

CALL FOR PAPERS

Prohibition: Perspectives from the Humanities and Social Sciences, edited by Dr Susannah Wilson, Assistant Professor in French Cultural History, School of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Warwick (UK).

An edited volume to be proposed to the Proceedings of the British Academy Series.

In 1920 the US government brought into effect a nationwide ban on the manufacture, sale and transportation of alcoholic beverages – an act of prohibition that resulted in an upsurge of organised crime. For a range of reasons, this constitutional amendment was repealed in 1933, and historians of prohibition hold differing views on the extent to which banning alcohol represented a public health ‘success’. Yet, if the question is framed a different way, from a philosophical angle, the application of measures of success or failure to the concept of ‘public health’ infringes upon citizens’ capacity to dispose of their bodies and minds as they see fit, and in accordance with their personal choices in the context of their own, private circumstances. Some leading philosophers in this field now view addictions as rational adaptations to these circumstances. In more recent decades, the US-led ‘War on Drugs’ has lasted years without achieving its stated aims, and at the cost of spiralling criminality. Governments in Portugal, New Zealand, and elsewhere – as well as certain US states – have relaxed prohibitive bans on certain ‘drugs’, opting for systems of regulation and control instead of blanket bans. Many twenty-first century governments, however, continue to pursue acts of prohibition, such as the forthcoming Psychoactive Substances Bill, currently being prepared to pass into UK law in 2016.

At this timely moment, this volume will explore what is particularly human about the drive to prohibit, alongside the equally deep instinct to resist prohibition and freely seek intoxication. Whilst recognising the common desire to achieve a better world through more effective global drug policies, contributors are asked to pinpoint the problems and complexities presented by the impetus for change – for example, the paradox of both prohibition and movements to decriminalise being motivated by the concept of ‘harm reduction’. Addressing this question from a global perspective, and in the context of academic research in the humanities and social sciences on the prohibition of psychoactive substances since c. 1800, this volume will offer a critical, intellectual engagement with the issues at the heart of this forthcoming legislation.

In particular, contributors will explore subjects relating to personal liberty, addiction, crime, intoxication, and human consciousness. It will not be sufficient simply to dismiss the thinking that lies behind the urge to prohibit psychoactive substances: we need to account intellectually for the sociological and cultural function that is served by prohibiting intoxication, and outline the broader rational case for ending prohibition. We also need to examine the historical reasons why drug-control law has evolved as it has over the course of the twentieth century. This will be based on historical, anthropological, philosophical, literary, and sociological case studies from across the world that investigate and explain the prohibitive tendency in culture and society. Essays will also address the

question of why bans on intoxicants have historically been problematic, in a variety of ways. Contemporary and historical studies, from different fields and using different research methodologies, will shed light on the tensions and paradoxes at the heart of policies that proscribe psychoactive substances, addressing questions of social control, moral responsibility, public health, free will and the universal human quest for intoxication. Contributors are asked to explore such questions as why, in a context in which the professional, academic consensus is moving away from prohibition towards policies of regulation and control, a regressive prohibition agenda is still being pursued with cross-party support in the UK Parliament. One key concept to be interrogated is the idea of 'psychoactivity' itself: the Bill has at its core an understanding of the 'psychoactive' that is potentially so wide as to be either unenforceable, or, if enforced, totalitarian in its purchase on citizens' freedom.

The volume will have coherence in terms of the research questions being asked, but the individual contributions will not, as a whole, speak with one voice: some will highlight the politically totalitarian nature of such legislation from a philosophical perspective; others will give a pragmatic, historical account of past attempts to legalize drugs/alcohol and the problems posed by the everyday realities of such broad-ranging legal shifts. These may also suggest that structural, sociological and cultural differences between countries mean that ending prohibition has radically different consequences in different geographical contexts. Yet, if prohibition is universally ineffective, what purpose does it serve? What is the aim of prohibition, and what questions should we be asking about the success and failure of such policies?

Other possible themes:

- Issues of race, gender/sexuality and class in relation to psychoactive substances and the law
- Legal double standards
- Libertarian vs. paternalistic perspectives
- Age of legal responsibility: children and psychoactive substances
- The era of prohibition in the USA
- The 'long view' of the 20th as the global era of prohibition
- Legal and philosophical considerations of the increasing availability of psychoactive substances
- Anthropological perspectives on the ritual use and control of psychoactive substances in cultures removed from the industrialised West
- Industrialisation, intoxication and prohibition
- Religion and prohibition
- Psychoanalytical perspectives

List of contributors (provisional):

Editor: Dr Susannah Wilson, University of Warwick

Oliver Davis (Reader in French Studies, Philosophy and Critical Theory, University of Warwick):

The broad angle of the paper would be that this Bill is an extension of the police-carceral-security state's purchase over its 'population' and expert discourses on addiction will be read as symptoms of economic and security interests which they themselves neglect to grasp.

Stuart Walton (Independent scholar; freelance cultural historian and philosopher; author of *Out of It: A Cultural History of Intoxication*):

Paper on the psychology and philosophy of prohibition, reflecting on the reasons as to why bans on intoxicants never properly work, and giving the subject some historical perspective.

Susannah Wilson: (Assistant Professor in French, University Of Warwick, editor) will contribute a chapter on morphine in the fin-de-siècle French imagination, and reflections on the epidemiology of morphine 'addiction' in a pre-prohibition era (when drugs were controlled by pharmacists, and in practice widely available with repeat prescriptions). The chapter will also consider the sorts of cultural anxieties that surrounded morphine in an era when it was subject to some legal control but not banned, that led to prohibition being seen as the answer.

Ben Smith (Reader, Centre for Global History, University of Warwick): 'The Year Mexico Legalised Drugs': historical perspective on prohibition and the structural/legal problems of legalisation, as well as the need for international co-operation.

David Boyd Haycock (Freelance historian and journalist): A historiographical essay on Prohibition in the US.

We also have three very promising proposals from high-calibre PhD candidates.

If you wish to propose an essay for inclusion in this volume, please send a 300-word outline, together with a brief CV and author bio/affiliation to:

s.m.wilson@warwick.ac.uk

Deadline for proposals: Friday 15 January 2016