

HUMBOLDT CONVERSATIONS IN PHILOSOPHY

15:15-18:00
GWZ H2 1.16

JUNE 13



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SPONTANEOUS EXPRESSION AND INTENTIONAL ACTION

When spontaneous expressions such as smiling or crying have been at issue in Anglophone philosophy of action, the touchstone has been Donald Davidson's belief-desire account of action. In this essay, I take a different approach. I use Elizabeth Anscombe's formal conception of intentional action to capture the distinction and unity of intentional action and spontaneous expression. Anscombe links intentional actions and reasons through the applicability of a why-question. I argue that spontaneous expressions are subject to a different but related why-question. Further, I argue that while the answers to Anscombe's why-question reveal that intentional actions are means-end ordered, the answers to the why-question posed to spontaneous expressions form a distinctive order of conceptual and normative connections.

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