

Signs of the Social: Ethics and Ontology

(Sponsored by International Social Ontology Society (ISOS), Vienna)

Dates: 14th and 15th December 2023
Centre for Philosophy, JNU

The thought that values belong essentially to individuals and individuals are the sole bearer of mental properties has undergone some serious philosophical reconsideration in recent times. An impetus behind this reconsideration is the rational possibility of treating collective entities on a par with individual human agents in situations concerning actions, inactions, and omissions in our social world. Such a possibility emerges out of a relentless methodological effort of showing how collective entities can be separated from their constituent members without either having to deal with any dubious ontological categories or resorting to any narrative that thrives on explanatory gaps.

This project of reconsideration is now a part of a larger area of philosophical research called social ontology that studies the nature and properties of the social world from an interdisciplinary perspective. Even though groups and collectives are not the only entities that constitute our social world, analyses of group-related or group-involving phenomena have dominated the territory of most social ontological investigations. Over the last few decades, philosophers in this area have been involved in analyzing groups or collectives by debating over a range of hitherto unexplored or less-explored concepts such as we-intentions, collective agency, group mind, plural subjects, collective emotions, and the like. Engagements with these concepts have subsequently given rise to myriad of issues and positions such as normativity, cooperation and commitment, forms of individualism and collectivism, atomism and emergentism, reducibility and distributability, and interdependence of individual, shared, and collective responsibility (both in their backward-looking or forward-looking senses).

The proposed workshop aims to foreground these concepts, issues, and positions by reengaging with some of the fundamental questions about collectives: Do collectives really exist on their own, in an irreducible way? If they do, how are they constituted and what constitutes them? What sort of properties do they have and how do we know them? As the issue of the reality of collectives and their properties takes the center stage in ontological explanations of society, the problem of collective morality, especially the issue of attributing of moral obligation and responsibility to collectives has also received considerable attention. Moral responsibility of collectives refers not only to the responsibility of the collective *per se*, but also to different forms of responsibilities borne by individual participants in those collectives. The heart of this lies in many factors ranging from shared aims, values, norms, and conventions to common beliefs, pursuits, and perspectives of the individual members. This workshop will deal with some of these factors by unearthing their ontological foundations in various social contexts.

Despite being a new area- mostly developed outside the subcontinent, of late social ontology as a field of research has generated a great deal of interest in many Indian universities and institutes. Similar academic interest has also been observed,

albeit separately, with respect to studying morality of groups or collectives from the points of view of multiple disciplines including law, business, social and political philosophy, and others. The main objective of this workshop thus is to offer a platform for dialogue and discussion among researchers working in the areas of ethics and ontology of sociality. It plans to do so by involving three different sets of people from India and abroad—subject experts, doctoral and post-doctoral researchers, and a keenly interested group of commentators with backgrounds in politics, economics, and philosophy. With the help of these scholars, the workshop hopes to make significant contribution to the following few themes-

1. Ontological Issues of Sociality
2. Group Agency, Group Mind, and Plural Subjects
3. Social Kinds (Race, Gender, Class, and Caste)
4. Shared, Joint, Corporate, and Collective Responsibility
5. Shared, Joint, and Collective emotions
6. We-attitudes vs I-attitudes
7. Cooperation, Commitment, and Competition
8. Responsibility and Complicity

Invited Speakers:

1. Hans Bernhard Schmid
Faculty of Philosophy and Education
University of Vienna

2. Carole Rovane
Department of Philosophy
Columbia University

3. Bill Wringe
Department of Philosophy
Bilkent University, Turkey

4. Bijoy H. Boruah
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Jammu

5. Stephanie Collins
Department of Philosophy
Monash University

6. Jeremy Koons
Department of Philosophy
Georgetown University- Qatar

7. Sundar Sarukkai
Formerly Professor of Philosophy
NIAS, Bangalore

8. Vikram Singh Sirola
Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Bombay

9. Manidipa Sen
Centre for Philosophy
Jawaharlal Nehru University

10. Sushruth Ravis
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology

11. Luke Roelofs
Department of Philosophy
University of Texas at Arlington

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