

## Workshop: Empathy, Understanding, and Appreciation

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### Fellow Feelings, Responses and Acknowledgment

The current discussion on empathy and empathetic emotions is primarily focused on the idea that these play an important epistemic role. That is to say that many theorists suppose that the job of empathetic emotions is to detect or register something about another's psychological condition: they are ways of coming to know about their emotions and feelings. Relatedly, empathetic emotions are thought to promote understanding in virtue of playing this epistemic role. That is, they promote understanding of other people in virtue of what they register or detect about their psychological condition. In this talk, I argue that empathetic emotions play a different role. Focusing on cases of feeling with another (fellow feeling, *Mitfühlen*), I argue that they constitute a form of acknowledgment of another's psychological condition. This claim, which is inspired by Scheler (1923), is different from the claim that they constitute a way of coming to know of it. In contrast to awareness or knowledge of something, acknowledging something is a response which presupposes some awareness or knowledge of it. To say that some mental attitude or action is a response to *x* is to say that *x* is a reason for which it is held. It is crucial in this context that reasons for which we feel (believe desire etc.) – also called motivating reasons – are distinguished from causes. Many causes are not motivating reasons: that I slept badly may be a cause of my being angry at someone, but it is typically not the reason for which I am angry at her. I argue for the claim that fellow feelings constitute a form of acknowledgment by calling attention to their responsive character: feeling with another is a specific way of responding to their psychological condition. I finally address the question whether the type of acknowledgment constitutive of fellow feelings contributes to understanding others. I argue that it does not. I suggest that this does not make them any less interesting or valuable, though. Fellow feelings are valuable in virtue of being a specific form of acknowledgment of others.