



## Philosophers and Psychologists Talk Emotion



The European Society for Philosophy and Psychology (ESPP) held its annual conference in Geneva from July 9 to 12. The NCCR Affective Sciences played a leading role in organizing this conference, together with the Philosophy Department of the University of Geneva. The local organiser of the conference was Kevin Mulligan, and the conference coordinator was Philipp Keller of the Geneva Philosophy Department.

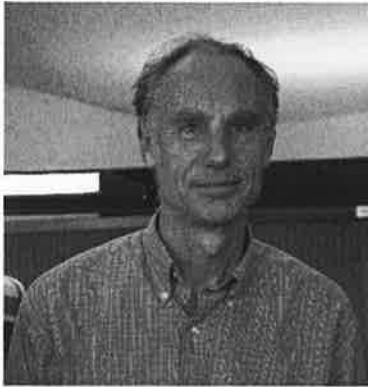
Emotion was very much on the agenda.

NCCR Visiting Professor Paul Harris, who is now leaving us to return to Harvard, opened the conference with an invited lecture entitled "Trust in Testimony". He discussed how young children learn from the testimony of others. In an earlier stage of child psychology, this was dismissed by Piaget as "verbalism". However, as Paul Harris took pains to point out, we are all dependent on testimony from others. Hume had already talked about "the veracity of human testimony" as a philosophical problem. In the experiments he conducted, Harris found that young children tend to believe what they are told by familiar informants such as parents and caregivers, but as children get older, the established reliability or accuracy of informants becomes more important than their familiarity. At any rate, there is a socio-emotional factor, familiarity, at work in the matter of trust in testimony. Harris speculated that the attachment style of older children may be related to their experience of their parents' reliability as informants.



Hume: "veracity of human testimony"

The following symposium on "Moral Emotions" brought together Peter Goldie, Paul Harris and Klaus Scherer, each of whom made a presentation. Peter Goldie talked about "thick concepts". These represent value judgements, but they are stronger than "good" or "bad", because they involve subjective emotional content. Examples would be "dangerous" or "stupid"; another would be "Sabbath", which incidentally shows that thick concepts are not innate, but socially determined. Goldie used Kahneman's distinction, in the theory of dual-process thinking, between the intuitive, coloured by emotion, and the deliberative. He discussed thick concepts and their role in ethics. They match typically with emotions, but they are still cognitive, which also reminds us of the cognitive basis of emotional experience. Goldie argued that emotions and thick concepts are made for each other: in emotional experience we can intuitively and immediately grasp things as being dangerous, people's actions as being brave or cruel, and so on.



*NCCR visiting professor Paul Harris, soon to return to Harvard, played a leading role at the ESPP conference*

Paul Harris talked some more about his experiments involving the moral emotions of children – this time involving the problem of desire versus duty. He said that younger children don't attribute remorse to wrongdoers if it results in a situation of benefit to the latter, whereas older children do, probably because they have developed a "theory of mind". Yet these older children do not condemn children who do not feel bound by a duty that they themselves recognize, such as vegetarianism.

Klaus Scherer insisted on the distinction between shame and guilt established in the work of the NCCR philosophers. Words or labels for emotions like "shame" and "guilt" are cultural, and distinct from the emotions themselves, which are universal. Scherer

described how the work of the philosophers has helped him sharpen his universal theory of emotions.

The paper session on "Emotion and Attention" (July 12) was organized by David Sander of the NCCR Affective Sciences. At this session, Tobias Brosch and David Sander talked about "Relevance detection and its role in attentional capture". They presented some potential links between appraisal mechanisms and attention, and proposed that all classes of stimuli that have high biological significance – not just negative ones like spiders and snakes, but positive ones like human offspring – are prioritized by the attention system. These findings were derived from a series of experiments involving Lorenz's "Kindchenschema" (baby face).

Patrik Vuilleumier of the NCCR talked about "the cerebral underpinning of 'emotional attention' ". He discussed how investigating the brain can help us to better understand the effects of emotion on attention. In particular, the amygdala seems to play a critical role in providing both direct and indirect top-down signals on sensory pathways, which can influence the representation of emotional events. Vuilleumier argued that these modulatory effects implement specialized mechanisms of "emotional attention" that may supplement but also compete with other sources of top-down control of perception.

The interdisciplinary nature of the conference and its discussions was commented upon favourably by many of those who took part. David Sander told us afterwards: "I found that the ESPP was a place of real debate, both the conference in general and the symposium I organized in particular. The barriers between disciplines were hardly felt, and questions were asked and discussed – it didn't matter whether they were points about conceptual analysis or empirical results. The discussions were certainly animated, and we all enjoyed getting down to the root of things."



