

Joshua Schuster

## **Finitude and Plenitude**

What sort of thought is it that starts not with the beginning but with the end? Instead of first philosophy, is there something like last philosophy? How might finitude lead to a theory of plenitude and care rather than nothingness or apocalypticism? This course will examine the different meanings of finitude and the finiteness of thought. Kant is perhaps the first to locate in philosophy a limitation that is also a truth; philosophy must think something inaccessible to thought, something not fully knowable in any human way (the ends or transcendental purposiveness of nature). This is one kind of finitude. Hegel posits that the finite subject must fuse with the rational that is infinite, thus subsuming finitude back into a universalism (note that both Kant and Hegel will be read in shorter excerpts).

Heidegger resituates the centrality of finitude for thought in two ways: by examining the finitude of Dasein as constitutive of a world with a horizon of care, and by referencing a non-present and a non-appropriable aspect of thought itself that perpetually calls for thinking. We will hopefully have time to examine several other perceptions of finitude in Freud (the death drive), Foucault (the “analytic of finitude”), Derrida (“the ends of man”), and especially in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy (essays including those in *A Finite Thinking*). We will study some ecological theorizing especially in the vein of ecofeminism that reckons with existential finitude as important for attending to a biodiversity that refuses the mastery of nature. We will culminate this section with Fred Moten’s “Blackness and Nothingness” and some discussion of “Afropessimism.” Our turning point will be Quentin Meillassoux’s *After Finitude*, which argues for an absolute that follows on scientific realism but concludes that there is no ultimate reason for the scientific and mathematical coordinates of the universe.

Finitude means that there is no ultimate guarantee or security for thought or being, and that reality is perishable. But precarity and entropy can paradoxically be engaged in the production of worlds and the proliferation of existences. Plenitude is what is at stake in finitude and what is possible because there is no preset plan or end. There is also the ecological meaning of plenitude in Darwin’s “entangled bank,” and in the energy radiating from the sun. We will have time to study some versions of plenitude, including in Indigenous Canadian thought (Leanne Betasamosake Simpson). We also will consider the cosmologies of plenitude proposed by Gilles Deleuze, the utopian political theory of Fredric Jameson, and the poetics of plenitude in Walt Whitman.

## Grading

Presentation – 20%

Book Review – 10%

Final Essay – 55%

Class Participation – 15%

