

A black and white close-up photograph of Jean Améry. He is an elderly man with a deeply lined face, looking down and to the left. His right hand is pressed against his cheek, with his fingers resting near his eye. He is wearing a dark, textured jacket or sweater. The background is dark and out of focus.

Solidarity in Danger

Jean
Améry
The Resilience
of Enlightenment

International Conference Thursday, 30. June – Saturday, 2. July 2022

EINSTEIN
FORUM

Einstein Forum

Am Neuen Markt 7

14467 Potsdam

Tel.: 0331 271 78 0

<https://www.einsteinforum.de>

einsteinforum@einsteinforum.de

Jean Améry

The Resilience of Enlightenment

No one wrote more profound or penetrating essays on survival in Auschwitz, torture, ageing, and suicide than Jean Améry, born Hans Mayer in Vienna. Yet along with the—often despairing—works that made him famous, he also wrote the 20th century's most passionate defenses of the much-maligned Enlightenment. Are these works in conflict with each other, or must they be read in tandem? This conference will explore this question while focusing on those aspects of Améry's work that have received scant attention.

Speakers and Themes

Moshe Halbertal (Jerusalem)

On the Fragility of the Human. Améry on Counter-Enlightenment

The presentation will focus on Améry's critique on "post-humanism" as it is articulated by Michel Foucault and others.

Moshe Halbertal currently is professor of Jewish thought and philosophy at Hebrew University. He received his PhD from Hebrew University in 1989, and from 1988 to 1992 he was a fellow at the Society of Fellows at Harvard University. Halbertal served as a visiting professor at Harvard Law School, University of Pennsylvania Law School, and Yale Law School. He is the author of many books: *Idolatry* (with Avishai Margalit, 1992), *People of the Book. Canon, Meaning, and Authority* (1997), *Concealment and Revelation. Esotericism in Jewish Tradition and Its Philosophical Implications* (2007), *On Sacrifice* (2012), *Maimonides. Life and Thought* (2013), *The Beginning of Politics. Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel* (with Stephen Holmes, 2017), and several books published in Hebrew: *Interpretative Revolutions in the Making* (1997), *By Way of Truth. Nahmanides and the Creation of Tradition* (2000). His latest books are *Nahmanides. Law and Mysticism* (with Daniel Tabak, 2020), and *The Birth of Doubt. Confronting Uncertainty in Early Rabbinic Literature* (2020). Halbertal was the recipient of the Michael Bruno Memorial Award of the Rothschild Foundation and the Goldstein-Goren Book Award for the best book in Jewish thought in the years 1997 to 2000. In 2010, Halbertal was named a member of Israel's Academy for the Sciences and the Humanities.

Stephen Holmes (New York)

It May be Paradoxical but it's Still Not True

How did the weight of lived experience and the buoyant spirit of Enlightenment combust into Améry's witty defense of "banality" against those who seem to mock it from some elusive place high above human life?

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 of *The Cost of Rights. Why Liberty Depends on Taxes* (with Cass Sunstein, 1999) and of *The Beginning of Politics. Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel* (with Moshe Halbertal, 2017) as well as *The Light That Failed. A Reckoning* (with Ivan Krastev, 2019), and co-editor of the *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism* (with András Sajó and Renáta Uitz, 2022).

Peter Stephan Jungk (Paris)

Jean Améry on a Suicide Mission. Charles Bovary, Country Doctor

I will show that this evidently flawed book, Améry's last book publication, contributed to some extent to the author's demise, his second suicide attempt after surviving a first one in 1974. On a reading tour through German cities, he realized the book's tremendous weaknesses, before taking a few days off, resting in a luxurious Salzburg hotel. Bad reviews did not help to alleviate the pain. My parents' link to Améry, as well as remarks by his main translator into English, Sidney Rosenfeld, and details from a conversation with his main German publisher, Michael Klett, will accompany my talk.

Peter Stephan Jungk lives in Paris and works as a writer, director, and translator. He grew up in Vienna, Berlin und Salzburg. In 1974, he moved to Los Angeles to study at UCLA and the American Film Institute. In 2011, he was a visiting professor at Washington University, St. Louis, teaching Contemporary German Literature. He taught at Salzburg University as a visiting professor in 2012. In 2018, he spent three months as Writer-in-Residence at Oberlin College, Ohio. Amongst others, he directed the documentary films *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* (1990), and *Tracking Edith* (2016), and he adapted several literary works for the screen and theatre, e.g. Robert Musil's *Grigia* (1991), Guy de Maupassant's *Bel Ami* (1996/1997), and Ivan Gontsharov's *Oblomov* (performed at the Zurich Schauspielhaus in 2005). The first book of prose, *Stechpalmenwald*, a collection of short stories about Hollywood, was published in 1978, the novel *Das elektrische Herz* in 2011. His latest book *Marktgeflüster – Eine verborgene Heimat in Paris* was published in 2021.

