

# **The Future(s) of Feminist Philosophy. Challenges, Paradoxes and Utopias in a Fragmented World**

Workshop of the International Association of Women Philosophers, in cooperation with the Margherita-von-Brentano Centre for Gender Studies, Freie Universität Berlin

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## **Abstracts**

**Eyja M. Brynjarsdóttir (University of Iceland)**

### **Utopias by Gaslight: On Doing Philosophy in the Face of Adversity**

In recent years, so-called gaslighting has gained increasing attention as a tool of psychological abuse and manipulation. What I think has been neglected, however, is how gaslighting does not only target individuals but is also used in a systemic way in the oppression of subordinated groups, including women. My focus in this talk will be on a narrower case of this, exemplified by how women in the history of philosophy are routinely forgotten, and the long-time resistance of the philosophical community to acknowledge the importance of the visibility of women in philosophy. When women who have been trying to express their need to hear female voices in philosophy have been met with a lack of understanding and have gotten the message that they are not only wrong to insinuate that philosophy has a woman problem but that there is something wrong with them for making such a claim, they have effectively been gaslighted. Women working in philosophy who have kept going in spite of these adversities in their chosen field have had to engage in utopian thought. By finding unique ways to think about philosophy and engaging in original philosophical thought, they have created philosophical spaces that were not meant to exist. Furthermore, they have had to rely on cognitive abilities of their own that they were not meant to have.

**Karen Green (Monash University Melbourne)**

### **Catharine Macaulay's Enlightenment Faith and Radical Politics**

The disappearance of Catharine Macaulay's eighteenth-century defense of the doctrines, which justified the seventeenth-century republican parliament, has consequently obscured an important strand of enlightenment faith that was on the one hand active in the lead up to the American and French Revolutions, as well as also playing a significant role in the history of feminism. This faith was made up of two intertwined strands, 'Christian *eudaimonism*' and 'rational altruism'. Dominant contemporary accounts of the origins of republicanism and democratic theory during the eighteenth-century have excluded serious consideration of Macaulay's writing. Bringing her works into the mix, both pose difficulties for certain genealogies of the political thought of the period, and tend to favour a once popular view, which emphasized the centrality of Locke. Nevertheless, the Locke whose influence is found in Macaulay's writing is not the possessive individualist, or rational egoist, that he and other liberals have been represented as being, but rather a rational altruist, whose political

philosophy is grounded in natural law, and harks back to Milton. This same philosophy provides the philosophical foundations for Wollstonecraft's two most significant political texts, the *Vindication of the Rights of Men* and *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

**Annemie Halsema (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)**

**Objectification. A Feminist-Phenomenological Account of Sexuality**

In the moral and feminist debate, sexuality is most often perceived in the context of objectification, and related to male treatment of women. As a consequence, sexuality is considered morally objectionable. The Kantian notion of objectification that prevails in the feminist discussions on sexuality makes that it is considered morally wrong because of being directed to the other person as an object of appetite, a thing. In this paper, I will argue instead that "objectification" forms an essential feature of sexuality. It is not strictly related to male treatment of women, or to feminine sexual desire, but part of the sexual experience of both sexes. On the basis of a phenomenological analysis (mainly drawing from Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and De Beauvoir) I will interpret sexuality as - in the first place - a form of affective intentionality, in which your body begins to exist for you as a sexual one and the other person is perceived under the aspect of his/her sexual embodiment. Sexuality, secondly, includes being awakened to your and the other's body. Thirdly, the kind of relationship that sexuality includes is a subject-object relationship, but one in which both partners can take both positions. The paper argues for a broader notion of objectification that is not restricted to considering the other person as a thing, but to conceptualizing what it means to be embodied.

**Susanne Lettow (Freie Universität Berlin)**

**Rethinking Emancipation: Subjectivity, Domination and Time**

"Emancipation" is one of the most opaque words in political language and political theory. It refers to the hope of overcoming all forms of domination, yet is articulated with the highly ambivalent notions of reason, progress, equality and liberty, and the unfulfilled utopias that accompany them. In light of the different and contested uses that have been made of the concept of emancipation within and beyond contemporary feminist theory, I argue that a close examination of the concept and of the unresolved political and theoretical questions it articulates is a timely endeavour. With reference to Reinhard Koselleck's conceptual history of emancipation which highlights three developments that helped to shape the modern concept of emancipation—first, the turn towards a reflexive understanding of emancipation as self-emancipation; second, the politicalisation of the concept; and third, its temporalisation— I discuss the ways in which subjectivity, domination and time have been articulated in contemporary feminist theory.

**Tujia Pulkkinen (University of Helsinki)**

**The Challenge of "Fragmentation" in Feminist Philosophy – Cavarero and Butler on "Human"**

The paper considers whether fragmentation, in terms of philosophical orientations, should be considered as a challenge for the future of feminist philosophy, and argues that it should not. Instead of being understood as a single entity that could be considered as becoming fragmented, feminist philosophy should be increasingly understood as being a condition of philosophical plurality. As a case in point, the paper takes up and explores the

philosophical stakes in how the two leading contemporary feminist theorists, Adriana Cavarero and Judith Butler, relate to the concept “human” in their work. I argue that Cavarero’s philosophizing bears a close relationship to the existential tradition, manifesting most prominently in her emphasis on the singularity of the human. In comparison, Butler’s relation to the basic tenets of the phenomenological-existential tradition are more interventionist. I suggest the concept of “politics of philosophy” for the analysis of what both theorists do with their use of the concept of “human.” I also argue that instead of a challenge that threatens feminist philosophy, the contestation in concepts should be understood as productive. In this case it has also resulted in a productive process of thought between the thinkers who express obviously different attachments and goals with respect to the tradition of philosophy.

## **Christina Schües**

### **Prejudice and Epistemic Vulnerability**

Vulnerability is not simply a quality that can be attributed to the body, emotions, or perhaps the dignity of an individual. It is a *conditio humana*, which, as precariousness, determines the life and the relations of a human being. Precariousness, which people share with one another and make them more or less vulnerable, depends on the historical, social, technological and political dimensions that are normally associated with the body exposed to the other. But furthermore, precariousness affects an epistemic dimension, namely language, the order of knowledge and the normative framework of references in society.

## **Sigrídur Thorgeirsdóttir (University of Iceland)**

### **The Torn Robe of Philosophy: From Mansplaining Lady Philosophy to Remembering her Wisdom**

In contemporary philosophy it is commonly acknowledged that the body has been troublesome in the history of Western philosophy, with views ranging from contempt for embodiment and the sensuous to denial of the importance of the body for understanding the human being. Despite the advancing of the philosophy of the body in the 20th century allowing a richer understanding of the human being as embodied, the common view of the denial or contempt of the body in the history of philosophy remains. This becomes apparent in many contemporary interpretations of some classical and canonical texts of philosophy. In my reading of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, an early medieval text by Boethius, I will challenge this common view by discussing an example that can modify it. I will discuss how the body and the emotions are more present in this text than interpreters have grasped or admitted. Philosophical thinking is presented in this text as explicitly working with emotions and reflecting them. This happens in the dialogue between lady Philosophy and Boethius who has been sentenced to death. In my interpretation of the figure of Philosophy as a woman, I will argue how her figure represents traces of ancient notions of the noun *sophia* (wisdom) as embodied, sensual and practical knowledge and not only theoretical wisdom.