

## **Textual Bodies in the Study of Religion**

Foucault's Sexuality

REL 630 | Fall 2017 | M 17:45–20:00

Professor William Robert

Preferred pronouns: he | him | his

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### **Approaches**

How do religion and sexuality relate? How do they relate to each other? How do they, and their relations, relate to other things—to textual bodies, for example? (What *are* textual bodies?) How can we follow, comprehend, make, unmake these relations: of religion and sexuality, and other things?

And what does Michel Foucault's work have to do with these questions? How can Michel Foucault's work help us to respond to these questions?

In our seminar, we will use this last question as a way of approaching, and as a resource for beginning to develop, responses to these other questions.

Why Michel Foucault? Because Foucault refigured "sexuality." Foucault fundamentally changed how we imagine, and reimagine, humanities, as disciplines and as forms of life. Foucault affected humanistic inquiry—and how and why we do it—as profoundly as any European writer during the last half-century. Despite Jean Baudrillard's injunction, we cannot forget Foucault.

The textual corpus named "Foucault" is much too much to take on in a semester. It is too big, too complicated, too complicating. So we will focus our attention on a part of this corpus: Foucault's texts on sexuality and religion between 1976 and 1984. Focusing on these years is no accident. They mark a period of fundamental changes in, and for, Foucault's work, especially on religion and sexuality and their relations. We will track those changes in our readings of Foucault's texts.

To focus our attention even further, we will track 5 terms through these texts—religion, sexuality, confession, truth, power—and relations between, and entailed by, these terms. We will investigate how Foucault maps these terms and their relations in *The Will To Know*, the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, and how he remaps them (and remaps them again) in his subsequent seminars, at the Collège de France and elsewhere.

Focusing our attention will allow us to read carefully. It will allow us to consider thoughtfully the claims Foucault makes, the stories Foucault tells, the languages Foucault uses, about sexuality and religion—and their implications and stakes. It will allow us, among other things, to consider translation and its roles in how we read Foucault.

**Aims**

Our seminar's materials, discussions, and activities work together in the service of our seminar's learning goals:

- (1) to understand and articulate Foucault's senses of "sexuality" and its attendant terms (e.g., confession, *dispositif*, power, problematization, truth);
- (2) to understand and articulate roles religion plays in Foucault's senses of "sexuality";
- (3) to understand and articulate the implications and stakes of religion's and sexuality's relations in Foucault's texts;
- (4) to use religion and sexuality, and their relations via Foucault's texts, to think critically about studying religion;
- (5) to translate these relations into broader discourses of religious studies and of humanistic inquiry.

**Texts**

Michel Foucault, *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self* (9780226188546)

Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité 1: La volonté de savoir* (9782070740703)

Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, volume 1 (= *The Will To Know*) (9780679724698)

David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (9780195093711)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (9781316602591)

Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's "History of Sexuality" and the Colonial Order of Things* (9780822316909)

Additional texts will be available on Blackboard. Be sure to have in seminar paper copies of whatever text(s) we are discussing on a given day.

**Communal Responsibilities**

Imaginative sympathy, hermeneutic charity, close reading, critical acumen, inventive analysis, conceptual precision, linguistic clarity, punctual attendance, active participation, sustained engagement, mutual respect, academic integrity.

Our seminar will follow Syracuse University policies on academic integrity, religious holidays, and related concerns.

**Guiding Principles**

- (1) None of us knows everything.
- (2) Each of us is here primarily to learn.
- (3) Each of us can contribute to our learning—our own and others'.
- (4) Learning requires differences.
- (5) Questions are usually more illuminating, and more interesting, than responses.
- (6) Responses are primarily ways of asking better next questions.

**Assignments**

In addition to active participation in our seminar meetings, the following learning activities afford opportunities to deepen, to assess, and to contribute to our learning. We will share with our seminar all learning activities' products.

### Prehistory

Understanding Foucault's textual corpus is easier, and richer, if we understand some of this corpus's prehistory. This prehistory includes archives, discourses, writers and their writings. To explore a part of this prehistory, each seminar participant will write (in 1000 words) and share with our seminar a critical assessment of Foucault's Nietzschean heritage. This assessment should engage and draw upon Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* and Foucault's "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"—and nothing else. It should not be a summary but an enactment of critique as Foucault figures it.

### Summary

Understanding Foucault's *The Will To Know* and subsequent work demands understanding Foucault's earlier writings. To gain this understanding, each seminar participant will write (in 1500 words) and share with our seminar a summary of 1 of Foucault's books written before *The Will To Know: History of Madness, The Birth of the Clinic, Death and the Labyrinth, The Order of Things, The Archaeology of Knowledge, Discipline and Punish*. No more than 2 seminar participants should select and summarize any 1 of these books.

### Book review

Understanding Foucault's texts means understanding them in their discursive contexts. Shaping those contexts are the voluminous writings about Foucault's texts. To gain and share senses of these worlds of secondary literature, each seminar participant will write (in 1000 words) and share with our seminar a review of a book about Foucault's textual corpus, selected from a pre-distributed list. Each seminar participant should select and review a different book.

### Critical presentation

Taking critique (as Foucault figures it) seriously calls for subjecting Foucault's work to practices of critique. We will do that halfway through our seminar. We will read and report on 2 critiques of Foucault's *The Will To Know*: Ann Laura Stoler's, concerning race and colonialisms, and David Halperin's, concerning queer politics. Half of our seminar's participants will read one text, the other half the other. Then each group will work together to present (in 50 minutes) its text's critique—and its critiques of it—to the seminar's other participants. The presentations' aims will be primarily pedagogic. Each group will earn a collective grade for its work.