*NCCR's David Sander*



Philosopher Peter Goldie

## An Interview with Peter Goldie

*Following his participation as a guest speaker at the ESPP conference, Peter Goldie spoke with Terence MacNamee about his philosophy of emotion and his cooperation with psychologists working in the same field.*

**TMcN:** What made you decide to become a philosopher after a career of many years in the business world?

**PG:** I was Chief Executive of a large financial services group in the City of London. Then came the downturn in financial services of the 1980s - Black Wednesday and all that followed. I found myself out of a job. So I turned to a new career as a philosopher. To that extent you could call me “an advertisement for adversity”. Philosophy didn’t just emerge out of the blue, though; I had always been attracted by the sorts of questions that philosophy poses (one I remember troubled me was how words come to mean what they do mean), although I had no idea of how to go about answering them. So there I was, an undergraduate at University College London at the age of 45, buried in philosophical studies. Friends used to ask me what I did when the other students were pursuing sport and sex, and I would reply: philosophy!

**TMcN:** You are the author of *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*. What role do emotions play in your philosophizing?

**PG:** Literature and the arts get little light shed on them by philosophy of mind without emotion. And what are great novels or operas about *except* human emotions? Emotions are what make people interesting—and lovable. I am referring not just to emotional episodes – which is what psychologists have mainly studied – but to long-term emotional dispositions. These are the engines that drive us, like the engines deep in the belly of a great transatlantic liner. They are an area that philosophy and psychology would do well to study together, in my view.

**TMcN:** It struck me listening to the papers at the ESPP conference that philosophers seem to be very accepting of the contributions of psychology. I heard you yourself quoting psychological theories with approval. Has philosophy become just an “underlabourer” (to use Locke’s term) of psychology when it comes to accounting for phenomena like emotion?

**PG:** In moral psychology, it is often held that philosophy deals with the prescriptive, or the sphere of norms, whereas psychology is descriptive. In other words, philosophy is particularly concerned with the question of what one *ought* to do, not just what one does; and, as Hume said, you cannot get an “ought” from an “is”. Not, mind you, that the philosopher may be the best person to tell you what you ought to do – that might be more a matter for the priest, or a close friend. But the philosopher at least thinks and talks about that domain, in contrast to the psychologist. Also, philosophy is interested in the sources of moral intuition. Take the case of euthanasia, a moral dilemma. The

utilitarian says: if you have nothing before you but a life of suffering, of course it is the right thing to do to bring an end to it; at least it should be permissible. Someone with an opposing view of things will say: no, life is sacred - we have that moral intuition. The utilitarian replies: then your intuition is wrong if it conflicts with the theory of utilitarianism. And so the argument goes on, circling around the question of whether or not our moral intuitions are a good starting-place for thinking about what we ought to do—arguably, utilitarianism is itself grounded in some basic intuition about what is fair or just. The philosopher is deeply interested in examining such questions, and here psychology, especially developmental and evolutionary psychology, can be a real help about the sources of our intuitions.

**TMcN:** Earlier this week, we heard Paul Harris's account of his work on the moral intuitions of children, which opened the ESPP conference. He started out by quoting Hume on the "veracity of human testimony". Then he described a series of experiments involving children's judgements of the reliability of informants. Do you find his experimental work relevant to philosophy?

**PG:** I find Paul Harris's work as a developmental psychologist very relevant, particularly in moral philosophy in the ways I have just been discussing. The development of imagination, which he spoke of a great deal, is of particular interest to moral philosophy. It also has implications for the response to literature and art, for example, so it is important for philosophical aesthetics. Paul, and many other psychologists, are philosophically highly aware and astute, and this enables us to work together profitably.

**TMcN:** Our Affective Sciences Centre has been conceived as an interdisciplinary venture. It involves philosophers and psychologists, among others, working together. How do you suggest we improve the dialogue between philosophy and psychology? Especially with regard to emotion?

**PG:** Conferences like ESPP are very good, as are focussed meetings on the emotions, a number of which have taken place over the last few years. They have given me the opportunity to have some pretty serious interdisciplinary conversations. There are people (especially on the continent of Europe) with degrees in both philosophy and psychology, so they are aware of the viewpoints of the two disciplines. What I am particularly interested in is the emotional dispositions below the surface of consciousness which I referred to earlier – and less about emotional episodes, which have been amply studied hitherto. I hope the two disciplines can work together on this.

**TMcN:** Then can philosophers and psychologists actually work together cooperatively on projects, and not just talk to each other?

**PG:** When you think of the work that has been done cooperatively in cognitive science, involving philosophers, psychologists and neuroscientists, there are grounds for optimism. Why shouldn't we do the same thing with emotion?

