

Bentham Digest

Issue 2 2019





Contents

Letter from the Editors	3
Feminism and Equality	4
On the Value of Feminism	5
What Is Interesting About Discrimination?.....	6
A PHILOSOPHER'S VIEW	8
Why is Comedy Dominated by Men?.....	8
A Feminist Review Of Sexuality.....	11
The Obsession with Female Fertility.....	13
INTERVIEW	15
Has Feminism Made Us Morally Better?.....	17
UCL MAP	18
YOUR PHILOSOPHY SOCIETY	19

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

With the second issue of our very own *Bentham Digest* comes a more coherent editorial vision and what we hope to be a foundation stone for the continuation of the magazine.

Following the success of our first release in the Spring of 2018, the current issue focuses on Feminism-related discussions as a celebration of the role of WOMEN in society. And the timing couldn't be better: only a few days before the International Women's Day and during the Women in Philosophy Week organised by the UCL Philosophy Society, the current issue hopes to shed some light on the debates around Feminism, its role and its effects, in a way that it's suitable for both trained philosophers and the general public.

We spoke about the editorial vision that this issue introduces: doing philosophy in a popular way that might help take philosophy in the public debate as opposed to guarding it as a tool but for a few, remains at the core of our magazine. But we also hope that through it, in connection with the efforts our UCL Philosophy Society made this academic year, UCL Philosophy students could get a stronger feeling of belonging to a friendly, dynamic, and forward-looking community. That is why we felt the need to include an 'Our Philosophy Society' column. Here, we would like to thank Sailee Khurjekar, this year's President of the Philosophy Society and her team for the brilliant events they have organised throughout the year and for all their wonderful work. The Co-Editors would like to thank Sailee personally for her invaluable input in the release of this issue.

Two further columns, 'A Philosophers' View' and the 'Interview' section, have been kept as part of what we hope to become the recognisable structure of the *Bentham Digest*. Our first issue included both, and the feedback we received inspired us to continue with them.

A final remark on the editorial vision is that the overall design of the magazine has changed to reflect our new approach: the sections are now clearly indicated, and the magazine follows the general structure of a philosophical debate: setting the issue, exploring its implications, and looking at the conclusions that could be drawn. We mention this in the hope that the future editorial team will contemplate our reasons for editorial decisions when they will undoubtedly have to decide themselves where to take this project further.

To conclude on that note, we would like to make an OPEN CALL to ALL first and second-year students who want to apply for a position on next year's editorial committee for the *Bentham Digest*. Please email manuel.cazac.16@ucl.ac.uk if you wish to be part of next year's team. We strongly encourage our first and second-year colleagues to take this opportunity and help grow this wonderful project called the *Bentham Digest*.

The Co-Editor's special thanks go to our Editorial Team who has done a brilliant job of writing, editing, drawing and making this issue possible as well as to Nilanjan Das, our Staff Supervisor, whose feedback helped us a lot.

And last but not least, our gratitude goes to you, the reader, without whom all of these would be in vain.

Feminism and Equality

by Ida Sjoberg

In most popular debates about feminism, people who deny they are feminist are faced with the accusatory question: ‘do you not believe that men and women should be equal?’ When asked this, many people will agree that they support equality, but that this does not necessarily entail that they are feminists. If this is an accepted definition of feminism, then this seems problematic for those who accept equality but do not want to label themselves as feminist. However, feminists themselves do not necessarily want equality either, and this article discusses the reasons why.

Starting off with the weaker and more elementary arguments, some feminists claim they are not searching for full equality. Rather, they are just aiming for the situation of women to be improved upon from what it currently is. Personally, I feel this is a weak argument: the question of what is good enough is never fully answered. Thankfully, proponents of this argument are in a minority. Others believe that feminism can in no way be described as equality between sexes due to the fact it is called feminism (a large internet-wormhole is dedicated to this topic). Again, addressing the name of a cause is rarely going to result in a robust argument (especially because the definition of feminism and what it means to be a feminist is contentious).

However, some disagree with the definition as equality between genders as they believe this removes and ignores the female specific concerns and the struggles that women face which men do not. Others continue this to say our view of what it means to have gender equality is male centred as it means that the supposed goal of feminism is to make women the equal of men – therefore equality is defined by male privilege and qualities. So rather than levelling the playing field, this looks closer to women chasing what men can and can’t do, not addressing other issues. “The reason women are oppressed is because we are different from men. Historically, patriarchy has used difference to justify subordination. We do not need to be seen as equal to men: we need to be seen as worthy and valid not in spite of, but because of our differences. Women should not have to be perceived as the same as men to be deserving.”¹

Others take equality between genders to be both a female and male concern – one which addresses what is seen as a female act (not eating Doritos) and a male act (eating Doritos). For some people, feminism includes not only a strive towards expanding what women can do in terms of the male sphere, but also towards embracing the idea that men should be allowed to be more traditionally feminine. This is quite a popular argument in support of feminism being beneficial for both genders since both would receive an expansion in the set of ways they can behave.

Conversely, it can be claimed that the fight for equality is a negative action and the reason some feminists deny they want equality is because equality does not necessarily have to be positive – if everyone is in the same situation they are equal; but if everyone is oppressed, are people really better off? They may be equal but in a worse position than before, which is why equality is seen as unimportant for some. Feminism is not about getting men to share in the oppression of women (and getting every woman to be oppressed in a similar way), leaving everyone worse off.