### Journal special issue

Our seminar's culmination will be the collective production of an imaginary special issue of the journal *Foucault Studies*. Each seminar participant will contribute a 5000-word article related to the issue's theme. The journal committee, comprised of seminar participants, will be responsible for organizing and producing the issue: selecting and announcing the theme, arranging and editing and formatting the submissions, and sharing the issue with seminar participants. The journal committee will earn a collective grade for its work.

### Colloquium

Our seminar will conclude with a colloquium. The colloquium will consist of discussion panels, organized by topics. Each seminar participant will be a member of a discussion panel. Discussants will build on, rather than repeat, their earlier work in our seminar. Each panel's discussants should collaborate to reach for new

insights, to pose new questions, and to offer new responses. The colloquium committee (those seminar participants not on the journal committee) will be responsible for organizing and running the colloquium and will earn a collective grade for its work.

### Assessment

Our seminar's learning activities will comprise your seminar grade based on the following weighted valuations.

Active participation	15%
Prehistory	5%
Summary	5%
Book review	5%
Critical presentation	5%
Committee work	5%
Journal submission	45%
Colloquium discussion	15%

Learning activities are due by 17:45 on the designated days. Submit each written assignment (1) to me via email as an attached, readable, virus-free, Microsoft Word document and (2) to our seminar archive on Blackboard as a PDF document. I will not accept late work or work not submitted according to these procedures. I will translate letter grades based on the following scale.

	B+ = 88%	C = 75%
A = 95%	B = 85%	
A- = 92%	B- = 82%	F = 65%

I will calculate seminar grades based on the following scale.

	B+ = 88–89%	C = 70–79%
A = 93–100%	B = 83–87%	
A- = 90–92%	B- = 80–82%	F = 0–69%

### Words for Thought

*"Ma façon de plus être le même est, par définition, la part la plus singulière de ce que je suis."* (Michel Foucault, "Pour une morale de l'inconfort," in *Dits et écrits*, 3:784)

*"My problem, or the sole possibility of theoretical work that I feel, would be to leave, according to the most intelligible design, the trace of the movements by which I am no longer in the place where I was just now."* (Michel Foucault, *Du gouvernement des vivants*, 74–75)

### Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

Date	Topic	Focal Foucault Text(s)	Supplementary Texts	Assignment
28 August	Beginning with Critique	"Foucault" "What Is Critique?" Collège de France lecture, 5 January 1983 (first hour)	Gary Gutting, "Michel Foucault: A User's Manual" Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?"	
4 September	Labor Day			
11 September	Genealogy and Other Problems	"Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations"	Carol Bacchi, "Why Study Problematizations" Arnold Davidson, "Archaeology, Genealogy, Ethics" Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i>	Prehistory
18 September	Stories of Sexuality	<i>The Will To Know</i> , §1	Sigmund Freud, "Infantile Sexuality" Sigmund Freud, "Repression" Judith Butler, "Subjection, Resistance, Resignification"	
25 September	Disclosing Discourses	<i>The Will To Know</i> , §2	Judith Butler, "Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions" Thomas Flynn, "Foucault's Mapping of History" Mark Jordan, "Chatting Genitals"	Summary

Date	Topic	Focal Foucault Text(s)	Supplementary Texts	Assignment
2 October	Arts of Pleasure, Sciences of Sexuality	<i>The Will To Know</i> , §3 Collège de France lecture, 19 February 1975	Judith Butler, "Bodily Confessions" Karma Lochrie, "Desiring Foucault" Pierre Payer, "Foucault on Penance and the Shaping of Sexuality"	
9 October	<i>Dispositif</i> and Power	<i>The Will To Know</i> , §4	Matti Peltonen, "From Discourse to <i>Dispositif</i> " Carol Pollis, "The Apparatus of Sexuality" Joseph Rouse, "Power / Knowledge"	Book review
16 October	Biopolitics of Life and Death	<i>The Will To Know</i> , §5 Collège de France lecture, 17 March 1976	Francesco Paolo Adorno, "Power over Life, Politics of Death" Judith Butler, "Sexual Inversions" Judith Revel, "Identity, Nature, Life"	
23 October	Critique Enacted	<i>The Will To Know</i> Ann Laura Stoler, <i>Race and the Education of Desire</i> David Halperin, <i>Saint Foucault</i>	Jana Sawicki, "Queering Foucault and the Subject of Feminism" Brad Elliott Stone, "The Down Low and the Sexuality of Race"	Critical presentation

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Focal Foucault Text(s)</b>	<b>Supplementary Texts</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
30 October	Turn Back Time	<i>About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self</i>	James Bernauer and Michael Mahon, "Michel Foucault's Ethical Imagination" Philippe Chevallier, "Vers l'éthique" Mark Jordan, "The Sobbing Matron and the Loquacious Monk"	
6 November	Confessions	Collège de France lectures, 6 February 1980, 5 March 1980, 7 January 1981, 25 February 1981, 25 March 1981	Arnold Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics" Daniele Lorenzini, "Foucault, Regimes of Truth, and the Making of the Subject" Judith Revel, "Between Politics and Ethics"	
13 November	Finally Telling Truth	Collège de France lectures, 12 January 1983 (second hour), 1 February 1984, 28 March 1984	Frédéric Gros, "La <i>parrêsia</i> chez Foucault" Dianna Taylor, "Resisting the Subject"	Journal submissions
Thanksgiving break				
27 November	Other Bodies, Other Pleasures	"Sexual Choice, Sexual Act" "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity"	Mathieu Potte- Bonneville, "Les corps de Michel Foucault"	Journal distribution
4 December	Colloquium			Colloquium discussions