

ARTICLE

doi: 10.4013/fsu.2026.272.08

Existential feelings and the feeling of pastness in episodic remembering *

Sentimentos existenciais e o sentimento de passadidade na recordação episódica

Editores responsáveis:

Inácio Helfer

Leonardo Marques Kussler

Luís Miguel Rechiki Meirelles

Róbson Ramos dos Reis 

Universidade Federal de Santa Maria – UFSM – Programa de Pós-
Graduação em Filosofia, Santa Maria, RS, Brasil. E-mail:
robson.reis@ufsm.br

*¹Research for this work benefited from the financial support afforded by *National Council for Scientific and Technological Development* – CNPq (Grant 304109/2021-5) and by CAPES-COFECUB (Grant 88887.468340/2019-00). I would like to thank the participants from the Centre for Integrated Studies in Phenomenology and Hermeneutics at the Federal University of Santa Maria and the Centre for Philosophy of Memory at the Université Grenoble Alpes (CPM) for their discussion of the short version of this paper. I would also like to thank César Schirmer dos Santos and André Sant'Anna for their comments and suggestions.

RESUMO: Neste artigo, proponho uma abordagem colaborativa para a análise da experiência fenomenal da recordação episódica, reunindo a fenomenologia contemporânea dos sentimentos existenciais e as abordagens metacognitivas do sentimento de passadidade (feeling of pastness). Exploro a questão de como os sentimentos existenciais, por meio de sua função pré-intencional, podem constituir a intencionalidade e a valência dos sentimentos epistêmicos envolvidos na recordação episódica. Apresento (1) os principais resultados da análise fenomenológica dos sentimentos existenciais e (2) as conclusões da perspectiva metacognitivo-afetivista sobre o sentimento de passadidade na recordação episódica. Em seguida, considero (3) a relação de dependência entre as experiências de possibilidades proporcionadas pelos sentimentos existenciais e o papel do contexto na especificação do conteúdo de passadidade do sentimento epistêmico envolvido na recordação episódica. Por fim, esboço (4) uma análise da intencionalidade de horizonte própria do sentimento de passadidade. Concluo apresentando direções para pesquisas futuras em uma fenomenologia da memória episódica baseada na elucidação dos sentimentos existenciais.

Palavras-chaves: sentimentos existenciais; recordação episódica; sentimento de passadidade, fenomenologia.

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I propose a collaborative approach to analysing the phenomenal experience of episodic remembering, bringing together contemporary phenomenology of existential feelings with metacognitive approaches to the feeling of pastness. I explore the issue of how existential feelings, through their pre-intentional function, can constitute the intentionality and valence of the epistemic feelings involved in episodic remembering. I present (1) the main results of the phenomenological analysis of existential feelings, and (2) the outcomes from the metacognitive-affectivist account on the feeling of pastness in episodic remembering. Then, I consider (3) the dependence relation between experiences of possibilities provided by existential feelings and the role of context in specifying the

pastness content of the epistemic feeling involved in episodic remembering. Finally, I sketch (4) an analysis of the horizon intentionality proper to the feeling of pastness. I conclude presenting directions for future research into a phenomenology of episodic memory based on the elucidation of existential feelings.

Keywords: existential feelings; episodic remembering; feeling of pastness; phenomenology.

1 Introduction

My aim here is to outline a collaborative approach to the elucidation of phenomenal experience in episodic remembering. On the one hand, contemporary phenomenology of existential feelings may open up a further level of analysis of the affective features of episodic remembering.¹ On the other hand, a recent metacognitive feeling-based account of the feeling of pastness offers challenging directions for a more detailed phenomenology of the pre-intentional function of existential feelings. In this sense, the metacognitive and affectivist approach to the phenomenality of episodic memory provides a solid foundation for developing the phenomenological claim that existential feelings are pre-intentional in that they make the modalities of intentional states possible. An analysis of existential feelings based on the phenomenology of horizon intentionality, in turn, allows for a deeper understanding of the dependence relationships that underlie the phenomenality of episodic memory. I will proceed as follows. The next section summarises the main outcomes of the phenomenology of existential feelings. Section 3 highlights two results of a recent metacognitive affectivist account of the feeling of pastness in episodic remembering. Section 4 presents a proposal for understanding the pre-intentional function of existential feelings in determining the intentionality and valence of epistemic feelings. Section 5 points out a dependence relation between existential feelings as experiences of possibilities and the role contexts have in specifying the pastness content of epistemic feelings. I conclude presenting directions for future research in the program of an existential feelings-based phenomenology of episodic remembering.