This article has only touched on some of the responses to the idea that feminism and equality are joint concepts. There remains a lot more to be said about different conceptions of equality and whether they are ‘positive’ or ‘negative’. I hope this has introduced some of the problems of claiming that feminism is a fight for equality without thinking about the actuality of that statement, and why saying feminism isn’t a fight for equality is not as negative as it may originally seem.

¹<https://medium.com/@radfemfatale/feminism-is-not-about-gender-equality-efc2ccb1e46b>

On the Value of Feminism

by Dylan Ngan

It is often interpreted that feminism is about the equality of gender, and rightly so, that this definition suffices in achieving its goal in promoting equal treatment regardless of gender. Opportunities, values, wages, and how we treat others should depend and change depending on a person's gender, for their gender is no basis for the grounds of discrimination. On the other hand, I tend to argue in the following paragraphs ahead in this short piece of writing, that feminism is perhaps better off leaving the realm of a gender issue, and into an issue of humanity. Perhaps it's time for us to dig down into the fundamentals of its values and render it something a little bit simpler and more universal.

If feminism is truly about equality of gender, then inherent in its definition is a categorical difference which implicates social significance. Now I ask, why is this necessary? If it is equality we wish to achieve, then gender does not have any social significance in terms of affecting how we should treat others. In fact, regardless of gender, we should aim to treat others as their individual selves, with their own respective identities and personalities. We shouldn't allow people to be categorised and defined by gender, which does not capsule their individual integrities or entail any presupposed personality characteristics. Furthermore, we should delve to treat any individual with kindness and compassion, with a desire to understand their uniqueness as an individual. It is not about what you call people, but how you treat them, that matters.

Take for example, one's social circle and one's close group of friends. Whereas one would be inclined to define strangers by their physical characteristics and even gender, we see our friends in terms of their individual personalities, maybe their hopes and dreams, their ambitions and fears, and the moments that

are shared together. If we are to embrace the value of equality, then we must let go of the assumptions that come with surface observation, and delve to understand individuals, and extend to others the empathy, kindness, compassion and tolerance we extend to those who are closer to us.

If we are to truly comprehend feminism, we have to be aware of its principle, and that is the value of the individual person. We strive for equality because we fundamentally believe that individuals have an inherent worth and value, and they have the intrinsic right to be treated equally and to be of our concern and care. If for instance, to use my example of friendship before, that the classifications of gender and physical characteristics fade away as people matter more to us, and have a higher value to us, then the extension can be made even to strangers. The more we understand and acknowledge the underlying value of humanity, the more the same classifications fade away, into the simple and universal principle, "be kind to others".

In my opinion, feminism manifests itself best not in large scale revolutions or policy, but in our day to day attitudes, in how we treat the others. Feminism becomes a simple doctrine of human decency. I am as much a feminist, as I am a decent human being, who wishes to do good, to be kind to others. We sometimes forget that to be good, we do not have to change the world overnight, but simply in an expression of gratitude, a smile, a gesture of good will, or caring and of seeing others with worth and value. I have seen many new policies and regulations take place in the name of feminism and equality, but it is not those rules and policies that define us, rather, it is our values and principles that define rules and policies. If we are going to change for the better, then let's begin with that.

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What Is Interesting About Discrimination?

by Daniel Simons

The topic of discrimination is rightfully a vocal area of discontent for feminism, and the recent outrage directed at revelations about the [gender pay gap](#) demonstrate that the majority of people find this kind of discrimination objectionable. But what is wrong about discrimination?

Consider these three scenarios for Judith. At her school Judith applies to be a member of the debating society. However, Judith's application is unsuccessful, the committee reject her on the account of her being a woman. Judith also applies for the school netball team. Unfortunately, again she is rejected, but this time the coach based her decision on Judith's poor netball ability. Finally, after school, Judith confidently approaches the bar at her local pub. However, she is refused service and thrown out of the pub, this on account of her only being 17 years of age.

All three cases naturally come under the descriptive remit of discrimination. In the first instance Judith is discriminated against because of her sex, the second on her ability at netball, and the third because of her age. Between the three cases though, there seems to be morally significant differences. We all agree that the debating society discriminating against Judith based on her sex (assuming there are no important reasons why she can't join the debating society) is morally repulsive. Conversely, the netball coach discriminating based on Judith's netball ability, and the pub discriminating against her based on her age, are both not morally objectionable. I employ these examples to draw out the distinction between discrimination as a distinctive action type, something that is common place and every day, and wrongful discrimination. This wrongful discrimination is a subset of discriminations, they are wrongful because they are discriminatory (not just discrimination that happens to also be morally wrong).

So far, so obvious, I expect. But the interest in the preceding discussion is drawn out by considering what exactly is the wrong of wrongful discrimination. I want to present several intuitive, although unsophisticated, ways of modelling the wrong involved, and highlight the difficulties with each approach. This will lead to a refocus, I want to argue that more fundamentally we need to get a grip on what is distinctively interesting about the act type of discrimination, to begin addressing what makes it wrong.

One intuitive response to the wrong involved in discrimination is that it is based on traits the discriminated party has no control over. In the case of the school debating society, Judith has no control over her gender. Whereas, Judith is in some sense in control of her netball ability, and thus it is acceptable to discriminate along this feature. This view has serious problems though. Firstly, it is questionable to what extent Judith is 'in control' of her netball ability. Secondly, there are also many cases where it is justifiable to discriminate based on traits that the agent is not in control of. Refusing Judith a beer is discriminating on a trait out of her control (her age) but it is not morally objectionable.

