

SYLLABUS

Course Description *From Humanism to Posthumanism*

This course develops around the notion of the human, presenting it not as a static category, but as a process which is constantly evolving. In the first part of the course, we will explore key concepts such as: evolution (Darwin), the overhuman (Nietzsche), technology (Heidegger). In parallel, we will address the notion of the posthuman which, in the contemporary debate, has become a key term to cope with the urgency for an integral redefinition of the human. The philosophical landscape which has developed, includes several schools of thought such as: Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism and New Materialism. We will explore the differences between these movements, entering actively into the debate. In the second part of the course, we will address the deconstruction of the notion of the human, following different assets of discrimination: class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age and physical abilities, among others. From Marx and Engels, we will explore the Seventies and Eighties (Feminism, Critical Race Theory, Post-Colonialism) to the Nineties (Intersectionality, Cyborg Theory, Animal Studies). We will focus on Environmental Studies and the rise of the Anthropocene, developing an open conversation to envision desirable futures for humans and posthumans alike. Among the themes the course explores are the philosophical and political debates that followed the creation of global empires, as societies from around the world confronted imperial policies and institutions. The course also considers the rise of vast, new international markets, the spread of revolutionary and national liberation movements, and the planetary effects of globalization. In the final part of the Course, we will provide an interactive environment where students directly engage with the contemporary debate. In four workshops, we will discuss crucial topics such as the “pros and cons” of human enhancement (Bioethics), what it means to be posthuman in the daily practices of living (Ethics & Pragmatics), and how to move towards an equal and just posthuman society (Futures Studies). This Course will enrich each participant in their intellectual, existential and social perspectives, realizing that we all have agency in the developments of the futures.

Schedule of Activities:

Week 1 **1/26** **M** Introduction to the course, its goals, contents and requirements.

First Section:
The Human as an Evolving Notion

- 1/28 **W** **The birth and Politics of *Homo Sapiens***
 “Systema Naturae” (Linnaeus 1758)
- Readings:*
 Schiebinger, L. (1993) “Why Mammals are Called Mammals: Gender Politics in Eighteenth-Century Natural History” pp. 382-411.
- Topics:*
 Linnaeus
Scala Naturae (The Great Chain of Beings)
Homo Sapiens
- Week 2** 2/2 **M** **The Rise of Evolutionary Biology**
 (focus on Lamarck, J.B and Darwin, C.)
- Readings:*
 Ridley, M. (1996) “The Rise of Evolutionary Biology” pp. 3-20
- Topics:*
 Evolution
 Lamarck, J. B. - the inheritance of acquired characters
 Darwin, C. - “On the Origins of Species”
- 2/4 **W** **Contemporary interpretations of the notion of Evolution**
- Readings:*
 Gould, S. J. (1996) “Full House. The Spread of Excellence from Darwin to Plato” (selected passages)
- Maturana, H. / Varela, F. (1987) “The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding” (selected passages)
- Topics:*
 Criticism of Progressivist Bias (Gould, S. J)
 Autopoiesis (Maturana, H. / Varela, F.)
 Evolution and Creationism in the US
- Week 3** 2/9 **M** **Transhumanism**
****Theoretics of the Posthuman 1***
- Readings:*
 Huxley, J. (1957) “Transhumanism”
 Online Text:
<http://www.transhumanism.org/index.php/WTA/more/huxley>
- Hansell, G. R. / Grassie, W. (eds.) (2011) “Transhumanism and Its

Critics” (selected passages)

Topics:

Huxley, J.
Transhumanism
Humanity +

2/11 W Human Enhancement, Liberal Eugenics and Its Critics

Readings:

Bostrom, N. (2008) “Ethical Issues in Human Enhancement”

Online Text:

<http://www.nickbostrom.com/ethics/human-enhancement.html>

Habermas, J. (2003) “The Future of Human Nature” (selected passages)

Topics:

Human Enhancement
Liberal Eugenics
Bioethical Criticisms of Human Enhancement

Week 4 2/16 M No Class

Second Section:

From Humans to Posthumans

**2/18 W The composite landscape of the Posthuman
*Theoretics of the Posthuman 2**

Readings:

Ferrando, F. (2014) “Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations”

Online Text:

https://www.academia.edu/6396791/POSTHUMANISM_TRANSHUMANISM_ANTI_HUMANISM_METAHUMANISM_AND_NEW_MATERIALISMS_DIFFERENCES_AND_RELATIONS