2 Existential feelings

Existential feeling is a technical concept introduced by Matthew Ratcliffe to describe a type of affective phenomena that, with a few important exceptions,² was almost entirely neglected in the philosophy of affectivity and emotion. Based on theoretical and methodological resources of the phenomenological tradition, Ratcliffe developed a structural analysis of those feelings. The outcomes of his analysis are relevant for understanding human experience and intentionality in general. Additionally, those results also contribute to a more adequate approach to several complex issues in philosophy of affectivity and emotions, philosophy of psychiatry and medicine, and metaphilosophy.³

¹ The account outlined here is more limited than the phenomenology of remembering elaborated by Casey (1987). My proposal remains neutral with respect to claims, based on phenomenological insights, that consider the distinction between semantic and episodic memory as being not one of kind but of degree. Nor can I examine here the claim of existence of the phenomenon designated by the expression “Rilkean memories” (Rowlands, 2017).

² For example, Heidegger’s account of mood (*Stimmung*) and attunement (*Befindlichkeit*), and the discussion of self-feeling (*Selbstgefühl*) in psychology and modern philosophy (Withy, 2024; Thonhauser, 2020; Rzesnietek, 2014; Wellbery, 2003; Frank, 2002).

³ In fact, the theory of existential feelings has already been critically examined and widely applied in various philosophical fields (Manzotti, 2012; Saarinen, 2018; Ratcliffe, 2020; Fitzpatrick, 2023).

Existential feelings make up a widely diverse set of affective phenomena (Ratcliffe, 2002; 2005; 2008; 2012; 2015; 2020). Some of them resemble moods or background feelings, such as *Angst*, boredom, nausea, and despair. Others are more diffuse, expressed metaphorically as feelings of being ‘at home’, ‘empty’, ‘disconnected from the world’, ‘overwhelmed’, ‘complete’, and so on. These feelings are ways of experiencing the self, the world, and the self-world relation (Ratcliffe, 2008, 37; Slaby, 2008; Slaby & Stephan, 2008). Regarding their ontology, they are not emotions, but bodily feelings. Moreover, they are bodily feelings not directed towards something different from the body, nor towards parts of one’s body. Rather, existential feelings are pre-intentional.⁴ They have a pre-intentional function, operating as a backdrop to all experience, thought, and activity (Ratcliffe, 2008, 37; 2015, 35).

In formal terms, existential feelings bring about a sense of reality and belonging. This sense of reality and belonging, in turn, is conceived structurally as non-inferential experiences of possibility. The formal analysis of this type of modal experience is developed by Ratcliffe based on the phenomenological theory of horizon-intentionality.⁵ Horizons are systems of types of possibilities articulated by a complex structure of anticipation. Hence, existential feelings make up a sense of being posited and of existing in a space that shelters kinds of possibilities. These possibilities are categorized, furthermore, as significant possibilities, possibilities of intersubjective agential actualization, possibilities that foster actions pertaining to capacities, and possibilities whose actualizations are associated with modes and styles of anticipation. The latter component is the most complex, since human experience has a structure of anticipation of possibilities that is complicated, multifaceted, dynamic, and cohesive (Ratcliffe & Broome, 2022, p. 66). The habitual form of the affective style of anticipation of possibilities is that of *basic trust* (Ratcliffe *et al.*, 2014; Ratcliffe, 2023). The spaces of possibilities manifest in existential feelings are, finally, intrinsically dynamic and susceptible to erosions, losses, and recoverings. Overall, existential feelings act in a tacit, inconspicuous and pre-reflexive manner, but may undergo changes that allow for their thematization.

To examine the phenomenological function of existential feelings relative to the intentional mode of remembering, I focus on episodic memory. In particular, I point out how existential feelings condition the temporal aspect of the phenomenality of episodic remembering.

3 Epistemic feeling of pastness, metacognition, and contextualism

According to a feeling-based metacognitive account, the feeling of pastness in episodic remembering is an epistemic feeling (Dokic, 2014; Perrin, Michaelian & Sant’Anna, 2020; Perrin & Sant’Anna, 2022). Based on an intentionalist framework (Goldie, 2000), e-feelings were explained as bodily feelings towards (Arango-Muñoz, 2014). Besides referring to intentional objects or pieces of information, e-feelings also have positive or negative valences, through which they indicate, evaluate, and afford possibilities of mental actions (Arango-Muñoz, 2014, 196). Valence or phenomenal valence is considered a central trait of affective experiences (Loev, 2022, 3). This subjective sense of positiveness or negativeness issued by an experience has been elucidated in hedonistic terms, or assessments of value. Performances linked to cognitive tasks can bring about e-feelings with positive or negative valence relative to the capacities or achievements of the cognitive system (Arango-Muñoz, 2011). Considering the difference between e-feelings concerning capacities and achievements of the cognitive system, the feeling of pastness in episodic remembering is conceived as an e-feeling towards acquisitions of the cognitive system (Perrin, Michaelian & Sant’Anna, 2020).

