

The Midwest Faculty Seminar

Death and the Politics of Life

March 1-3, 2012

How do life and death assume political meaning? What are the basic processes by which the lives of individuals and of populations become the objects of political control? And how can we understand the impact of the politicization of life on some of the most important political questions of our time? This seminar will look at the emergence of Biopolitics in the modern West and at the influence it has had on the development of law, philosophy, politics, theology and medicine. Part of our inquiry will focus on the important accounts of biopolitics and biopower offered by thinkers like Michael Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Derrida. We will, however, also try to construct a link between these theoretical works and the practical effects that biopolitics has had on how we think about life and death in the political sphere. The seminar, therefore, will also consider the politics of life as it pertains to thorny political issues surrounding health care policy and the end-of-life care, genomics and medical ethics, abortion and reproductive health, and human and animal rights. Our hope is that these two modalities through which we register the politics of life and death might be brought together in mutually enlightening ways.