Topics:

Posthumanisms
Post-Humanism and Post-Anthropocentrism (decentering the human)
Post-Dualism (deconstructing binary oppositions; the notion of the difference; evolution's drive towards diversity)

Week 5 2/23 M Nietzsche's Overhuman "Thus Spoke Zarathustra"

Readings:

Nietzsche (1883-5) "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" (selected passages)
(Trans. Del Caro, A., Pippin, R., 2006)

Sorgner, S.L. (2009) "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism"

Online Text:

<http://jetpress.org/v20/sorgner.htm>

Topics:

Nietzsche

The Uberman and "Thus Zarathustra Spoke"

Nietzsche, Posthumanism and Transhumanism

2/25 W Heidegger, M.

Readings:

Heidegger, M. (1947) "Letter on Humanism" (selected passages)

Heidegger, M. (1953) "The Question Concerning Technology" (selected passages)

Topics:

Heidegger

Humanism and Posthumanism

Technology and Ontology

Week 6 3/2 M Postmodernism

Readings:

Sheehan, P. (2004) "Postmodernism and Philosophy" pp. 20-42

Deleuze, G. / Guattari, F. (1980) "A Thousand Plateaus" (selected passages)

Topics:

Postmodernism

Deconstruction (Derrida, J.)

Rhizome (Deleuze, G. / Guattari, F.)

**3/4 W Antihumanism
*Theoretics of the Posthuman 3**

Readings:

Foucault, M. (1966) "The Order of Things" (selected passages)
(Emphasis on The Death of Man)

Schnackenberg Cattani, M. (1990) "An Essay on Antihumanism -
Foreword" pp. 17-29

Topics:

Antihumanism

Foucault and the Death of Man

Other Antihumanisms (Marxism and Althusser, L.)

Week 7 3/9 M Posthumanism
****Theoretics of the Posthuman 4***

Readings:

Hassan, I. (1977) "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist
Culture"

Hayles, K. (1999) "How We Became Posthuman" (selected passages)

Ferrando, F. (2014) "Posthumanism"

Online Text:

<https://www.academia.edu/8041656/POSTHUMANISM>

Topics:

From Postmodernism to Posthumanism

Hayles and the Digital Humanities

Contemporary Posthumanism

3/11 W 1ST EXAM

FIRST ABSTRACT DUE

+ Class Evaluation

Week 8 3/16-22 SPRING BREAK

Third Section:

Humans, Non-Human Others, Posthumans

Week 9 3/23 M FIRST ESSAY DUE

Category of Deconstruction: Nature / Culture

Readings:

Rousseau, J.J. (1754) “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality”

Topics:

Rousseau, J.J.

Nature / Culture

Economic Inequality

3/25 W Category of Deconstruction: Class

Readings:

Marx, K. / Engels, F. (1848) “The Communist Manifesto”

Online Text:

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>

Topics:

Classism

Marx, K. / Engels, F.

The Legacy of Marxism

Week 10 3/30 M Category of Deconstruction: Race

Readings:

King, M. L. (1963) “Letter From Birmingham Jail”

Movie:

DuVernay, A. (2014) “Selma”

Topics:

Racism

King, M. L.

Gandhi, M. & Non Violence

4/1 W Category of Deconstruction: Gender & Sexual Orientation

Readings:

Butler, J. (1990) “Gender Trouble” (selected passages)
(Emphasis on Gender Performativity)

Topics:

Sexism

Feminism & Gender

Homophobia & Queer Studies

Week 11 4/6 M Categories of Deconstruction: Abilities & Age Intersectionality

Readings:

Disabilities Studies:

Linton, S. (2006) "Reassigning Meaning" pp. 161-172

Age Studies:

Butler, R. (1969) "Age-ism: Another Form of Bigotry"

Crenshaw, K. (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics"

Online:

<http://philpapers.org/archive/CREDTI.pdf>

Topics:

Age Discrimination – Ageism

Abilities – Ableism

Intersectionality

**4/8 W Category of Deconstruction: Species
*The Non-Human Others***

Readings:

Haraway, D. (1985) "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s"

Topics:

Haraway, D.