**TMcN:** Do you think philosophers get their fair share of the work in these ventures?

**PG:** Philosophy has to find its place. It must not pretend to be empirical science, which is what psychologists and neuroscientists do. Neither can it pretend to do what literature and the arts—Proust, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Jean Renoir, Conrad, Verdi—accomplish so well. One aspect—an important one—of philosophy's job is to explain our everyday

commonsense understanding of emotions; to carry out a conceptual analysis of emotion phenomena. Now that may sound like the underlabourer position you mentioned earlier, but I see this as the beginning of a real cooperative exercise between the disciplines, which can then extend into moral philosophy and into wider conceptual and theoretical issues. As evidence of that I would cite the Affective Sciences Centre here, and also the HUMAINE project funded by the European Union in which I am involved, which focuses on emotion in human-computer interaction; in both cases philosophers have had a very substantial input in all of these areas.

One thing I have learned in working with empirical psychologists is that it is no longer true, if it ever was true, that psychologists do not take seriously the fine-grained detail of emotion. For example, recent work on facial expressions, body language and so on is highly sensitive to the nuances of expression. Emotional phenomena are certainly not simple, and psychologists these days are fully aware of this. Our job as philosophers, on the other hand, is not to do empirical experiments, but *thought* experiments; and we too should be sensitive to the fine-grained detail of emotional experience. It is here especially that one can draw on literature and the arts.

## A Moderate Dose of Moralism

Also at the ESPP annual meeting, Catrin Misselhorn of our Centre gave a talk in defence of moderate moralism.

Moralism is the position that the ethical value of a work of art can have an impact on its aesthetic value, that is to say, the spheres of the moral and the aesthetic are not independent. Moderate moralism does not claim that ethical flaws always amount to aesthetic ones, but just sometimes. She tried to explain when exactly this is the case with the help of an emotion-based account. Based on this emotion-based view of the imagination, she holds that the ethical flaws of a work of art can sometimes also be aesthetic flaws, and, accordingly, that there is a connection between the ethical and the aesthetic value of a work of art.



Catrin Misselhorn

Dr. Catrin Misselhorn is an assistant professor at the Department of Philosophy of the University of Tübingen (Germany). She has been on a research semester at the CISA in Geneva since March of this year. In order to pursue her research in Geneva she was awarded a Feodor-Lynen fellowship by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

Currently, she is working on the role of emotions in aesthetic experience. While in Geneva she gave a number of talks to NCCR audiences. One of them was on what is known as the puzzle of imaginative resistance. This means that we seem to feel resistance to imagining morally different worlds. A morally different world is not just a different culture, a social context where people think differently about morality. It is a world in which the moral facts *are* different, so that, for instance, genocide is not just considered to be a good thing by the people involved, but genocide really *is* a good thing. We find this hard to imagine, whereas we do not have any comparable trouble imagining worlds that differ vastly from the real world in non-moral respects.

Yet, Catrin Misselhorn is not just interested in the recent philosophical and psychological discussions. She also deals with the twentieth-century Austrian author Robert Musil's aesthetics and theory of emotion – a fascination which she shares with another philosopher at the NCCR, Kevin Mulligan.

Catrin Misselhorn has now left our Centre to continue her research in Paris. She will be working under the auspices of the Collège de France in cooperation with the Institut Nicod. Her research will focus on the representational content of aesthetic experience, and – more on the practical side of aesthetics – on the implications of her view of aesthetic experience for the relationship between philosophy and literature.

The Tübingen philosopher believes she has very much profited from the interdisciplinary environment at the NCCR for her research. She especially appreciates the discussions she had with Kevin Mulligan and the group of young philosophers here known as the Shame and Guilt Club.

## Book Review: The Navigation of Feeling



William Reddy

William M. Reddy is a cultural historian who teaches at Duke University. He has been studying the history of emotional experience since 1995, and is currently writing a history of romantic love. His book *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* was published in 2001, but it is still evoking reactions. Recently (January 2007) the author was interviewed by PsychJourney, an American website that provides “audio interviews with authors and leaders in the field of psychology, mental health, social work, and science”. You can hear the entire interview in mp3 format at the PsychJourney web-page

[http://www.psychjourneypodcasts.com/index.php?post\\_category=Emotions](http://www.psychjourneypodcasts.com/index.php?post_category=Emotions).

*The Navigation of Feeling* critiques established psychological and anthropological research on emotions. Reddy offers a new theory of emotions and historical change, drawing on research from many academic disciplines. This new theory makes it possible to see how emotions change over time, how emotions have a very important impact on the shape of history, and how different social orders either facilitate emotional life or make it more difficult.

Reddy favours a componential approach to emotion, rather than a hard-wired “basic emotion” approach. Emotions for him are to a great extent culturally learned. They are like learning a language; eventually you get so good at it you can manipulate the language to express your own particular point of view.

