is itself embedded in wider narratives and practices. Technological practice designed with emotional sensitivity can support the movement of solicitude and compassion, and motivate others to act by

⁹⁵ Wolff, "Ricœur's Polysemy of Technology and Its Reception".

⁹⁶ Reijers and Coeckelbergh, *Narrative and Technology Ethics*.

⁹⁷ D'Ignazio and Klein, *Data Feminism*, 73, 75.

⁹⁸ The data visualisation in question can be viewed online: <https://guns.perisopic.com/?year=2013>.

⁹⁹ D'Ignazio and Klein, *Data Feminism*, 73, 75.

showing the suffering of the vulnerable other (who could after all, be oneself). The latter example also retains the individuality of the others and two-fold attention in a unique way, by naming them¹⁰⁰ and also by making clear they are dead. This example also demonstrates how novel digital technologies can carry the other to our attention and awaken solicitude in us, and in doing so stir emotions which strike desire itself, and can rouse us towards ethical action.

It might be noted that it cannot be expected for solicitude to come naturally to the technology developer or designer. It instead becomes a matter of corporate responsibility and political mobilisation and education to instil empathic and compassionate capabilities and dispositions within the developers and designers of today and tomorrow so that they may engage in their practices with solicitude — a difficult task in a global political economy and systems of incentives and disincentives that may militate against impediments to disruptive innovation.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the tools exist to help grow the imaginations of innovators and enable them to place themselves in the shoes of the other, to see their faces and to learn to be summoned to responsibility. Such tools include narratives — both narrative fiction, even science fiction, and non-fiction— that can support them in their growth as innovators who can imagine, feel appropriately and thus act appropriately with and for others, in just institutions.¹⁰²

V. Conclusion

The preceding is intended to evidence the importance of Ricœur’s “little ethics” to current ethical thought and support the case for the continued development of his “little ethics” into one that responds to today’s significant and urgent questions of the good with regards to technology —the question of how technology can serve the collective human pursuit of the good life. This paper also had the aim of illustrating the importance of (and further sketching an ethical account of) the emotions (or feelings) in Ricœur’s ethics, and how the emotions (as channelled through the virtue of solicitude) are vital in establishing ethical connections with other human beings. In today’s world, whilst technologies bring people formerly at distance closer together (through video call apps and social networking sites, for example) they also still have the power to drive distance between people, and such distance can diminish the very possibility of solicitude. Yet to truly be human —to learn, exhibit, and master a mode of care, a virtue that is a form of Being-in-the-World and hence fundamental to the very project of being human and becoming who we are— we must be vigilant to ensure that technical practice itself is designed to help us cultivate our powers of solicitude. VPD provides a framework strongly informed by Ricœur’s work that gives us the tools to design technical practices with emotion, with due regard for the other and their lived experience (whether it is joy or suffering) and to understand the call to responsibility of the other, which can be triggered by co-feeling with them. What is important to re-focus and commit to the ethical salience of emotion in VPD, to ensure that it is not overlooked in our

¹⁰⁰ Notably, however, a more recent iteration of Periscope does not name the victims, see online: <https://guns.periscope.com/>.

¹⁰¹ Hayes, Fitzpatrick and Ferrández, “From Applied Ethics and Ethical Principles to Virtue and Narrative in AI Practices”.

¹⁰² Emmanuelle Burton *et al.*, *Computing and Technology Ethics: Engaging Through Science Fiction* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2023); Hayes, Fitzpatrick and Ferrández, “From Applied Ethics and Ethical Principles to Virtue and Narrative in AI Practices”; Martha C. Nussbaum, “Literature and Ethical Theory: Allies or Adversaries?”, *Yale Journal of Ethics*, vol. 9 (1 January 2000), 5; Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998; new edition); Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*.

projects of technological design. This can be achieved when we recall that solicitude is a critical and indispensable element of VPD, and that solicitude is an affective virtue and the seat of experiencing emotions with and for others.

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