

Biopolitics and the Unconscious

Taking its cue from a recent essay by Jacqueline Rose on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which she noted that it was a pandemic text, shaped by Freud's mourning for his daughter Sophie after her death from flu early in 1920, this course will center on the question of how Freud's theories of drive and affect suture body and mind, and will ask what are the politics of understanding life as based on trauma in the way that Freud does. To address these questions we will circle back to nineteenth century theorists of population and collective life, including Malthus, Darwin, and Weismann.

One aspect of the course's intellectual project will be to stage an encounter between Freud's work and Michel Foucault's late work on biopolitics. We will use Foucault's work on power, life, and population to frame the political stakes of the questions the course covers. For Foucault, from the late eighteenth century on, the question of life is always a political one, posed not with respect to the individual but to the population. From the era of Malthus, life and death cease to be effects of chance or acts of God, and become facts in the field of political economy, capable of political management and determining in their turn fundamental facts of social life such as the value of labour and the price of food.

Our rereading of Darwin and Freud will thus bring to bear on their work Foucault's thesis that the life and death of populations is a political question. In particular, we take into account Foucault's theorization of race as the caesura between life and death in a biopolitical age. Besides readings of Malthus, Darwin, Freud, and Foucault, the course will engage with current theorists of biopolitics, including Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Achille Mbembe, Elizabeth Grosz, Rey Chow, Ursula Heise, and Donna Haraway.

Herewith a very tentative reading list; most of these to be covered in selections.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

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Chow, Rey. "Foucault, Race, and Racism." In *After Foucault*, ed. Lisa Downing.

Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. 1879. Eds.

Desmond, Adrian and James R. Moore. London: Penguin, 2004.

---. *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. 1872. Ed. Ekman, Paul. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

- . *On the Origin of Species*. Ed. Beer, Gillian. Rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Esposito, Roberto. *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*. Trans. Timothy Campbell. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. Robert Hurley, trans. New York: Vintage, 1978.
- . *'Society Must Be Defended': Lectures at the College de France 1975-76*. Translated by David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle; Civilization and its Discontents*.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Harraway, Donna. "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse."
- Heise, Ursula. *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meaning of Endangered Species*.
- Malthus, Thomas. *An Essay on the Principle of Population and Other Writings*. Edited Robert Mayhew. London: Penguin, 2015.
- Mdembe, Achille. "Necropolitics."
- Rose, Jaqueline. "To Die One's Own Death." *LRB* 42.22 19 November 2020.
- Wesmann, August. *Germ Plasm: A Theory of Heredity* (1892).