

**Chair:**

**Susan Neiman, Potsdam**

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## Participants

Aleida Assmann, Konstanz

*“The Beauty of Truth is That It Cannot be Possessed”*

*Reflections on Karl Jaspers and John Milton*

My lecture brings together two authors who lived 300 years apart. Coming from different nations, languages and cultural backgrounds, John Milton and Karl Jaspers emphatically defended truth in texts written in the 1640s and the 1940s, protecting it against political appropriation and its fusion with power. Both of them shared a strong commitment to truth but were convinced that truth had to be distanced from human reach. Bringing their texts and ideas together, I will present them as pluralistic thinkers who respected difference and discovered new similarities.

*Aleida Assmann* is Professor Emerita of English Literature and Literary Theory at the University of Konstanz, Germany, where she taught from 1993–2014. She received an Honorary Degree from the University of Oslo (2008) and the Max Planck Research Award (2009). Her main areas of research are historical anthropology, history of media, history and theory of reading and writing, cultural memory, with special emphasis on Holocaust and trauma. Publications in English include *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices, and Trajectories* (ed. with Sebastian Conrad, 2010); *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (2012); *Memory and Political Change* (ed. with Linda Shortt, 2012); *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity* (2016) and *Empathy and its Limits* (ed. with Ines Detmers, 2016).

**Amber Carpenter, Singapore**

*The Useless Beauty of Truth*

We know the truth is often ugly, and pleasure is bewitchingly attractive. Thus we indulge those daily flights into fantasy and self-deceit that the Delphic injunction to “Know Thyself” is in constant labor against. How then can Plato claim that transformative truth is of incomparable beauty – that beauty itself is a guide to truth? A contrast case of an ultimate truth devoid of beauty reveals that Plato’s outlook is one that – without delusions about ugly everyday realities in ourselves and around us – nevertheless retains vital space for hope and redemption, by its recognition of a compelling goodness beyond utility, signaled by beauty.

*Amber Carpenter* is Associate Professor at Yale-NUS College, Singapore, and supervises doctoral students at the University of York. She received her B.A. in Philosophy from Yale University in 1996 and her Ph.D. from King’s College London in 2001. 2003 to 2005 she was Assistant Professor at the Franklin & Marshall College, 2005 to 2007 teaching fellow at the University of St. Andrews; in 2007 she was Albert Einstein Fellow at the Einstein Forum. She works in Ancient Greek philosophy and in Indian philosophy. Her general interest is in ethics, ancient and modern, and specifically in the place of reason in a well-lived life – what might reason be that it could be ethically relevant, or even required? Her publications include a number of articles on Greek and Indian philosophy and a monograph entitled *Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (2013).

Wendy Doniger, Chicago

*The Beauty of Jewelry and the Falsehood of Women in European Narratives*

There is an old sexist saying that a translation is like a woman: if she is beautiful, she can't be faithful, and if she's faithful, she can't be beautiful. (I think this is true of translation.) But a great corpus of myths from ancient India through medieval European narratives to contemporary films argues that beautiful women trick men into giving them jewelry, which they want in part because jewelry makes them appear to be more beautiful than they are, so that they can trick more men into giving them more jewelry.

*Wendy Doniger* is the Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions in the Divinity School at the University of Chicago. Her research and teaching interests revolve around two basic areas: Hinduism and mythology. Her work on mythology addresses themes in cross-cultural expanses, such as death, dreams, evil, horses, sex, and women; while her publications on Hinduism cover a broad spectrum that, in addition to mythology, considers literature, law, gender, and zoology. Doniger has written 16 books, translated (primarily from Sanskrit to English) with commentary nine other volumes, has contributed to many edited texts and has written hundreds of articles in journals, magazines and newspapers. Her most recent book is *Beyond Dharma: Dissent in the Ancient Indian Sciences of Sex and Politics* (2018).

