In Europe, from the late Middle Ages onward the concept of ‘race’ was used in order to distinguish different kinds of people. As a rule the distinctions drawn between human races were accompanied by clear cut moral hierarchies. Most early modern Europeans appear to have considered racial differences the result of a variety of external circumstances, but during the Enlightenment as a result of taxonomical attempts to classify man within the wider context of nature a modern, allegedly scientific racism arose, according to which these distinctions had a biological basis. In this course we will concentrate on the way in which European authors active prior to Darwin, who denied the reality of different human ‘species’, and to such 19th- and 20th-century racists as De Gobineau, Chamberlain, and Rosenberg tried to meet the challenge implied by the discovery of peoples and cultures that looked fundamentally different from the ones early modern Europeans had been accustomed to, born as they were into a world which only recently had started to globalize. Some of the texts involved take the superiority of the inhabitants of Europe for granted. Other early modern authors, however, reveal an evident fascination sometimes coupled with genuine admiration for indigenous ‘natives’.

Course Outline

We will start with four introductory lectures on proto-racist attitudes in Classical Antiquity and (early) Christianity, focusing on the Greco-Roman notion of ‘barbarians’ and biblical accounts of human diversity. Next, the outlines will be drawn of some of the major medieval and early modern strands of thought on race. Finally, in the last two sessions, we will read a number of texts, from Montaigne to Kant, which students will be expected to present and discuss in class. Students will be graded according to the quality of their presentation and a separate paper on the primary text they have (co-)presented.

Recommended literature:

• Dikötter, Frank, The Discourse of Race in Modern China (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1992).
• Eigen, Sara, and Mark Larrimore (eds.), The German Invention of Race (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).
• Garnsey, Peter, Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to St Augustine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
• --, The Burdens of Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
• Squadrito, Kay, ‘Racism and Empiricism’, Behaviorism 7 (1979), 105-115.
• Zack, Naomi, Thinking about Race (Belmont Ca.: Wadsworth Cengage, 2006).
• https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/race/ (Michael James)

Primary Sources

Montaigne, *Essais*, Chapter XXX. *Of Cannibals*: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3600/3600-h/3600-h.htm#link2HCH0030 (Links to an external site.)


