

**CSTC 9229**

**Biopolitics and the Unconscious**

Wed. 12:30-3:30, in person.

DRAFT. THE FINAL SYLLABUS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED AT THE SEMINAR'S  
FIRST MEETING

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Office number UC 2401. Hours: Wed. 3:30-5:00 and by appt.

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 Weimann.

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, Sylvia Wynter, Ursula Heise, and Donna Haraway.

**Required Books:**

Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans Todd Dufresne. (Broadview, 2011).

*Biopolitics: A Reader*, Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, eds. (Duke UP, 2013).

Darwin, *The Origin of Species*. Ed Gillian Beer. (Oxford 2008).

Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population and Other Writings*, ed John Mayhew. (Penguin 2015).

I have ordered these editions at the bookstore; they are also readily available from online sellers, eg, Amazon.

Other readings will be made available as .pdfs.

**Assignments:**

-- A 5000 word paper on a topic of your choice relevant to our work in this course will be due on April 20, two weeks after our last meeting; please choose your topic as early as possible in consultation with me. The finished paper is to be submitted as if for publication, with full scholarly apparatus in accordance with either the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* or the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

--a 500-word paper proposal describing your final paper (word count does not include bibliography). Due March 30 or before. I will grade this independently of your final paper, and your grade on your final paper will not be affected by any changes in your project from what you have proposed.

--As early in the term as possible, preferably before reading week, each of you will read a conference style paper to the class, based on the reading for that week. The paper will be limited to 15 minutes; a period for questions and discussion will follow. You should turn in hard copy to me at the end of class. 60% of your grade on this assignment will be based on my assessment of the written text and 40% on your presentation and handling of questions. You will be penalized if you go over 15 minutes.

--Throughout the term, and above all, read the material assigned on the syllabus and come to class prepared to discuss it, and to ask and answer questions about it.

**Evaluation:**--40% of your overall grade will be determined by the final paper.

--10% of your grade will be determined by your paper proposal.

--30% of your grade will be determined by your presentation.

--20% of your grade will be determined by my evaluation of your participation in and contribution to the seminar. You will begin the class with a presumptive grade of 100 on this part of your grade. I will deduct 15% for any unexcused absence from class. Beyond that, I expect you to be in class, to have done the reading, and to bring the texts to class ready to discuss. In discussion, you should be attentive to and respectful of others. Fulfillment of these expectations will get you a strong participation grade.

If medical or other circumstances affect your participation in the seminar, please discuss them with me. As circumstances warrant, I will excuse you from class and make whatever arrangements are possible to help you keep up with our work, without penalty to your grade.

**Schedule:** Please complete all readings before the dates listed.

**Week 1: Jan 12.** Introductions. How to read (Foucault).

**Week 2: Jan 19.** Biopolitics in theory and history. Readings from Michel Foucault *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* “Right of Death and Power over Life” *Biopolitics: A Reader*, 41-61; and *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76*, lecture of 17 March 1976, *Biopolitics: A Reader*, 61-81.

**Week 3: Jan 26.** *Security, Territory, Population* Lecture 1 pp. 1-4, Lectures 2 and 3, pp. 29-86. Recommended, lectures 5 and 6, pp. 115-62.

**Week 4: Feb 2.** Malthus *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. In Mayhew, 1-163.

**Week 5: Feb 9.** Giorgio Agamben, “Introduction” to *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Mbembe “Necropolitics,” Esposito “The Enigma of Biopolitics.” All in *Biopolitics: A Reader*

**Week 6: Feb 16.** Darwin *The Origin of Species*, Introduction, Ch 1-4, pp. 5-100.

**Feb 23.** Reading week—no class

**Week 7: Mar 2.** Darwin *The Origin of Species*, chapters 6-7; end of 10; 13-14. Pp. 129-81, 242-54, 303-360.

**Week 8: Mar 9.** Darwin, Selections from *The Descent of Man*, Part 3. From *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* ch. 13 “Self-Attention—Shame—Shyness—Modesty: Blushing.”

**Week 9: Mar 16.** Elizabeth Grosz, from *Becoming Undone* (2011), “The Inhuman in the Humanities: Darwin and the Ends of Man.” Ursula Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species*, pp. 133-47. Silvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, “[Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations](#)”, in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human As Praxis*, 9-89

**Week 10: Mar 23.** Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (with emphasis on sections 1-3).

**Week 11: Mar 30.** *BPP*, continued—emphasis on sects. 4-7. Jacques Derrida, “A Kind of Discourse on Method” in *BPP*, 331-58

**Week 12: Apr 6.** Jacques Derrida, “‘Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida’”, trans. Pascale-Ann Brault and Michael Naas, in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, ed. Giovanni Borradori, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Donna Haraway, “The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self and Other in Immune System Discourse” (in *Biopolitics: A Reader*); Roberto Esposito, “Biopolitics” (in *Biopolitics: A Reader*); Margrit Shildrick “(Micro)chimerism, Immunity and Temporality: Rethinking the Ecology of Life and Death,” *Australian Feminist Studies*, 34:99, 10-24.

As required by the University, I remind you that students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

In my own voice, let me observe that we become scholars and critics by modeling ourselves on others. I urge you to read widely this term and to use your reading to find your own style and mode of critical argument. If when preparing an essay or presentation for this class you become in any way concerned about the question of plagiarism, please come and discuss the matter with me.