



Interview

Emanuela Ceva

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Anne Saab (AS):

Good morning and thank you so much Professor Emanuela Ceva for having us here in your office this morning and for speaking with us. The first question that I'd like to ask you is whether you could tell us a little bit about your career trajectory and especially how you became interested in emotions.

Emanuela Ceva (EC):

Sure, thank you very much for this opportunity to share my research on emotions and where it all got started.

I think I should get back to my PhD when I was a PhD student at the University of Manchester more than 20 years ago. My main research question in my PhD in political theory was the grounds for people to find a cooperative way of interacting in circumstances of conflict. So, the idea is that we have several value conflicts in politics, so conflicts about whether abortion should be granted or whether people should have access to euthanasia, and how we get people to talk on morally solid grounds despite their different views.

So, the question of people's motivations for talking and the quality of their relationships dynamics during this kind of talk got me interested. But back then, there was very little talk about affective dimensions; all of these exchanges were all about standards of reasonableness, deliberation, and actually very strict reasons for actions. But something was off with this account because so much when you speak about these very hot topics concerns people's emotions, their feelings of frustration, anger, fear, and also empathy.

And so I got very interested in the ambivalence of emotions and how concerning the same topic people might have very contrasting emotions. And if we concentrate and are able to pick the positive emotions out of this scenario, they can actually work as a very strong motivational force and can get people to talk and actually to improve the situation.

And that sort of stayed with me throughout my postdoctoral research, that was at the University of Trento in Italy. Then I moved on to my first job at the University of Pavia, also in Italy, where I taught for 15 years before coming to Geneva, where I discovered that there was a host of scholars and analytical philosophers working on emotions, and that gave me just the ideal setting for carrying out my research.

AS:

Thank you. Thank you so much. A second question that I'd like to ask is around a current research project that you were working on, which is broadly around trust and institutional functioning. Could you tell us a bit more about that project?

EC:

Yeah, so actually I'm carrying out two projects, one that has just ended and one that hopefully will be starting soon. And so the first project, the one that has just ended, **was dedicated to the notion of “endogenous institutional trustworthiness,”** and you can see the continuity with what I was saying earlier on, concerning the normative standards for interaction of members of an institution, and how members of an institution, in particular officeholders in public institutions, can and ought to trust each other, and to trust especially each other's commitments to acting in ways coherent with their mandate, as a necessary condition for institutional functioning. So, the idea is that, of course, institutions are made of rules and regulations, and much of institutional functioning depends on people's commitment and capacity to comply with rules and regulations, but that's only one formal part of the story.

Then there's also the quality of people's interactions, and the extent to which the members of an institution can actually trust that their joint work is capable of sustaining institutional action. And that was the topic, so the endogenous conditions, how we can generate within institutions the kind of trust that the institution needs to be trustworthy, and in turn to elicit trust from those who interact with the institution from the outside. So that was the dynamic regarding that project, and in particular there I was interested in exploring what I've called the mixed affective fabric of dysfunctional institutions.

So part of my work has been on **corruption and the ethics of anti-corruption**,¹ and I've always got very fascinated and also a bit shocked with the very contrasting emotions that corrupt officeholders can be attributed when they are involved in corruption scandals. So there's a bit of shame, of course, because you are caught up in it, but sometimes there's also a bit of pride, because you were a little more clever than the others, and you could use your power to do certain things. And so again the interest was to try and build some kind of analytical mapping of all the contrasting emotions, including trust of course, that could emerge within dysfunctional institutions, and how

¹ See also Emanuela Ceva and Maria Paola Ferretti, *Political Corruption: The Internal Enemy of Public Institutions* (Oxford University Press 2021).

they could be disentangled, and again the positive side of emotions could be used to set in motion mechanisms for the self-repair of institutional functioning.

AS:

Great, thank you so much. And I have a final question for you, which is about the future of emotions research. So where do you see the future of emotions research? What do you see as some of the most pressing issues? And I suppose that question is both for within your field, but more broadly as well.

EC:

Within my field I think that this idea of deepening the study of mixed emotions, and in particular the fittingness of mixed emotions, is very important. So, when one is justified in reacting emotionally in a certain way to certain political events. And that's just to give you a concrete illustration, that's very relevant when we speak of such affective states as trust. So, there is sort of a looming narrative that there is a crisis of trust from citizens towards institutions across democracies, and that is arguably considered as being responsible for populist movements thriving, and having people like Trump elected into office, right? And then so the idea is there's a crisis of trust, so the presumption is that trust is good, and therefore we should be restoring trust in institutions.

But obviously, the problem that citizens distrust institutions is a problem only if institutions are actually trustworthy, otherwise it's actually good that citizens distrust institutions. So what is the kind of trust that we need? When is the affective state of trusting an institution actually warranted, justified, and fitting? And when it's not, when it's just this kind of gut reaction that in fact tells you nothing about the quality of the institution. So I think there is a lot of research there, which is both philosophically interesting and very politically salient, also in terms of looking at understanding social and political phenomenon like manipulation, general self-deception.

So, there's a lot of work to be done, which I think is really very interesting, and is not limited to philosophy, but it's actually a very strong political import. So, trying to combine the descriptive and analytical understanding of emotion with a solid normative take on whether certain emotional states are justified. So, building this bridge between empirical and normative philosophical research to me is still to be made, and that's a direction which I think that the research in emotion has very good reasons to take in the coming years.

AS:

Thank you so much Professor Ceva for your time and your insights.

EC:

Thank you.

