

PHIL 329H1 F: Topics in 20th-Century Continental Philosophy
Topic: Continental Biopolitical Theory

Fall Term 2023/ University of Toronto St. George Campus (3 credits)

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Instructor:	Natalie Helberg (Lecturer, Department of Philosophy)
Office:	TBA
Email:	natalie.helberg@mail.utoronto.ca (email is my preferred contact method)
Office hours:	Thursday 12:00-14:00 (or by appointment) *There will be no office hours the first week of class
Class schedule:	T & R 15:00-16:30 in person; location: WW119

Course description: ‘Biopolitics’ (or ‘biopower’) refers to contemporary, internally-heterogeneous networks of power which target populations, attempting to manage their characteristics and make them usable in various ways. As a means to these ends, biopower also sets out to administer or control the lives (the health, the energies, the possibilities for being, the affects) and deaths (the nature and circumstances of these deaths, the acceptability of these deaths, the dignity of these deaths) of the individual bodies of which populations are composed. In this course, we will explore thinking on the subject of biopolitics developed within the continental tradition. We will read lengthy selections from Michel Foucault’s *Society Must Be Defended* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, from Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*, from Jacques Derrida’s *The Beast and the Sovereign (Volume 1)*, *Life Death* and *The Death Penalty (Volume 1)*, and from Judith Butler’s *Antigone’s Claim*. Some of the questions we will consider as we study the relationships between these different discourses on biopolitics include: What is biopower’s relation to the concept of sovereignty? Are there sovereign agents of biopower? To what extent is resistance to biopower the affair of sovereign individuals? What happens to biopolitical thinking when we deconstruct the concepts derived from the life sciences which animate biopolitics? Are there significant differences in the ways genealogical and deconstructive methods intervene in the domain of the biopolitical?

Required texts: The texts below must be purchased through the UofT Bookstore. The course will involve studying lengthy selections from these texts and some of the texts in their entirety.

Foucault, Michel. 2003. *Society Must Be Defended*. New York: Picador.

Foucault, Michel. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics*. New York: Picador.

Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford UP.

Derrida, Jacques. 2009. *The Beast and the Sovereign* (Volume 1). Chicago; London: U of Chicago P.

Derrida, Jacques. 2020. *Life Death*. Chicago; London: U of Chicago P.

Derrida, Jacques. 2014. *The Death Penalty* (Volume 1). Chicago; London: U of Chicago P.

Butler, Judith. 2000. *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*. New York; Chichester: Columbia UP.

How the course will run and expectations:

We will meet at our scheduled times in the room that has been assigned to us. Make sure that you monitor Quercus for any announcements and keep apprised of any email communications from me. If ever an emergency constrains me to cancel class, I will notify you using Quercus.

Do your very best to complete the readings for a given week in advance. Many of our texts are difficult. You will be learning how to read the more linguistically challenging texts on our reading list during lectures (I will give you the frameworks you need for the texts to become intelligible to you; specifically, I will introduce you to Derridean deconstruction and the very different critical project developed by Foucault; Agamben develops Foucault's ideas and Butler inherits ideas and tactics from both Derrida and Foucault). Please cultivate a committed reading practice over the course of the term. Make time regularly to sit with and pore over our texts. Having such a practice will help deepen your relation to what I teach you in lecture; it will also help you as you complete writing assignments.

Informal reading policy: I will be working with an informal 'reading policy' as I run the course. The policy is designed to alleviate some of the anxiety students who have a limited amount of time (because they are also obliged to work, or are taking a number of other heavy courses, or for other reasons) often experience as they attempt to complete their coursework. I want the class to be maximally enriching, and so I've loaded it up with fantastic texts. I realize, though, that this can set students up to feel overwhelmed by the course and perhaps unable to rise to its challenges; it can set students up to feel as if they are up against the impossible, or even to feel like abject failures. These feelings are among the worst the contemporary university can foster. How, then, to strike a balance between the desire to teach generously—to give students everything it is possible, as an instructor, to give them—while also refraining from subjecting them to the abuses of finitude that the contemporary university is already so primed and prone to inflict (e.g., acting like dense texts can be processed instantly, or in no time at all, or even acting as if 'time,' that precious resource, is evenly distributed across the student body, when the truth is that some students have more than others)? How, too, to offer resistance to a post-literate culture? Many students struggle with reading itself and with attention. I believe in the value of the activity that is reading, so the solution to the problem of stressing students out with more

