

Ethics of play

Institute of Philosophy – Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic

Department of Contemporary Continental Philosophy

Prague: November 18 - 20, 2014

Keynote speakers:

Bonnie Mann (University of Oregon, USA)

Mechthild Nagel (SUNY Cortland, USA)

Emily Ryall (University of Gloucestershire, UK)

Monica Vilhauer (Roanoke College, USA)

The conference's goal is to open a discussion on the mutual resonances and confrontations among different approaches to what could be called the Ethics of play. These approaches use play as an essential framework, ontological model, or the very form of reality in which ethics may be approached, structured, manifested or achieved.

The notion of play is pervasive in contemporary philosophy. To mention but a few manifestations, Heidegger, in *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, considered the possibility of defining *Dasein's* being-in-the world as play, a concept that overcomes the opposition between subject and object. Fink's ethics is fundamentally situated in play as a symbol of the world. Gadamer understands play as a medium of co-existence in which one may sustain transformation through dialogue. Sartre referred to play as the fundamental attitude that can free us from the oppressive "spirit of seriousness". Wittgenstein's language games open a new space of meaning where ethics cannot be expressed but which still manifests a tendency in the human mind that must be deeply respected. Badiou's ethics of play is an imperative for the subject to be a-substantial in order to uncover the nomadic dimension of human existence. The theory of performativity seeks the capacity of the ungrounded subject to give an account of itself through permanent (critical) engagement in power games. In critical theory play may serve as an instrument of emancipation thanks to its ability to demystify ideologies and the tyranny of the everyday. Let us also mention the essential connections of this subject with an ethics of ambiguity (Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty), with relational ethics and the ethics of care, as well as with enactivism.

These approaches, although different, share a common feature: respect for what is happening, for reality in play, for the other, and for the world rather than dominance over the real and oneself through individual voluntarism. They all challenge sheer realism and lead beyond the classical distinction between *gnôsis*, *praxis* and *poiésis*. Thanks to the fact that play provides a very particular distance from reality, relief from excessive requirements on responsibility might test the malleability and potentialities of social and gender roles, and enable the maintenance of critical thinking combined with the structuration of a specific order of acting/decision making.

However, in spite of the overwhelming presence of the theme of play in the theories mentioned above, the ethical significance of play and the exact modalities of an ethics of play remain to be more

fully investigated. If time, existence, language, social structures, nature and institutions are to be regarded as *Spielräume*, what ethical implications are entailed? How can one take play seriously, so as to contest seriousness without reducing ethics to a masquerade?

Submissions

Please send your 200-word proposals for 20-minute-long presentations to the following e-mail address: ethicsofplayprague@gmail.com, no later than June 30, 2014.

We shall inform you on the submission's reception by July 15, 2014.

On behalf of the organizing team:

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For any other questions or queries, please, contact us at ethicsofplayprague@gmail.com.

Website of the conference: <http://web.flu.cas.cz/filosofievexperimentu/ethics-of-play/>