

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON VULNERABILITY

DON KULICK

Fall Term 2020

Thursdays 15.00-17.00, with one exception (7 October, which is a Wednesday)

Venue to be determined

The idea of vulnerability is currently undergoing re-evaluation in the social sciences and the humanities. From having been perceived as a condition from which subjects should be defended, rescued or liberated, vulnerability and passivity have increasingly come to be theorized as a position and experience that confronts us with the limits of understanding, empathy, ethics and theory. This course will discuss work that attempts to engage with vulnerability as a challenge that can guide us towards new ways of thinking about and engaging with the world.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Active class participation and presentations. Throughout the course, you will be called on to present and discuss the arguments made by the various authors we will read. You will also be asked at various points to prepare introductions to the literature. The point of these introductions, which must last no longer than 5 minutes, is to quickly summarize the material and open the discussion to topics that you feel merit attention.
2. A total of four critical/reaction papers posted on the course site. You may choose whichever four weeks you like. The papers should be about one page in length, at 16 pt. line spacing, Times New Roman font. They may deal with any questions the readings raise for you, such as queries or criticisms you have of the authors' method or argument; connections to other readings; disparities among the readings; implications of the readings for important issues in anthropology or ethnography, and the like.

A guiding rule of engagement in this class is: be generous. The authors we are reading are not stupid, and they have probably considered at some length most of the questions or objections you may raise. With that in mind, engage with the texts in the spirit of dialogue and generosity, not opposition and attack. I put tremendous stock in exegesis and will stress this throughout the class, because in order to engage critically with a text, you need to have really understood what it says. So make sure that you work out the various authors' arguments clearly before you engage in any kind of critique.

To facilitate discussion, the papers must be posted by noon on the Wednesday before the material is to be discussed in class. Everyone should take 30 minutes before class to read through the papers that have been posted there. These papers will not be graded but they obviously should make it evident that you have read the relevant literature.

3. A final paper that uses the literature to discuss a topic of your choice that puts the various topics covered in the course in conversation with one another. The paper should primarily be exegetical and must range over a number of the arguments developed by scholars whose works we read during the course. It must be written in English.

By **15 October** you must submit a written one page summary of the topic you plan to write on, along with a list of the literature you plan on using.

The paper is due by **Friday 6 November** at noon. Put a hard copy of the paper in my mailbox in the Anthropology Department, and email me the paper as an attachment to don.kulick@antro.uu.se.

Length: no more than 10 pages, excluding title page and bibliography (Times New Roman 12 pt. font, double spaced, 1 inch margins on all sides). Do not use footnotes. Do not forget to number the pages.

REQUIRED BOOKS

You are expected to buy or borrow the following books and you must read them thoroughly before the class in which they will be discussed.

Butler, Judith 1997. *Excitable Speech: the politics of the performative*. New York: Routledge.

Coetzee, J.M. 1999. *The Lives of Animals*. Princeton: Princeton Univ Press.

Derrida, Jacques 2008. *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. Fordham Univ Press (or read the article version, in *Critical Inquiry*)

Foucault, Michel 1978. *The history of sexuality, Vol. 1*. Any edition.

Kulick, Don & Jens Rydström 2015. *Loneliness and its Opposite: sex, disability and ethical engagement*. Duke Univ Press.

Morrison, Toni 1992. *Playing in the Dark: whiteness and the literary imagination*. Boston: Harvard Univ Press.

Nussbaum, Martha 2007. *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. Harvard Univ Press.

Turner, Bryan S. 2006. *Vulnerability and Human Rights*. The Pennsylvania State Univ Press.

Book chapters will be provided, you should find the articles online.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: it is best to read the literature in the order it is listed below in each section.

Session 1. Introduction, 10 September

Turner, Bryan S. 2006. *Vulnerability and Human Rights*. The Pennsylvania State Univ Press.

Foucault, Michel 1978. *The history of sexuality, Vol. 1*. Any edition.

Kulick, Don 2005. Four hundred thousand Swedish perverts. *GLQ* 11(2): 205-236.

Young, Iris Marion 1997. "Asymmetrical Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder and Enlarged Thought." *Constellations* 3 (3): 340-63.

Note: you are expected to have read both these books and the articles before the first class. Be ready to summarize and discuss them.

Session 2. Nussbaum on the capabilities approach, 17 September

Nussbaum, Martha 2007. *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. Harvard Univ Press.

Session 3. Animals and vulnerability, 24 September

Berger, John 2007 (1972). Why look at animals? In *The Animals Reader*, edited by Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald. Bloomsbury Academic.

Descartes, Rene 2007. From letters of 1646 and 1649. In *The Animals Reader*, edited by Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald. Bloomsbury Academic.

Heidegger, Martin 1995. *The fundamental concepts of metaphysics: world, finitude, solitude*. Indiana Univ Press, read pages 193-212.