reading than they can do *cannot* be that of having no required readings or even a scanty number of them. I view the class as partly an opportunity for students to develop the reading muscles whose atrophy our culture encourages. It is imperative, then, for students in the class to read, and not only read, but read as much as they can—to exercise those muscles, in other words, and transform their limits by pushing them. What I would like students in the class to do, then, is to use the texts on our reading list to cultivate a reading practice guided by the following principles.

1. View the reading list as a challenge to push your reading capacities beyond their own bounds. Everyone will come to the class with different capacities. The point is not to feel that you're competing with your peers; the point is to gauge where you as an individual are and to try to use the class, and the work you do in it, to move past that particular point. If, after the course ends, you've done this (your own reading limits have budged and you find yourself able to productively read more than you were able to before), then you've succeeded.
2. Make time every week to look at, or expose yourself to, the readings for the following week (or as much of the assigned reading as you can).
3. Make a concerted effort to do all of the reading assigned for a given week, BUT don't think you've 'failed' (or are not meeting expectations) if you don't manage to. *Try* to tackle our mountain of texts and then observe how far you were able to go. This is a way of learning about where your limits stand now. Track how they change over time (that is, track how they change during the time of the course and after the course is over).
4. If you don't have time to get to a given text on our reading list, or to a specific section (or specific sections) of a text that were assigned, while the course is running, consider saving it/them for a rainy day in the future. The course is pointing you to interesting resources. We act as if learning can transpire in 12 weeks, but often it takes far more time. Don't be afraid to let the course exceed its own bounds and spill over into your post-course life.
5. You do have to read the texts you work with to produce your written assignments carefully. If you find yourself having to make hard choices about what to read and what to save for another day, prioritize the texts you think you might want to write on. It will be possible to write strong essays on the books we're studying even if you haven't managed to read the texts, or assigned selections, in their entirety; you will have to read substantial portions of our texts (or selections) carefully to write strong essays, however.
6. Do attend lecture. If you haven't had a chance to read a given text (or missed a section or two), you can still learn about it (or them) by listening to me discourse on it (or them) while taking notes. If you happen to be writing on a text that you didn't have time to fully read, this sense of what happens in the parts you haven't read will help you achieve a more rigorous understanding of the parts you have read and are using in your own work.

I will provide notes which indicate the core ideas I've discussed during a given lecture after the lecture via Quercus, as students often find them useful to have while studying the readings independently and while working on written assignments. Please also take your own notes (creating a personalized set of notes while engaged in a learning process is a special, enriching activity!). The lectures themselves will contain more detail than typed-up lecture notes can convey and you may want to capture some of it.

I will invite questions, comments, and some discussion during my lectures. You're free to jump in with questions and comments at any time—just raise your hand.

Evaluation/Assignments:

1) First Essay (30%; due Oct. 7 via Quercus by 11:59pm)

2) Second Essay (30%; due Nov. 25 via Quercus by 11:59pm)

3) Third Essay (30%; due Dec. 15 via Quercus by 11:59pm)

*Instructions and prompts for a given essay will be posted on Quercus at least two weeks before the essay's deadline. The instructions for the Third Essay, which is due in the exam period, will be distributed before the last two weeks of class. Each essay assignment will involve working closely with some of our readings to defend an original thesis.

4) Collection of Examples of Biopolitics in Action (10%; due by or before Dec. 5, our last day of class, via Quercus by 11:59pm)

*Using the knowledge you're acquiring in the course, find 4 distinct and unique examples of biopolitics in the world as you know it. Describe the examples and explain how they exemplify ideas we've encountered in our readings. Try to connect each example to our readings in a different way (you don't want your submissions to be repetitive; they should showcase your knowledge of our course content in its variety). Each 'example,' once detailed and linked to the course content, should be between 250 and 300 words long. Don't provide examples that were already provided in lecture or in our readings; instead, find new ones.

Assignment Submission: All assignments should be submitted via Quercus by 11:59pm on the day they are due.

