

Proposal for a Special Issue of *Hypathia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy, on Politics and Emancipation: Rethinking Subjectivity, Power and Time*

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Narrative

The aim of the proposed special issue is to re-evaluate the concept of 'emancipation' from the perspective of feminist philosophy and theory. Like concepts of equality, progress and freedom, which during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were used to articulate struggles of feminist, anti-slavery, anti-racist and socialist movements, 'emancipation' has been harshly criticized by post-structuralists from the late 1970s onward (Lyotard 1979, cf. Laclau 1996). Since then it almost vanished from political language and theory. Within feminist theory 'emancipation' disappeared from discourse without much debate, although the alliance of 'feminism and postmodernism' was much debated in the early 1990s. Seyla Benhabib even claimed that this alliance might "place in question the very emancipatory ideals of the women's movements altogether" (Benhabib 1995: 22). It seemed as if the critique of the subject understood in terms of a rational agent striving for 'emergence from self-incurred immaturity', of power understood in terms of oppression, and of history understood in terms of linear time and as 'progress', rendered obsolete any reference to the concept of emancipation.

A re-evaluation of the concept of emancipation, including its ambivalent history and its critiques is now timely for two reasons. Firstly, the concept of emancipation is currently re-surfacing in critical political and social philosophy as a wide range of conferences and publications show (Hewlett 2007; Rancière 2010; Boltanski 2011). However, perspectives from feminist philosophy and gender studies are largely missing from these debates. This is a serious intellectual gap given the importance of women's movements for the constitution of the modern, political meaning of the concept and the rich history of feminist critique along with feminist re-articulations of 'emancipation'. From the early nineteenth century on, women's movements and feminist theorists have used the concept of emancipation in order to articulate struggles for social and political change as well as for transformations of subjectivities and modes of living. At the same time, feminists have been highly critical about philosophical and political assumptions about subjectivity, power and change underlying the modern narrative of emancipation. The concept and the idea of emancipation has thus been constantly contested and challenged within feminist theory.

Given the rich intellectual history of the concept of emancipation within feminist thought from the late eighteenth century to the present, the omission of gender issues and feminist perspectives in the contemporary debates is highly problematic and calls for feminist philosophical attention and debate. A special issue of *Hypathia* on this topic would be ideal to make a significant and highly visible contribution to this.

The second reason for a special issue on 'emancipation' is that a critical debate about the potential, the problems and ambivalences of the different uses that have been made of this concept by feminists throughout the centuries and from different local and global perspectives would be an important contribution to ongoing debates about theoretical and political implications of the 'constructivist turn' in gender studies and feminist theory.

While abjections of social constructivism are now increasingly challenged from epistemological as well as political-ethical perspectives, the concept of emancipation re-surfaces again. Nancy Fraser, for example has called for a re-politicalization of feminist theory in contrast to the 'cultural turn' which in her view has led to highly problematic alliances with neoliberal politics. In her recent work on Karl Polanyi and contemporary social transformation she explicitly refers to the concept of emancipation without, however, exploring the implications of the concept in detail (Fraser 2011; Fraser 2012). This is also the case with Joan W. Scott who has recently analyzed the 'vexed relationship of equality and emancipation' in contemporary feminist theory and politics on sexuality, religion and multiculturalism (Scott 2012). Her analysis clarifies just how politically ambivalent contemporary ideas of (sexual) emancipation are and that 'emancipation' always has been a highly opaque concept. Both examples show that a re-examination of the philosophical and political-ethical meanings of 'emancipation', used to articulate the most vibrant issues of contemporary feminism, is timely and needed within current feminist theory.

In particular, a close examination of the concept and the politics of emancipation can help to re-conceptualize subjectivity, power and time beyond the constructivist paradigm. In this paradigm, subjectivity is mainly understood as subjectivation; domination and power are mostly conceived as unstable and highly fluid relations; time and social change are articulated through ideas of repetition and iteration. These ideas, however, are by no means self-evident but also rely on philosophical narratives that can and should be scrutinized. In short, the focus on emancipation that—in its modern political (and not just juridical) sense—was derived from Enlightenment politics and philosophy, is an ideal starting point for re-thinking the late twentieth century critiques of the Enlightenment that have informed much of feminist thought in recent decades.

A special issue of *Hypathia* – the leading journal of feminist philosophy and one of the most important sites of feminist intellectual debate – which is devoted to the concept of emancipation and its philosophical, political and ethical implications, would be a highly valuable contribution to rethinking theoretical orientations of feminism and gender studies in times of crisis and change. Although this task is a multi- and interdisciplinary one, feminist philosophy can and should make significant contributions to it. Most valuable would be feminist philosophical analyses of

- Concepts of 'emancipation' in the political language of feminism and in the history of feminist theory and philosophy
- 'Emancipation' in relation to central concepts of political philosophy and ethics such as 'freedom', 'equality', 'history', 'revolution', 'democracy', 'solidarity', 'utopia', 'autonomy', 'self', 'identity', etc.
- Philosophical traditions and authors who use or criticize the idea of emancipation, in particular marxism, liberalism, critical theory, post-structuralism, communitarianism, new political philosophy (Zizek, Badiou, Rancière, Balibar), etc.
- Ideas of emancipation in contemporary feminist theory and philosophy, such as queer theory, post-colonialism, critical race studies, disability studies, animal studies and in particular intersectionality theory.

