



Lecture by Professor Dan Zahavi
(University of Copenhagen)

Empathy, the Second Person Perspective and the We

Date: 14:00-17:00 Wednesday, May 22, 2013

Venue: Bld. 18, 4F, Collaboration Room 1, the University of Tokyo (Komaba Campus)

Admission Free, Registration is not required

Commentators: Yosuke Taniuchi & Masahito Nangaku (Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the University of Tokyo)

Abstract: What is a we-perspective and what are its prerequisites? To what extent does it presuppose and build upon self-consciousness, second-person perspective taking and empathy? In my talk I will discuss a recent proposal by David Carr according to which the we is the label for a distinct way of being with others, a distinct form of social existence. As Carr stresses, experience can be social not only in the sense that it can take other subjects as its intentional objects, but also in the sense that it can enlist the individual into a We-subject, by making it a member of a community of experiencers. The we is consequently and very importantly not some entity that is observed from without, but rather something I experience from within in virtue of my membership and participation. On such a proposal, adopting the we-perspective is most definitely not to leave the first-person perspective behind; it is merely to take up the plural rather than the singular first-person perspective. I am sympathetic to Carr's proposal, but I think there is an important question that remains rather underdetermined and unaddressed not only by Carr, but also by a number of other we-theorists, and this concerns the question regarding the cognitive and affective presuppositions for we-intentionality. To make headway, I will turn to a number of phenomena discussed by the classical phenomenologists (Husserl, Scheler, Stein). I think their analysis of the distinction between emotional contagion, empathy and emotional sharing can be quite illuminating not only when it comes to an understanding of the socio-affective/cognitive presuppositions for we-intentionality, but also allow for a better grasp of what precisely a we-perspective is.

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Sponsored by JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (No. 24300293) Philosophy of Psychiatry:

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