



CSLS SPEAKER SERIES

Monday, November 28, 2016

Christopher Kutz

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“Valuing Lives in France and in the United States: Norms of Warfare and Environmental Regulation”

I will discuss a nascent project, conducted with a French colleague, Ariel Colonomos, which aims to provide a comparative analysis of the institutional valuing of life in two different domains, warfare and environment, in France and the United States. The comparison is attractive because while both France and the United States share many elements of a rights-based democratic political culture, they diverge sharply in many other social and political respects. We believe that examining how French and American institutions assign values to life, here in assessing the life risks of warfare and pollution, provides a window on the relativity of these valuation questions even between close normative neighbors.

Our approach is interdisciplinary and involves primarily three disciplines: law, moral philosophy, and political science. Studies on risk have greatly expanded and have focused on the “value of statistical life” (Baumstark), a debate in which lawyers have intensively participated (see, e.g., Sunstein). Moral philosophers have discussed the valuing of lives and weighing of incommensurable values (Broome, Chang). In sociology, valuation studies have recently greatly developed (Karpik; Beckert & Aspers; Fourcade). But discussions of the normative frameworks have not looked closely at national-ideological differences, but rather – as in philosophy – have assumed universality or – as in political science – looked to non-national, institutional differences (for example between military and humanitarian organizations, or between industry and regulators). We believe that a comparative study can cast new light on the unspoken assumptions of these literally life-and-death matters in policymaking, revealing the interrelations of ethical values in political and historical contexts.

Because the project is still in its initial phase, I will not be presenting conclusions so much as explorations, and I look forward to the advice of members of the workshop on how best to engage in the doubly-comparative aspect of the project: between countries, and between fields of regulation.

PLACE Selznick Seminar Room, 2240 Piedmont Ave.
TIME **12:45 – 2:00pm.** Coffee and water provided. Bag lunches welcome.
INFO <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/centers/center-for-the-study-of-law-society/>
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