Why Sexual Ethics and Politics? Why Now? An Introduction to the Journal

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> Against the certainties of [the naturalistic and scientific, medicalised and psychiatric] tradition, I intend (...) to offer an alternative way of understanding sexuality not as a primordially 'natural' phenomenon but rather a product of social and historical forces. 'Sexuality' (...) is a 'fictional unity' that once did not exist, and at some time in the future may not exist again (...). (Weeks 2010: 7)

> For Foucault, sexuality was a relationship of elements and discourses, a series of meaning-giving practices and activities, a social apparatus (...) achieving a modern conceptual unity, with diverse effects, only within the modern world.
> The most important result of this historical approach to sexuality is that it opens the whole field to critical analysis and assessment. (Weeks 2010: 18)

One important contribution of French post-structuralist thinking, whether taken from Derrida, Foucault or Rancière, is the notion that any attempt to describe a thing has the propensity to (perhaps inevitably) discipline it, neutering it of that quality that made it dynamic and critical, reducing it into orthodoxy – whether pre-existing or emergent – subject to the exercise of power and subordination. The study of sexuality might be regarded as providing a paradigmatic illustration of this notion. The study of sexuality as a specific subject is now commonly traced to the emergence of classical sexology in the second half of 19th Century, and the work of figures such as Magnus Hirschfeld, Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis. These studies combined an attempt to develop a body of scientific knowledge about sexual difference and sexual health with advocacy for a tolerance and respect for those who were different (see, e.g., Mancini 2010; Nottingham 1999; Bullough 1994). From a contemporary perspective it is easy to criticise classical sexology for its role in subordinating sexuality to medico-moral discourses that would legitimate pathology and prejudice. But we should keep in mind that many classical sexologists spoke to the identity politics of homosexual rights and transgendered politics in hostile times, and their work contains within it the contradictions that would encourage the more critical work that followed. Any consideration of the early articulations of sexuality studies also has to take account of the subjugation of women's scholarship and the importance of ties between early explorations of sexuality and wider criticisms of gender relations.

From these modest routes, studies in sexuality developed in sexology and across literature, humanities, history, sociology, philosophy and medicine, often in a minor key and at the periphery of those fields, but leaving accumulating bodies of knowledge that both advanced knowledge and understandings and fuelled a growing politics of sexuality. This came to a point of explosive radical departure, rupturing and transgressing traditional prejudices and pathologies to assert the political legitimacy of identities and perspectives that were other than heteronormative and heteropatriarchial in the 1960s and 1970s. Since then, sexuality studies have matured into an established field of studies, albeit unevenly in its manifestation across the globe. In Europe, North America, Australasia, parts of South America and South East Asia and more conditionally elsewhere, sexuality studies has a recognition as a legitimate field of learning. It has also become 'mainstream' as part of a political discourse in these same geographical areas, with varying degrees of success in underpinning political campaigns for legislation, policy and politics for dignity, respect and liberties for diverse sexual identities and forms of sexual practice. The 'balance sheet' of progress against continued pathologisation and discrimination should be a cause of continual review and critique, but the 'coming of age' of sexuality studies in university curriculums, intellectual discourse – whether art or science – and public production – books, journals, exhibitions, media programming – is evident. There is a burgeoning and established literature and a preponderance of media representations across the more technologically advanced, wealthy and powerful nations, where different sexual identities have become established and visible features of the community. Again, this increased visibility and representation should not be regarded as necessarily constituting more sophisticated and enabling discourses of sexuality within contemporary societies, but in many there is at least a presence for legitimated non-heterosexual relationships and legitimacy in the diversity of social and sexual relations, orientations, behaviours and practices.