Animal Studies

Cyborg Studies

**Week 12 4/13 M Interconnection
*The Environment and The Anthropocene***

Readings:

Shiva, V. (1995) "Biotechnological Development and the Conservation of Biodiversity" pp. 193-213

Crutzen, P. J., Stoermer, E. F. (2000). The "Anthropocene" In: Global Change Newsletter No. 41, pp. 17-18

Topics:

Environmental Studies

Sustainability & The Anthropocene

Space Migration

4/15 W New Materialism

****Theoretics of the Posthuman 5***

Readings:

Barad, K. (2003) "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter"

Coole, D. / Frost, S. (2010) "Introducing the New Materialisms"

Topics:

New Materialism

Relational Ontology (Barad 2007)

Quantum Physics

Week 13 4/20 M Possible Futures

Readings:

Masini, E. (1999) "Rethinking Futures Studies" pp. 35-48

Film:

Jonze, S. (2013) "Her"

Topics:

Futures Studies

Science-Fiction

Future interactions among species

SECOND ABSTRACT DUE

4/22 W **Braidotti, R. (2013) The Posthuman**

Week 14 4/27 M Braidotti, R. (2013) The Posthuman

SECOND ESSAY DUE

Fifth Section:

Workshop

4/29 W Workshop "The Posthuman" 1

Discussions in Small Groups:

1. Pros and Cons of Human Enhancement (Bioethics)
2. Daily Practices of the Posthuman (Ethics & Pragmatics)
3. Towards a Posthuman Society (Futures Studies)

Assignments

Peer-reviews (2 essays each)

Week 15	5/4	M	Class Evaluation
			Workshop “The Posthuman” 2 Presentation in Small Groups Discussion
			<i>Assignments</i> Individual Portfolios
	5/6	W	Workshop “The Posthuman” 3 Compilation of our collective document “The Posthuman” + Return of Second Essay
Week 16	5/11	M	Presentation of the collective document “The Posthuman” (compiled during workshops 1-3) End-of-Semester Celebration (Sharing Circle)
Week 17	5/13-19		FINAL EXAM (Date: TBA)

***Theoretics of the Posthuman:**

These classes will focus on the main movements that constitute the composite landscape of the posthuman.

List of Texts

Required

Braidotti, R. (2014) “The Posthuman”. Polity: Cambridge (MA).

Online

Readings listed in the syllabus will be provided electronically as pdfs, via library databases, or as links.

Course Requirements

1. Midterm and final examinations are a mix of short essay questions, as well as multiple choice ones.

2. Two essays, between 1,500 and 2,500 words, typed, 1.5 spacing (1” margin on all sides, font: Times New Roman 12). Please, make sure to add the word count at the top of your paper. The total amount of words, between the 2 essays, has to be at least 3500-4000 words of finished writing. These essays must reflect your understanding of the texts covered in class as described above. You will be expected to do a close reading that includes textual analysis, as well as demonstrating strong argumentative and rhetorical skills (do not simply summarize the text). A list of possible topics will be provided. Alternatively, students are given the opportunity to develop their papers on specific topics of interest upon approval. Electronic or late submission of the essays will not be accepted.

3. Two shifts as “host” (see “Grading” n. 2).

4. Two Extra-Activities.

Grading

1. Attendance and participation: 10%
2. Hosting (2 shifts, 5% each): 10%
3. Essays (20% each): 40%
4. Midterm and Final exam (10% each): 20%
5. Writing Assignments: 10%
6. Extra-credits (2 shifts, 5% each): 10%

1. Attendance and Participation: Students are required to attend every class, do the assigned reading, and finish all course work on time. Students must bring the assigned book(s) and/or text(s) to class and be prepared for discussions. This grading is a reward for being active and inspiring during the class discussions and in the workshops “Social Foundations” 1-4.

2. Hosting: This grading will be devoted to covering a number of shifts (2) as hosts, according to these guidelines. For each class, we will designate a team of 3 hosts in a balanced rotation. Each host will give a 5 minute presentation on a topic of their choice, selected between the material indicated in the section “Topics,” or independently proposed (upon prior agreement). These presentations shall be done with slides. Once they have presented, each host will share their slides with the classmates on the course website.

b. After the designated leaders have presented, we will open the discussion to all the participants. This is the class etiquette, which will be enforced and maintained:

- everyone has the opportunity and feels welcome to present their view; no-one feels discriminated against based on their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, political or personal view, physical (dis)abilities, personal characteristics etc.
- the discussion is balanced in tone and in the amount of time offered to each discussant and to each presenter (everyone respectfully taking the podium; no-one left in the

shadow)

Note that the use of neutral language is mandatory both in your writing as well as in the classroom. Make sure to use gender-neutral language and race-neutral words; avoid expressions that stereotype or patronize LGBT persons as well as people of different ethnicities, religions, beliefs, physical and/or intellectual (dis)abilities.

