



March 28th 2023 | 6.30 pm | HS A

MORAL LANDSCAPES OF SELECTIVE ABORTION

Prognostic uncertainty and medical authorisation in the context of second- and third-trimester abortions in Austria

Discussion with Dr. Veronika Siegl (Universität Wien)

In Austria, second- and third-trimester abortions need to be medically authorized and can only be performed in exceptional cases. The most common reason is when the foetus is expected to have a “severe damage”, as the law phrases it. The meaning of “severe damage” is, however, not defined, neither by laws nor by guidelines. Consequently, doctors and clinics have to develop their own moral standards when making their case-to-case decisions on whether to authorize a patients’/couple’s request for a termination or not. The lack of clear criteria results in significant differences between hospitals in Austria – regarding the circle of professionals involved in decision-making as well as the evaluation of individual diagnoses. These decisions are all the more difficult, as some severe disabilities and illnesses can be prenatally diagnosed, while it remains hard to predict how a diagnosis will play out in a specific child’s future.

This presentation zooms in on doctors’ and clinics’ decision-making processes and scrutinizes how they grapple with the legal power, the ethical responsibility and the emotional burden of making life-and-death decisions in the context of selective abortions.



Veronika Siegl is a social anthropologist and gender studies scholar. She is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Vienna (Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology) and at the University of Bern (Institute of Geography). Her research focuses on questions of ethics, inequality and autonomy in the context of medicine, technology, economy and the body. After working on commercial surrogacy in Russia and Ukraine for her PhD, her current postdoc project explores disability-selective pregnancy terminations in Austria, with a focus on providers’ experiences.

The discussion will be held hybrid. Please register via e-mail to miriam.schwaiger@univie.ac.at