That would rather beg the question of why another journal, and indeed a journal focused on sexual ethics and politics (broadly conceived) is regarded as necessary and useful in the context of a thriving field of study with a plethora of such initiatives? That question can be given some provisional answer by outlining just four impressionistic questions that arise from a cursory survey of the study of sexuality:

- **The question is whether sexuality studies has become an orthodoxy in itself.** When texts begin to identify with or are drawn within a field of study called sexuality studies, it begs the question as to whether, as Foucault would caution, that field becomes orthodoxy. It is certainly the case that sexuality studies appears to be dominated by constructionist and queer approaches to the study of sexuality, predominantly focused in the social sciences and humanities, and very much focused on sexual identities, orientations and relationships, particularly lesbian, gay and transgendered/transsexual studies. Of course, it may well be that the myriad studies from diverse disciplines and approaches might claim to see the label of 'sexuality studies' as immaterial to their work or a motif without meaning, but the question remains. There is an understanding amongst those who write and think about and study sexuality that there is a corpus of work that is recognised as setting parameters for sexuality studies, and if the Foucauldian

claims that past heterosexist discourses in different fields subjugated sexuality as a subject are to be recognised as equally valid *for* sexuality studies, the question of orthodoxy is quite important. Seidman *et al.* (2011) have recently produced a text designed to facilitate learning about sexuality with an explicit appeal to something called 'sexuality studies', and the same sort of assumption that there is a field, however diverse in its constitution, that has a recognisable audience is evident in contemporary literatures, particularly on lesbian and gay life, culture and identity. As Seidman (2011: xvi) observes:

> The new sexuality studies perspective does not deny the biological aspects of sexuality. There would be no sexuality studies perspective without bodies. However, it is social forces which determine which organs and orifices become "sexual", how such organs and orifices may be used or expressed, their social and moral meaning, which desires and acts become the basis of identities, and what social norms regulate behaviour and intimacies.

- **The question of the disciplinarity of sexuality studies**. Sexuality studies as a field has been most prominent in a number of key disciplines to its development. It has thrived in sociological studies, and their marriage with human geography, anthropology and to a lesser extent politics. It has an increasing prominence in professional education, particularly in health studies, education and social work. It has also developed a critical engagement with studies on sexuality in psychology and psychoanalysis, medicine and biological studies, and sexology continues to be a terrain of fertile studies within both scientific and more critical paradigms. It has a rich presence in literature, the creative arts, history and the performing arts, and adjacent studies such as film studies. Issues of sexuality are clearly increasingly important in the study of law and crime, and whilst there is a philosophy of sexuality it is under-represented in sexuality studies. As noted above, contemporary studies in sexuality are principally located in the humanities and social sciences, with critical approaches to scientific disciplines emanating from them. However, this gives rise to concerns that studies are increasingly either following the lines of orthodoxy emergent within sexuality studies, or sit within their discipline, and there is a rarity of studies that are transdisciplinary. This should not be surprising as sexuality studies are produced by people working within disciplinary structures, but it raises the question as to whether the rhetoric of transdisciplinarity is met by studies that genuinely dissolve disciplinary lines and provides innovative and critical work (For some overviews, see Aggleton & Parker 2010; Parker & Aggleton 2007; Herdt & Howe 2007).
- **The question of identity and practice**. Following on from the brief outline of the main trends in sexuality studies, it is reflecting more specifically on the focus on identity, orientations and relationships. One problem with this is that, whilst sexuality studies emerge from critiques of the pathologically 'evil' or 'unnatural' acts, it might be argued that it has lost sight of sexuality as inherently about practice. This raises questions about the marginalisation of diverse practices in sexuality studies, such as (to an extent) BDSM, or fetishistic behaviours. One danger is that sexuality studies are normalised by academic and intellectual convention,

which neuters the erotic in the study of sexuality. It is not that sexual texts should be sexual – though it is an interesting assertion of the relationship between the subject of study and the form this study takes – but it might be argued that the study of sexuality might be focused more creatively on integrating the embodied, affective subject that engages in pleasure and desire through sensuous practices within studies that look at the subject through medical, sociological, historical and other lens. In this sense, the blending of the auto-biographical, the bodily, the aesthetic and the intimate with the public, the analytic, the theoretical and the textual seems a fruitful area of interest (indicatively, see Harwood *et al.* 1993).

