

Conference

The Ethics of Emotions

Fittingness, Fairness, and Control

University of Bern, 07–09 July 2021

Call for Abstracts

Emotions have become a focus of attention in various areas of moral philosophy: the fairness of attitudes like anger and resentment plays an important role in many Strawsonian accounts of moral responsibility; it is considered appropriate or even virtuous to admire the good and despise the bad; the harms that fear and contempt can do to individuals and their relationships are highlighted. In these and other contexts, emotions are subjected to what appear to be various forms of moral critique. They are considered hurtful, inappropriate, or unfair, e.g. when someone resents a more successful colleague, is amused at a racist joke, disgusted by a someone's bodily deformation, or angry at a small child. But are these valid forms of criticising our emotions? Can emotions be a proper object of moral evaluation? Can we hold people responsible for them?

Emotions have long been considered an appropriate target for certain kinds of epistemic criticism, e.g. in terms of representational accuracy or their coherence with one's beliefs about their object. For example, the fear of a harmless spider is considered unfitting because it misrepresents the spider as dangerous. However, assessing an emotion as inappropriate or unfair seems more severe than saying that it is somehow mistaken about its object. On the other hand, many consider emotions to be the wrong kind of object for moral critique. After all, we do not have voluntary control over our emotions (as we have over our actions), so how can it be morally wrong or even blameworthy to feel them?

The aim of the conference is to investigate the norms that govern our emotions and to explore whether there can be an ethics of emotions. In particular, it will provide an occasion for discussing fundamental questions at the intersection of normative ethics, the theory of responsibility, and the philosophy of emotions, including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Are there moral duties to (not) feel certain emotions? What are they?
2. Which emotions are subject to moral scrutiny? Only so-called moral emotions like indignation, gratitude or resentment, or also other emotions, like fear, joy, shame, grief and admiration?
3. What, if anything, distinguishes the moral assessment of an emotion like anger from its assessment in terms of fittingness?
4. What is the relation between the moral assessment of a person's emotions and the moral assessment of their character?
5. Can we hold people responsible for their emotions? What kind of control does responsibility require? Do we have that kind of control over our emotions?

6. How are emotions morally relevant? Can they harm people other than their bearer, even when they do not actually result in any harmful behaviour?
7. In what sense are emotions private? Does criticizing a person's emotions violate their private sphere? Would that make it impermissible?

The conference will feature talks by Macalester Bell (Bryn Mawr College), Jonas Blatter (University of Bern), Justin D'Arms (Ohio State University), Sabine Döring (University of Tübingen), Laura Luz Silva (University of Geneva), Leonhard Menges (University of Salzburg), Anne Meylan (University of Zurich), Christine Tappolet & Mauro Rossi (University of Montréal), and Fabrice Teroni & Julien Deonna (University of Geneva).

We invite submissions for additional talks. If you are interested, please send an abstract of 800 – 1000 words (suitable for a talk of 30–40 minutes) as a PDF attachment to ethics@philo.unibe.ch by December 1st 2020. The abstract should be suitable for blind review, i.e. it should not contain any information that may identify you as the author. You will be notified about the decision by early January 2021. Please make sure that the e-mail to which the abstract is attached contains your name and institutional affiliation (if applicable). Researchers from underrepresented groups in academic philosophy are especially encouraged to submit.

We will provide hotel accommodation for all accepted speakers. In addition, there is a limited budget for covering some of the travelling expenses of those whose home institutions do not bear these expenses. We also expect to be able to arrange for professional childcare during the workshop. Please contact us for more information on this.

The conference is hosted by the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Bern and organized by Jonas Blatter and Andreas Müller. If you have any questions, please visit our website at www.philosophie.unibe.ch/ethicsofemotions or contact us at ethics@philo.unibe.ch.

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which is funded by the [Swiss National Science Foundation](#).*