⁴ See Strasser (1956, part 3) for the difference between intentional and pre-intentional feelings.

⁵ It is in Husserl’s work that horizon appears as a philosophical notion. Its phenomenological elucidation contains difficulties and technicalities that do not need to be examined here (Geniusas, 2012).

Another outcome of this affectivalist approach is the metacognitive explanation of the mechanism by which the feeling of past comes about. According to this view, epistemic feelings are brought about by type 1 metacognitive monitoring processes (Perrin, Michaelian & Sant'Anna, 2020, 6; Arango-Muñoz, 2011, 204; 2014, 77). This approach allows for an important qualification. Empirical studies indicate that the content of e-feelings depend on the mental type in which the first-order content of a memory is entertained. Thus, an epistemic feeling has a pastness content if the imagistic content to which it is associated is experienced in a mnemonic mental state. This approach permits an elucidation, for example, of “the double life of fluency” (Perrin & Sant'Anna, 2022, 19), that is, an elucidation of those situations in which fluency is sometimes associated with the feeling of familiarity, and sometimes with the feeling of pastness.

Naturally, the crucial point is the explanation of the factors that specify the mental type in which a content is entertained. The contextualist thesis offers a solution. The processing context assigns a mental type to a content, which, in turn, determines the content of the corresponding epistemic feeling. Therefore, the content of an epistemic feeling is contingent. The notion of context, in turn, is analysed in terms of a cognitive task and background beliefs (Perrin & Sant'Anna, 2022, 19-20). Depending on the cognitive task and of the doxastic background, the same mental content can be entertained in different types of mental states. In the case of the feeling of pastness, the context must assign a mnemonic psychological mode or mental state to the first-order memory content.

Let me return now to the phenomenology of existential feelings and propose a further step in the elucidation of dependence relations within an affectivalist account of the temporal phenomenality of episodic remembering. In the next section I address the question of how existential feelings may condition epistemic feelings in general.

4 Epistemic feelings and horizon intentionality

Existential feelings are bodily feelings that comprise a background in which all kinds of attitudes and intentional states are formed, including feelings and emotions. One may naturally expect that the pre-intentional role of existential feelings plays a part in epistemic feelings. To examine this, one has to consider the analysis of existential feelings by the phenomenological theory of horizon intentionality. According to this theory, contentful phenomenological experiences incorporate in a non-inferential manner an experience of possibilities. Such an experience, in turn, presupposes: 1) a dynamic space of interdependent types of possibilities, categorised according to perceptual modality, significance, content determination, relationship to agency, mode and style of anticipation, and interpersonal accessibility;⁶ 2) a complicated, coherent, and dynamic structure of anticipation of actualizations of possibilities, correlating to organised experiences of disappointment and fulfilment (Ratcliffe & Broome, 2022, 66).

Based on this general framework, I think that the elucidation of the content and nature of epistemic feelings provides a more specific way of addressing the dependence relation between e-feelings and horizon-intentionality. In this respect, I follow an analysis of epistemic feelings in terms of bodily intentionality, valence, directionality, conceptual penetrability, motivational function, and partial transparency (Arango-Muñoz, 2014). In this regard, it should be emphasized that the program for a general phenomenology of the horizonal structure of the e-feelings comprises the explanation of how significance, agency, interpersonal accessibility, perceptual modality, and mode of anticipation determine the intentionality, valence and directionality, conceptual nature and bodily nature of the epistemic feelings. Theoretically, that phenomenology might be able to be specified for each kind of e-feeling. But that is a general statement that needs to be detailed conceptually and assessed empirically. In the following, I will suggest in a speculative manner how the intentionality and valence of e-feelings may be conditioned by the horizon-intentionality.

⁶To the best of my knowledge, no criteria for sorting out *kinds* of possibilities in the phenomenology of horizon has been put forth. Yet, this does not prevent the elaboration of a modal phenomenology based on a description of the changes that existential feelings undergo (Ratcliffe, 2020, 252).