- **The question of ethics and politics.** For some, ethics and politics are two discreet fields. The ethical sphere involves discussion of the morality of sexual identities, relations, orientations, behaviours and acts from a position where reasoning produces notions of good or bad and right or wrong. These notions might guide individuals or states, but their advice is often in a discourse of philosophical reasoning abstracted from concrete bodies, relations and contexts. Alternately, sexual politics focuses on gaining understandings of past struggles and analyses of current struggles, based on theoretical analyses and ideological commitments, which form the basis for modelling what the future might bring. The literatures on sexual ethics and sexual politics often have little in the way of engagement with each other. Indicative of sexual ethics is a philosophical literature with a heavy presence of Christian texts, often entangled with love and marriage, and a standard approach that applies philosophical notions and ethical theories to sex and sexuality (see Halwani 2007; Jordan 2001; Primoratz, 1999; Soble 1998; Verene 1995). Sexual politics often focuses on law and policy and political struggles through the lens that focus on rights, justice and citizenship, often from feminist, queer or left positions, and often focused on particular identities and their interests, with ethical questions often assumed as presupposed, but rarely exercised (see indicatively, Bell & Binnie 2000; Binnie 2004; D'Emilio *et al.* 2002; Dunphy 2000; Floyd 2009; Jeffreys 2002; Phelan 1997; Richardson 2000; Stychin 2003; Wolf 2009; Wilchins 1997). Yet it would seem axiomatic that a politics of recognition, redistribution (where appropriate) and resolution of the borderlines of permission, prohibition and regulations for matters sexual should combine an ethical awareness and reasoning with an understanding of political concreteness and sense of the power of authority, institutions, structures, culture and orthodoxy. This would facilitate both particular sexual identities or practitioners and those who embrace sexual practices and those committed to sexual liberty and choice in making claims and arguing cases with political engagement. This focus on ethico-political synergy also allows for a wider trans-disciplinarity where politics is understood as cultural, aesthetic and intimate as well as public and protest based, and ethics is understood as a subject of reasoning in the abstract in concert with a particular sensitivity to agents, contexts, conjunctures and cultures. There are some attempts to develop this sort of work, often borne of a particular sense of engagement with a topic like monogamy and polygamy or what of pornography should be permitted or prohibited and how it should be regulated. In respect of work that engages both the ethical and the political, how-

ever, there is clearly work to be done to develop a critical and dynamic ethically informed sexual politics for the 21st century. This relationship between sexual ethics and politics is elaborated below

These questions are some of the questions that encouraged the formation of INSEP and the idea that a transdisciplinary, critical and eclectic space was necessary to provoke critical thinking around sexual matters. And these questions encouraged the development of this journal – an additional and new contribution to the field of studies in sexuality. Of course, the journal is textual and academic in style, though it hopes to publish over a wide and diverse range of concerns that do not easily fit into many other more focused journals on sexuality. The broader project of INSEP and the accompanying book series for INSEP may well afford more creative opportunities to engage these questions.

For those who have an interest in the genealogy of such an enterprise, it began with a series of late night reflections, disputes, collegial sharings between Tom and Paul over a number of years in various European cities attending conferences or workshops. This developed into a view that disparate initiatives and events, whether mercenary for profit, tied to organisations or individual initiatives, left a hole in the space for discussion and debate. This space seemed to be transdisciplinary, though it had a common thematic character in broken dialectics between theory and practice, abstract thinking and embodied doing, building within and subverting orthodox positions and the relationship between ethics and politics. INSEP was developed as one modest means of filling some of that hole, if only by bringing it into focus and encouraging critical thinking within it. INSEP had its first conference in 2011 in Ghent in Belgium, where it enjoys the support and hosting of the *Centre for Ethics and Value Inquiry* (CEVI) at Ghent University. This journal, and the accompanying book series we are developing with it, was always envisaged as part of the first phase of the Network's development. The slow process of building the credibility of the Network and supporting its first steps took much of the first two years, and the journal and book series only began to take shape with the involvement of Jakob Horstmann of Barbara Budrich Publishers, whose interest and enthusiasm for the project and remarkable qualities of diplomacy and patience in laying down the foundations for a fruitful relationship should be acknowledged. Likewise, the emergence of the editorial board – which is still being constituted – reflects a remarkable enthusiasm by experienced and well recognised intellectuals with only reputation to lose and younger intellectuals who have chosen to commit to the project when probably more career suitable options for commitment were available. This commitment from the board, and support from members of INSEP and participants in its conference and activities, has been collegial in character and often reflected a real sense of willingness to give and support, but it also reflects a common sense of the value of such an imitative.

