About the Hartnack Lecture

On the occasion of his 90th birthday, the Annual Justus Hartnack Lecture was inaugurated in gratitude to his service, and to help preserve the international outlook that Hartnack gave to the Aarhus Philosophy Department from its beginning. The honour of giving the Annual Hartnack Lecture is given to an internationally recognized and distinguished researcher, who has made outstanding contributions in philosophy.

Abstract - Empathy, Alterity and Morality

During the last few years, the assessment of empathy has changed radically. While Obama has lamented the empathy deficit and Rifkin has claimed that empathy is the key to the solution of many of our current global challenges, others such as Bloom, Bubandt and Willerslev have argued that empathy is morally suspect, a dark force we shouldn’t automatically rely on if we wish to promote justice and fairness. In my talk, I will assess these different claims, and then turn to an alternative analysis of empathy that can be found in classical phenomenology. I will discuss some of the central claims made by Husserl, Scheler and Stein and argue that empathy on this alternative account can still be ascribed a fundamental moral significance. Not because empathy is to be conflated with sympathy or compassion, but because it fundamentally concerns our encounter with the other’s irreducible alterity.

Time: Friday, November 9, 2018 at 13.00 - 16.00

The lecture is followed by a reception.