E-feelings have as their intentional objects items or pieces of information. Some concern the capacities of the cognitive system; others concern its achievements. Both assume that the cognitive agent is in a space with the types of possibilities proper to the cognitive capacities of the system. Yet, these possibilities are not just only those pertaining to the logical space implicated by the concepts of cognition and cognitive system. Beyond that, the corresponding types of possibility must be significantly present or matter in relation to the concerns and projects with which an agent is engaged. In experimental and ecological contexts, the experience of epistemic feelings is associated with cognitive tasks that correspond to the actualization of cognitive possibilities experimented as mattering for the task at hand.

Possibilities that are typified by the intermodal perception criterion belong to the horizon of intentional objects. Some actualizations of those possibilities are specific to a perceptual modality, while others are not, that is, they are actualizations accessible by different sensory modalities. It is relevant to stress that perceptual intersensoriality is in part responsible for the sense of reality implied by intentional experiences. Thus, the intentionality of epistemic feelings implies a sense of reality associated with its intentional object (information item, accomplishments, and capacities of the cognitive system), and with the context and the cognitive task. Hence, that sense of reality is also determined by the intersensorial trait of the actualization of cognitive possibilities. Consider, for example, agents that do not have on their horizon the possibility a tactile access to the outcomes of their cognitive performances. Suppose those outcomes are only visible (or audible), but unconditionally not tangible. For those agents, the sense of reality and belonging to a context where cognitive possibilities are actualized would be robustly diverse (“strangely distant”, Ratcliffe, 2015, 53) and would qualify in a very peculiar way the intentionality of their e-feelings.

The horizon also contains possibilities typified by the relationship to agency criterion. This means that the actualization of cognitive possibilities is experienced as relating in various ways to the cognitive agent’s actions. Given a cognitive task, one may experience the actualization of the possibility of calculating, for example, as something brought about by the agent herself, by other agents, or even by no single human agent. Composed in the mode of anticipation, the relationship to agency constitutes a dimension that allows for a sense of degrees of difficulty in the actualization of cognitive possibilities. The intentionality of the e-feelings towards capacities and accomplishments of the cognitive system is also qualified by agency and a sense of degrees of difficulty (Ratcliffe, 2015, 52). This aspect of the horizontal structure determines the direction and motivational force of the e-feelings by shaping a range of possibilities for solving a cognitive task.

The intentionality of e-feelings is also conditioned by the interpersonal accessibility of the types of cognitive possibilities that are experienced. It follows that the intentional object of e-feelings can be accessed not only by the cognitive agent but also by others. Access to it is potentially interpersonal and does not consist only of a contingent fact, but is a formal determination of the experience of cognitive possibilities. This qualification is also responsible for the sense of reality with which the intentional object of e-feelings is experienced. For a feeling to be had of the capacities and achievements of the cognitive system, one needs to experience them as enduring entities that differ from the agent herself, something which is partially brought about by interpersonal accessibility.

The structure of anticipation of possibilities of a cognitive agent also conditions the intentionality of the e-feelings. As mentioned, the structure of anticipation is articulated in terms of determination of the anticipated content, as well as of the mode, style, and experience of fulfilment-disappointment. This indicates that e-feelings are not simply referred to capacities or achievements of the cognitive system, but that intentional reference is qualified by the structure of anticipation with which the possibilities implied by the cognitive capacities are experienced. Reference to capacities and achievements of the cognitive system happens on the basis of a complex and dynamic configuration of anticipation of cognitive possibilities.

The fleshing out of this suggestion would have to examine explanatory and descriptive problems. Initially, one must characterise the structure of the anticipation of specific types of cognitive possibilities, such as remembering, imagining, inferring, etc. In general terms, it seems natural to assume that temporal distance is an important variable in relation to the degrees of determination of actualizations of cognitive possibilities. For example, the anticipation of the possibility of accessing an information item can be determined as “not now, but in a few moments” or “not now, not later”, which is important for differentiating feeling of knowledge from feeling of familiarity. Naturally, the normativity of the cognitive capacities implies that there are other variables involved in the degree of determination of the anticipation of cognitive possibilities (for example, fully or accurately accessing an information item). One also would have to explain how differences in the mode and style of anticipation of possibilities, as well as how the resulting dynamics of the experiences of satisfaction and disappointment, operate in contexts of processing and taking on cognitive tasks. It seems equally plausible that confident habitual certainty is the usual mode and style of anticipation of cognitive possibilities. However, it is not odd to view the solution of a cognitive task in some ecological situations as occurring in an uncertain and non-confident mode of anticipation. For example, a cognitive agent may be uncertain and not confident in the actualization of the cognitive possibility of accessing an information item.⁷ Furthermore, one needs to explain how horizon intentionality operates in the attribution of a mental type to a first-order content, thus contributing to the definition of the content of the e-feelings. I cannot take on these issues here, but I will point out a direction for conceiving the dependence of the valence of e-feelings relative to the structure of the anticipation of possibilities.