The editorial board is convinced that the launch of *Sexual Ethics and Politics* is timely. They subscribe to the view that sexual ethics and politics can benefit from entering into a dialogue with each other, which is the central rationale and justification for the journal. Philosophical and ethical work on sexuality is scattered around many philosophical, historical, sexological, gender-oriented, queer and feminist and

other journals and books (series). Likewise, critical reflection on sexual activism and politics can be found in many other publication channels, often partisan and/or institutional in nature. *Sexual Ethics and Politics* aspires to be a publishing platform bringing those contributions together and a space promoting transdisciplinary discussion and debate where those working in the domains of sexual ethics and politics can engage in fruitful and creative dialogue.

Sexual ethics and politics are ubiquitous, both in academe as well as in real life. We believe that both domains could profit from a sustained effort of mutual interrogation, inspiration and support. We would like to argue for an enlargement of the scope and a revaluation of the allegiances of both domains. We take 'sexual ethics' to mean more than academic musings on the normative and evaluative aspects of sexuality under the aegis of (Western) philosophy (of sexuality). And we take 'sexual politics' to mean more than the configurations and power relations between the sexes and criticisms thereof, but also include the multitudinous forms of (world-wide) activism for sexual justice and emancipation, on behalf of or by all those whose sexual lives and experiences are impoverished or oppressed and could be bettered substantially, aiming at the realization of a pleasurable and flourishing sexuality.

Insofar as we seek to set an agenda for the journal, when the hope is that it emerges from those who engage with it, we wish to elaborate further on some of the ideas that instigated the launch of the Network and the Journal.

The Importance of Sexual Ethics *and* Politics

Sexual *ethics and politics* lie at the core of how we understand and practice our sexual lives. They form the basis from which we understand and engage with diverse and different sexualities – the description of which includes different sexual identities, values, relations, orientations, behaviours and practices. Our explicit as well as implicit ethical thinking and feeling about sexuality are a significant way of understanding, analysing, evaluating and judging sexuality as a personal, public and social construct. It contributes to our exploring of ascriptions of both positive and negative values to sexual practices that have impacts on those who do them and on the societies in which they are done. These evaluations and judgements bear on the existential, philosophical, psychological, social, political and emotional aspects of our sexual life. They speak to blends of legal and cultural (*nomos*) permissions, prohibitions or regulatory forms that characterise the legal, social, cultural and political means by which sexualities are subjects of discourse, law and politics in contemporary societies.

Sexual *ethics* provides a means of reasoning about what is pathologised, prejudiced against and discriminated against, and what is held up as healthy, virtuous and legitimate. It seeks to cut through discursive silences, aesthetic impressions, poorly reasoned judgements, and illegitimate and oppressive state and public responses to erotic pleasures and desires. In the process of doing so, sexual ethics challenges the vocabularies, discourses and meanings that are publically propagated and supplants them with reasoned, careful, humane and critical thinking. It should be conceptu-

ally clear, deliberatively justified and critically reflexive, and should enrich debates through using a range of insights from philosophical traditions, the social and natural sciences, psychology, and from the humanities, history, law, art and culture. Sexual ethics forms the basis not simply for analyses of the vagaries and ills of contemporary moral values, legal rules and political and cultural discourse on sexuality; it allows us to explore and creatively imagine and further better values, discourse and rules in more enlightened societies.

This is, by its very nature, a *political* understanding. This should be seen in two respects. The sexual is political because the notion of sexuality is invariably social and public, involves community decisions, attributions of value and codifications of prohibition, permission or regulation. Whilst we might experience our sexual pleasures singularly, in couples or in small groups of like minded people, the space to do so is invariably under the jurisdiction of community. The traditional conservative argument that sex is a private concern within the 'household' both permits abuses within that context and is unconvincing given the history of conservative interests seeking to regulate others' sexualities (particularly those that have not been heteronormative). If sex and sexuality involve attributions of value and the desire for those values to be extended as liberties or prohibitions to all others, sexuality must be regarded as political.