A related response is to argue that the wrong in discrimination is that decisions are based on arbitrary features not relevant to the decision at hand. This would correctly distinguish the three cases along the moral lines we intuitively hold. The netball team and the pub discriminate on non-arbitrary features. Whereas the debating societies' decision was based on a completely irrelevant feature for membership. Unfortunately, this model also quickly runs up against problems. One of which is that there will be situations where discrimination will be based on relevant features, but it still seems morally wrong. For example, a shopkeeper could operate in a majority white racist area. His shop is struggling, and the only way to improve business is to ban black people from shopping there, as the white people in his area don't like

shopping with black people. The colour of the skin is a relevant feature in the case, but it still seems like wrongful discrimination.

This failure of two intuitive approaches to discrimination demonstrates that although we have deeply moving moral convictions regarding discrimination, it is difficult to model what it is that is the distinctive wrong of discrimination. This area has a flourishing literature, full of interesting and diverse attempts to solve just this problem.² However, this literature also suffers from similar problems to our less sophisticated approaches. Each account is at least open to counterexamples where there seems to be wrongful discrimination and yet the approach doesn't account for it. This is because each approach attempts to perfectly fence off just the wrongful discriminations, but each approach is open to examples where there is a discrimination of interest that doesn't share the key feature of that account. This leads to a sense that each view determines what is wrong about the discriminations they have fenced off, but is unable to explain what is wrong with wrongful discrimination in general. With this in mind, I want to refocus our attention away from the distinctive wrong, to what is distinctive about the discrimination we are interested in. This work on what interests us is essential to address what is wrong, as it aims to highlight the aspects of certain discriminations that make it a worthwhile task to model what is morally wrong with them. This will then help when approaching the wider literature.

I believe there are two aspects of the discrimination that we are interested in that are the key to understanding its importance. Firstly, it is an action done to an individual that compares them to another hypothetical/real individual based on certain traits or features. It is comparative. Secondly, it is also an action that needs to be contextualised in the wider group dynamics to be fully understood. Not allowing Judith in the debating society because she is a woman can only be fully understood when it is contextualised within a society that has a history of mistreatment of women. The interaction between these two features is what is distinctive about the discrimination we are interested in. This means that any successful approach must give an understanding of how discrimination can be a harm to an individual, and/or a harm to a group.

This is only a modest proposal, but it will help anyone approaching the important topic of discrimination to understand what to look for in explaining when it is wrong and why it is wrong.

² A selection:

Eidelson, B. (2015). *Discrimination and Disrespect*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hellman, D. (2011). *When is Discrimination Wrong?*. London: Harvard University Press.

Lippert-Rasmussen, K. (2014). *Born Free and Equal?: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Nature of Discrimination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

A PHILOSOPHER'S VIEW

Why is Comedy Dominated by Men?

by Joe Hawley

People often forget the importance of comedy. Its roles are numerous and its effects are great. It can cheer us up, it can make us think, and it can confuse us. It can cast a critical eye over our ideas as well as our governments. It can open us up to the absurdity of life and how we live it. It can help us feel empathy and form relationships. It is clear, then, that comedy is a powerful tool—but is it one that is used to underrepresent women?

Before looking at the shortage of women in comedy, I want to make a few remarks about what feminism should hope to achieve. I think it is first important to realise that feminism should not be about equality of outcome, or at least not in some respects. What I mean by this is that one should not expect to have absolute equality in every respect. For example, when men and women have a fair and equal opportunity to pursue careers of their choice, we should not expect every profession to have a 50/50 split between men and women. The average man and average woman are different in some respects, and there are known biological differences between male and female brains and the means by which they exercise their functions. Biological studies show, for example, that women outperform men on verbal fluency, while the opposite is true of visualising shapes in the mind. Differences of this sort explain why some careers are dominated by women and some by men.

Some people find the claim that men and women have different talents immediately offensive and argue that societal norms are more influential in determining into which careers men and women enter. It is clear that some social norms skew the split between men and women in certain careers, but it is also important to realise that even in a world with perfect equality of opportunity for men and women, where there is no social pressure for men or women to follow certain paths, biological differences would still skew the male-female split in some fields. Of course, the nature of taking averages means that even if, on average, men are better at visualising shapes, many men will be worse than the 'average man', and many women will be better than the 'average' women when it comes to this mental ability. This, of course, means that lots of women will be better than lots of men at visualising shapes, even though men are on average better at this skill. The fact that men are better at this skill would, for example, explain why engineering courses at universities are dominated by men, but this is not the whole picture.

The problem that these differences between men and women causes is that they are exaggerated by social norms. In a perfectly fair society, we would expect to see more men than women in engineering due to the differences I have already highlighted, but we would not expect it to be dominated by men to the extent that it is today. Imagine a society where social barriers did not exist for women in a field like engineering. Let's say that in this society there may be a 60/40 split between men and women in the field due to natural differences in the choices made by men and women. Immediately, there is an imbalance, but a fair imbalance nonetheless. However, the very fact of there being an imbalance means that people begin to see engineering as a 'male' field and some women are understandably put off by this. Thus, fewer and fewer women go in to the field and the male-female split widens to the point where there are huge social barriers that lie in the way of women and men when it comes to entering fields dominated by the opposite sex.