Konstanty Gebert, Warsaw

*The Immoral Seduction of Beauty (On the Margins of a Poem by Zbigniew Herbert)*

Is evil ugly? Can we trust beauty to be good? Oppressed by a system of ugly lies and brutal violence, one is tempted to believe this. But what of the “potato-faced boys” and “very ugly girls”? If we condemn them as emissaries of evil, do we not ourselves become bearers of another wickedness, possibly even more malevolent? And yet, if the seduction of beauty may be immoral, how can we trust it to guide us toward truth?

*Konstanty Gebert* is an author, journalist, lecturer, and political activist based in Poland. In 1976 he graduated from the Department of Psychology at the University of Warsaw. He was a prominent figure in the democratic opposition in the 1970s and 1980s and cofounder of the unofficial Jewish Flying University (1979), the Polish Council of Christians and Jews (1980), and a trade union of the employees in academia, technology, and education that merged with *Solidarnosc* (1980). After the government imposed martial law, he wrote and published articles for various underground publications under the pseudonym Dawid Warszawski. Gebert also served as a war correspondent in Bosnia for *Gazeta Wyborcza*. His articles have appeared in a variety of national periodicals and foreign media. He has written numerous books, including a first-hand account of the Polish Round Table negotiations of 1989 as well as books on French policy toward Poland, on the Yugoslav wars, the wars of Israel, Torah commentary, and postwar Polish Jewry. Gebert is the founder of *Midrasz*, the first Polish-language Jewish periodical in postcommunist Poland, and regularly lectures in Poland, Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and the U.S.

Sander Gilman, Atlanta

*Beauty ain't Truth; it ain't even Beauty*

The modern debates around "beauty" as a universal have their roots in the Enlightenment notion of race. How "blackness" became the touchstone not only for the definition of beauty and truth in aesthetics but also in psychology will be the theme of my riff on William Faulkner's "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (1951). That too was about blackness and history.

*Sander Gilman* is a distinguished professor of the Liberal Arts and Sciences as well as Professor of Psychiatry at Emory University. For twenty-five years he was a member of the humanities and medical faculties at Cornell University where he held the Goldwin Smith Professorship of Humane Studies. For six years he held the Henry R. Luce Distinguished Service Professorship of the Liberal Arts in Human Biology at the University of Chicago. For four years he was a distinguished professor of the Liberal Arts and Medicine at the University of Illinois at Chicago where he created the *Humanities Laboratory*. During 1990–1991 he served as the Visiting Historical Scholar at the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, MD; 1996–1997 as a fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, CA; 2000–2001 as a Berlin prize fellow at the American Academy in Berlin; 2004–2005 as the Weidenfeld Visiting Professor of European Comparative Literature at Oxford University; 2007–2012 as Professor at the Institute in the Humanities, Birkbeck College; 2010–2013 as a Visiting Research Professor at The University of Hong Kong. He is the author or editor of over ninety books. Most recently: *Obesity. The Biography* (2010); *The Third Reich Sourcebook* (ed. with Anson Rabinbach, 2010); *Are Racists Crazy? How Prejudice, Racism, and Antisemitism Became Markers of Insanity* (2016); *Jews on the Move: Particularist Universality in Modern Cosmopolitanist Thought* (ed., 2016) and *Stand Up Straight! A History of Posture* (2018).

Carey Harrison, New York

*Beauty in the Classroom*

Is aesthetics, debated in the ancient world and later developed in Enlightenment Germany as a staple of philosophy, still relevant to critical discourse? Can we speak the word "beauty" in the classroom? If so, what does it mean? If not, what have we lost?

*Carey Harrison* was born in London during the Blitz, the Luftwaffe's bombing onslaught, and as soon as the war ended he was taken to America, where he has lived, on and off, for the past 74 years. The off periods have coincided with his British education, at Harrow School and Cambridge, and a teaching post at Essex University. He has subsequently taught Comparative Literature at Cornell, at UC San Diego, at UT Austin, at the Florida Institute of Technology, and for the past 20 years at the City University of New York. He is the author of 16 novels and over 200 plays and scripts for TV, theatre, radio, and film. His work has been shown in 37 countries, and translated into 13 languages. His novels won him a Fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in 2016/17.