Equally, as feminist theory recognised and promulgated, the personal and intimate is political. The *somatechnics* of bodily inscription, contortion, use, enjoyment and interaction are central to the practice of sex. The body is often conceived as an intimate zone of engagement, with a culturally and socially shaped notion of how far we can self-govern our bodies, its functions, and its sensations. Our bodies house our consciousness – dualist or holist questions deferred – and we experience through our bodies, express through our bodies and enjoy our capacities through our bodies. Likewise, the intimate zones of relationships, exchanges, expressions of desire and pleasures and exercises of sensations felt as compulsions or choices all correspond to make the personal political, whether understood in feminist terms in relation to the violence and subjection of women's bodies, or the Foucauldian sense of the biopolitical regulation of the body and discursive inscription and regulation of the intimate self. The personal is always political and the sexual is a part of that politics (see indicatively, Grosz 1995; Heyes 2007).

As such, the sexual is political, and just as sexual politics should be enriched by ethical thinking, sexual ethics should connect with contemporary sexual activism, politics and practices aiming at the realisation of sexual emancipation, equality and justice. Thinking sexual ethics and politics is a way of grappling with and critically exploring the problems and possibilities of our sexual lives. This acknowledges the many and diverse ways we think about and respond to our and other people's sexualities, the contexts of sexual rights and justice, and key developments such as sexual commerce and work, sexual health and illness, sexual liberty and repression. Often a focus on the sexual leads beyond the sexual, and a focus on other facets of social life leads to interesting developments in thinking about the sexual. Hence the line between what is and is not sexual is porous, and the relationship between the sexual and the social a subject of constantly shifting and transient boundaries.

If ethical thinking is invariably political, the obverse is also true. Only the most abstractive philosophical thinking has no relation whatsoever with the world we live in. *Ethics* certainly – even the most abstract analytical or meta-ethics – reflects on issues that have (often direct) relevance in and to peoples' lives. Thinking through philosophical and ethical issues on sexuality effortlessly translates in raising question of a broadly social and political nature. Speaking and writing about sexual issues – for example, liberty, consent, autonomy, harm, choice, sexual identity, agency, emancipation, prostitution, commodification and objectification, pornography, the private/public divide, relationships, marriage, monogamy, polyamory, fidelity, promiscuity, casual sex, desire, lust, pleasure, adultery, intimacy, love, meaning, sexual value(s) and norms, perversion, pathology, normality, masturbation, the body, abortion, virginity, the historicity of sexuality, homosexuality, the permissibility of diverse sexual repertoires, cybersex – to name but a few of the 'classical' topics within sexual ethics, automatically leads to wider issues of a social, economic, political and cultural nature. Sexual ethics could benefit from taking into account more explicitly these wider contexts and conjunctures and their implications, thereby becoming more attuned to real people's needs, lives and struggles.

The same goes for sexual *politics*. In sexual activism and politics, concepts and ideas are put to work, guiding and inspiring action, providing frames of reference and interpretation, mobilizing, uniting but also dividing people. Concepts and issues – for example race and ethnicity, class, culture, gender, power, feminism, patriarchy, justice, law, equality, solidarity, diversity and difference, sexual education, abstinence, sexual and reproductive rights, LGBT-rights, human rights, discrimination, sexual health and disease, sexual citizenship, intimacy, marriage and divorce, polygamy, emancipation, empowerment, trafficking, sex tourism, sexual violence, harassment, sexism, rape, sex (as) work and commerce, pornofication and sexualisation, (new) media, censorship, – often come with voluminous histories, meanings and contextualisations. Often it is necessary to engage in an exercise in abstraction and the application of ethical criteria or ethical and socio-cultural theory to organise thinking about the concept or issue.