3. Writing Assignments: Post them online, on NYU Classes. I will check them periodically over the semester. At the end of the Course, you will have to submit an individual portfolio, which consists in the hard copy of your assignments (required) plus extra material (optional).

Extra-credits

1. Visits to related exhibits / museums / conferences (upon prior agreement and with related proofs of attendance). You will have to give a 2/3 minutes presentation in class. Credits: up to 5%.
2. Covering an extra shift as host. If you have already covered your required 3 turns (see “Grading / Attendance and Participation”), and there is a need for a host, you may volunteer (no more than one extra shift for each student). Credits: up to 5%.
3. Watching a Documentary or a Movie related to material, between the list offered or upon prior agreement. You will have to give a 2/3 minutes presentation in class. Credits: up to 5%.
4. A short lecture / performance / video based on one of your essays. This assignment is intended as a way to share your research with your classmates and train you to face international audiences. This presentation shall last no more than 8 minutes (depending on the number of applicants), and shall not be a mere reading of your essay. It shall include slides / multimedia / performative arts / rhetorical skills: creativity and originality are strongly encouraged and will be evaluated positively. Credits: up to 5%.
5. Working on a visual presentation / or printed document / or artistic representation of the final collective document “The Posthuman”, produced in workshops 1-4. This assignment will be only available on week 14, after the last workshop (n. 4). It will be presented and shared with all of the classmates on the last day of class. Credits: up to 5%.
6. Volunteering as Media Facilitators, helping uploading material and updating our website. Credits: up to 5%.

Workshop “The Posthuman”

This workshop is aimed at experiencing first hand the task of setting a document for posterity, a manifesto outlined for the evolution of a just and equal posthuman society. In four workshops,

we will discuss crucial topics such as the pros and cons of human enhancement (Bioethics), what does it mean to be posthuman in the daily practices of living (Ethics & Pragmatics), and how to move towards a posthuman society (Futures Studies).

Optional: Volunteers may develop the document into printed copies / slide shows / acts / art pieces (see section “Extra-Credits” n. 3.). In the last class, the works produced by the volunteers will be presented in teams and distributed (if printed).

Computer & Electronic Devices Policy

No computer or other electronic devices allowed during class (with the exception of our 3 hosts, designated for each lesson, who will have access to their computers and to the internet).

Before entering the class, make sure that your phone is turned off or, in case of personal emergencies, silenced (please, inform me if so before the class starts).

Absence Policy

Absence and repeated lateness will diminish the grade (more than six absences without legitimate excuse will result in failure for the course). Below is the Absence Policy according to LSP guidelines:

- * Please furnish me with a written explanation if you miss two consecutive classes.
- * If you miss more than three classes for reasons besides religious observance, your class participation grade will fall by five points per each absence.
- * Be aware that it is my duty to contact the Advising Office to make further inquiries should you miss four consecutive classes.
- * You cannot pass the course if you miss six consecutive classes for any reason (excluding religious observance).
- * If you miss more than six (non-consecutive) classes for reasons besides religious observance, you cannot pass the course.

If you plan to miss any classes for religious observance this semester, please let me know their dates by the end of the first week of the term. You will not in any way be penalized for such absences, but I may require you to submit any work due for these classes in advance.

Absences related to documented medical conditions will be excused.

Plagiarism & Academic Rigor

NYU faculty take your scholarly work seriously. We expect you to read your assignments thoroughly, analyze them carefully, and articulate your understanding clearly. Academic honesty is a required standard. For these reasons, plagiarism (that is, presenting someone else's ideas, works or words as your own), is simply not tolerated and will result in failure of the course for the student who plagiarizes. Please refer to Liberal Studies Program's *Student Handbook* for a better understanding of plagiarism.

Differently-Abled Students

Differently-abled students who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, see the CSD website: <http://www.nyu.edu/osl/csd>.

Office Hours

Thursdays: 2 pm – 3 pm; 5 pm – 6 pm
or by appointment.

Emails will be answered within 24 hours (M-F):
ff32@nyu.edu