Stephen Holmes, New York  
*Half-Truths and Beauty Contests*

The many obvious ways in which governments lie to their citizens to avoid democratic accountability wrongly suggests that truths do not lend themselves so easily to political manipulation, a conjecture refuted by the various uses to which the revelations of “truth heroes” such as Julian Assange and Edward Snowden have been put. The current American administration’s instrumentalization of half-truths (such as the dark history of “the deep state”) for nefarious purposes is an even more telling reminder that truth-telling is not always a signal of moral decency and integrity. Similarly, the U.S. president’s sordid history as an organizer of beauty contests, where pre-packaged ideals of female attractiveness are always tinged with cruelty to those who do not measure up, takes on a pungently political significance in light of the role of eye-deceiving glitz in the man’s rise to public renown and victory over a no-longer-young woman in the ultimate “beauty contest” of the presidential election.

*Stephen Holmes* is Walter E. Meyer Professor of Law at the NYU School of Law. He previously taught at Harvard, Princeton, and the University of Chicago. His fields of specialization include the history of liberalism, the disappointments of democratization after communism, and the difficulty of combating terrorism within the limits of liberal constitutionalism. He is the author of *Benjamin Constant and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (1984); *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (1993); *Passions and Constraint: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy* (1995) and *The Matador’s Cape: America’s Reckless Response to Terror* (2007). He is co-author (with Cass Sunstein) of *The Cost of Rights: Why Liberty Depends on Taxes* (1999) and (with Moshe Halbertal) of *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel* (2017).



Eva Illouz, Jerusalem

*Emotional Truth*

Can we know the truth of our emotions, and does the very notion of truth even apply to the emotional realm? This paper does not provide an answer to these questions but rather ponders the difficulties in answering them.

*Eva Illouz* is Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She has also taught at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and at Princeton University. Her books include *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1997); *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (2007); *Saving the Modern Soul. Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* (2008); *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation* (2012) and *Hard-Core Romance – “Fifty Shades of Grey”, Best-Sellers, and Society* (2014). A selection of her critical interventions in *Haaretz* has been published in German, entitled *Israel. Soziologische Essays* (2015).

Philip Kitcher, New York

*Ugly Truths*

Many people believe in a tight connection between truth and beauty. That belief rests on the existence of some truths with remarkable aesthetic appeal. This lecture will begin by considering a few examples that move people to celebrate “beautiful truths.” I’ll then point out how many truths, across a wide range of areas, are downright ugly.

It’s often thought that the blotches signal the limits of our knowledge. If only our inquiries were more advanced, people suppose, we would have a system of truths that would be beautiful throughout. Confidence in some aesthetically satisfying “final theory” rests on untenable views about the unity of the sciences (largely conceived). I shall argue for the inevitability of ugliness. Finally, turning from inquiry to the arts, I’ll explore ways in which literature and music enable us to come to terms with the absence of beauty in many aspects of the world and of our lives.

*Philip Kitcher* is the John Dewey Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University. His research interests lie in the ethical and political constraints on scientific research, the evolution of altruism and morality, and the seeming conflict between science and religion. Kitcher earned his BA from Christ’s College, Cambridge, in mathematics and philosophy of science, and a Ph.D. in philosophy from Princeton University. He was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2002, and the American Philosophical Association awarded him its inaugural Prometheus Prize in 2006 for lifetime achievement in “expanding the frontiers of science and philosophy.” Kitcher has also received grants from the American Council of Learned Societies, the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin, Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, and the Library of Congress. Kitcher’s recent books include *The Ethical Project* (2011); *Preludes to Pragmatism* (2012); *Deaths in Venice* (2013); *Life after Faith: The Case for Secular Humanism* (2014) and *The Seasons Alter: How to Save our Planet in Six Acts* (with Evelyn Fox Keller, 2017).