A Philosopher's View

We then face the problem of how such societal norms are (to be?) reversed, but I won't go into that here. Instead, we turn to the questions raised earlier about women in comedy. I want to consider to what extent the fact that men dominate comedy is down to biological differences, and to what extent it is down to social barriers in the way of women.

The famously controversial writer Christopher Hitchens once wrote an article in *Vanity Fair* entitled, 'Why Women Aren't Funny'. In this article, Hitchens argues that women are naturally less funny than men for several reasons. His main point is that comedy is a more important tool for men in finding a partner. He argues that women appeal to men without being funny, whereas men need to utilise humour to appeal to women. Hitchens also speaks to Fran Lebowitz, who comments that comedy is largely "aggressive and pre-emptive" and asks "what's more male than that?".

Lebowitz's contention that comedy appeals to characteristics more prominent in men would, if correct, perhaps explain why comedy is a male dominant field. Comedian Lee Mack famously wrote that women are less prominent in stand-up because they feel less of a need to show off compared to men. However, what characteristics are funny in a stand-up comedian? Wit and delivery are two of the most fundamental features of a good comedian and these seem to be characteristics which are not predominantly 'male' at all.

Evidence shows that the problem isn't that women are less funny than men, or that comedy is one that favours characteristics more predominant in men, but instead the issue is simply that fewer women pursue the career in the first place. For example, In 2012, Chortle - the UK's leading industry site - reported that 20% of the entries in its student comedy award were women, and 17% of its catalogue of comedians were women. These figures show that roughly the same proportion of women who try to get into the field do in fact make it into the industry. The issue therefore isn't necessarily some sort of bias within comedy itself, but that not many women go into comedy in the first place. However, much like our engineering example earlier, it must be established whether this skew is natural, or whether it is socially induced.

There is no doubt that barriers used to lie in the way of women in comedy. A 2010 poll by Channel 4 found that 94 out of the 100 best stand-up comedians were men, whereas a YouGov poll found that 4 of the 10 most popular contemporary comedians were women. The all-time figures from the Channel 4 poll show that the skew in favour of male comics used to be much greater and this is most likely the cause of some people's beliefs that men are funnier than women; there simply used to be far more funny men on TV than women. Artificial barriers in the way of women have led to comedy being a male dominated career and are surely part of the reason why many funny women are put off going into comedy. Therefore, while barriers against women within comedy itself have largely been removed, there are still problems in terms of young women having the confidence to pursue a career in comedy in the first place.

A Philosopher's View

But what is to be done about this? Firstly, we should ask what male-female split would be deemed acceptable in comedy. Suggesting all panel shows and comedy nights have a 50/50 split between men and women is markedly undesirable. Enforcing gender quotas like this would both be patronising to female comics and unfair to their male counterparts. Also, once social conventions are broken down such that women feel welcome to pursue careers in comedy, we needn't expect a 50/50 split because, as stated earlier, men and women will not, when given a free choice, necessarily sort themselves into equal quantities in every profession.

Wanting to shift the gender balance within comedy is entirely understandable. However, it would be artificial and illiberal to pick some arbitrary male-female split as being 'right'. In order to get more women into comedy what is needed is a social, not procedural, change. From a young age, girls need to be given the confidence and encouragement to pursue any career they wish. However, if this does not lead to an equal number of men and women going into comedy, we should not complain. As long as people are free of procedural and social barriers when entering comedy or any other career, then whatever gender split arises in that career is fair and just. When the gender balance is obviously skewed, as it is in comedy, then there is an issue to be addressed, but we should not fight against the free choice of men and women in order to reach absolute (and artificial) gender equality.

A Feminist Review Of Sexuality

by Efreem Craig

The aim of this essay is to explore the idea that sexuality is a choice. Aside from the historical narrative of liberation movements for both women's rights and LGBT+ rights, there is a philosophical question that presents itself: what defines who we are and how we behave? (Here we take the question to be in two parts, as who we are is defined by what we do, and vice versa). I propose that the answer we get from feminist theories about gender means we must doubt whether sexuality is innate, that we were 'born this way'. In order to do justice to those who experience sexuality as chosen, this is a necessary argument to consider.

A basic element of feminist thought comes from Simone de Beauvoir, who said, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". Though over-quoted, this is the grounding for the argument that gender is socially constructed. We learn from this that society has come to dictate what is appropriate for women to be and do. But rather than accepting this, Beauvoir sees these constructs as an opportunity for choice and change: a woman can liberate herself by challenging these social constructs, which oppress her from being who she wants to be. Though not all 'first wave' feminism is agreeable, we can at least accept this notion of autonomy as fundamental for liberation. The way we act, the way we are, is down to our own choice, and not the choice of society – our autonomy guides this choice.

So let's suppose the case for sexuality is analogous. Society developed the view that having straight sex is the right way to act, being straight is the right way to be. But, like gender, sexuality is a social construct: the belief in a correct sexuality was developed to oppress those who stray from the norm. Also like gender, these constructs are oppressive because they do not correspond to how we want to behave, i.e. we want to have non-straight sex (or no sex). So by analogy we can see that our autonomy liberates us from these constructs; we choose to act how we want, rather than how society wants. It is our choice. This is how many LGBT+ people view sexuality today, though many are demonised for the belief.