In general terms, I maintain that the contribution of existential feelings in the constitution of the valence of e-feelings can be identified by considering the significance of cognitive possibilities and the structure of anticipation that articulates those possibilities into an intentional horizon. Naturally, agency and interpersonal accessibility are also implied in the valence of an e-feeling. As indicated above, the experience of taking on a cognitive task happens in contexts that have horizons, which are structured systems that have types of possibilities experienced as meaningful in various ways. This entails that also the possibilities associated to cognitive capacities can be experienced as meaningful relative to the cares, concerns, and projects of an agent. The possibility of remembering, for example, is experienced in certain situations as enticing, desirable, urgent, practically useful, or, on the contrary, as dispensable, not required or even as not facilitating the resolution of a task. The significance of a cognitive possibility seems to be a condition of the valenced felt evaluation of its actualization and also of the corresponding cognitive capacity.

This formal condition, however, is not sufficient. It is also necessary that the significant possibilities be integrated into a complex and dynamic system of anticipations. My claim is that the valence of an e-feeling is relative to the variations in the anticipations of actualizations of significant cognitive possibilities. The distinction between content and mode of anticipation allows us to examine in more detail the dependence of valence on the structure of anticipation. According to the content, the anticipation of a possibility admits degrees of determination. The temporal distance is an important determining variable, alongside other variables pertaining to the normative scope of the cognitive capacities – for example, perceiving details in an instant, remembering something straight away, and calculating a number correctly later on. In some circumstances, assessing the degree of determination of the actualization of a cognitive possibility can yield different valences.

⁷ It seems that an episode of feeling of knowledge, understood as the feeling of having information that will be accessed in a few instants, could not happen on the basis of habitual certainty. There would be an inconsistency between the episodic e-feeling and the background existential feeling. However, empirical support is needed to support this claim.

Beyond the determination of actualization, the mode of anticipation impacts the valence of an e-feeling as well. In the habitual certainty mode, the future is experienced as a dimension in which the cognitive possibilities are actualized according to their normative variations. There is trust in the adequate performance of the cognitive capacities. When fulfilment occurs in this mode of anticipation, a positive valence becomes salient in the epistemic feeling. When a disappointment occurs in the habitual mode of anticipation, a negative valence may come about. The valence of e-feelings is thus relative to the experiences of satisfaction or disappointment that happen in the structuring of significant cognitive possibilities in a system of anticipations. Experiences of deception in the usual anticipation of the actualization of a cognitive possibility relative to a task allow for feelings that have a negative valence. On the other hand, the satisfaction of a habitual anticipation allows for a positive valence of the feeling.

The account outlined here is wide ranging and incomplete. I cannot go into the implications of the structures of anticipation and of the experience of fulfilment or deception for the direction and motivational force of the e-feelings. Especially relevant for the problem of the direction of e-feelings is the objection that the concept of affordance is not sufficiently powerful to elucidate the experience of possibilities implied in the existential feelings (Ratcliffe & Broome, 2022, 60-66). To be sure, this is a matter of examining the relation between the bodily aspects of e-feelings and existential feelings, which are corporal but pre-intentional. I turn now to the e-feeling of pastness.

5 Horizon intentionality in the feeling of pastness

According to the phenomenological perspective I endorse, the notion of context can be enriched by adding existential feelings onto background beliefs and tasks. Hence, I argue that existential feelings contribute to the contextual determination of the content of pastness that belongs to the affective phenomenality of episodic remembering.⁸ My specific point is that mental type attribution takes place in contexts in which an agent already has a felt sense of reality that renders possible a differentiation between memories, perceptions, and imaginations.

