

Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics, & Ethics
(CAPPE), University of Brighton

Transforming Sexuality and Gender
Research Cluster, University of Brighton

Centre for Ethics and Value Inquiry,
(CEVI), University of Gent

The Politics of Sex & Gender Lecture Series

6.30pm-8.00pm

University of Brighton, Edward Street Campus Lecture Theatre

Arianne Shahvisi (Brighton & Sussex Medical School) - 11th October 2016

"Pro-choice" and the limits of reproductive autonomy

"Pro-choice" has assumed a rhetorical power which over-reaches the moral arguments from which it originates. As the term is co-opted to dovetail with consumer capitalist logics, in line with a broader trend of interpreting feminism through the fetishisation of choice, it is critical that the limits of reproductive autonomy be troubled in order to motivate a more careful demarcation of its rightful scope. I undertake an ethical analysis of "choice," interrogate the moral legitimacy of its relationship to feminism, and attempt to establish that various forms of pre-natal screening and selection do not constitute legitimate exercises of reproductive autonomy, and should not be permitted to free-ride on the political and historical particularities which grant reproductive autonomy its moral mandate.

Arianne Shahvisi is a Kurdish-British academic, writer, and activist. She holds a doctorate in the philosophy of science from the University of Cambridge, and recently joined the Brighton & Sussex Medical School as a Lecturer in Ethics and Medical Humanities, following two years at the American University of Beirut. Her current research spans a diverse set of topics in applied philosophy, including: reproductive ethics, academic freedom, and social epistemology. She teaches courses on feminist theory, bioethics and political determinants of health. Arianne serves on the editorial board for "Kohl: a Journal for Body and Gender Research," a feminist journal on gender and sexuality in the Middle East, South West Asia, and North Africa regions.

Heather Brunskell-Evans (University of Leicester) - 25th October 2016

Pornography: The Performance of Sexual Freedom

The narrative of radical sexual politics is that pornography has the potential to liberate individuals from traditional mores and values which repress sexuality. In this view pornographic sex is 'sex-in-the-raw' stripped of the taboos which regulate sexual fantasy and conduct. Of course proponents are fully aware the sex is staged and that performers are acting. However, since the performers are both acting and having actual not simulated sex, and since the consumer, in masturbating to the sex-acts, or indeed interacting with performers in the virtual space of web-cams, is undergoing a fully embodied experience that feel external to politics, then pornography is deemed to facilitate the free expression of the visceral and of fantasy. To be critical of pornography is to be critical of sex itself, and to be critical of sex itself is to be 'sex-negative' – to be morally censorious, to align oneself with outmoded tradition or religious fundamentalism, and to be out of step with Western democratic sexual freedoms. Moreover, in contrast to the radical feminist view, which understands pornography as the eroticisation of male dominance and female submission, sex-radicals insist pornography is not 'one thing' since it has many genres and sub-genres that subvert hetero-normativity. Pornography is a rich resource for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, whose non-normative sexualities are marginalised and disciplined.

In this presentation I will argue against this sex-radical narrative by calling upon the work of Michel Foucault and the radical feminist Andrea Dworkin. Whilst it is true that there is a diversity of pornographies – heterosexual, gay, lesbian, transsexual and so on – I do not bracket minority pornographies as completely distinct from mainstream heterosexual pornography. Firstly, the myriad of pornographies all fall into the category of what Foucault calls a liberal 'incitement to speak sex': Pornography is a discursive practice by which we self-subjectify as if our very democratic freedoms and individual psychological health depend upon freeing an internal sexuality. Secondly, Dworkin argues pornography helps construct rather than reflect human sexuality and as such reproduces historical and political monological notions of female sexuality and 'what a woman's body is for': Femininity is the degraded physical Other through which men's metaphysical assertion of self is fashioned and symbolic representations of femininity and masculinity cross-cut most, if not all, genres of pornography. Foucault and Dworkin invite us to examine radical sexual politics for the normative status of its politics, for its (neo) liberal individualism, and for its complicity with the pornography industry which incites gendered sexual imaginaries for profit. How then might we re-imagine freedom, sexual pleasure and sexual ethics?