To clarify, this view choice is not of somebody arbitrarily deciding 'today I'll be gay' in the way they might say 'today I'll eat bread'. Rather, this view of choice accepts the notion of free will – whilst our actions are influenced by nature and environment, the essential motive for performing certain actions is our free choice. But some might argue that gender and sexuality are not analogous, a key reason being that sexuality is genetic and gender is not. However, I want to quickly suggest the 'gay gene' theory is flawed. Not only is there (depending on the source) little grounding in science³, but it is also unhelpful in our struggles for liberation. Believing in a gay gene has troubling implications: (1) if there is a gay gene, there must be a straight gene. Yet if we discover that a non-straight person has a straight gene, do we believe they are deviating from their true nature? Would we tell this non-straight person to follow their genetic code and be straight? To do so would clearly be oppressive; (2) if there are gay genes and straight genes, there must also be asexual, bisexual (etc.) genes – unless we simply distinguish straight genes from non-straight genes (which is obviously problematic), we must discover all the genes on this ever-extending list.

³ E.g. evolutionarily there is no reason for a gene to exist that damages the chances of a species' survival. I don't believe that this evolutionary fact is a reason to become straight.

More to the point, would the discovery of these genes be helpful? The Nazis believed in the gay gene, yet it didn't stop them killing millions of LGBT+ people. Similarly, if there was a gene that determined all the decisions a woman made, would this stop oppression against women? I doubt it, since many of the oppressors believe in this determinist model anyway, when they say women were born to do a particular thing. So, some people ask, who would choose to be non-straight in this world? Who would choose to be a woman? Although these questions are complex, part of the answer can be phrased simply: for freedom, it is worth the struggle! The freedom we have to form our own choices, our own definitions, is invaluable; we respect our capacity to make

autonomous decisions about the things we do (and who we are). We choose our own freedom. Perhaps this is where the split comes historically: whilst feminists everywhere have embraced autonomy, freedom and choice, the LGBT+ movements have claimed a lack of choice, a lack of freedom, a lack of autonomy. In this moment, we have lost everything that is so important about being non-straight. And without accepting at least some experience of free choice into the struggle for liberation, we remain a subject of pity and tolerance for the bigots. Yet the people who want to change us know the uncomfortable truth: it's not that we can't change, it's that we don't want to change. We don't want to conform to the structures of straightness. We want to be ourselves, as we define it.



Recommendations:

Straight Expectations, Julie Bindel, 2014

Straight Sex: Rethinking the Politics of Pleasure, Lynn Segal, 1994

The Obsession with Female Fertility

by Matei Gheorghiu

It is said that when a suffragette demanded to know what the essential difference was between herself and Sir John Mahaffey, Oscar Wilde's tutor at Cambridge, he is said to have replied "Madam, I cannot conceive". Neither can I nor the late Christopher Hitchens who, in his controversially titled January 2007 Vanity Fair article 'Why Women Aren't Funny', remarked that "Men are overawed, not to say terrified, by the ability of women to produce babies. [...] It gives women an unchallengeable authority."

This obsession with female fertility is even intrinsic to most major religions: it is said that the Greek hero Perseus was born from

an underground cavern and every child in the West is told that Mary gave birth to Christ whilst still a virgin. Likewise, in the East, Siddhartha Guatama, the founder of Buddhism, is said to have been born from the right-hand side of his mother and the Hindu god Brahma was born of a lotus emerging from the navel of Vishnu. (Anything, it seems, to avoid the vagina.) Need I mention that according to Genesis 3:16, painful childbirth is women's punishment for eating the forbidden fruit?

In his article, Hitchens quotes a section of Rudyard Kipling's poem 'The Female of the Species':

*But the Woman that God gave him,
every fibre of her frame
Proves her launched for one sole issue,
armed and engine for the same,
And to serve that single issue,
lest the generations fail,
The female of the species must be
deadlier than the male.*

*What could be this 'sole issue'? Certainly, it is
childbirth.*

Even our word 'female', which shares its etymological roots with the French word 'femme', is derived from Proto-Indo-European words meaning the one breastfeeding' or, even earlier, the verb 'to suckle'. It is also connected to the Latin words 'fetus' meaning 'offspring' or

'pregnancy' and 'fecundus' meaning 'fruitful, fertile' or 'productive'. Thus, the attitude Hitchens and Kipling espouse seems to have a strong roots in how women have been viewed over the centuries.

Of course, men have historically been a necessary part of female fertility. That is to say, women are not able to give birth without the (sometimes very brief) assistance of men. In his article, Hitchens even notes “[y]ou may well wonder what people were thinking before that realization hit, but we do know of a society in Melanesia where the connection was not made until quite recently”. Imagine that!

It has even been thought that the English word ‘woman’ is derived from, connected to, or related with the word ‘womb’. The reasons for this seem to be based in an understanding of the difference between the sexes as being based in the ability of the one, but not the other, to conceive. However, it a misconception and the true etymology of the word avoids this connection—it is thought to come from the Old English word ‘wifman’ which is a compound of ‘wif’ and ‘man’ meaning ‘lady’ and ‘human being’ respectively. According to Century Dictionary: “[i]t is notable that it was thought necessary to join wif, a neuter noun, representing a female person, to man, a masc. noun representing

either a male or female person, to form a word denoting a female person exclusively.” The purpose of this is apparently still confounding and may be lost to history. Nevertheless, the use of the word ‘wif’ (or ‘wife’) to denote a woman shouldn’t seem too odd to us since we still use the terms in this general sense when we say, for example, that something is an ‘old wives’ tale’.