Having a sense of reality is not an experience of an entity as being here and now, nor is it the assertion that some state of affairs is the case. Instead, it is what enables the difference between 'here, now' and other possibilities. The erosion of this contrast would collapse the very distinction between perceiving, imagining, and remembering (Ratcliffe, 2015, 18). Moreover, the phenomenological analysis claims that the sense of reality is constituted by horizon intentionality. A universal or external horizon contains significant and agentive possibilities (Maier, 2015) capable of intersensorial and interpersonal access in modes of anticipation. Intersensorial accessibility implies structured relationships between perceptual possibilities, for instance, between tangibility, visibility, audibility, etc. The fact that such relationships may hold in given circumstances makes up the felt sense of reality (Ratcliffe, 2008, 136). In what follows, I point out the types of possibilities and the habitual mode of anticipation that partially constitutes the horizontal structure of episodic remembering.⁹

⁸ I think the following suggestion is consistent with the criticism of the assumption that there is a singular and univocal feeling of pastness (Ratcliffe, 2025).

⁹ The differences between remembering in ecological and experimental contexts, as well as between spontaneous and intentional remembering (Perrin & Sant'Anna, 2022), may imply relevant distinctions in the configurations of the horizon and structure of anticipation. I shall not address this topic now.

What is episodically remembered and presented with an imagistic phenomenality (Perrin & Sant'Anna, 2022, 5) cannot be accessed by tactile perception. Hence, this feature of the intersensory relationships may be called unconditional non-tangibility. The lack of tangibility is unconditional, because it is not affected by the satisfaction of the conditions for actualization of tactile perception (namely, spatial distance, adequate functioning of tactile capacities, etc.). The intangibility of the objects of a remembered scene is also interpersonal. Nobody can actively or passively touch the things that feature in a remembered episode. Intangibleness does not mean only the impossibility of tactile access. Considering the relation between touch and vision (Ratcliffe, 2008, 99), it also has consequences for the experience of the imagistic phenomenality in episodic remembering. Naturally, also kinaesthetic possibilities are partially lacking in the general horizon of episodic remembering.

Furthermore, the actualizations of episodically remembered possibilities, precisely as the ones that have already taken place, are no longer susceptible to personal and interpersonal agency. The necessity of those actualizations implies that in the horizon of the person who remembers some possibilities lack agentiality.¹⁰ However, the lack of agency in relation to such possibilities does not imply the loss of their significance. On the contrary, the significance of possibilities whose actualizations have become necessary is still connected with the significance of other possibilities anticipated in the horizon of the one who remembers episodically. Hence, the organisation in the unfolding of possibilities implies some continuity in the significance of the possibilities already actualized.¹¹

With regards to the structure of anticipation, the habitual and confident mode of episodic remembering is marked by a limiting quality: nobody has tactile access to the remembered scene. When remembering, one is confident that the elements given in the imagistic phenomenality cannot be touched. Likewise, passive touch concurrent to a perceived scene and later recalled is no longer experienced as something personal and shared. The change in the ergonomic significance in the horizon of remembering implies, therefore, a *sui generis* experience of deception in the anticipation of intangibility: doubt about whether the mode of presentation is in fact mnemonic. The altered situations – for example, in ambiguous experiences of time and in perceptual changes sometimes occurring during grief – are heuristically privileged for this topic (Ratcliffe, 2022, 146, 159, 175). Moreover, in the habitual mode the experience of possibilities in episodic remembering is organised dynamically. In other words, by remembering intangible actualizations of significant possibilities, other possibilities become salient (while others still are eclipsed).

This aspect is relevant for the problem of the contribution of existential feelings to the contextual determination of the mental type of a first-order mnemonic content. The presentation of a cognitive task is situated in contexts formed by a dimension with types of significant possibilities that are structured in modes of anticipation.¹² It is not artificial to view the experience of a cognitive task as accompanied by a sense of reality and belonging to the context in which the task has become salient. Also, considering the meaning of the question and the cognitive task, possibilities of solution and answers are distinguished, which are related to types of cognitive possibilities that must already be present as significant in the horizon of the cognitive agent. Hypothetically, agency and interpersonal access to possibilities in the horizon of an agent can undergo changes that contribute to formal differences in cognitive tasks. If this is the case, then agency and interpersonality are also determinants in the contexts that designate mental types, and thus contribute to the determination of the contents of e-feelings.

¹⁰ I cannot examine here the objection that if we allow for genuine Cambridge changes, then the horizon of someone who remembers an episode should also contain agency with respect to possibilities already actualized.

¹¹ If the sense of having significant possibilities in one's own future is lost, the past appears as an array of closed and irrevocable actualities (Ratcliffe, 2015, 140). In this sense, there also appears to be a remarkable bond between episodic remembering and basal hope.

¹² The analysis of this condition requires a more general elucidation of the horizontal structure of the position of cognitive tasks and of the formulation of various kinds of questions.

