The Phenomenology of Depression: A Workshop

26th to 29th March 2012, University of Osnabrück

AHRC/DFG-Funded Project “Emotional Experience in Depression: A Philosophical Study”
PIs: Matthew Ratcliffe (Durham University) and Achim Stephan (University of Osnabrück)

Monday 26th March – Philosophical Analysis and empirical data

09.00 – 09.20 Arrival and coffee
09.20 – 09.30 Welcome and Introduction – Matthew Ratcliffe & Achim Stephan

09.30 – 10.45
Benedict Smith and Hannah Shand (Durham University, UK)
First results from the Durham depression questionnaire

Coffee break

11.15 – 12.30
Outi Benson, Susanne Gibson and Sarah Brand (SANE, London, UK)
Themes from a study of suicidal feelings

Lunch break

14.00 – 15.00
Philip Powell (University of Sheffield)
The revolting self: The role of disgust in depression

15.00 – 15.45
Birgit Weyel and Annette Haußmann (University of Tübingen, Germany)
Church-based support and depression: An outline on the effect of social and spiritual support with regard to depression

Coffee break

16.15 – 17.00
Kerrin Jacobs (University of Osnabrück, Germany)
The habitual aspect of depressive comportment

17.00 – 18.30
Matthew Ratcliffe (University of Durham, UK):
TBA
Tuesday 27th March – Depression in Socio-Cultural Context

09.00 – 09.30 Arrival and coffee

09.30 – 10.45  
**Tom Csordas** (University of California San Diego, USA)  
*Biographical coherence in the narratives of depressed adolescents*

**Coffee break**

11.15 – 12.30  
**Christian Postert** (University of Münster, Germany)  
*Emotion in cultural context: Toward a social phenomenology of depressed mood in exchange*

**Lunch break**

14.00 – 15.00  
**Renata Kokanovic** (Monash University, Australia)  
*The ‘Recovery’ of the Self through Depression*

15.00 – 16.00  
**Angela Woods** (Durham, UK)  
*TBA*

**Coffee break**

16.30 – 18.00  
**Alain Ehrenberg** (Paris, France)  
*What brings a dose of sociology to the philosophy of emotions?*
Wednesday 28th March – Psychiatric issues

09.00 – 09.30 Arrival and coffee

09.30 – 10.45
Markus Pawelzik (Münster, Germany)
The depressive syndrome from the social brain perspective – its phenomenological function and function in general (working title)

Coffee break

11.15 – 12.30
Henrik Walter (Charité, Berlin, Germany)
Chronic Depression – a disorder sui generis? Psychopathology, neurobiological foundations and therapy

Lunch break

14.00 – 15.15
Anna Buchheim (Innsbruck, Austria)
Psychoanalysis and depression

15.15 – 16.15
Somogy Varga (Kopenhagen/Osnabrück, Denmark/Germany)
Does CBT fit to our understanding of emotion in depression?

Coffee break

16.45 – 18.00
Jennifer Radden (Boston)
Depression in the onset of dementia
Thursday 29th March – Epistemic issues

09.00 – 09.30 Arrival and coffee

09.30 – 10.45
**Dirk Koppelberg** (FU Berlin, Germany)
*Melancholic epistemology reconsidered – Depression from an epistemic point of view*

  Coffee break

11.15 – 12.30
**Jan Slaby, Achim Stephan, and Asena Paskaleva** (FU Berlin / University of Osnabrück, Germany)
*Enactive Emotion and Impaired Agency in Depression*
Abstracts:

**Emotion in cultural context: Toward a social phenomenology of depressed mood in exchange**

**Christian Postert**

Abstract: The connections between emotions and social exchange in non-Western communities still remain largely uncharted. Postert conducted long-term anthropological fieldwork on the dynamics of depressed mood in exchange cycles from 2000 to 2002 in Hmong highland villages in the Province of Luang Phabang, Laos. Hmong gift and commodity exchanges embody diametrically opposed values and different social configurations. Hmong depressed mood (tu siab) emerges as a regulatory device at the tension laden intersection of these opposing spheres of social exchange. Hmong depressed mood is part of a bidirectional coregulative process connecting the individual and social realm. These data provide evidence of the deep embeddedness of Hmong depressed mood (tu siab) in a specific cultural context challenging universalizing and psychopathologizing approaches to cross-cultural research on emotions.

Dr. med. Dr. phil. Christian Postert
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**What brings a dose of sociology to the philosophy of emotions?**

**Alain Ehrenberg**

Abstract: It will be about the relations between values and norms of autonomy, and the rise of the concern about emotions and affects in contemporary social life. I'd like to link together changes in the spirit of action, gathered by the concept of autonomy, and changes in the ways of being affected, gathered by the concept of psychic suffering.