The allocation of the concepts and issues just enumerated to the domain of sexual ethics or politics is, of course, to a great extent artificial. Some of the concepts listed live in both academic ethical and activist political discourse. In sexual politics, issues of marriage and divorce, emancipation, the body, identity and autonomy, for example, play an important role, just as they do in philosophical discourse and analysis. Conversely, concepts and issues like gender, justice, power, rape and rights, for example, are by no means alien to philosophical discourse. But that is not to say that their meanings and/or practical implications are the same or stable across these domains. Other concepts and issues seem more firmly moored in one discourse and are less often addressed in the other. Philosophers and sexual ethicists ponder the metaphysical and moral standing of sexual pleasure and lust, but this is addressed less in activist and political discourse. This will come as no surprise. The discourses, goals and methodologies of sexual ethics and politics are different. Philosophers of sex and sexual ethicists ask different types of question than sexual political activists, and recognising the questions each ask and addressing them from a synergistic position can offer new thinking to issues often well exercised within particular orthodox-

ies and disciplines. Activists (often) are more concerned with getting things done and strive towards making peoples' lives better. They (often) are not concerned by sophisticated philosophical reflection on the ontological and epistemological status of 'rights'. Philosophers scrutinizing the (ultimate) value and place of sexuality in 'human life' seldom take into account the many ways in which desire is played out in and formed by culture and history. Yet both discursive spaces are to a certain point overlapping, and could and should be brought together more closely.

Of course, it would be singularly unfortunate if a focus on sexual ethics and politics failed to recognise the intersections and intermediate domains within which sexual ethics and politics inhabits space, such as the domains of law and law in culture (*nomos*), medicine, the sexual sciences including sexology and the cultural construct of heteronormativity. These provide institutional and discursive regulatory structures that are both constituted by claims of naturalness, normality and morality framing and demarcating the boundaries between the legitimate and illegitimate. These structures also constitute the boundaries between permission, prohibition and regulation, and so house and in housing seek to shape ethical and political debates around sexuality and sex. Law, as a codification of values based on cultural and scientific discourses that claim prevalence in decoding sex and sexuality, is often the focal point for sexual ethics and politics as critical discourses, particularly in relation to emergent and diverse sexualities (Brooks-Gordon *et al.* 2004). Of course, both law and these other domains are constituted in contradiction, both maintaining existing understandings that occupy the space for emergence and alternatives in sexuality and sex and can be resistant to change, yet at the same time constitute the terrain in which dissident or emergent sexualities develop their critical positions against orthodoxy (for example in respect of scientific and medical paradigms, Kaschak 2001; Tiefer 2008).

To give one example of where the concerns of sexual ethics and politics come together within a discursive terrain that is bounded by legal, cultural and scientific/medical institutions and orthodoxies, sexual citizenship constitutes a fertile ground for thinking the questions of values, rights, equality, justice and liberty balanced with regulation explicit in questions of what it is to be a citizen (see, indicatively Bell & Binnie 2000; Bernstein & Schaffner 2005; Binnie 2004; Carver & Mottier 1998; Cossman 2007; Evans 1993; Friedman 2005; Lee 2011; Oleksy 2009; Plummer 2003; Richardson 2000; Richardson & Monro 2012).

Another example that cuts across these terrains is that of health, where the previously dominant scientific and medical discourses that defined and bounded what constituted health and well-being are now, whilst still dominant, challenged by more critical social and cultural understandings of what it is to be healthy and well (see indicatively, Aggleton & Parker 2010; Chavkin & Chesler 2005; Corrêa *et al.* 2008; Graupner & Tahmindjis 2005; Parker & Aggleton 2007).

The two examples of law and health tend to be very much bounded by powerful institutions that make or inhabit the deliberation and implementation of orthodoxies. Yet there are other domains, equally important but with more complex and less institutionally constituted forms, such as global development issues, where health, poverty, traditional and religious prohibitions and laws and culturally diverse meanings and taboos provide very different organization of sexual problems and questions

of sexual ethics and politics (see, indicatively, Adams & Pigg 2005; Aggleton *et al.* 2012; Altman 2001; Cornwall *et al.* 2008; Jejeebhoy *et al.* 2005; Jolly *et al.* 2013; Lind 2010; Wieringa & Sivori 2013).