*Dr Heather Brunskell-Evans is a political philosopher. She is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Medical Humanities, the University of Leicester. Her research focuses on the gendering of the body by contemporary discourses of sexuality and medicine. In particular, she analyses the bio-politics of pornography, prostitution, the sex-trade, and transgenderism as material practices that occur within the context of structural gender inequality, neo-liberalism, global capitalism and the proliferation of digital-technologies. She has published widely on sexual and gender politics, including *Performing Sexual Liberation: The Sexualized Body and the Medical Authority of Pornography* (Cambridge Scholars 2016, forthcoming) and *Internet Pornography: Disciplining Women Through Sexual 'Freedom'* (Palgrave MacMillan 2017). She is also politically active in campaigning for and advising on the Nordic model of prostitution and she is a trustee of the newly formed charity FiLia, where she is the Director of its Stop Violence against Women and Girls section.*

Paul Reynolds (Edge Hill University) - 15th November
2016 *Sexual Consent: A Necessary Fiction?*

Much research that intersections sexual violence, sexual politics and sexual ethics sits on the cornerstone of sexual consent - the ethical 'golden mean' of sex. Consent is at the centre of the battleground in the fight against rape culture, the epidemic of rape and sexual violence against women (not exclusively but in particular) and for better sexual etiquette and relationships. Yet in this paper, I will focus not on the scope of consent, but on its limits. I will argue that sexual consent as a legal-analytic concept mis-describes sexual communication and mis-directs attempts to improve sexual relationships and practices in sometimes counterproductive ways. Sexual consent is best understood as a necessary fiction - necessary but not sufficient to effect a change in the way we relate sexually. That does not mean it has no value - but its value is severely limited unless it is accompanied by a broader approach to sexual ethics and the ethical transformation of sexual - and social - relationships and culture.

Paul Reynolds is Reader in Sociology and Social Philosophy at Edge Hill University. His research focuses on sexual ethics and politics with special reference to sexual consent, literacy and well-being, radical - particularly Marxist - theory and politics and the role and responsibilities of intellectuals. He is co-convenor of the International Network for Sexual Ethics and Politics (INSEP) and co-editor in chief of its Journal, and co-Director of the international network Cultural Difference and Social Solidarity (CDSS).

Vicky Margree (University of Brighton) - 22nd November 2016
Women, Biology, Technology: The Dialectic of Sex Revisited

Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* burst onto the feminist scene in 1970 and proved immediately controversial. The book's key thesis is that the origins of women's oppression lie in biology: specifically, in the fact that it is women and not men who conceive, gestate, give birth to and nurture children. Firestone's solution is revolutionary: since it is biology that is the problem, then it is biology that must be changed, through technological intervention that would have as its end the complete removal of the reproductive process from women's bodies. With its proposal for the development of artificial wombs, its call for the abolition of the nuclear family, and its vision of a socialist, cybernetic, society, Firestone's manifesto may seem hopelessly utopian and out-dated. This lecture, however, will argue for the book's continuing significance for feminism today, as a text that asks provocative questions about gender, biology, sexuality, work and technology, and the ways in which our imaginations in the 21st century continue to be in thrall to ideologies of maternity and the nuclear family.

Dr Vicky Margree lectures on the Humanities Programme at the University of Brighton. Her talk is based upon a forthcoming book on Firestone, which in turn draws upon her experience of teaching Firestone's text on the 'Feminisms' course on the Self and Society Option pathway. She also researches in the areas of late 19th and early 20th fiction.

Conny Wächter (Ruhr University, Bochum) - 6th December 2016
Complicity and Transgender Politics

Transgender politics are suffused with rhetorics of complicity. To name but a few examples, especially in radical feminist and queer circles, trans women are frequently accused of complicity in patriarchal ideology and in reaffirming the gender binary – whereas trans men rarely face analogous criticism; representations of trans* people are often criticised for their complicity in cissexism and sensationalism; and cis-gendered scholars in the fields of medicine, sociology, or literary and cultural studies may become complicit in power/knowledge constructs that disavows the voice of transgendered subjects and contributes to their marginalisation and pathologisation. As this lecture is going to demonstrate, the critical analysis of complicity rhetorics can serve to unmask and to illustrate ongoing ideological struggles and discursive fault lines in transgender politics. A particular focus will be placed on the politics of representation in this respect.

