

Visibility and Empathy: Philosophical Explorations of Human Intersubjectivity (Fellowship an der Harvard University)

Initiative: Postdoctoral Fellowships in den Geisteswissenschaften an Universitäten und Forschungsinstituten
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Humans are visible. They are visible in virtue of their embodied nature and their up-right carriage. In a more pregnant sense, they are visible as seeing beings and as social persons. Seeing and being seen constitute the sphere of human visibility and produce various types of gazes in which perception and recognition overlap. Among the different forms of visibility, a physical and a social one can be distinguished as very basic modes. Humans are characterised by their physical visibility as any other object that has at least one opaque layer. In this mode of visibility, humans are perceptually identified. Social visibility transcends this identification, because it calls for a recognition of the other person (in a more moral sense). In recognising the other, one confirms their "value" as a person and as an interaction partner. Recognition can, however, be absent in various ways, when one does not consider the other. Three types of invisibility can be distinguished, which are characterised by their different modes of intersubjective gaze, ranging from innocuous inattention over self-forgetful ignorance to demonstrative looking-through somebody. Social invisibility can occur passively through subjective dispositions and too much self-referentiality, or it can be actively created. In all cases it implies a lack of empathic expressions and shows the boundedness of social visibility to embodied expressivity. The project aims at systematising the different types of social gazes and integrating a level of embodied expressivity and empathy in the architecture of visibility, thereby elucidating the relationship between empathy and recognition.

Projektbeteiligte

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