A second and perhaps more ironically neglected domain of discussion about sexual ethics and politics, bounded by law, health and culture, is that of sexual pleasure and desire, which is often dislodged from a centrality in thinking about the politics and ethics of sex by pathologies, prejudices, bio-political appropriations and legal regulations (see indicatively, Gagnon 2004; Jolly 2007; Jolly *et al.* 2013; McCormick 1994; Padilla *et al.* 2007; Rubin 1984).

This is little more than a brief sketch that explains how we envisage exploring sexual ethics and politics in a synergistic and contradictory relationship with each other and through both substantially and less substantially constituted, institutionalized and discursively orthodox domains.

The agenda sketched is open to contest, debate and criticism, and such activity is welcomed. Any organism only survives through interaction with other, contrasting as well as complementary organisms, and the journal is conceived as something that should evolve organically in part, to both reflect its foundational values but also embrace the voices of difference that are reflecting on those values. Perhaps more than other journals of its type, the editors are acutely aware of the relationship between the journal and its parent Network. Networks only thrive by constant engagement with members and the infusion of new thinking alongside that established in the network's roots. The Journal seeks to reflect that philosophy with its readers, contributors and subscribers.

It is as a result of this thinking that we are pleased to launch the *Journal of the International Network for Sexual Ethics and Politics* or more succinctly, *Sexual Ethics & Politics*. The Journal is an outgrowth and activity of INSEP, the *International Network for Sexual Ethics and Politics*. The journal's mission is that of the network that underpins it, and can be read on the Networks website – http://www.insep.ugent.be. *Sexual Ethics & Politics* is a trans-disciplinary journal for the publication of critical research work on any aspect of sexual ethics and politics as it pertains to sexual identities, practices, behaviours, relations, orientations, desires and pleasures, geographies, histories, national and transnational politics and policy, theories and ideas. It provides a space where academics and practitioner/activists can debate key and contemporary issues on all aspects of sexual ethics and politics. The editors and editorial board of the journal wish to promote thought-provoking and politically relevant research on sexual ethics, sexual politics, and the interplay between both in broad conception.

The journal seeks to publish articles, shorter interventions, replies and reports and reviews or review articles of relevant publications that promote:

- critical understandings of the ethical problems and possibilities for diverse sexualities;
- critical understandings of the discourses, vocabularies and bodies of knowledge by which sexuality is conceived, understood and articulated in contemporary societies, and their historical lineages;

- critical awareness and evaluations of the beneficence or malfeasance of particular articulations of sexuality, strengths or deficiencies of different sexual cultures and discourses, their historical antecedents and their contemporary patterns of prejudice, pathology and discrimination or practice and advocacy, as well as emergent sexual politics aiming at emancipation and liberation;
- critical understandings of the role of law, politics and culture in the prohibition, permission or regulation of sexualities, both in its oppressive deployment and possibly liberating possibilities in contemporary societies;
- and, finally, critical and constructive engagements with sexual ethics itself, thinking through its forms, role and meanings, and its history, present and future.

Sexual Ethics & Politics seeks to provide a critical and dynamic space for cutting edge thinking, new research and key discussions and debates about issues of sexual ethics or politics, whether conceptual and theoretical discourse, analytical studies or aesthetically or empirically constituted insights. The journal sees the value in the fullest range of approaches to the study of sexual ethics and politics, including gendered and feminist perspectives; distinctive lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and transsexual perspectives; queer perspectives; and approaches from more general positions such as liberalism, Marxism and democratic theory.

The editors welcome submissions that focus on sexual ethics and politics/activism more narrowly construed but also and especially look forward to publishing contributions that deal with the complex interplays between both, thereby connecting philosophy to real life and contexts, and deepening activist thought by philosophical reflection on activist and political initiatives, interventions and organizations.

It only remains to add that the editors hope that this is the beginning of a productive contribution to thinking about, debating and learning about the ethics and politics of sexual difference, identities, relations, orientations, behaviours and practices, and extend the invitation for those who have read this far to submit writings, become involved in the Network and join us in making this productive contribution possible, tangible and worthwhile.

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