Dr Cornelia Wächter is Assistant Professor of British Cultural Studies at the Ruhr University Bochum, Germany. She is the author of Place-ing the Prison Officer: The 'Warder' in the British Literary and Cultural Imagination (Brill/Rodopi, 2015) and co-edited Middlebrow and Gender, 1890-1945 (Brill, 2016) with Christoph Ehland. Cornelia currently works on a book project on complicity and the politics of representation.

Nadje Al-Ali (SOAS, University of London) - 24th January 2016
How to talk about gender based and sexual violence in the Middle East? Dilemmas for transnational feminist solidarity

My paper attempts to intervene in feminist debates about how to approach and analyse sexual and wider gender-based violence in Iraq specifically and the Middle East more generally. Recognizing the significance of positionality, I argue against dichotomous positions and for the need to look at both macro structural configurations of power pertaining to imperialism, neo-liberalism and globalization on the one hand, and localised expressions of patriarchy, religious interpretations and practises and cultural norms on the other hand. Finally, my paper will reflect on the question of what a transnational feminist solidarity might look like in relation to sexual violence by ISIS.

Nadje Al-Ali is Professor of Gender Studies in the Centre for Gender Studies, at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Her main research interests revolve around gender theory; feminist activism; women and gender in the Middle East; transnational migration and diaspora mobilization; war, conflict and reconstruction. She has worked in Bosnia, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey and Jordan as well as the UK and the US.

Her publications include What kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq (2009, University of California Press, co-authored with Nicola Pratt); Women and War in the Middle East: Transnational Perspectives (co-edited with Nicola Pratt; (Zed Books, 2009); Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present (2007, Zed Books); New Approaches to Migration (ed., Routledge, 2002, with Khalid Koser); Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East (Cambridge University Press 2000) and Gender Writing – Writing Gender (The American University in Cairo Press, 1994) as well as numerous book chapters and journal articles. Her most recent book (co-edited with Deborah al-Najjar) is entitled We are Iraqis: Aesthetics & Politics in a Time of War (Syracuse University Press).

Professor Al-Ali was President of the Association of Middle East Women's Studies (AMEWS) from 2009-2011, and was also elected to the board of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA). She is a member of the Feminist Review Collective.

Tom Claes (University of Gent) - 7th February
Sexual Rights / Sexual Politics

The post WWII era has seen the emergence of a widely embraced human rights discourse and activism. Human rights were later on applied to specific groups and specific sectors, such as women's and children's rights and rights pertaining to labour and to sexuality. The formulation of so-called 'sexual rights' is one of the latest developments and they are now widely mobilized in sexual activism and development policies.

Progressive activists and movements of all stripes have enthusiastically embraced this rights-based sexual politics of equality and agency. But it has recently come under increased scrutiny and has been heavily criticized as an overly individualistic and decontextualized stance that obfuscates the impact of the wider neo-liberal economic and political context. A sexual politics of freedom and choice, it is claimed, fails properly to account for structural and cultural gender or for power imbalances, precariousness and vulnerabilities. It also is unable to problematize the intensifying marketization and commodification of sexuality, and leads to a politics and ethics of freedom and tolerance (often couched in terms of 'citizenship', 'agency', 'empowerment' and 'choice') over a politics and ethics of solidarity and care.

In my talk I will critically evaluate these allegations and weigh the pros and cons of a sexual rights-based sexual politics. I shall argue that a sexual rights and health agenda - the often correct criticism notwithstanding - still has huge emancipatory potential and when properly connected to issues of gender, social and economic justice can serve as the basis for the development of a notion and practice of sexual justice.

Tom Claes is Associate Professor of Ethics at the Department of Philosophy & Moral Science at Ghent University. Since 2012 he has been the director of CEVI - Center for Ethics and Value Inquiry (CEVI), Ghent University. Together with Paul Reynolds (Edge Hill University, UK) he is network leader and founding member of INSEP - International Network for Sexual Ethics & Politics (<http://www.insep.ugent.be/>). He is also a member of GCGS - Ghent Centre for Global Studies (<http://www.globalstudies.ugent.be/>) and co-promoter of the Ghent-based Academic Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Policy, bringing together SRHR activists and policymakers from more than ten countries world-wide. He teaches and publishes on ethics, sexuality and globalisation. His main research focus is on issues of consent, the globalisation of sexuality, sex work and trafficking. He is currently exploring new approaches to the formulation of a theory of sexual justice based on sexual health and rights discourses and activism.

