

Philosophy Workshop “Varieties of Phenomenology”

May 13th-14th, 2026 - IUSS Pavia

Abstracts

Giovanna Colombetti (University of Exeter)

Phenomenology and Emotion: Theoretical and Applied Approaches

There is an esteemed philosophical tradition of approaching emotion from a phenomenological perspective. How exactly can this tradition help further our understanding of emotion and related phenomena (such as moods and possibly other affective states)? How does a phenomenological approach differ from an analytic and/or empirically minded one? I will address these questions by critically reviewing classical phenomenological approaches to emotion/affectivity—which are mainly theoretical—and more contemporary ones—which include more “applied” orientations (such as neurophenomenology). The aim is to draw some general lessons for the topic of the workshop.

Bruno Cortesi (University of Graz)

Witness-Consciousness and Depression

The aim of my talk is to suggest that certain depressive conditions involve a distinctive form of self-identification: namely, identification with what philosophers such as Bina Gupta and Miri Albahari term witness-consciousness—an ownerless, impersonal, and non-agentive transcendental field of manifestation against which all phenomenal contents appear.

After clarifying the concept of witness-consciousness and delineating its principal features, I will turn to examining a range of first-person accounts from individuals experiencing depression. I will suggest that several characteristic features of the depressive condition—such as, for instance, the way temporal experience is disrupted in this condition—align with the hypothesis that some depressive states involve an identification with witness-consciousness.

Francesca Forlè (Vita-Salute San Raffaele University)

Selfhood and Bodily Expressivity. A Phenomenological Account

In the contemporary philosophical debate, emotions are often presented as embodied. Stemming from various philosophical perspectives, such as phenomenology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of cognitive sciences, different accounts describe emotions as intrinsically linked, when not constituted by, their bodily expressions, so that the body appears as the “sounding board” (James 1884) of our

emotional life (Green 2007, Krueger and Overgaard 2012, Colombetti 2014, Fuchs 2016, Krueger 2018).

However, the potential different ways in which the body is involved in our affective life, based on the kind of affective experience expressed and its impact on our personal self, have not been a primary focus of interest in these accounts until now.

This talk aims to address this neglected topic by sketching a phenomenological account of bodily expressivity, mainly drawing on the work of two classic phenomenologists, namely Edith Stein (1917) and Max Scheler (1916, 1923).

I will first present Stein's differentiation between *bodily expressions* of feelings and mere *physical accompaniment*, distinguishing between the level of essential dependencies and motivational laws in which the former develop, and the level of mere causal connections in which the latter is involved. Then, I will make use of Scheler's multilayered account of emotional life (Scheler 1916) in order to sketch how we can differentiate bodily expressions based on the kind of affective experience they express. This move will also be useful to discuss how much of one's personal self can be disclosed by different forms of bodily expressivity.

Danilo Manca (University of Pisa)

Enacting a Sustainable Lifeworld: A Phenomenological Approach to Climate Change Experience

In current debates on anthropogenic climate change, a growing body of research has produced robust frameworks for identifying its causes, analyzing its social dynamics, and guiding mitigation and adaptation. Yet climate change remains a "wicked problem," resistant to clear definition and difficult to grasp in everyday experience.

My talk argues that a phenomenological account of subjective experience is essential for understanding this difficulty. While the situated mind paradigm successfully emphasizes the deep integration of organism and environment, it also reveals a paradox: this very integration hinders our ability to recognize, in everyday life, the need to transform our behaviors and our understanding of the natural conditions that sustain human life.

To substantiate this claim, I analyze the roles of the notions of niche and lifeworld within the situated mind framework. I critically assess the extension of the biological notion of niche and argue for a distinction between niche and lifeworld analogous to that between organism and living body in classical phenomenology. This distinction clarifies the specific contribution of the phenomenological theory of the lifeworld to the situated mind paradigm and its significance for the ecofeminist debate on the end of the concept of nature.

Valentina Martinis (University of Liège)

Old, Contemporary, and New Transparency: from Moore and beyond

The contemporary debate on Transparency is largely shaped by Harman's (1990) and Tye's (1992) claim that introspection reveals only the features of the external objects of experience, but not of the experience itself. Let us call this the *Contemporary Transparency Claim* (CT). As it

has often been noted, both Harman and Tye drew from G. E. Moore's (1903b) remarks on the 'transparent' or 'diaphanous' character of consciousness, but misconstrued them as supporting a strong version of the thesis (according to which it is impossible to attend directly to one's experience) rather than a weak one (according to which it is merely difficult but not impossible to do so) (Kind, 2003; Hellie, 2007).

In this talk, I will show that both interpretations of Moore's transparency are mistaken. Moore's *Original Transparency claim* (OT) was directed not at the qualitative properties of experience, but at "that which makes the sensation of blue a mental fact". Following a certain Brentanian theme, this fact is identified with a state's directedness or intentional character (which may or may not be an intrinsic, qualitative property of experience). In other words, OT states that the directedness of mental acts (that which makes mental acts mental) appears to be transparent, i.e., difficult or impossible to introspect.

After discussing the similarities and differences between OT and CT, I will argue that my interpretation of Moore's transparency gives rise to a *New Transparency Claim* (NT). NT has some important implications for the contemporary debate, for instance, by putting pressure on ostensive definitions of intentionality (such as the ones put forward by some Phenomenal Intentionality theorists). I will conclude by sketching some possible replies to NT.

Søren Overgaard (University of Copenhagen)

The Presentational Character of Experience

Unlike beliefs and conscious thoughts, perceptual experiences seem to directly present, reveal, or make manifest aspects of the mind-independent environment. This presentational character (as I shall call it) of experience is the 'the signal feature' of perceptual phenomenology (Sturgeon 2000, 9), and it plays important roles in recent discussions within epistemology and philosophy of perception. Naïve realists (and sense-datum theorists) have appealed to presentational character in attempts to bring to light shortcomings of the dominant representational accounts of perceptual experience. And epistemologists have looked to presentational character in an attempt to solve what has been called 'the mystery of direct perceptual justification' (Markie 2005). However, I suggest in this paper that we have not yet earned the right to press presentational character into service in those ways. For we have not succeeded in explaining the core notion of 'presentation' or 'revelation'. Appeals to presentational character seem to face a dilemma. On the one hand, philosophers often resort to metaphors or neologisms – 'scene immediacy' (e.g. Sturgeon 2000), 'givenness in-the-flesh' (Husserl 1907), etc. – they either do not explain or explain in terms of other metaphors. On the other hand, when philosophers make serious attempts to break out of the circle of metaphors, they define presentational character in terms that make it trivially unfit for the services into which they want to press it. Yet there is a way of jumping between these two horns. I propose that we explain presentational character in terms of the semi-technical, but familiar, philosophical notion of perception.