Thomas Naumann, Zeuthen

*From Kepler to Einstein – Truth and Beauty in Physics*

Cosmos describes the beauty, order and harmony of our universe. But what is beauty? Is it only in the eye of the beholder? How is it connected to simplicity and symmetry? Discussing the relations between truth and beauty in physics, we ask: is beauty a reliable criterion of truth or can it mislead our search for truth?

*Thomas Naumann* studied physics at Technische Universität Dresden and has worked at the Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron (DESY) in Zeuthen since 1992, where he served as its deputy director from 2001 to 2009. In 2005, he was appointed Honorary Professor at the University of Leipzig. The following year he joined the ATLAS experiment at the CERN Large Hadron Collider in Geneva. Since 2007, he has also acted as the public relations coordinator for the LHC in Germany.

Susan Neiman, Potsdam  
*How Anachronistic is this?*

Like many other natural scientists, Einstein saw a unity of truth and beauty in the universe itself. Outside the natural world, however, the concepts of truth and beauty have undergone such a beating that any attempt to revive – or even discuss – them can seem anachronistic. We have seen a century in which most non-natural truths seem downright ugly; we've expanded our awareness of our own parochiality and perspective. Can we reconstruct ideas of truth and beauty that are not dependent on markets and media? Are we afraid to try?

*Susan Neiman* is director of the Einstein Forum. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Neiman studied philosophy at Harvard and the Free University of Berlin. She was professor of philosophy at Yale University and Tel Aviv University before coming to the Einstein Forum in 2000. Her works include *Slow Fire: Jewish Notes from Berlin* (1992); *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant* (1994); *Evil in Modern Thought* (2002); *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-up Idealists* (2008) and *Why Grow Up? Subversive Thoughts for an Infantile Age* (2014). She is currently completing a book titled *Learning from the Germans*.

Lisa Randall, Cambridge, Mass.

*Truth and Beauty and Other Scientific Misconceptions*

Truth and beauty are often used as markers of a successful physical theory. This seemingly innocuous characterization is however rather problematic in that the notion of beauty changes with time and depends on the individual who decides it. Economy is a better characterization of good scientific theories but even then we have challenges such as deciding the size of the system being described.

*Lisa Randall* studies theoretical particle physics and cosmology at Harvard University. She earned her Ph.D. from Harvard University and held professorships at MIT and Princeton University before returning to Harvard in 2001. Her research connects theoretical insights to puzzles in our current understanding of the properties and interactions of matter. She has developed and studied a wide variety of models to address these questions, the most prominent involving extra dimensions of space. Her work has involved improving our understanding of the Standard Model of particle physics, supersymmetry, baryogenesis, cosmological inflation, and dark matter. Randall's research also explores ways to experimentally test and verify ideas, and her current research focuses in large part on the Large Hadron Collider and dark matter searches and models. Publications include *Warped Passages: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Universe's Hidden Dimensions* (2005); *Knocking on Heaven's Door: How Physics and Scientific Thinking Illuminate the Universe and the Modern World* (2011) and *Higgs Discovery: The Power of Empty Space* (2012). Randall has also pursued art-science connections, writing a libretto for *Hypermusic: A Projective Opera in Seven Planes* that premiered in the Pompidou Center in Paris, and co-curating an art exhibit for the Los Angeles Arts Association, *Measure for Measure*, which was presented in Gallery 825 in Los Angeles, at the Guggenheim Gallery at Chapman University, and at Harvard's Carpenter Center.

Jan Philipp Reemtsma, Hamburg

*Unboxing Truth*

Attempts to establish a correlation between true statements and some observer-independent truth, between truths in the plural and truth in the singular, have routinely failed. And yet we continue to be driven by a desire to seek out and unveil the ultimate truth that stabilizes the many contingent truths. Once we strip down truths to the one naked truth, we expect to find beauty. But could it be our very longing that casts truth in a light of beauty?

