

Conference

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Feeling & Form

*Philosophical Reflections
on Emotions and their Importance
for a Grasp on the World*

SPEAKERS

Post. Doc. Claudia Welz, CFS, KU

Associated Prof. Steen Brock, IFI, AU

Prof. Olli Lagerspetz, Åbo Akademi, Finland

Associated Prof. Ingmar Meland, Høgskolen i Telemark

Prof. Raben Rosenberg, Centre for Psychiatric Research, AU

Time

May 23, 2008

09.00-16.30

Place

The University of Aarhus,
Nobelsalen,
building 1453, room 122

Responsibles

Anne Marie Pahuus, AU

Esther Oluffa Pedersen, AU

Programme

09.00 – 09.15

Welcome Address by Associated Prof. Anne Marie Pahuus, AU

09.15 – 10.15

(De)Formed by Feelings: The Self in Love, Guilt, and Shame

Post Doc. Claudia Welz, CFS, KU

10.15 – 10.30 Short Break

10.30 – 11.30

*Feeling, Function and Form - On the Current Bearing of Ernst Cassirer's
Doctrine of "Basis Phenomena"*

Associated Prof. Ingmar Meland, Høgskolen i Telemark

10.30 – 10.45 Short Break

11-45 – 12.45

Feelings, emotions and cognition – some input from neuropsychiatry

Prof. Raben Rosenberg, Centre for Psychiatric Research, AU

12.45 – 13.45 Lunch

13.45 – 14.45

Wittgenstein on Trust

Prof. Olli Lagerspetz, Åbo Akademi, Finland.

(Co-author: Lars Herzberg)

14.45 – 15.00 Short Break

15.00 – 16.00

The Sense of Self and the Emotional Frame for Feelings

Associated Prof. Steen Brock, AU

16.00 – 16.30

Concluding Remarks by Assistant Prof. Esther Oluffa Pedersen, AU

Feeling and Form

**Philosophical Reflections on Emotions
and their Importance for a Grasp on the World**

Theme of the conference

Philosophers have not reached agreement on the description of feelings and emotions – although almost everyone would assent to the importance of feelings and emotions in human life. The philosophical examination of feelings and emotions opens a field of questions concerning *feelings and cognitive content* (are emotions non-cognitive or cognitive?), *the correlation of private feelings and public representation* (seen from both first person and third person perspectives), *collective versus individual emotions* (can an emotion be said to be collective? And in what way?), and *emotions and interaction* (is some degree of stability and reliability of a person's emotional set-up necessary for meaningful interaction with the person?).

Objective

This conference aims to advance the investigation of *feeling and form*. In this manner, the conference will revolve around the connections between feelings as inner states of subjects and the articulation of these feelings as an act of giving inner and/or outer form to the feelings. This implies, firstly, that human feelings cannot wholly be isolated from, on the one hand, *expressions* of the body and, on the other hand, *cognitive* abilities such as human language. But neither does it seem plausible that emotions simply are to be equated with either bodily expressions or cognitive abilities. Secondly, the outlook is a broad one, facilitating investigations into the importance of feelings and emotions in a variety of philosophical disciplines.

Abstracts

Claudia Welz: *(De)Formed by Feelings*

Feelings are our affective bonds to the world. On the one hand, they already have the forms in which they are felt. On the other hand, we are giving forms to our feelings when expressing what we feel. The feeling of shame seems not only to form, but also to deform the self. The self in shame feels to be defective, degraded and diminished. It feels eyes upon itself and ends up observing itself as if it would see itself from outside. Yet, despite the devastating self-reflexivity, the ashamed self seeks to hide and to avoid the reflection that mirrors it. This mode of manifesting, and at the same time concealing, oneself is to be distinguished from the mode of appearance of another feeling that also includes a negative self-assessment, namely guilt. Is it correct to claim that shame affects and pervades a person as a whole while guilt is only directed to the deeds the person has done, and that for this reason, shame has an ‘egoistic drift’ while guilt tends to lead into reparative action and is likely to foster other-oriented responses? I would like to challenge this view and explore the ambiguities and the positive potential of shame in the context of love, the quality *par excellence* of being and feeling for and with another. Shamelessness – the transgression of boundaries – negatively points to what is at risk when *one’s own* feeling of shame does not tactfully protect and affirm *the other’s* dignity, fragility and finitude.

