

# AMA Announcement: Monday 4/16/18 12PM EDT - Clare Chambers on contemporary political philosophy

BernardJOrtcutt<sup>1</sup> and r/Science AMAs<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Affiliation not available

April 17, 2023

## Abstract

The moderators of /r/philosophy are pleased to announce an upcoming AMA by Dr Clare Chambers, University Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Cambridge. This AMA is the sixth in our Spring 2018 AMA Series; you can find more details on all of this semester's AMAs with philosophers by going to the AMA Hub Post. You can find all of our previous AMAs over the years by going to the AMA wiki. Dr Chambers will be joining us on Monday April 16th at 12PM EDT to discuss issues in contemporary political philosophy. Hear it from her: Clare Chambers I am Clare Chambers, University Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Cambridge. I am a political philosopher specialising in contemporary feminist and liberal theory. I've been researching and teaching at Cambridge for twelve years. I was educated in the analytical tradition of political theory at the University of Oxford, where I did Politics, Philosophy, and Economics as an undergraduate. After a year spent as a civil servant I studied for an MSc in Political Theory at the London School of Economics. At the LSE I continued working on analytical approaches to political theory in contemporary liberalism, but I also engaged in a sustained way with feminist thought, and with the work of Michel Foucault. It seemed obvious that Foucault's analysis of power and social construction was of profound relevance to liberal theory, but I had never read work that engaged both traditions. Wanting to work on this combination for my doctorate, I returned to Oxford to be supervised by Prof Lois McNay, who specialises in feminist and post-structural theory, together with Prof David Miller, who specialises in contemporary analytical thought. The result was a thesis that later became my first book: *Sex, Culture, and Justice: The Limits of Choice* (2008). *Sex, Culture, and Justice* argues that the fact of social construction undermines the liberal focus on choice. Liberals treat choice as what I call a "normative transformer": something that changes a situation from unjust to just. If someone is disadvantaged liberals are likely to criticise that disadvantage as an unjust inequality, but will change that assessment if the disadvantage results from the individual's choice. For example, women may choose to take low-paid jobs, or to prioritise family over career, or to follow religions that treat them unequally, or to engage in practices associated with gender inequality. However, our choices are affected by social construction. Our social context affects the options that are available to us. It affects whether those options are generally thought to appropriate for people like us. And it affects what we want to do. I argue that, if our choices are socially constructed in these ways, it doesn't make sense to use them as the measure for whether our situation or our society is just. Instead we need to develop the normative resources for critically analysing choice. Most feminists understand this, and liberals should, too. Feminism is a movement that seeks to empower women, which in part means giving women choice, but it is also a movement that recognises the profound limitations on individual choice, and the way that power, inequality, and social norms shape our choices. My most recent book also combines feminist and liberal analysis and tackles a specific question of state regulation. *Against Marriage: An Egalitarian Defence of the Marriage-Free State* argues that the state should not recognise marriage. Even if state-recognised marriage is reformed to include same-sex marriage, as has happened in many states recently, it still violates freedom and equality. Traditionally, marriage entrenches sexism and heterosexism, and this traditional symbolic meaning has not been destroyed. And all state recognition of marriage treats married and unmarried people and their children unequally, elevating one way of life or relationship form above others. The fact that state recognition of marriage involves endorsing a particular way of life also means that it undermines liberty, especially as political liberals understand that idea. Instead of recognising marriage, the state should regulate relationship practices. Other areas that I work on include multiculturalism and religion, political liberalism and the work of John Rawls, beauty and cosmetic surgery, the concept of equality of opportunity,

and varieties of feminism including liberal feminism and radical feminism. I am about to start a new project on the political philosophy of the unmodified body. Thank you for joining me here! Links of Interest: “Marriage as a Violation of Equality” - the first chapter of *Against Marriage* (OUP 2017). You can purchase this book with a 30% discount by going to the OUP site and using promocode AAFLYG6 at checkout Podcast interview on “The State and Marriage” “The Marriage Free State” - podcast recording and paper draft “Sex, Culture and Justice” - interview at 3:AM Magazine Multiculturalism Bites podcast interview on when intervention in peoples’ lives is justified AMA Please feel free to post questions for Dr Chambers here. She will look at this thread before she starts and begin with some questions from here while the initial questions in the new thread come in. Please join me in welcoming Dr Clare Chambers to our community!

[REDDIT](#)

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**AMA**

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**CORRESPONDENCE:**

**DATE RECEIVED:**

April 10, 2018

**DOI:**

10.15200/winn.152328.89059

**ARCHIVED:**

April 09, 2018

**CITATION:**

BernardJOrtcutt , r/Science ,  
AMA Announcement: Monday  
4/16/18 12PM EDT - Clare  
Chambers on contemporary  
political philosophy, *The  
Winnower* 5:e152328.89059 ,  
2018 , DOI:  
[10.15200/winn.152328.89059](https://doi.org/10.15200/winn.152328.89059)

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