



Bittersweet, Ancient and Modern
Mixed Affect in Emotional Experience from Plato to Brain Imaging
PRIN2022 (2022CS3XR3)

Emotion and Intersubjectivity

Dates: 05.05.2025-07.05.2025, Place: Aula Mondolfo, Università di Bologna, Via Zamboni 38

Organisers: Pia Campeggiani & Michele Ombrato (michele.ombrato@unibo.it)

05.05

09:00 Welcome coffee

09:15 – 10:00: Lorenzo Benigno (Università di Bologna):

Plato and the Logical Space of Pleasure

10:00 – 10:45: Q&A

11:00 – 12:00: Olivier Massin (University of Neuchâtel):

The Reactive Theory of Emotions

12:00 – 12:45: Q&A

06.05

09:00 Welcome coffee

09:15 – 10:00: Michele Ombrato (Università di Bologna):

Non-Normative Intelligibility of Emotional Transitions

10:00 – 10:45: Q&A

11:00 – 12:00: Naomi Eilan (Warwick University):

Psychopathy, Understandability and Emotions

12:00 – 12:45: Q&A

07.05

09:00 Welcome coffee

09:15 – 10:00: Niccolò Nanni (Università di Torino):

Feelings Touched: on Tactually Perceiving the Emotions of Others

10:00 – 10:45: Q&A

11:00 – 12:00: James Laing (University of Oxford):

Belonging

12:00 – 12:45: Q&A





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ABSTRACTS

Plato and the logical space of pleasure

Lorenzo Benigno

Plato is the first philosopher to articulate the Principle of Opposites and to present pleasure and pain as contraries. In his refutation of hedonism in the *Gorgias*, however, he introduces an argument that challenges this opposition: pleasure and pain frequently occur together, seemingly violating the Principle of Opposites. Furthermore, in dialogues such as the *Republic* and the *Philebus*, where he investigates the nature of pleasure, Plato argues that most experiences of pleasure are interwoven with pain. The acknowledgment of the possibility of the simultaneous occurrence of pleasure and pain may suggest that Plato does not, in fact, regard them as contraries in a strict sense, even though he never explicitly rejects their commonsensical opposition. In this paper, I will argue that pleasure and pain exhibit a distinctive form of contrariety characterized by an asymmetry between their poles.

The Reactive Theory of Emotions

Olivier Massin

Evaluative theories of emotions purport to shed light on the nature of emotions by appealing to values. Three kinds of evaluative theories of emotions dominate the recent literature: the judgment theory equates emotions with value judgments; the perceptual theory equates emotions with perceptions of values, and the attitudinal theory equates emotions with evaluative attitudes. This paper defends a fourth kind of evaluative theory of emotions, mostly neglected so far: the reactive theory. Reactive theories claim that emotions are attitudes which arise in reaction to perceptions of value.

Non-normative Intelligibility of Emotional Transitions

Michele Ombrato

Much of our occurrent emotional life is made up of long-lasting, articulate experiences involving emotional transitions or changes in attitude—e.g., shifts from terror to relief, from shame to regret or dread and so on. Accounts of emotions which target single emotion attitudes as their sole *explananda* typically neglect these more articulate emotional experiences, and, arguably, miss their centrality to our self-understanding as well as our understanding of the psychology of others. One possible strategy to highlight this neglect and argue that it is problematic rests on the claim that such sequences of emotions are intelligible emotional *unities* governed by diachronic *rational* norms (Na’aman 2019, 2021; cf. Helm 2001). I will examine this strategy and suggest that it does not allow us to fully remedy the neglect: much of our emotional life is in fact made up of sequences of emotions the intelligibility of which cannot be derived from rational norms. Elaborating Campbell’s (2000) discussion of our understanding of singular *vs.* general causation in the mind, and more specifically, his discussion of Jaspers’ notion of “meaningful psychic connections”, I will finally sketch an account of the non-normative intelligibility of such experiences.

Psychopathy, understandability and emotion

Naomi Eilan

My talk takes off from Cleckley’s account, in *The Mask of Sanity*, of the sense in which psychopaths are un-understandable. I will suggest that his account of psychopathy brings into view aspects of understandability that we take for granted in our everyday interactions with people, but which tend not to feature in common philosophical explanations of our understanding and knowledge of other minds. His account requires, I will argue, expanding, and amending, Jaspers’ account of genetic understanding, where doing so serves to highlight two distinct roles for emotion in our understanding of others. The first concerns a background assumption in our everyday interactions with people of ‘personality’, as Jaspers called it, or character, something Cleckley argues that psychopaths lack. This lack serves to highlight a constitutive link we implicitly assume as background, when we ascribe mental states to people, between personality, emotion and practical reasoning. The second concerns Jaspers’ (and others’) reliance on *unidirectional* empathy to explain our understanding of others ‘from the inside’. I’ll suggest that psychopathy makes vivid our everyday reliance on the possibility of *bi-directional* mutual connection, in understanding and being understood -- impossible to achieve with psychopaths as Cleckley describes them -- and a distinctive role for particular emotions in such understanding.



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Feelings Touched: On Tactually Perceiving The Emotions of Others

Niccolò Nanni

It has recently been argued that the emotions of others can be directly perceived. On such a view, when we see, e.g. an angry face—the teeth exposed, the brow furrowed, the jaw clenched—we do not merely see its low-level visual features, such as its shape, color, or spatial orientation. We also directly see its anger. Until now, the debate on direct emotion perception has remained largely confined to a visuocentric framework, with all sensory modalities beyond the visual receiving little to no attention. The aim of my presentation is to advance further our understanding of how we perceive the emotions of others by focusing on the overlooked role of touch. The presentation will be divided into three parts. In the first part of the presentation, I will discuss some evidence that human beings can accurately assess the emotions of others based solely on tactile stimulation. As in the visual domain, however, recognizing the emotions of others based on touch does not necessarily entail that said emotions are tactually perceived; it might instead involve inferring emotions from tactile cues. Thus, in the second part of the presentation, I will challenge the latter view via an argument that draws from the recent empirical literature on the relationship between purely tactile cues and our ability to recognize emotions from those cues. Lastly, in the third part of the presentation, I will explore some key differences between visual and tactile emotion perception, highlighting the unique role of touch in the perception of prosocial emotions like love, gratitude, and sympathy.

Belonging

James Laing

Human beings are social animals that seek to live in communities in which they feel like they belong. But what is it we want in wanting to belong? In this talk, I distinguish two, distinct, forms of belonging—belonging in a place and belonging to a group—and offer an account of their relationship.