Ingmar Meland: *Feeling, Function and Form*

In recent years the states of emotion and feeling have come to the forefront in disciplines like psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and philosophy. In what can be seen as a reaction to abstract theory and steep theorizing, scholars have turned “towards the concrete” in order to explore what happens when what has traditionally been relegated to the body is thought of in the context of epistemology.

Cassirer saw feeling as the basis of mind. Motivated by epistemological concerns, he began his investigation of symbolism with the examination of feeling. This paper focuses on the role that Cassirer gives feeling in the manuscript on “On Basis Phenomena”. Taking up John M. Krois’s assertion that Cassirer in his philosophy deals mostly with the discipline that C.S. Peirce coined “speculative rhetoric”, it is argued that Cassirer’s doctrine of the basis phenomena, in addition to

underpinning his philosophy of symbolic forms, gives us a theoretical basis for an interdisciplinary research into the epistemic function of emotions and feelings. This is done by connecting the concept of “symbolic pregnance” with the doctrine of basis phenomena, understood as a kind of fundamental phenomenology, and Cassirer’s view on philosophy.

The overall purpose of this line of argument is not only to make a case for the general relevance of Cassirer’s philosophy of feeling in the context of present day epistemological concerns and interdisciplinary research, but also to show *in concreto* how one can fruitfully philosophize along with Cassirer.

Raben Rosenberg: *Feelings, emotions and cognition*

Affective and anxiety disorders are psychiatric disorders characterized by various moods and emotional symptoms. However, persons suffering from affective and anxiety disorders do most often also present significant cognitive dysfunctions as evidenced by catastrophic misinterpretation of bodily symptoms and continuously worrying about the future. In severely depressed patients, delusional thinking may lead to suicidal behavior. Current research in neuroscience focuses on elucidation of the neural correlates of clinical phenomenology, i.e. brain regions and mechanisms involved in emotional processing. Different brain areas have been delineated including both limbic and neo-cortical structures. Furthermore, cognitive therapy is a well established psychotherapy with high efficacy in the treatment of both affective and anxiety disorders. At the neuro-chemical level, changes in neurotransmitter levels by drug treatment may lead to improvement of both emotional and cognitive symptoms. Such findings do question the validity of a sharp delineation between emotion and cognition. Finally, emotions and cognition are not only characteristics of the brain, but of the whole body. Does modern neuropsychiatric research have relevance for philosophers? Do philosophers and psychiatrists speak the same language? These are some evident questions that call for a good transdisciplinary discussion.

Olli Lagerspetz (co-author: Lars Herzberg): *Wittgenstein on Trust*

I develop three themes in Wittgenstein’s work that are particularly relevant for understanding the concept of trust. They imply important insights as well as serious criticism of much of the existing research.

(1) Wittgenstein's discussion of language, and of psychological concepts in particular, suggests that psychological expressions are not primarily employed to refer to independently identifiable states. Thus we need not expect the presence of a specific state of mind or a specific behavior pattern every time the word "trust" is applicable. We claim that the concept of trust should instead be seen as part of an interaction where moral relations come into play. In particular, it is connected with the attribution of blame.

(2) If philosophers assume that our grasp on reality is ultimately to be spelled out in terms of factual assertions, they will come to see trust as a matter of holding certain beliefs about the person trusted; beliefs that, in turn, will be taken to justify our confidence in what the person tells us. However, the sense of an assertion, Wittgenstein claimed, is dependent upon how it enters a context of life. This realization leads to a non-reductive understanding of trust. In many cases our trust in another individual will be basic to the beliefs we come to form, not the other way round.

(3) In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein is exploring the fact that we take some ways of thinking as self-evident without asking for further evidence. Skepticism is only possible against the background of massive general agreement. Our general situation may be described as logical and epistemic division of labor. Ascriptions of trust as well as distrust make sense against this background of mutual dependence.

Steen Brock: *The Sense of Self and the Emotional Frame for Feelings*

At first glance it might seem as if feelings are more immediate and fundamental than emotions. However, a proper view on emotions should underscore that these are essentially connected to - what in recent psychological theory has been called - the Sense of Self. I will try to elucidate and justify this (Wittgensteinian) view - and its related account of the integration of linguistic practices and bodily forms of expression - with themes and concepts in three distinguished contemporaries of Wittgenstein: Cassirer (and the link between perception and concepts), Heidegger (and the notion of *Befindlichkeit*), and Merleau-Ponty (and the notion of "The World as Experienced"). In the light of these Fountains of Philosophy, I will finally outline an adequate model for assessing the relation between feelings and emotions.