Extensions: Extensions may be permitted for valid reasons (emergencies, severe illnesses, etc.). Please request an extension before the day the assignment you are requesting an extension for is due. Retroactive extensions may be possible, depending on a person's reasons for requesting

them. Getting in touch with me to explain your situation and see what accommodations are possible never hurts!

Late Policy: Late assignments for which an extension has not been granted will be penalized (2% of the grade will be subtracted each day after the deadline until the assignment is submitted).

Email Policy: If you have questions that require elaborate philosophical responses or detailed explanations, please come to my office hours or schedule a meeting with me to pose them (I won't have time to write up a treatise for you by email, but I'm happy to speak with you and help you that way—I can answer questions much more efficiently using spoken language). For practical questions: First, make sure I haven't already answered the question (e.g., on the syllabus or on Quercus), then, if I haven't, feel free to reach out. You can email me to ask for extensions or to set up meetings. Email: natalie.helberg@mail.utoronto.ca.

Re-marking Policy: When a graded assignment is returned to you, please consider the feedback provided on it carefully. If, after careful consideration of this feedback, you feel that your grade is unfair, you can reach out to me and request a re-evaluation. In the email you send me, you must explain your reasons for thinking the initial grade is unfair. I will then decide whether a re-evaluation is warranted. There are three possible outcomes of a re-evaluation: the grade may remain the same, the grade may be adjusted upwards, or, in cases where a reconsideration of the work makes me think I was initially too generous, the initial grade may be lowered.

Attendance Policy: Attendance is not mandatory, and you will not lose marks if there are some lectures you must miss. Our texts are too difficult to grapple with alone though, and genuine success with respect to the written work for the course will hinge on attending lectures (think of the lectures as access routes to our hard readings).

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:

Plagiarism (misrepresenting the work of others as one's own, or failing to cite one's sources properly) and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses and will not be tolerated. Offenses of this kind run counter to the aims of education and evaluation: Skill acquisition (one becomes a better reader, writer and thinker because one does the work) and fair assessment (one's grades should reflect one's actual capacities; competition in the academic environment should be fair). In order to avoid inadvertent acts of plagiarism, students should familiarize themselves with the following resources: <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai> (the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters: a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations) and <http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca>. Reach out to me or your TA for advice on anything you find unclear.

Accessibility:

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. Accessibility-related concerns should be communicated to me. I will do my best to accommodate students who require accommodations. Depending on the nature of the accommodation, students requiring accommodations may also need to contact accessibility services: www.accessibility.utoronto.ca

Reading Schedule

*Note: Our reading schedule isn't set in stone and we will be free to adjust it as the course progresses if we need to. Some topics may require slightly more time to cover than our reading schedule indicates, in which case we will allow them to spill over into subsequent weeks. Think of the course, of our thinking in the course, as an organism developing, rather than as a body of pre-partitioned information whose delivery is rigidly determined in advance.