- Present social, cultural, political and economic transformations of gender relations and feminist politics and new understandings of emancipation.

Feminist Philosophers and Theorists Who Might Contribute and/or Review

The idea to publish a thematic issue of *Hypatia* developed in the wake of a workshop that I organized [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] All of the speakers of the workshop are potential contributors and would be willing to submit their unpublished work.

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Other potential Authors/Reviewers

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This is a provisional list of potential authors and reviewers that could make remarkable contributions to the special issue. If the issue is approved, additional prospective authors will be identified through the publication of a call for papers. The topic is of general interest to all scholars who are engaged with feminist theory and philosophy, in particular, in the areas of political and social philosophy, political theory, and ethics. I therefore expect a broad interest in the project. As an editor, my intention is to bring together feminist analyses from different philosophical and theoretical traditions, and I would work hard to include analyses from different cultural and geopolitical backgrounds. I will therefore do my best to publish the call for papers through different national and international networks. In addition to *Hypatia's* website:

- International Association of Women Philosophers (IAPh), which I am currently serving as Secretary
- Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP)
- UNESCO network on women philosophers
- Feminist ethics and social theory listserv (FEAST)
- American Philosophical Association
- German Philosophical Association

I would also gladly welcome further suggestions from the editors of *Hypathia*.

Call for Papers (draft)

Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy seeks contributions for a special issue on “Emancipation: Rethinking Subjectivity, Power and Change.” ‘Emancipation’ is one of the most iridescent concepts of political language and has – from the late eighteenth century on – inspired feminist politics, theory and critique. While the concept of emancipation almost vanished from political discourse in the wake of the critiques of the ambivalent legacies of the Enlightenment and Modernity, the concept resurfaces again in the present which is shaped by the multiple and highly gendered crises of politics, economies, nature and

culture. A re-evaluation of 'emancipation' and its political and philosophical implications from a feminist perspective is thus imperative. In particular, a fresh debate about the ideas of subjectivity, power and change that have shaped modern narrations of emancipation, as well as feminist critiques of these narrations, will contribute to such a re-evaluation and help feminist theory and politics address current political and philosophical challenges.

Hypatia welcomes contributions from history of ideas, social and political philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, and other areas of philosophy and feminist theory. Papers that explore the ambivalences, problems and possibilities from within or with regard to diverse cultural and geopolitical contexts are highly welcome. Possible topics may include:

- Emancipation and subjectivity
- Emancipation and emotions
- Emancipation, desire and sexuality
- Emancipation, power and domination
- Emancipation, democracy and the state
- Emancipation and religion
- Emancipation and race
- Emancipation and intersectionality
- Emancipation and (global) mobilities
- Emancipation, history and time
- Emancipation and feminist utopias
- Emancipation and nonhuman nature
- Emancipation, science and technology

Deadline for submission: *To be determined*

Papers should be no more than 8000 words, inclusive of notes and bibliography, prepared for anonymous review, and accompanied by an abstract of no more than 200 words. For details please see *Hypatia's* submission guidelines:

http://depts.washington.edu/hypatia/submission_guidelines.html

Please submit your paper to: <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/hypa>. When you submit, make sure to select "Emancipation" as your manuscript type, and also send an email to the guest editor indicating the title of the paper you have submitted: Susanne Lettow (lettow2@zedat.fu-berlin.de)

Editor's Qualification

I am currently an adjunct senior lecturer (*Privatdozentin*) at the Department for Philosophy at the University of Paderborn, Germany and a Visiting Fellow at the Max-Planck-Institute for the History of Science in Berlin. From 2010-2012 I was a Visiting Professor for Social and Political Philosophy of Gender Relations at the Free University Berlin. Since 2008 I have been serving as the secretary of the International Association of Women Philosophers. My work in feminist philosophy focuses on contemporary social philosophy, bioethics/biopolitics and the critical philosophy of race. My publications include two monographs: one on gender relations in Heidegger (*The Power of Care: The Philosophical*

Articulation of Gender Relations in Heidegger's 'Being and Time', published in German, Tübingen: edition discord 2001) and one on bioethics and philosophical biopolitics (*Biophilosophies: Science, Technology and Gender in Contemporary Philosophical Discourse*, published in German, Frankfurt/Main and New York: Campus 2011). I have edited and co-edited three volumes, two in German and one in English: Susanne Lettow, Ulrike Manz, Katja Sarkowsky: *Public Spheres and Gender Relations: Strategies, Experiences, Subjects* (published in German), Königstein/Ts.: Ulrike-Helmer-Verlag 2005; Susanne Lettow: *Bioeconomy: The Life Sciences and the Management of Bodies* (published in German) Bielefeld: transcript 2012; Susanne Lettow: *Reproduction, Race and Gender. Philosophy and the Early Life Sciences in Context*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press (in print, 2013). I have also published several peer-reviewed papers in journals (*Philosophy and Social Criticism; Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology*). I have served as a reviewer for the journal *Diogenes*, which is published under the auspices of the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies with the support of UNESCO, and for a special issue on 'Gender-Knowledge-History' of the *Austrian Journal of History*. I am confident that my editorial experience and my contacts in the field of feminist philosophy will help to produce an excellent and interesting special issue of *Hypatia*.

A detailed CV is attached to this document.