

PHIL 190, Section 01, “Biopolitics and Necropolitics”

Fall 2023

Wednesday, 6:00-8:45 PM

Sweeney Hall 241

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Course Description

This course focuses on the management of life and death. We will consider questions such as: Why do some lives matter more than others? What social, political, and economic factors structure the vulnerability and hardship faced by different groups? How does one become a second-class citizen? How are some lives pathologized and made into a problem? We will examine these questions via the lens of biopolitics and necropolitics. For Michel Foucault, biopolitics refers to the techniques used by states to govern, optimize, and regulate the life of the population. This ‘optimization’ is not simply concerned with maximizing life expectancies. Rather, a central function is to protect the lives of those regarded as making the state better, while exposing all others to death and violence. Relatedly, Achille Mbembe’s notion of necropolitics studies the creation and management of “death-worlds” wherein people are subjected to perpetual precarity, such as refugee camps, prisons, national borders, as well as poverty-ridden and war-torn areas.

Prerequisites: PHIL 70A, PHIL 70B and 6 units of upper division philosophy, or instructor consent.