He takes his point of departure in anthropology but also in literary and historical gender studies. The evidence from anthropology is that emotion is not universal, but that there are “local emotion systems” in particular cultures. Gender studies have noted that women were traditionally found to be more emotional than men, and that attitudes to women's supposed emotionality varied over time – sometimes it was regarded as good,

having a humanizing influence on society, sometimes it was regarded as bad, distracting the menfolk from rationality in their public and private affairs. If thinking about emotion can change so much over historical time, then surely emotion is not hard-wired!

Delineating his own theory of emotion, Reddy says that we “prime” ourselves for emotion. Emotions are thus not like chemicals in a test tube. By observing them and naming them, we are affecting them. Emotional expression can be considered as a type of speech act. Emotional expression shapes emotional experience. Thus emotional expression is not necessarily “sincere” or “insincere”, “true” or “false”. When we report our emotional states, we are not just reporting, we are to a great extent determining how we feel. People select the emotional styles that they can share and that work for them in the social setting they live in.

He focuses in his book on the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the French revolution as being the age of sentiment. At this time women’s emotionality was in favour. Emotion was found to be a good thing, essential for a moral person. It was sociable – people shared it in their friendships and their salons. The Revolution was swept by emotion. In the early days of the Convention, the legislators were often in tears. This was felt to be proof they were doing right. Then the whole elevation of sentiment was discredited by the years of the Terror. Napoleon’s rise to power in 1800 was accompanied by a new emphasis on classic reason, sentiment being banished to the private sphere. Romanticism was, of course, a movement of feeling, but it was feeling experienced largely alone, not with the social group, as had been the case in the age of Rousseau. The 19<sup>th</sup> century became a time of “liberal reason, romantic passions”. We are stuck in that view of things ever since, Reddy finds: we believe that emotions should not cloud rational decision making.

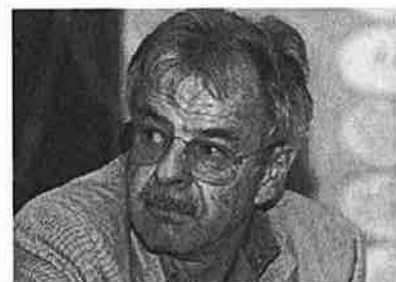
Reddy’s book is certainly wide-ranging. It opens with a discussion of contemporary psychology and anthropology and ends with French history before and after the Revolution. Readers may find the book to lack focus; they will certainly be more interested in some chapters than in others. However, it is worth reading precisely because of its interdisciplinary scope. Affective scientists who are thoroughly at home in one part of the book will find themselves surprised and out of their depth in another. William Reddy is a commentator on the study of emotion well worth the attention of all of us.

**Reddy, William M.: *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*: Cambridge University Press, 2001.**

## Site Visit Was Positive Experience

On June 25 and 26, we received our annual visit from the International Review Panel under the auspices of the Swiss National Science Foundation. This panel, chaired by Dr Wolf Linder of the University of Bern, is responsible for general oversight of the research work and organizational standards of the NCCR Affective Sciences.

During their visit, the members of the panel heard presentations of current research from the various projects. This year the presentations were made by the young researchers working on the projects themselves, as had been



*Prof. Wolf Linder chaired the International Review Panel*

requested by the Panel in its last report. There were also presentations of organizational aspects of the NCCR's work by members of the management team.

The Panel were positive in their response, delivered at the end of the site visit. Our steering board, management committee and project leaders as well as the National Science Foundation (our funders) were pleased to hear the Panel's judgement that the Centre is continuing on the right track. Our Director, Klaus Scherer noted: "In particular, our visitors appreciated the constructive fashion and the rapidity with which we reacted to the comments made at last year's site visit, and our ability to rapidly switch from the transversal modules to the Research Foci, which are seen as very promising."

## Website to Get New Look

For many people all over the world who are interested in the topic of emotion, the NCCR's website [www.affective-sciences.org](http://www.affective-sciences.org) is their initial introduction to our Centre and its work. This large website was set up in late 2005, and its content and presentation have not changed much since then.



The only major change that has occurred has been the linking of the "external" website to the "internal" Intranet; both sites are now based on the Drupal system, and it is possible to upload material from the internal to the external site. A major overhaul of the external website has been contemplated for a while, and now, during the relative lull before the beginning of the university year in Switzerland, the management team are working on this with the help of Dajana Kapusova Leconte, who is responsible for IT support in the NCCR.

The content of the pages is being updated, and an effort is being made to develop a more user-friendly site. As this external website is in English, there will be a link to the smaller French-language site, also currently under development with the help of the NCCR's public relations committee. The new version of [www.affective-sciences.org](http://www.affective-sciences.org) should be ready for launch by October.

## Upcoming Events

For all upcoming events, log on to the NCCR Intranet at <http://affectco.unige.ch>

### *Affect*

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