Ivan Krastev (Vienna)

Enlightenment. Reflection on a Divorce

In the early 1990s, the German poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger prophesied that what would follow the end of the global Cold War is an endless series of never-ending local civil wars, a kind of civil war epidemic. He saw the race riots in Los Angeles and the wars in Yugoslavia, Chechen commanders and Liberian warlords as expressions of one and the same disintegrative trend. What brings them together are “the autistic nature of perpetrators, and the inability to distinguish between destruction and self-destruction...Violence has freed itself from ideology”. Violence has stopped to be an instrument for achieving certain political goals, it has become the way to express one’s identity. The smashing of the hospital in Mogadishu in Enzensberger’s view is the best example of this new molecular civil war. The armed band destroyed every X-Ray machine and killed all doctors and nurses, knowing well that this is the only hospital in the region and that if they need a medical help, there is no one left to help them. “One is tempted to call this the reduction ad insanitatem” —wrote Enzensberger—“In the collective running amok, the concept of ‘future’ disappears. Only the present matters. Consequences do not exist”.

It is in this context that I want to reflect on Améry’s idea from “Enlightenment as Philosophia Perennis” that Enlightenment at the end of the day is the art of not being afraid of the future.

Ivan Krastev is Chair of the Center for Liberal Strategies in Sofia, Bulgaria, and a permanent fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna. He is a founding board member of the European Council on Foreign Relations and a contributing opinion writer for the *New York Times* and other publications. Latest books: *After Europe* (2017), *The Light That Failed. A Reckoning* (with Stephen Holmes, 2019), *Is It Tomorrow Yet? Paradoxes of the Pandemic* (2020).

Susan Neiman (Potsdam)

The Resilience of Jean Améry

Améry's essay on the intellectual at Auschwitz is probably his most famous. Superficially a biographical description of why humanistic intellectuals like Améry found survival at Auschwitz more difficult than others, the essay darkly suggests that the intellect itself is no match for world-threatening evil. Why and how did he later write such powerful defences of the Enlightenment? I will seek to answer these questions while discussing the prescience of his critiques of two most powerful 20th century counter-Enlightenment thinkers, Adorno and Foucault.

Susan Neiman is Director of the Einstein Forum. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Neiman studied philosophy at Harvard and the Freie Universität Berlin, and was professor of philosophy at Yale and Tel Aviv University. Her books, translated into many languages, include *Slow Fire. Jewish Notes from Berlin* (1992), *The Unity of Reason. Rereading Kant* (1994), *Evil in Modern Thought* (2004), *Fremde sehen anders* (2005), *Moral Clarity. A Guide for Grown-up Idealists* (2008), *Why Grow Up? Subversive Thoughts for an Infantile Age* (2016), *Widerstand der Vernunft. Ein Manifest in postfaktischen Zeiten* (2017), and *Learning from the Germans. Race and the Memory of Evil* (2019). She has also published over one hundred essays and was most recently the Tanner Lecturer at the University of Cambridge and the Gifford Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh.

Jan Philipp Reemtsma (Hamburg)

Monsieur Bovary

Jean Améry's *Charles Bovary, Landarzt* is a novel and should be read as such. The novel is a trial Charles Bovary vs. Gustave Flaubert, and Charles Bovary wins—whatever that means. Flaubert is accused of misusing the freedom of creation by creating a Charles Bovary not fit to be the lover Emma Bovary deserved. He is accused to be not a true realist as an author, because he did not show reality as a bundle of possibilities. Instead as an It-is-what-it-is-prison (for Charles). Améry defends Charles Bovary against his creator because he himself wants an appropriate lover for Emma—not those she had chosen. Améry defends Charles and his defence transforms in a love-phantasy. *Charles Bovary, Landarzt* is a novel of and about the author Jean Améry to a woman another author had created. A strange book—and a fascinating one.

Jan Philipp Reemtsma is the founder and chair of the Hamburg Foundation for the Advancement of Scholarship and Culture and the founder of the Arno Schmidt Foundation. Until March 2015, he was the director of the Hamburg Institute for Social Research, which he also founded. Among his many works, those available in English include *Trust and Violence* (2012 [2008]), *In the Cellar* (1999 [1997]), and *More than a Champion. The Style of Muhammad Ali* (1998 [1997]). His latest publication is *Helden und andere Probleme* (2020).

David Shulman (Jerusalem)

Torturing the Mind. A Palestinian Addendum to Améry

Améry's classic essay on torture needs no commentary; I have no intention of focusing on local variations. The Israel High Court of Justice outlawed torture in 1999; this was one of the few significant achievements of the Israeli left and Israeli human-rights organizations. The Court did, however, leave a loophole in cases defined as "ticking bombs", when torture is still allowed. But there is another, more widespread and no less noxious form of torture that deserves to be defined and explored—the systematic and collective tormenting of Palestinian minds under Occupation. Here I will have some personal experiences to report.

David Shulman is Professor Emeritus of Indology and Comparative Religious Studies at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He received his PhD 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 two book-length accounts, entitled *Dark Hope. Working for Peace in Israel and Palestine* (2007), and *Freedom and Despair. Notes from the South Hebron Hills* (2018) of his years working, and often clashing, with police and settlers, to deliver food and medical supplies to Palestinian villages.