Derrida, Jacques 2002. The animal that therefore I am (more to follow). *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2): 369-418. NOTE: this long article has also been published as a book by Fordham Univ Press. Read the text in either format. Read everything, but skip pages 404-415 in the article. Check with me regarding the corresponding pages in the book.

– 2003. And say the animal responded? In *Zoontologies: the question of the animal*, edited by Cary Wolfe. Minneapolis: Univ of Minnesota Press, 121-46, and included in *The Animal that therefore I am* volume.

– 1991. 'Eating well', or the calculation of the subject: an interview with Jacques Derrida. In *Who Comes After the Subject?*, edited by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy. London: Routledge, 96-119; Read only pages 111-18.

Coetzee, J.M. 1999. *The Lives of Animals*. Princeton Univ Press. Read pages 1-69 and Barbara Smut's commentary, pages 107-120.

Session 4. Ethical engagement, 1 October

Kulick, Don & Jens Rydström 2016. *Loneliness and its Opposite: sex, disability and ethical engagement*. Duke Univ Press.

Kulick, Don 2015. The problem of speaking for the other *redux*: insistence on disclosure and the ethics of engagement. *Knowledge Cultures* 3 (6): 7-27.

Session 5. Vulnerability and language, 7 October (OBS – this is a Wednesday)

Derrida, Jacques 1972. Signature Event Context. In *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, edited by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Columbia Univ Press, pp. 80-111.

Althusser, L. (1993). Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards and Investigation). In *Essays In Ideology*, New York: Verso, p. 1-50.

Butler, Judith 1997. *Excitable Speech: the politics of the performative*. New York: Routledge.

Kulick, Don 2003. No. *Language & Communication* 23: 139-151.

Session 6. Levinas on the face of the Other, 15 October

- Levinas, Emmanuel 1951. Is ontology fundamental? In *Emmanuel Levinas: basic philosophical writings*, edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, 1996, Indiana Univ Press.
- 1969. Ethics and the face. In *Totality and Infinity*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Duquesne Univ Press.
 - 1988. Useless suffering. In *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, edited by Robert Bernasconi and David Wood. Routledge (156-167)
 - 1990. The name of a dog, or natural rights. In *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, translated by Sean Hand. Johns Hopkins Univ Press (151-53)
- Levinas, Emmanuel and Richard Kearney 1986. Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas. In *Face To Face With Levinas*, edited by Richard A. Cohen. State Univ of New York Press, (13-33)
- Wright, Tamra, Peter Hughes, Alison Ainley 1988. The paradox of morality: an interview with Emmanuel Levinas. In *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, edited by Robert Bernasconi and David Wood. Routledge (168-80).

Session 7. The power and vicissitudes of silence and ignorance, 22 October

- Reread Foucault's remarks on silence in *The history of sexuality, Vol. 1.*, esp. p. 27.
- Morrison, Toni 1992. *Playing in the Dark: whiteness and the literary imagination*. Boston: Harvard Univ Press.
- Proctor, Robert 2008. Agnotology: a missing term to describe the cultural production of ignorance (and its study). In *Agnotology: the making and unmaking of ignorance*, edited by Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ Press. pp. 1-33.
- Billig, Michael 1997. The dialogic unconscious: psychoanalysis, discursive psychology and the nature of repression. *British Journal of Social Psychology* 36: 139-159.
- Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve 1990. Axiomatic. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Berkeley: Univ of California Press, pp. 1-66.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is obligatory. You are allowed one unexcused absence, which must be made up by submitting a 5-page paper that summarizes the literature read during the week of the absence. This paper must be turned in, in class, the week following the absence. Two absences during the term for any reason will result in an automatic fail grade.

GRADING

The class will be graded as Pass/Fail. The final grade is not determined on the basis of a strict mathematical calculation, but will be based on whether you have read the literature thoroughly and can actively participate in class discussions, and on your degree of seriousness, thoughtfulness, and engagement.

If you haven't read the literature for a given week, or if you don't complete all four reaction papers, or the final essay, you will fail the course.

INCOMPLETE

You cannot receive an Incomplete in this class.

POLICY ON LATE ASSIGNMENTS

No late papers will be accepted.

USE OF COMPUTERS AND CELL PHONES IN CLASS

Please turn off and put away all cell phones and computers during class.

TONE OF CRITIQUE IN CLASS

READ THIS QUOTE FROM JOHN RAWLS AND KEEP IT IN MIND WHEN ENGAGING WITH THE LITERATURE

I always assumed...that the writers we were studying were always much smarter than I was...If I saw a mistake in their arguments, I supposed they saw it too and must have dealt with it, but where? So I looked for their way out, not mine. Sometimes their way out was historical: in their day the question need not be raised; or wouldn't arise or be fruitfully discussed. Or there was a part of the text I had overlooked, or hadn't read.