Well, what can we make of all of this? Our attitudes towards women may have strong historic root in our ignorance—women can conceive and men cannot, but why this should be, we do not know and so we believe it to be a defining part of the female sex. Yet, what if this weren’t the case as it soon might not be? What if we find some scientific procedure which allows both sexes to conceive? How might Sir John Mahaffey have answered the suffragette then? I do not know the answers to these questions, but leave them as an exercise for the reader



INTERVIEW

with **Amia Srinivasan** by **Grace Atkins**

I remember you discussing the burden of the "natural philosopher" in a lecture before. Do you feel this label applies to you? If not, how did you get into Philosophy, and what motivated you to become an academic?

There are various different ways in which one can be said to be 'naturally' inclined towards philosophy (though I think there is very little that is 'natural' about us in the sense of being biologically innate; most of what is seemingly 'natural' about us is produced by the contingencies of culture, family and upbringing). The one I stress when I teach first year undergraduates is the tendency towards an obsessive, somewhat masochistic, relationship to the kind of pain that comes from using the mind, reflexively, to think about the mind itself, and its relationship to the world. I myself am attracted to philosophy because it gives me a language for talking about that pain. The reason I stress this dimension of doing philosophy in my undergraduate teaching is because having this sort of tendency comes apart from the usual understandings of being 'naturally good' at philosophy - being very logical, or being good at spotting the flaws in other people's arguments, or thinking quickly on one's feet. While those attributes can help one become a good philosopher, it's not really, I think, what being a philosopher is about. In the absence of a love of thinking, of a desire to get on to the way things are, those skills make one a sophist, not a philosopher. Unfortunately, sophists often are quite good at getting high marks.

Would you briefly explain the philosophical underpinnings of intersectionality? Why, or why don't you think this is important in 21st century society?

The term 'intersectionality' was introduced in 1989 by the Black feminist legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, though it resonates with ideas voiced by Black and other non-white feminists before the introduction of the term. An intersectional feminism is one that does not treat gender-based oppression in isolation from other systems of oppression -- such as classist or racial oppression -- as many mainstream (i.e. white, middle class) feminists had done. Crenshaw's great insight is to point out that oppressions are not (always) additive. For example, the oppression faced by Black women is not reducible to (a) the oppression they face qua women, and (b) the oppression they face qua Black people. Rather, Black women sometimes are oppressed qua Black women, in a way that cannot simply be reduced to their gender or race. The importance of intersectionality is two-fold. First, at the theoretical level, it demands that we address the complex interactions between various systems of oppression and privilege, rather than thinking of gender, race, class or some other form of system as fundamental; an intersectional feminism is thus opposed to the simplistic Marxist view that all oppression is 'really' class oppression, or the simplistic feminism that says that all oppression is 'really' patriarchal oppression. Second, at a practical level, intersectionality has insisted that feminists stop centring the voices and experiences of rich white women: that we place poor, non-white, non-abled bodied and queer women at the centre of our emancipatory struggle.

Do you feel like the 1st, 2nd, 3rd wave trichotomy to label feminism is useful?

The trichotomy probably obscures as much as it reveals. In particular, it risks ignoring the ways in which the concerns of any one of these waves were shared by feminists in the other waves, e.g. first-wave feminists were also interested in questions of gender, sex and the 'private' realm, and not just legal and political equality. There is also the worry that dividing things up this way makes us ignore feminism that was happening 'between' the waves, and of course before feminism's supposed beginning in the first wave. There is also the issue of how the taxonomy of the waves makes us interpret feminism outside the West.

What is your response to the anti-pornography movement, particularly, the ordinance of Dworkin and MacKinnon? Is this debate still relevant today?

One thing that is important to note is that MacKinnon and Dworkin were never interested in criminalising pornography -- rather, the idea was to make it possible for women to bring civil (not criminal) suits against pornographers for harm. So, the usual positioning of them as would-be censors is not quite right. In any case, I suspect that the possibility of civil suits against pornographers is a ship that has sailed. But what MacKinnon and Dworkin had to say about pornography, and the sort of sexual culture it both supported and was a symptom of, is very relevant today -- though their arguments are generally dismissed as displaying an authoritarian moralism that is counter to 'sex positive' third wave feminism. One thing that is very striking to me, when teaching feminism at UCL, is how much MacKinnon's account of heterosexual sex -- as fundamentally being, as she says, about domination and power -- resonates with my students, both women and men. So does Rae Langton's defence of MacKinnon's argument that pornography in itself silences and subordinates women. Langton's argument crucially depends on the premise that pornography has a kind of de facto authority, that porn teaches boys and men 'the truth about sex'. When I started teaching this material at UCL I was surprised to find just how many students, again women as well as men, agreed that pornography really does have that authority. I think the ubiquity of internet pornography -- the fact that children today, especially boys, have a massive amount of virtual sexual exposure before engaging in actual sexual activity -- explains this response. So in a way MacKinnon's arguments are more important now than ever.

Is the (increasingly popular) commodification of feminism useful in promoting a movement to a modern society?

Capitalism is extraordinarily adaptive, and its ability to absorb feminist discourse, including intersectional feminism, and redeploy it for its own purposes (i.e. profit maximisation) is a great example of that agility. I don't think we should look to such cooption with hope. The question is how to keep on moving, adapting and resisting ourselves.

Has Feminism Made Us Morally Better?

By Javaid Miah

We might quickly answer yes. Equality between the sexes has had an important social and political impact on society. We now have laws protecting women. We have greater appreciation of what women can do occupationally. There has also been a greater appreciation of femininity. And this arguably has had an important impact on the acceptance of the LGBT community in recent times.

