

LES ÉMOTIONS RÉPUGNANTES / NASTY EMOTIONS

Organisatrice / Organizer: Chloë Taylor

Philosophical interest in virtues and emotions has noticeably increased in recent years, especially although not exclusively in moral theory. After having been neglected by generations of moral philosophers due to their supposedly irrational nature, emotions have been recently reconsidered in the works of philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum, Robert Solomon, Amélie Rorty, Ronald de Sousa and Christine Tappolet. While “good” emotions such as love, empathy, and pity have come to be seen as central components of a flourishing life, this panel will focus on supposedly “nasty” emotions, such as rage, hatred, jealousy and shame. By addressing the biological explanations for as well as the ambivalent structure and normative significance of nasty emotions, the papers in this panel will attempt to broaden the basic framework of moral philosophy.

The panel will begin with Ronald de Sousa’s exploration of the biological causes of nasty emotions. Next, Christine Tappolet will discuss whether the nastiness of nasty emotions undermines the recent revalorization of emotions in moral philosophy. Taking inspiration from the phenomenological philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jen McWeeny will then present her “operative view” of the emotions with a focus on the nasty emotions of grief, anger and jealousy. Drawing on the philosophies of Descartes, Spinoza, and Agamben, the next two presentations in the panel, by Lisa Guenther and Hasana Sharp, focus on the emotions of shame and hatred, and will explore the question of whether such supposedly nasty emotions are in fact ethically productive. Finally, Mario Wenning’s paper contrasts the role of nasty emotions in Eastern and Western thought.

A particularly exciting feature of this panel is that it will bring together philosophers working on the philosophy of emotions from European, Anglo-American and Eastern traditions, with several of the panelists being conversant in at least two of these traditions of thought.

Individual abstracts of presentations (in the language in which they will be presented) as well as biographies of the panelists and organizer follow.

ABSTRACTS

Ronald de Sousa, “Les émotions répugnantes: trois raisons biologiques de s’y attendre”

Commentateur : Luc Faucher (UQAM)

Le sens commun accuse souvent les émotions d’être perturbatrices et irrationnelles; cependant la plupart des discussions philosophiques et psychologiques les plus récentes ont plutôt tendance à les considérer comme adaptives et fonctionnelles. Je proposerai dans la présente intervention trois raisons de s’attendre à ressentir ou à confronter de répugnantes émotions. La première est que si l’évolution nous favorise en tant qu’individus ce n’est que par hasard. Deuxièmement, bien que les partisans de la sélection de groupe en vantent le pouvoir d’engendrer l’altruisme, l’altruisme en question a de fortes chances de se réaliser sous forme de haines tribales ou de ferveur fasciste. Enfin la fitness biologique est souvent relative à la fréquence d’un trait donné. Aussi, dans un milieu donné, la psychopathie a-t-elle de fortes chances de constituer une stratégie évolutive incontournable, au même titre que l’anémie à hématies falciformes dans les régions malariales.

Christine Tappolet, "Valeurs et émotions répugnantes"

Commentateur : David Risse (Laval)

Les émotions ont longtemps été considérées comme profondément problématiques. Depuis quelques années, un nouveau consensus s’est établi. Loin de constituer un obstacle à la rationalité, les émotions seraient à la fois nécessaires au bon fonctionnement de la raison et essentielles à l’action morale. D’une manière ou d’une autre, les émotions nous permettraient de détecter ce qui est signifiant pour nous. C’est notamment ce qu’affirme la théorie perceptuelle des émotions, selon laquelle les émotions sont des

perceptions des valeurs. Certaines sortes d'émotions, comme la haine, le mépris ou la jalousie, se prêtent assez mal à une telle revalorisation : ce sont des émotions répugnantes. La question qui m'intéresse est de savoir s'il est possible de rendre compte du caractère répugnant de certaines émotions sans renoncer pour autant à la théorie perceptuelle.

Hasana Sharp, "The Virtues of Hatred in Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*"

Commentator: Kristin Rodier (Alberta)

This paper will examine Descartes' claim that, although entirely harmful to the soul, hatred is "primary and necessary" with respect to the body. Because hatred prompts the soul to will separation from what appears evil, it is essential to the preservation of the body. Clearly, it is important for the body to be alert to dangers and to repel threatening and corrosive objects. Hatred also has the function of validating certain kinds of losses as valuable. In particular, I will argue, based on Descartes' various references to the fetus in the womb, that the first loss that hatred affirms as salutary is the connection to the mother's body. The result is that the radical subjective independence for which Descartes' is notorious has an affective basis, not unlike the one described by Freud. Finally, I will juxtapose Descartes' notion that hatred is necessary for bodily preservation with Spinoza's unequivocal claim that "hate is never good."