*Jan Philipp Reemtsma* studied German literature and philosophy in Hamburg and also received his doctorate there. In 1981 Reemtsma created the *Arno Schmidt Foundation* to preserve, disseminate, and study the work of writer Arno Schmidt and has been on its board of directors since then. In 1984 he launched the *Hamburg Foundation for the Advancement of Research and Culture*. In the same year, he established the Hamburg Institute for Social Research (Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung), which he directed until 2015. From 1996 until 2007 he was Professor of Contemporary German Literature at the University of Hamburg. In 2008 he was the Johannes Gutenberg Professor at the University of Mainz, and in 2009 Schiller Professor at the University of Jena. Recent publications include: *„Wie hätte ich mich verhalten?“ und andere nicht nur deutsche Fragen* (2001); *Das unaufhebbare Nichtbescheidwissen der Mehrheit* (2005); *Folter im Rechtsstaat?* (2005); *Das Scheinproblem „Willensfreiheit“. Ein Plädoyer für das Ende einer überflüssigen Debatte* (2008); *Vertrauen und Gewalt. Versuch über eine besondere Konstellation der Moderne* (2008, engl. *Trust and Violence: An Essay on a Modern Relationship*, 2012); *Was heißt: einen literarischen Text interpretieren? Voraussetzungen und Implikationen des Redens über Literatur* (2016) and *Schriften zur Literatur. Gesamtwerk* (3 vols., 2016).

Jens Reich, Berlin

*Truth and Beauty – In the Eye of a Molecular Biologist*

Research into the universe of life used to be, during centuries, a quest for ideal truth in terms of natural theology, with beauty emerging as *splendor Dei veritatis*. Both truth and beauty receded when observation of nature was replaced by its dissection. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, catalysis of bioorganic interconversion became the basic concept of experimental biology. Its depiction on lab wallpaper could still induce a certain aesthetic pleasure, but any perceivable trace of beauty disappeared finally with the triumphal march of textual information as a guiding principle “Big Data” genomic biology. Both, beauty and truth, have shed their traditional emphatic meaning for molecular cell biologists. Soberness of argument and provisional acceptance by peers is what we aspire to.

*Jens Reich* is a physician and University Professor Emeritus of Bioinformatics at the Medical Faculty of the Humboldt University in Berlin. Reich has written about the ethics of human genome and stem cell research and has repeatedly taken public stances on political issues over the course of his career, which included playing a crucial role in the East German opposition movement in the late 1980s. Reich studied at the Humboldt University in Berlin, where he later became a professor of biomathematics and the director of the Central Institute for Molecular Biology. In 1984, he was forced to resign from this position after refusing to collaborate with the Stasi and to break off contact with friends and colleagues in the West. In 1991, Reich returned to research, with stays in United States and at the German Cancer Research Center in Heidelberg before being appointed senior researcher at the Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine in Berlin, where he studied human genome research until his retirement. He is the author of, among other works, *Es wird ein Mensch gemacht. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Gentechnik* (2003) and *Teufelsfragen. Ethische Konflikte in der Biomedizin* (2005).

Gesine Schwan, Berlin

*Disinterested Beauty – A Criterion for Truth?*

In his *Critique of Judgement*, Immanuel Kant claims a general validity for the judgment of taste. My short presentation will deal with the following questions: What understanding of truth is meant by that empirical and normative general validity? and: How generally valid or "true" can the judgment of taste be in a culturally diverse context? Or, the other way round: does the judgment of taste express a transcultural truth? Can it be a basis for mutual intercultural understanding? What is needed for such an understanding?