But the philosophical question behind this short inquiry is if feminism has made us morally better, it seems to commit us to the idea of objective morals. We seem to be saying that there exists a standard of morality that we can know. When we say feminism has made us morally better we also seem committed to the idea of moral progress and development. This means our society seems to be reaching a moral standard closer and closer as time goes on and as our society evolves socially and politically. This brief inquiry raises further questions

Are there objective moral values?

If there are objective moral values, how do we know of them (epistemological problem)?

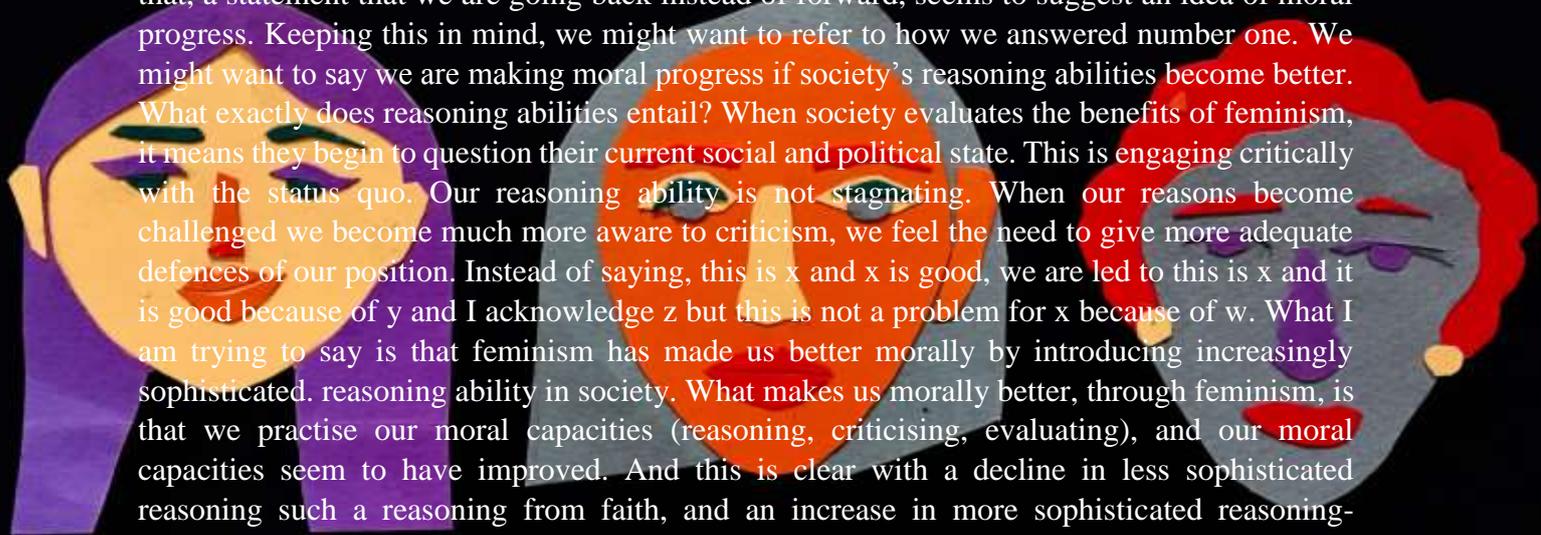
Can there be such a thing as moral progress?

One response to number one is, we do not need to buy into the idea that feminism is suggesting that there are objective moral values. We just need a way of evaluating beliefs and try to demonstrate with reason which ones are better explanations of why we think feminism is morally good. This is similar to the field of meta-ontology, which is about which competing explanations of the nature of reality should we accept, what kind of virtues of explanation do we prefer, such as simple ontologies or complex or mystical ontologies (see Chris Swoyer, *Abstract Entities*, which has inspired my response). Meta-ontology accepts that in many cases there may never be an answer that is wholly correct in metaphysics. So, its motivation is that philosophical explanations can be evaluated in terms of what is the best explanation instead of what is the explanation. This is something that feminist philosophies can also adopt. They do not need to demonstrate an objective moral value. They simply need a method to demonstrate the best explanation and a method of reasoning to that best explanation. And this is how we might start to reason towards whether feminism has made us morally better.

Since I have demonstrated how number one could be answered, by avoiding the objective/relative distinction in moral philosophy, I have little motivation to answer how I know feminism has made us morally better by reference to objective moral values.

However, number three still needs some adequate answer. How exactly do we progress morally? It might be quite assumptive on my part to suggest that we have progressed. Some might argue feminism has taken us back. But even my objector must realise in a statement like that, a statement that we are going back instead of forward, seems to suggest an idea of moral progress. Keeping this in mind, we might want to refer to how we answered number one. We might want to say we are making moral progress if society's reasoning abilities become better.

What exactly does reasoning abilities entail? When society evaluates the benefits of feminism, it means they begin to question their current social and political state. This is engaging critically with the status quo. Our reasoning ability is not stagnating. When our reasons become challenged we become much more aware to criticism, we feel the need to give more adequate defences of our position. Instead of saying, this is x and x is good, we are led to this is x and it is good because of y and I acknowledge z but this is not a problem for x because of w. What I am trying to say is that feminism has made us better morally by introducing increasingly sophisticated reasoning ability in society. What makes us morally better, through feminism, is that we practise our moral capacities (reasoning, criticising, evaluating), and our moral capacities seem to have improved. And this is clear with a decline in less sophisticated reasoning such a reasoning from faith, and an increase in more sophisticated reasoning- reasoning philosophically on a societal level.



