In a series of lectures and monographs written between 1973-1978 Michel Foucault proposed a radical rereading of the history of the modern world. If we consider modernity as a particular historical engagement that emerged from the religious, military, economic, technological, philosophical, scientific, and political upheavals that beset Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, then we can begin to apprehend why Foucault proposed that during the modern period, for the first time in human history, humans came to conceive of themselves historically as living beings. When humans began to think of themselves as living beings living in a world of other living beings—as what we now would call a species—they altered earlier metaphysical and religious worldviews that had simultaneously placed humans above other beings and ranked them in relation to one another according to a divine hierarchy (supposedly) ordained by God. However, this change in the fundamental significance of humanness leads us to a basic question: Following the new, “modern” way of understanding, how do humans make and make sense of their relations to one another and to themselves?

In order to ruminate on this question, Foucault introduced the elusive notions of “biopolitics” and “biopower,” notions that take the “life” of the human organism as a hinge that articulates us simultaneously as individuals and as populations. This vital parsing of the world allows us to situate the political, economic, medical, psychiatric, sociological, biological, criminological, and sexological discourses about human beings that began to appear during the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Following Foucault, we can say that these new disciplines for making sense of humanness—which he labels the “human sciences”—participate in a network of power relations that saturates us individually and collectively. Thus they not only inform who and what we “are,” but also shape what it might be possible for us to become. In reading Foucault’s lectures and monographs slowly and closely, we will try to appreciate Foucault’s endeavor to understand what he called “the history of the present.”

**PRE-REQS: 988:301, 302, or 303**