My general claim is that the horizon intentionality constitutes the sense of reality and belonging that accompanies the experiences of receiving and solving cognitive tasks and questions. Furthermore, in the horizon of the cognitive agent must be present the types of possibilities which make up the sense of reality that differentiates between perceiving, imagining, and recalling. For example, in the case of remembering, a sense of reality comprising a change in the intersensorial accessibility of possibilities: the unconditional intangibility. To sum up, existential feelings, analysed as horizontal structured experiences of possibilities that shape the sense of reality and belonging, form a backdrop against which contexts and tasks are experienced and made salient. A more fine-grained analysis should also explain how horizon-intentionality accounts for the double life of fluency. I cannot address this issue now. The proper phenomenological account of this topic requires, on the one hand, an assessment of the sufficiency of the notions of salience and affordance for describing the conscious experience of fluency, and, on the other, a characterization of the types of possibilities and of the structure of anticipation of possibilities pertaining to the intentionality directed towards processes. Naturally, one also has to characterise the changes in horizon intentionality that are implied by the experience of fluency, pastness, and familiarity. I have not examined the dependence relation between existential feelings and contextual background beliefs. Given that the sense of reality and belonging entails a contrast between something being and not being the case, existential feelings would also condition the intentional mode of believing (Ratcliffe, 2015, 18-19). Let me conclude with some questions for further investigation.

6 Open questions

The existential feelings-based account of the affective phenomenality of episodic remembering must face three specific questions. First, do existential feelings play a role in the metacognitive monitoring mechanism which brings about the feeling of pastness? A positive answer has to identify the dependence of the subpersonal identification and interpretation of the characteristics of the process on the experience of possibilities. The second question refers to the issue of explaining the attribution of pastness to a remembered scene. Do existential feelings, which are conceived as pre-intentional bodily feelings, collaborate in the inference process that interprets a detected bodily change as past? Third, if it is correct that someone undergoing a feeling of pastness already has a sense of reality that makes it possible for her/him to difference between imagining, perceiving and remembering, does this imply that this subject is aware of her/his mental state as being mnemonic before experiencing the feeling of pastness? This view appears not to satisfy the third meta-theoretical constraint of a satisfactory account of the feeling of pastness, as formulated by Perrin & Sant'Anna (2022, 20-21). Perhaps existential feelings provide only a sense of the difference between 'here, now' and other possibilities, but not of the difference between types of mental states. In any case, a more detailed analysis of the pre-intentional function of existential feelings in providing the differences in intentional modalities is required.

The more general issue I would like to mention by way of conclusion concerns the content of the existential feelings that conditions the feeling of pastness. Assuming that there is not just one single and constant sense of reality underlying intentional experiences (Ratcliffe, 2008, 70-71), we should not take for granted that in the contextual determination of the feeling of pastness there must be only one existential feeling. Yet, the analysis of the horizontal structure of the sense of reality highlighted that, in the habitual style, significant possibilities are anticipated in the mode of confident certainty. Would trust be the existential feeling operating in the context responsible for the definition of the pastness content of the epistemic feeling in episodic remembering? Not only trust in the cognitive capacities to solve a task or question (of the form *A trusts B to do z*), but a non-localized and one-place kind of trust (*A just trusts*)?

This path in the horizontal phenomenology of the affectivity of episodic remembering will lead us far into places where trust and hope make up a unitary structure (Ratcliffe, 2023). Trust in cognitive capacities meshes with a kind of basal hope in the future as a dimension where significant cognitive possibilities can become actual. Eventually, are we not bound to see that the contextual sensitivity of the feeling of pastness belongs to a tacit history, the natural history of trust and hope? This remains to be seen, time will tell.¹³

