

Workshop

Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics

July 10, 2018, 2 pm to 5 pm

Goethe Universität, Campus Westend, SH 3.101

2.00

Introduction (Thomas Lemke & Martin Saar)

2.15

Miguel Vatter (Professor in Political Science, College of Business, Government & Law, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia):

“Human Rights, Legal Personhood, and the Impersonality of Embodied Life: Considerations on the Biopolitics of Plessner and Esposito”

3.15

Coffee Break

3.30

Vanessa Lemm (Professor in Philosophy, Vice President and Executive Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Flinders University):

“Friedrich Nietzsche on Human Nature, Gender and Politics”

4.30

General discussion

Organized by:

Professur “Biotechnologie, Natur und Gesellschaft” (Thomas Lemke)
& Professur “Sozialphilosophie” (Martin Saar)

– no registration required –

Abstracts

Human Rights, Legal Personhood, and the Impersonality of Embodied Life

There is widespread agreement that human rights are connected to an idea of the human person. In this paper I wish to trouble this connection between humanity and personhood. For personhood, as Roberto Esposito has argued recently, is also a device of representation or a power apparatus (*dispositif*) whose unquestioned adoption makes it hard for human rights to be those particular kinds of “rights” possessed by “all human beings simply in virtue of their humanity.” The first hypothesis that is discussed is that human rights are intended to offer protection to the “precarious” reality of human embodied life, but the fiction of legal personhood generates an effect of “dis-embodiment” whereby this human life is left exposed and defenceless.

However, against Esposito, in this paper I argue that the validity of the above claim does not, as such, lead the discourse on human rights into an impasse. In the second part of the paper I propose a way to reconstruct the idea of legal personhood from a basis in the philosophical anthropology of embodied life, so that it may be more adequate to the required conception of human rights. To do so, I discuss Helmuth Plessner’s account of human embodiment as “excentric positionality” and suggest that his biologically-informed concept of the person need not turn embodied life into a thing to be possessed because it can be conceived as an “impersonal” or “third person” perspective on embodied life that turns this life itself into the subject of human rights. In this way, the need for human rights emerges from the embodied character of human personhood and, furthermore, such rights foster the co-immunity of embodied lives rather than the immunity of abstract, property-owning persons.

Friedrich Nietzsche on Human Nature, Gender and Politics”

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche envisages the naturalisation of the human being, its retranslation back into nature, as a liberating experience where the human being rediscovers nature as a creative and transformative force that the human being embodies. For Nietzsche, the question of the future of the human being is contingent on whether the human being is capable of re-embodiment of nature. Human nature for Nietzsche is not a given of the (human) body, something that belongs to the human being per se. Instead, nature in the human being comes with the task of retranslation, re-planting, re-embodiment of nature. This is why Nietzsche’s thinking about nature is future oriented, opening up the horizon of human transformation. In this paper, I argue that there is a distinctly political dimension to Nietzsche’s thinking about the transformation of human nature that can be extracted from his famously controversial views on the gender politics of his time. On my account, the rediscovery of nature is inseparable from the embodiment of a new idea of sexuality that is inherently political. I distinguish in Nietzsche’s thinking between a biopolitics of domination, where sexuality functions as a dispositive of domination and an affirmative biopolitics where sexuality is no longer bound by preconceived ideas of gender and where a renewed embodiment of nature opens up the horizons for social imaginaries of liberation and creative transformation.