Lisa Downing (University of Birmingham) - 21st February
Feminist Philosophy and the Politics of Selfishness

In this talk I examine the place occupied by the freighted concepts of “selfishness” and “selflessness” in the history of feminist thought and politics. After first outlining the feminist critique of the Kantian self and the homo economicus as masculinist constructions (Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Patricia Hill Collins), I move on in the main part of the talk to focus on two second-wave texts: Shulamith Firestone’s manifesto for feminist revolution, *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), and Carol Gilligan’s psychological study of the ways in which men and women appear to conceive differently of ethical dilemmas, *In A Different Voice* (1982). Both texts highlight a key tension: women report feeling “self-less” (or “deprived of Self”, in Firestone’s words), while simultaneously experiencing a disproportionate fear of being considered selfish. The talk concludes by revisiting this issue in the context of our contemporary moment, which has been defined as “the age of selfishness” or “me culture”. I briefly examine recent iterations of muscular, self-interested “feminism”, such as Sheryl Sandberg’s agenda of “lean-in”, and the response to such neoliberal, individualist discourses by Lacanian analyst Paul Verhaeghe which risks calling for the reestablishment of reactionary hierarchies (of gender, class and race) and the strengthening of the nuclear family in the name of connected community. In sum, I conjecture that a new conceptualization of female self(ishness), that harks back to the passion and radical agenda of the second wave, and that incorporates the ideas of feminisms of colour, may be needed to address properly feminist ends as an antidote both to so-called post-feminist, neoliberal individualism and to the pernicious nostalgia of agendas such as Verhaeghe’s.

Lisa Downing is Professor of French Discourses of Sexuality at the University of Birmingham, UK. She is the author of numerous books, articles, and chapters on sexuality and gender studies, film, and critical theory. Authored books include: The Cambridge Introduction to Michel Foucault (Cambridge University Press, 2008), Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters (co-authored with Libby Saxton, Routledge, 2010), The Subject of Murder: Gender, Exceptionality, and the Modern Killer (University of Chicago Press, 2013), and Fuckology: Critical Essays on John Money’s Diagnostic Concepts (co-authored with Iain Morland and Nikki Sullivan, University of Chicago Press, 2015). She is currently editing a volume entitled After Foucault for Cambridge University Press, and writing a monograph on gender and selfishness, from which the Lecture at Brighton is taken.

Katharine Jenkins (University of Nottingham) - 7th March 2017
Who’s Afraid of Andrea Dworkin? Feminism and the Analytic Philosophy of Sex

The nature of sexual desire has been a topic of profound interest to feminist theorists for some time, and certainly in the latter half of the 20th century. Yet this body of work is routinely overlooked by those working on this topic within the analytic tradition, resulting in two quite separate literatures. Focussing on the work of feminist theorist Andrea Dworkin – a distinctive and polarizing figure – I argue that much is lost by this partitioning. Dworkin’s work interrogates the connections between sexuality, gender, and dominance, aspects of sexual desire that are under-explored in the analytic philosophy of sex. I first show how an analytic approach can help us get the most out of Dworkin’s intricate prose by clarifying ambiguous

passages and disentangling distinct claims. I then argue that analytic work on sexual desire would benefit greatly from Dworkin's valuable insights about the social and political nature of sexual desire. A notable exception to the tendency to overlook Dworkin's work is Seiriol Morgan. However, I argue that even Morgan does not account for the full implications of Dworkin's arguments - and indeed, his work provides some especially clear examples of how her insights can be of use.

Katharine Jenkins is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Nottingham. She did her PhD at the University of Sheffield with Jennifer Saul and Miranda Fricker, before which she studied philosophy at the University of Cambridge. Her research is primarily in social philosophy, especially the ontology of social categories. She is interested in how social categories such as races and genders exist, and how these categories are bound up with systematic injustices. She also works on feminist philosophy and critical philosophy of race more broadly, on the philosophy of sex and sexuality, and on social epistemology.

Ros Gill (City University) - 21st March 2017

The Confidence Cult: How Neoliberal Individualism is Remaking Feminism