Prof. Dr. Alain Ehrenberg
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**Church-based Support and Depression: An outline on the effect of social and spiritual support with regard to depression.**

**Birgit Weyel**

Based on the assumption that parishes provide low-threshold services and social support with an explicitly religious focus, the purpose of this study is to survey the experiences of persons affected by depression, relatives, volunteers and protestant clergy. The main focus is on the clergy's spiritual counseling. The empirical methods applied are interviews and an online-questionnaire.

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Biographical Coherence in the Narratives of Depressed Adolescents

Thomas J. Csordas

In two previous presentations to this working group, I introduced the study Southwest Youth and the Experience of Psychiatric Treatment in which depression was a major factor among the adolescent psychiatric inpatients with whom we worked, and examined the responses of these depressed youth to open-ended ethnographic interviews to determine what could be inferred about the experiential immediacy of their afflictions. In this presentation I take another step in the analysis by focusing on the experience of four of our young participants chosen because of the centrality of depression and absence of comorbid diagnoses in their lives. I examine the degree to which biographical coherence can be attributed to what they say, either despite or because of the prominence of depression as a feature of their developmental trajectories.

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Melancholic Epistemology Reconsidered – Depression from an Epistemic Point of View

Dirk Koppelberg

What is the relation between depression and cognition? This apparently straightforward question does not admit an easy answer. Why not? The general formulation covers at least three different questions. First, does depression have any specific cognitive causes? If it has, what are these causes? Second, does depression fulfill any specific intellectual functions? If it does, what are these functions? And third, does depression satisfy any specific epistemic conditions? If it does, what are these conditions? These are the basic questions I’m going to discuss and which I will try to answer in my talk. I will ask how these questions hang together and I will show in which way my answers to them are related. I will close with a look on the prospects and on further projects of melancholic epistemology.

Dirk Koppelberg
Freie Universität Berlin

Depression, Normativity and Time

Jennifer Radden

Some states of sadness are akin to, but not, clinical depression. It is quite widely acknowledged, even within psychiatry, that a place must be made for states that are sometimes adaptive, normal responses to the loss of loved ones, for example. Other kinds of loss are also sometimes granted the status of understandable, adaptive, normal, even morally appropriate. My question is: does this privileging of certain responses to loss extend to losses in the future, losses that rather than fading, loom ever nearer with the passing of time? I want to explore one such future loss: the anticipated loss of ipseity, self, or personhood that takes place with the advent of dementia. Ethical implications here include some for the ongoing debate about evidence of depressive traits in those with early dementia. On analogy with the psychiatric “carve out” accorded to grieving, I will argue that the depression that accompanies dementia...
might better be treated as a normative, if not an adaptive, response to a future loss than (as it often is today), a symptom of disorder.

Jennifer Radden,
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The ‘Recovery’ of the Self through Depression
Renata Kokanovic
Depression has become a vital point for arguments about the legitimacy of various categories of mental illness. Consequently, Western societies, and increasingly the rest of the world, have been the supposed beneficiaries of a proliferation of knowledge, expertise and types of discourse on depression that emerged through the fields of psychiatry, biomedicine, psychology, and social science and has been apparent in government policy documents, ‘consumer’ guides, web sites, and media reports. This proliferation has made depression one of the most debated “health” issues in the public arena today. Depression can be conceptualized across the entire lay/medical spectrum, from the ‘normal’ highs and lows of the human condition to its inclusion within the dominant DSM classificatory system, as a form of Serious Mental Illness. In this context, a better understanding of peoples’ emotional experiences of depression, and in particular, how people conceptualize a possibility of getting better (‘recovery’) from depression is needed. This paper draws on narrative interviews with men in Australia conducted in 2010-2011, which was part of a larger project on experiences of depression. The paper outlines preliminary findings and considers how men narrate a continuous process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of selves, while negotiating their everyday life in a context of experiencing depression.

Renata Kokanovic
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The revolting self: the role of disgust in depression
Philip Powell
The emotion of disgust has been implicated in morality and a range of psychological disorders, such as specific phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and eating disorders. It’s involvement in depression has been hypothesized, but is currently associated with inconsistent results. This inconsistency may be explained by a traditional research focus on external disgust elicitors, while depression may be better characterized by self-directed disgust. Initial self-report studies suggest that levels of self-disgust positively correlate with levels of depressive symptoms. Furthermore, reported self-disgust has been found to predict depressive symptoms over time, but not the reverse. Nevertheless, despite these promising findings, the construct of self-disgust itself has yet to be empirically defined and its phenomenology remains particularly enigmatic. The present study aimed to explore the phenomenon of self-disgust in-depth in individuals with clinically-relevant depressive symptoms. Nine female participants completed semi-structured interviews about their understanding and experiences of self-disgust. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the data revealed five interlinked themes: ‘the
consuming nature of self-disgust’; ‘temporal fluctuations in the experience of self-disgust’; ‘difficulty cleansing the disgusting self’; ‘the role of others’; and ‘the relationship with other emotional states’. This research provides vital insight into the hitherto ambiguous concept of self-disgust and how it may be subjectively experienced in individuals with depression.

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