References

- ARANGO-MUÑOZ, S. 2011. Two Levels of Metacognition. *Philosophia*, 1(39): 71-82.
- ARANGO-MUÑOZ, S. 2014. The nature of epistemic feelings. *Philosophical Psychology*, 2(27):1-19.
- CASEY, E. 1987. *Remembering. A Phenomological Study*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- DE BRIGARD, F. 2014. Is memory for remembering? Recollection as a form of episodic hypothetical thinking. *Synthese*, 2(191): 155-185.
- DOKIC, J. 2014. Feeling the past: A two-tiered account of episodic memory. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 3(5): 413-426.
- FITZPATRICK, D. 2023. The pre-intentional, existential feelings, and existential dispositions. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-023-09937-8>. Accessed on: 30/01/2025.
- FRANK, M. 2002. *Selbstgefühl. Eine historisch-systematische Erkundung*. Frankfurt am Main: Surhkamp.
- GENIUSAS, S. 2012. *The Origins of the Horizon in Husserl's Phenomenology*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- GOLDIE, P. 2002. Emotion, feelings and intentionality. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 1: 235-254.
- LOEV, S. 2022. Epistemic Feelings are Affective Experiences. *Emotion Review*, 3(14): 206-216.
- MAIER, J. 2015. The Agentive Modalities. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1(90): 113-134. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12038>. Accessed on: 30/01/2016.
- MANZOTTI, R. 2012. An externalist approach to existential feelings: Different feelings or different objects? In: J. Fingerhut; S. Marienberg (eds.). *Feelings of Being Alive*. Berlin: De Gruyter. p. 8-79.
- PERRIN, D.; MICHAELIAN, K.; SANT'ANNA, A. 2020. The Phenomenology of Episodic Remembering is an Epistemic Feeling. *Frontiers in Psychology*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01531>. Accessed on: 20/06/2022.
- PERRIN, D.; SANT'ANNA, A. 2022. Episodic memory and the feeling of pastness: from intentionalism to metacognition. *Synthese*, 200: 109. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-022-03567-4>. Accessed on: 10/07/2023.
- RATCLIFFE, M. 2002. Heidegger's attunement and the neuropsychology of emotion. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 1: 287-312.
- RATCLIFFE, M. 2005. The feeling of being. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 12: 43-60.

¹³ I am quoting the last sentences of De Brigard (2014) not only for reasons of style, but to point out a further step of phenomenological analysis, specifically directed towards the horizontal structure of the simulation of future events.

- RATCLIFFE, M. 2008. *Feelings of Being. Phenomenology, psychiatry and the sense of reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- RATCLIFFE, M. 2012. The Phenomenology of Existential Feeling. In: J. Fingerhut; S. Marienberg (eds.) *Feelings of Being Alive*, Berlin: De Gruyter, p. 23-54.
- RATCLIFFE, M. 2013. What is it to lose hope? *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 12: 597-614.
- RATCLIFFE, M. 2015. *Experiences of Depression. A study in phenomenology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- RATCLIFFE, M. 2020. Existential Feelings. In: T. SZANTO; H. LANDWEER. *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Emotion*. London: Routledge, p. 250-261.
- RATCLIFFE, M. 2022. *Grief Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- RATCLIFFE, M. 2023. The Underlying Unity of Hope and Trust. *The Monist*, 1(106): 1-11.
- RATCLIFFE, M. 2025. When the past becomes future-like: A phenomenological study of memory, time, and self-familiarity. *Continental Philosophy Review*, (58: 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-024-09661-3>
- RATCLIFFE, M.; BROOME, M. 2022. Beyond ‘Salience’ and ‘Affordance’: Understanding Anomalous Experiences of Significant Possibilities. In: S. ARCHER (ed.), *Salience: A Philosophical Inquiry*. New York: Routledge, p. 50-69.
- RATCLIFFE, M.; RUDELL, M.; SMITH, B. 2014. What is a Sense of Foreshortened Future? A Phenomenological Study of Trauma, Trust and Time. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5(Article 1026): 1-11.
- RZESNITZEK, L. 2014. Narrative or Self-Feeling? A Historical Note on the Biological Foundation of the ‘Depressive Situation’. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5: 1-3.
- ROWLANDS, M. 2017. *Memory and the Self*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- SAARINEN, J. 2018. A critical examination of existential feeling. *Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, 17:363-374.
- SLABY, J. 2008. Affective intentionality and the feeling body. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 7:429-444.
- SLABY, J.; STEPHAN, A. 2008. Affective intentionality and self-consciousness. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 17: 506-513.
- STRASSER, S. 1956. *Das Gemüt. Grundgedanken zu einer phänomenologischen Philosophie und Theorie des menschlichen Gefühlsleben*. Freiburg: Verlag Herder.
- THONHAUSER, G. 2020. Beyond Mood and Atmosphere: A Conceptual History of the Term Stimmung. *Philosophia*, 3(49): 1247-1265.
- WELLBERY, D. 2003. Stimmung. In: *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe (ÄGB): Historisches Wörterbuch in Sieben Bänden*, v.7. Stuttgart: Metzler, p. 703-733.
- WITHY, K. 2024. *Heidegger on Being Affected*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Declaração de Disponibilidade de Dados:

Todo o conjunto de dados que dá suporte aos resultados deste estudo foi publicado no próprio artigo.

Submetido: 24 de julho de 2025.

Aceito: 09 de junho de 2026.