Lisa Guenther, "The Flush of Shame: Reading Antelme After Agamben"

Commentator: Bryan Smyth (Memphis)

In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Giorgio Agamben argues that the hidden structure of subjectivity is shame. In shame, I am consigned to something that cannot be assumed, such that the very thing that makes me a subject also forces me to witness my own desubjectification. Agamben's ontological account of shame is inadequate insofar as it forecloses collective responsibility and collapses the distinction between shame and humiliation. Through a re-reading of one of Agamben's sources, Robert Antelme's *The Human Race*, I develop an alternative account of shame as the structure of intersubjectivity, and of a collective responsibility that is more fundamental than the subject itself. On this basis, I sketch the preliminary outline of a biopolitics of resistance rooted in the ethics of alterity. The intuition driving this approach is that life is never bare, that even in situations of extreme affliction there remains a relation to alterity which provides a starting-point for resistance.

Mario Wenning, "Tragic knowledge versus karmic release: A trans-cultural comparison of Impure Emotions"

Commentator: TBA

The paper investigates the differences between nasty or impure emotions in the East and in the West. Contrasting the role that the exemplary emotion of guilt plays in Greek tragedy and the Bhagavad-Gita provides for an understanding of a substantive divergence between the two emotive and moral traditions these documents gave rise to. In the case of tragedy, a moral transgression becomes a transgression of morality. Tragic knowledge consists in a retrospective acknowledgment of the necessary guilt springing from the impurity of human action and the resulting fragility of our moral and emotional cosmos. In the Hindu context, the moral cosmos is left intact in spite of moral transgression. Rather than tragic acknowledgment, the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna, which forms the heart of the Bhagavad-Gita, aims at the release from the karmic law of cause and effect through so-called "detached action" (*niskama karma*). While both tragic and detached action aim to come to terms with the impossibility of emotional purity, they harbor radically different and far-reaching consequences for the moral (self-)perception of impure actors.

INFO ON PRESENTERS

Ronald de Sousa is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto. He has published extensively on philosophy of emotions, philosophy of biology, human rationality and philosophy of sexuality, among other topics. His publications include *The Rationality of Emotion* (MIT Press 1987), *Évolution et rationalité* (Presses Universitaires de France 2004), and *Why Think? Evolution and the Rational Mind* (Oxford University Press 2007).

Christine Tappolet is Professor of Philosophy at the Université de Montréal and is Canada Research Chair in Ethics and Meta-Ethics. Her research lies in the areas of moral psychology, meta-ethics and philosophy of emotions and has been supported by grants such as FCAR and SSHRC. She is the author of *Émotions et valeurs* (Presses Universitaires de France 2000) and, with Ruwen Ogien, *Les concepts de l'éthique* (Hermann 2009).

Lisa Guenther is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Vanderbilt University. She has a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto and was previously an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. Dr. Guenther's primary areas of research are French phenomenology and feminist philosophy and she is currently working on a study of American torture and the politics of shame. She is the author of *The Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction* (SUNY 2006) and is currently completing a manuscript entitled *Alterity, Difference, Indifference*.

Hasana Sharp is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at McGill University. Her primary areas of research are early modern philosophy, political theory, and feminist philosophy. She is the author of a number of articles on Spinoza, feminist philosophy and French post-structuralism, and has recently completed a manuscript entitled *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*.

Mario Wenning is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Macau. He has a Ph.D. from the New School and an M.A. from Concordia University in Montréal and the University of Münster in Germany. Previously he was an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Puerto Rico. His research interests include Critical Theory, German Idealism and Romanticism, Comparative Philosophy, and Aesthetics. He has published on Hegel, Adorno, Heidegger and Rorty. His translation of Peter Sloterdijk's *Rage and Time* is forthcoming (Columbia University Press, 2010) and he is completing a book manuscript on the role of utopia in the Critical Theory tradition.

Chloë Taylor is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Alberta. She has a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto and was previously a SSHRC and Tomlinson postdoctoral fellow at McGill University. Her research interests include twentieth-century French philosophy, philosophy of sexuality, feminist philosophy, and animal ethics. She is the author of *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault* (Routledge 2009) and is currently working on a manuscript entitled *Sex Crimes and Misdemeanours: Foucault, Feminism, and the Politics of Sexual Crime*.