James Wood (Cambridge/Mass.)

Unspeakable Realism. Defending Jean Améry, Defending Gustave Flaubert

Jean Améry's book, half fiction and half essay, *Charles Bovary, Country Doctor* rightly accuses Flaubert of an anti-bourgeois prejudice that effectively kills off Emma Bovary's husband as a site of interest or meaning. This, says Améry, is not only inhumane and thoroughly un-Enlightened; it also renders Flaubert something less than a great realist—or any kind of realist. Améry is surely right, and I will argue that, if anything, he somewhat underestimates the nullifying absolutism of Flaubert's novel. At the same time, I shall try to defend both Améry and Flaubert, by examining some of the complexities inherent in representing “the real” in fiction.

James Wood has been a staff writer and book critic at *The New Yorker* since 2007 and is Professor of the Practice of Literary Criticism at Harvard University. He was the chief literary critic at *The Guardian*, in London, from 1992 to 1995, and a senior editor at *The New Republic* from 1995 to 2007. His critical essays have been collected in three volumes, *The Broken Estate. Essays on Literature and Belief* (1999), *The Irresponsible Self. On Laughter and the Novel* (2004), which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and *The Fun Stuff. And Other Essays* (2012). He is also the author of a study of technique in the novel, *How Fiction Works* (2008), translated into German as *Die Kunst des Erzählens* (2011), and two novels, *The Book Against God* (2003), and *Upstate* (2018).

Taras Bychko (Lviv), Pavlo Kovach (Lviv), Garry Krayevets (Kyiv)
In Search of Light. Ukrainian Art in Anticipation of the War

In Search of Light is the title of an exhibition of photographs by the Lviv photographer Taras Bychko that has been on display at the Einstein Forum since May. Curated by Lviv-based artist Pavlo Kovach, the exhibition shows works created between 2016 and 2020.

In this closing event, Odesa-born artist, curator, and psychoanalyst Garry Krayevets talks about the context in which Ukrainian artists were working after 2014, when Russia first attacked Ukraine, but before the large-scale invasion of 2022. Taras Bychko and Pavlo Kovach join us on Zoom to discuss the realities of art in times of war.

Taras Bychko is a photographer from Lviv. He is a member of the international Little Box Collective that specializes in street photography, and co-founder of the Ukrainian Street Photography group, which aims to develop and popularize street and documentary photography in Ukraine. Taras Bychko has been the winner or a finalist in international competitions including Ukrainian Photographer of the Year 2016, Leica Street Photo, the Miami Street Photo Festival, and the Documentary Family Awards. His work has been published in *Leica Fotografie International*, *Burn Magazine*, *National Geographic*, *Lens Culture*, *Bird in Flight*, *Reporters*, *The Village Ukraine*, and others.

Pavlo Kovach is a Lviv-based artist. He studied at the Adalbert Erdeli Uzhhorod Art College and at the Lviv National Academy of Arts, where he received his BA and MA degrees. He co-founded the artist-run Detenpyla and Efremova26 galleries. Since 2009 Pavlo Kovach has been actively exhibiting both in Ukraine (Dzyga, Bottega, and Detenpyla galleries) and abroad. He was a co-author of all the works of the Open Group collective. The group won the PinchukArtCentre Prize 2015 and participated in the Venice Biennale in 2015–2017 and in 2019 as curators of the Ukrainian pavilions. Since 2020 he has been a curator at the Lviv Art Center.

Garry Krayevets is an artist, writer, performer, and curator. Born in Odesa, Ukraine, he lives and works in Kyiv. His work develops around the creation of new forms that transform psychoanalytic thought by changing its optics, mode of interaction, and linguistic apparatus. He works in various media including video, performance, radio plays, text, poetry, and theater mysteries. He explores new ways to deconstruct concepts such as identity, nationality, religion, and memory.

Program

Thursday, June 30

6:00 pm

Taras Bychko (Lviv), Pavlo Kovach (Lviv),
and Garry Krayevets (Kyiv)
*In Search of Light. Ukrainian Art in
Anticipation of the War*

Friday, July 1

11:00 am

Susan Neiman (Potsdam)
The Resilience of Jean Améry

12:00 am

Moshe Halbertal (Jerusalem)
*On the Fragility of the Human
Améry on Counter-Enlightenment*

3:00 pm

David Shulman (Jerusalem)
*Torturing the Mind. A Palestinian
Addendum to Améry*

4:30 pm

Stephen Holmes (New York)
*It May be Paradoxical
but it's Still Not True*

5:30 pm

Ivan Krastev (Vienna)
Enlightenment. Reflection on a Divorce

Saturday, July 2

11:00 am

Peter Stephan Jungk (Paris)
*Jean Améry on a Suicide Mission. Charles
Bovary, Country Doctor*

12:30 pm

Jan Philipp Reemtsma (Hamburg)
*Monsieur Bovary
(online)*

1:30 pm

James Wood (Cambridge/Mass.)
*Unspeakable Realism. Defending Jean
Améry, Defending Gustave Flaubert*