*Gesine Schwan* studied Romance languages, history, philosophy and political science in Berlin and Freiburg/Breisgau. In 1971 she was appointed Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the Free University Berlin and in 1977 named Professor of Political Science, with particular reference to Political Theory and Philosophy, at the Free University of Berlin. Her main fields of research are political philosophy and theories of democracy, and recently also problems of political psychology and political culture. From October 1999 to October 2008 she was president of the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). She was a co-founder and, from 2010 until 2014, president of the Humboldt-Viadrina School of Governance. In 2004 and in 2008, she was nominated by SPD and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen as a candidate for the office of Germany's Federal President. Her numerous publications include *Die Gesellschaftskritik von Karl Marx. Philosophische und politökonomische Voraussetzungen* (1974); *Sozialismus in der Demokratie? Theorie einer konsequent sozialdemokratischen Politik* (1982); *Politik und Schuld. Die zerstörerische Macht des Schweigens* (1997); *Vertrauen und Politik. Politische Theorie im Zeitalter der Globalisierung* (2006); *Allein ist nicht genug. Für eine neue Kultur der Gemeinsamkeit* (together with Susanne Gaschke, 2007) and *Ich bin ein leidenschaftlicher Mensch. Vom Mut, Grenzen zu überschreiten* (2015).



**David Shulman, Jerusalem**  
***The Landscapes of Truth and Beauty***

Landscapes of astonishing beauty would seem to be an unlikely backdrop to human wickedness, untruth, and ugliness, yet this is my repeated experience in the hills and deserts of Palestine. I want to explore, first, the dissonance that is thus generated in mind and heart and, second, the particular beauty that inheres in an unwitnessed moral act against impossible odds.

*David Shulman* is Professor Emeritus of Indology and Comparative Religious Studies at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He received his Ph.D. from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His many publications on Tamil and Sanskrit literature and mythology include *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit* (2001); *Spring, Heat, Rains: A South Indian Diary* (2008); *More Than Real. A History of the Imagination in South India* (2012) and *Tamil: A Biography* (2016); as co-author and co-editor: *Self and Self-Transformation in the History of Religions* (2002); *Siva in the Forest of Pines: An Essay on Sorcery and Self-Knowledge* (2004); *God on the Hill. Telugu Songs by Annamayya* (2005) and *The Demon's Daughter: A Love Story from South India* (2006). Shulman is also a long-time dedicated peace activist, and has published a book-length account, entitled *Dark Hope: Working for Peace in Israel and Palestine* (2007), of his years working, and often clashing, with police and settlers, to deliver food and medical supplies to Palestinian villages. His new book *Freedom and Despair: Notes from the South Hebron Hills* will be published in October.



# Program

June 13, 2018

19:00

Susan Neiman: How Anachronistic is this?  
David Shulman: The Landscapes of Truth and Beauty  
Sander Gilman: Beauty ain't Truth; it ain't even Beauty

June 14, 2018

11:00 Amber Carpenter  
The Useless Beauty of Truth

12:00 Gesine Schwan  
Disinterested Beauty: a Criterion for Truth?

12:45 Lunch break

14:30 Eva Illouz  
Emotional Truth

15:15 Thomas Naumann  
From Kepler to Einstein – Truth and Beauty in  
Physics

16:30 Jens Reich  
Truth and Beauty – In the Eye of a Molecular Bi-  
ologist

17:15 Lisa Randall  
Truth and Beauty and Other Scientific Misconcep-  
tions

18:15 Jan Philipp Reemtsma  
Unboxing Truth

June 15, 2018

10:30 Philip Kitcher  
Ugly Truths

11:15 Stephen Holmes  
Half-Truths and Beauty Contests

12:15 Konstanty Gebert  
The Immoral Seduction of Beauty (On the Mar-  
gins of a Poem by Zbigniew Herbert)

13:00 Lunch break

14:30 Wendy Doniger  
The Beauty of Jewelry and the Falsehood of  
Women in European Narratives

15:15 Aleida Assmann  
“The Beauty of Truth is that it Cannot be Pos-  
sessed”: Reflections on Karl Jaspers and John  
Milton

16:15 Carey Harrison  
Beauty in the Classroom

17:00 End of conference

19:00 Anniversary Celebration in Caputh