<i>Weeks</i>	<i>Readings</i>
1 <i>Sept. 7/2023</i>	Introduction to the course & lecture on Foucault. Start reading Foucault, Michel. 2003. <i>Society Must Be Defended</i> . New York: Picador.1-40.
2 <i>Sept. 12/2023</i> <i>Sept. 14/2023</i> ,	Foucault, Michel. 2003. <i>Society Must Be Defended</i> . New York: Picador. 43-85. Foucault, Michel. 2003. <i>Society Must Be Defended</i> . New York: Picador. 140-165 and 189-212
3 <i>Sept. 19/2023</i> <i>Sept. 21/2023</i> <i>Sept. 23/2023</i>	Foucault, Michel. 2003. <i>Society Must Be Defended</i> . New York: Picador. 215-223 and 239-272. Foucault, Michel. 2008. <i>The Birth of Biopolitics</i> . New York: Picador. 51-70. *Instructions and topics for First Essay distributed via Quercus
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<p>Sept. 26/2023</p> <p>Sept. 28/2023</p>	<p>Foucault, Michel. 2008. <i>The Birth of Biopolitics</i>. New York: Picador. Selections TBA.</p> <p>Foucault, Michel. 2008. <i>The Birth of Biopolitics</i>. New York: Picador. Selections TBA.</p>
<p>5</p> <p>Oct. 3/2023</p> <p>Oct. 5/2023</p> <p>Oct. 7/2023</p>	<p>Foucault, Michel. 2008. <i>The Birth of Biopolitics</i>. New York: Picador. 291-324.</p> <p>Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. <i>Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life</i>. Stanford: Stanford UP. 1-29.</p> <p>*Important note: I feel the need to provide a trigger warning for this text. In some sections, Agamben includes highly disturbing details about the Holocaust. These sections are emotionally difficult to read. If you have concerns about your ability to read this text, please get in touch with me. I will be able to give people a sense of which specific sections are the most disturbing and which ones should not be triggering after I've begun prepping my lectures on the book later in the term (but obviously before we're scheduled to study it).</p> <p>*Second important note: I may adjust the Agamben readings so that we can look at more of the book together.</p> <p>First Essay due via Quercus by 11:59pm.</p>
<p>6</p> <p>Oct. 10/2023</p> <p>Oct. 12/2023</p>	<p>Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. <i>Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life</i>. Stanford: Stanford UP. 29-62.</p> <p>Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. <i>Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life</i>. Stanford: Stanford UP. 71-103 and 166-188.</p>
<p>7</p> <p>Oct. 17/2023</p>	<p>Derrida, Jacques. 2009. <i>The Beast and the Sovereign (Volume 1)</i>. Chicago; London: U of Chicago P. 1-35.</p>

Oct. 19/2023	Derrida, Jacques. 2009. <i>The Beast and the Sovereign (Volume 1)</i> . Chicago; London: U of Chicago P. 1-70 (Optional: read to p.88)
Oct. 21/2023	*First Essay returned
8	
Oct.24/2023	Derrida, Jacques. 2020. <i>Life Death</i> . Chicago; London: U of Chicago P. Selections TBA.
Oct. 26/2023	Derrida, Jacques. 2020. <i>Life Death</i> . Chicago; London: U of Chicago P. Selections TBA.
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Oct. 31/2023	Derrida, Jacques. 2020. <i>Life Death</i> . Chicago; London: U of Chicago P. Selections TBA.
Nov. 2/2023	Derrida, Jacques. 2020. <i>Life Death</i> . Chicago; London: U of Chicago P. Selections TBA.
Nov. 4/2023	*Instructions for Second Essay distributed via Quercus
10	
Nov. 6/2023	Last day to drop courses.
Nov. 6-10/2023	No classes. Reading week.
11	
Nov. 14/2023	Derrida, Jacques. 2014. <i>The Death Penalty (Volume 1)</i> . Chicago; London: U of Chicago P. 1-27. (First Session December 8, 1999).
Nov. 16/2023	Derrida, Jacques. 2014. <i>The Death Penalty (Volume 1)</i> . Chicago; London: U of Chicago P. 28-46. (First Session December 8, 1999 Continued)
12	

Nov. 21/2023	Derrida, Jacques. 2014. <i>The Death Penalty (Volume 1)</i> . Chicago; London: U of Chicago P. 47-96. (Second Session Dec 15, 1999 & Third Session Jan 12, 1999)
Nov. 23/2023	Derrida, Jacques. 2014. <i>The Death Penalty (Volume 1)</i> . Chicago; London: U of Chicago P. 97-122. (Fourth Session January 19, 2000)
Nov. 25/2023	<p>*Second Essay due via Quercus by 11:59pm.</p> <p>*Instructions and topics for Third Essay distributed.</p>
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Nov. 28/2023	Butler, Judith. 2000. <i>Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death</i> . New York; Chichester: Columbia UP. 1-25.
Nov. 30/2023	Butler, Judith. 2000. <i>Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death</i> . New York; Chichester: Columbia UP. 27-55.
14	
Dec. 5/2023	<p>Butler, Judith. 2000. <i>Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death</i>. New York; Chichester: Columbia UP. 58-82.</p> <p>*Collection of Examples of Biopolitics in Action due via Quercus by 11:59pm</p> <p>Last day of class.</p>
Dec. 9/2023	*Second Essay returned
Dec. 9-20/2023	Exam Period
Dec. 15/2023	Third Essay due via Quercus by 11:59pm.