



“Is Sex Binary?” A Debate at MIT

April 21 2024, Cambridge, MA. The MIT Free Speech Alliance, MIT’s Students for Open Inquiry, and the Sloan School’s Chapter of the Adam Smith Society hosted an Oxford Union style debate at MIT’s Wong Auditorium at 7 p.m. April 17 on the proposition, “That sex is biological and binary and gender identity is no substitute for sex in social policy,” The event was [livestreamed](#) and the video is posted at [MFSA’s YouTube page](#), where it already has 8,100 views. A transcript is available there.

Debater Holly Lawford-Smith said: **“There hasn’t been a public event relating to trans issues that I know of where there hasn’t been a protest or disruption. I haven’t given a talk in the last six years (while working on gender-critical issues) that hasn’t required security.”**

This is the third in MFSA’s ongoing debate series modelling what vigorous but civil debate on a contentious issues looks like. (the [Spring 2023 debate recording](#) has over 28,000 views.) MFSA does not take an official position on any issue selected for debate. What we insist on is that controversial issues be openly and civilly discussed rather than having one side or the other be cancelled or shouted down. MFSA President Wayne Stargardt said, “The MIT Free Speech Alliance is continuing to demonstrate to the MIT community, and to society at large, how to have a civil discussion about difficult and controversial subjects. These debates reflect MIT’s traditional openness to a wide range of viewpoints, and their strong reception shows this spirit is still alive at our country’s leading STEM university.”

Nadine Strossen, past president of the ACLU and now Senior Fellow with the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression reprised her role as moderator. On the Affirmative Team were Dr. Alex Byrne, Professor of Philosophy at MIT and author of *Trouble with Gender: Sex Facts, Gender Fictions*, and Dr. Holly Lawford-Smith, Associate Professor in Political Philosophy at the University of Melbourne and author of *Gender-Critical Feminism*. On the Negative Team were Dr. Alice Dreger, American historian and journalist, a recipient of the Heterodox Academy’s Courage Award, and Aaron Kimberly, a trans man, mental health nurse, and Director of Public Engagement with the LGBT Courage Coalition.

Contact: Peter Bonilla, MFSA Executive Director, peter@mitfreespeech.org, 215-531-2171. See [the debate webpage](#) for bios and more photos. The full list of national co-sponsors is below.

The MIT Free Speech Alliance (MFSA) has over 1,000 members. Founded by MIT alumni in 2021 following the cancellation of Dorian Abbot’s Carlson Lecture. MFSA is a member of the [Alumni Free Speech Alliance](#), together with sister organizations at Cornell, Harvard, and the University of Virginia, among other institutions. MFSA is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization and is independent of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