UCL MAP

by Laura Silva

MAP is a collection of students in philosophy departments that aims to examine and address issues of minority participation in academic philosophy. Currently, MAP has 121 chapters throughout the world.



Although typically a graduate led initiative the UCL chapter was actually set up by two undergraduates in 2014: Victoria Monro and Verena da Silva, with Nathaniel Coleman acting as staff liaison. Currently we run MAP via a small committee comprising PhD students Jessica Fischer, Nikhil Venkatesh, Catherine Dale and Laura Silva, with Rob Simpson as staff liaison. We are keen to get undergraduates back at the center of UCL MAP!

Our chapter has been quite active in the past few years. We run a fortnightly reading group open to all within the department. Last year we read a variety of papers on issues including gender, race, meta-philosophy and sexuality. This year we've opted for reading a collection of essays by Marilyn Frye entitled 'The Politics of Reality'. This has been a really great experience and we've had a steady group of attendees that includes undergrads, grads and staff. Often, we pause to discuss how the issues in our readings relate to our lives within the department and academic philosophy more widely. This allows the reading group sessions to act as an informal arena for discussions on action and change within the discipline.

We've also organized annual welcome drinks for new female graduate students as well as an annual dinner for female graduate students and staff. As the gender balance in philosophy worsens drastically from undergraduate to graduate level, these events have been instrumental in fostering a sense of community and improving the overall experience of women in the department.

Given this drop in numbers of female philosophers, as well as other minoritized groups, from undergraduate to graduate level, we are keen to hear from undergraduates on how best to tackle the issue. For the past two years we have held informal Q and A sessions for undergraduates from minoritized groups that are considering further study, but want to hear from you on what can be done. We've got a discussion between undergraduate and graduate women lined up for the department's women in philosophy week, so you can find us there if you are coming for a chat, otherwise please contact us at:

mapcommittee.ucl@gmail.com, to get involved or share ideas, we'd love to hear from you!

We've lobbied for the diversification of department syllabi and inclusive seminar practice, the latter of which is now on the agenda at the department's teacher training sessions. Last year we hosted the inaugural annual UCL MAP public lecture. We hope this lecture will become a department tradition where a speaker working on topics broadly related to MAP concerns is hosted annually. We have renamed the lecture the 'Harriet and Helen Memorial Lecture' in honour of the unacknowledged labour and intellectual contributions to John Stuart Mill's work, made by his wife and step-daughter. We are happy to welcome Dr. Nina Power as our speaker this year, on the 21st of March. We hope to see many of you there!

YOUR PHILOSOPHY SOCIETY

by Sailee Khurjekar, UCL Philosophy Society President 2018-2019

Things have been rather hectic for the UCL Philosophy Society committee over the past five months. We've been extremely keen to build on the successes of last academic year's events in order to provide academic and social opportunities for the entire UCL philosophical community.

We're delighted that undergraduates, graduates, and staff have got involved with all the exciting events we've organised, alongside students from other departments. One of our key aims has been to be as inclusive as possible, and this is hopefully apparent through the positive reception we've had about our ideas and the ways in which we've executed them.

Speakers so far have included Nigel Warburton, Simon Blackburn, Richard Swinburne, and Peter Hitchens who talked about free speech and art, semantics, suffering in relation to God, and the rage against God respectively. It was great to engage with and probe academics in a somewhat relaxed environment, followed by drinks in the undergraduate common room or at the local pub. We've made an effort to combine the academic and social aspects of university life through these talks, and we've been immensely proud of the high turnouts.

As part of our **Women in Philosophy Week** (Sunday 3rd March - Sunday 10th March), a joint collaboration with the KCL Philosophy Society, we're delighted to host Helen Beebee (who will give an important practical talk about getting more women involved with philosophy) and Fiona Woollard (who will give a talk about maternal duties). It is especially empowering to have female academics speak to us during this week in keeping with the #BalanceforBetter ethos as part of IWD2019. Our remaining speakers are also women: Vanessa Brassey will be discussing the ways in which a painting can be sad and Nancy Cartwright will be discussing the philosophy of science.

There's more to come from us. Plenty more socials have been planned, following the success of our Christmas party in Hackney Wick and regular parties in the seminar room (we'll try and plan a professor-led beer pong one soon, I hope). We've run reading groups on Meta-ethics and Contemporary Aesthetics, and have a couple of staff-led reading group sessions in the works. Our monthly debates against KCL Philosophy Society have highlighted our sheer wit and charm on a range of topics, from the limits of philosophy to the value of pornography.

We're going to collaborate with English Society and Hindu Society soon, in the form of discussion groups. We'll hopefully host some philosophical movie nights in the coming months. Plus, we are beyond thrilled to host this year's London Undergraduate Philosophy Conference on Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th March. To be honest, this is simply a short snapshot of all the super fun things we've been getting up to or have planned for those within our department and outside of it.

Keep up to date with our events via the UCL Philosophy Society Group: (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/uclphilsoc/>).

It's been simultaneously rewarding and humbling being the UCL Philosophy Society President this academic year, and while I'll be sad to leave it behind, I'm honoured that students and staff alike have been receptive to our vision. It means a lot, and I hope that next academic year's team continues on with just as much energy and passion as we have (and I'd of course like to thank the rest of the committee for their support, patience, and brilliance).