

SYLLABUS SF3

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). In the third part of the course, we will focus on Environmental Studies and the rise of the Anthropocene in relation to contemporary issues such as human enhancement, artificial intelligence and space migration, 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. The course will provide an interactive environment where students directly engage with the contemporary debate. In four workshops, we will discuss crucial topics such as human diversity (Politics), the “pros and cons” of human enhancement (Bioethics), space migration (Futures Studies), and how to move towards an equal and just posthuman society (Ethics & Pragmatics). 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	9/6	T	Introduction to the course, its goals, contents and requirements.
	9/8	Th	The composite landscape of the Posthuman <i>*Theoretics of the Posthuman</i>

Readings:

Ferrando, F. (2013) “Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations”;
(2014) “The Body”

Topics:

Introduction to Posthumanism

First Section:

The Human as an Evolving Notion

(Focus: Bioethics)

**Week 2 9/13 T The birth and Politics of *Homo Sapiens*
The Rise of Evolutionary Biology**

Readings:

Darwin, C. (1859) “On the Origins of Species” (selected passages)

Topics:

Philosophy of Biology
Evolution
Darwin, C.

**9/15 Th Transhumanism
*Theoretics of the Posthuman**

Readings:

Huxley, J. (1957) “Transhumanism” pp. 13-17.

Online Text:

<http://www.transhumanism.org/index.php/WTA/more/huxley>

Max More “What is Transhumanism”

Topics:

Transhumanism
Huxley, J.
Humanity +

Week 3 9/20 T Liberal Eugenics

Readings:

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

Online Text:

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

Topics:
Human Enhancement
Liberal Eugenics

9/22 Th Human Enhancement and Its Critics

Readings:
Fukuyama, F. (2002) “Our Posthuman Future” (selected passages)

Topics:
Bioconservative Ethics

Week 4 9/27 T Workshop “The Posthuman” 1

Research Topic:
Pros and Cons of Human Enhancement (Bioethics)

Second Section: Beyond the Human
(Focus: Continental Philosophy)

9/29 Th Nietzsche – Life and Works

Readings:
Nietzsche (1883-5) “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” (Introduction)
(Trans. Del Caro, A., Pippin, R., 2006)

Documentary:
“Human, All Too Human – Beyond Good and Evil” (1999)

+ How to Write a Paper

Week 5 10/4 T Nietzsche's Overhuman

Readings:
Nietzsche (1883-5) “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” (selected passages)

Topics:
The Overhuman
The Eternal Recurrence
The Three Metamorphoses

10/06 Th Heidegger's Technology

Heidegger, M. (1953) “The Question Concerning Technology”

Topics:
Heidegger

Humanism and Posthumanism
Technology and Ontology

Week 6 10/11 T Antihumanism
****Theoretics of the Posthuman***

Readings:

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

Topics:

Antihumanism
Foucault and the Death of Man
Other Antihumanisms (Marxism and Althusser, L.)

10/13 Th FIRST ESSAY DUE

Workshop “The Posthuman” 2

Research Topic:

Pros and Cons of the Notion of the Human /
Sharing Research Papers

Week 7 10/18 T Revision for Midterm Exam

10/20 Th MIDTERM EXAM

Third Section:

Deconstructing the “Human”

(Focus: Social and Political Philosophy)

Week 8 10/25 T Category of Deconstruction: Nature / Culture

Readings:

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

Topics:

Rousseau, J.J.
Nature / Culture
Economic Inequality

10/27 Th 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 9 11/1 T Category of Deconstruction: Gender & Sexual Orientation

Readings:

De Beauvoir, S. (1949) “The Second Sex” (selected passages)

Topics:

Sexism

Feminism & Gender

Homophobia & Queer Studies

11/3 Th Category of Deconstruction: Race / Intersectionality

Readings:

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

Readings:

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:

Racism

King, M. L. & the influence of Gandhi on King

Intersectionality

Week 10 11/8 T Category of Deconstruction: Ethnicity

Readings:

Said, Edward (1978) “Orientalism”

Topics:

Said, E. & Orientalism

Islamophobia

Post-Colonialism

11/10 Th Workshop “The Posthuman” 3

Research Topic:
Recognizing Human Diversity

Movie:
DuVernay, A. (2014) “Selma”

Fourth Section:
Cyborgs, Non-Human Others, Posthumanities
(Focus: Future Studies)

Week 11 11/15 T 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

11/17 Th Category of Deconstruction: Interconnection
Earth Democracy and The Anthropocene

Readings:
Shiva, V. (2005) “Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace” (selected passages)

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

Topics:
Environmental Philosophy & Sustainability
Biodiversity & Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)
The Anthropocene

Week 12 11/22 T Braidotti, R. (2013) “The Posthuman”
****Theoretics of the Posthuman***

11/23 – 11/27 FALL BREAK

Week 13 11/29 T Category of Deconstruction: Matter
New Materialism
****Theoretics of the Posthuman***

Readings:

Karen Barad (2007) "Meeting the Universe Halfway"

Topics

Philosophy of Physics

New Materialism

Distributed Agency

12/1 Th Space Ethics

Readings:

Fedorov, F. N. "What Was Man Created For?: The Philosophy of the Common Task : Selected Works" (selected passages)

Topics:

Russian Cosmism

Space Politics

Space Ethics

Week 14 12/6 T SECOND ESSAY DUE

Workshop "The Posthuman" 4

Research Topic:

Possible Futures

Film:

Jonze, S. (2013) "Her"

Topics:

Robots and Artificial Intelligence

Futures Studies

Cyber-Phenomenology

12/8 Th Revision for Final Exam

Week 15 12/13 T Presentation of Extra-Curricular Activities

Class Evaluation

12/16 Th End-of-Semester Celebration

Sharing Circle

Week 16 12/19-12/23 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

Optional

Braidotti, R. (2013) “The Posthuman” Polity: Cambridge (MA).

Online

Readings listed in the syllabus will be provided electronically as PDFs (10% of each book), via library databases, or as links to public archives.

Course Requirements

1. Midterm and final examinations are a mix of multiple choice questions and short essay questions.
2. Two essays, between 1,750 and 2,000 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, should be at least 3,500-4,000 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. One Extra-Activity and One Workshop.

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 (1 shift): 5%

7. Workshop (1 shift): 5%

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: Students should post them online, on NYU Classes, by the due date. I will check them periodically over the semester.

Extra-credits

1. Visits to related exhibits / museums / conferences (upon prior agreement and with related proofs of attendance). You will have to give a 5 minutes presentation in class. Credits: up to 5%.
2. Covering an extra shift as host. If you have already covered your required 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. 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%.

4. Volunteers may develop the results of the workshops (see “Workshop”) into printed copies / slide shows / acts / art pieces. In the last class, the works produced by the volunteers will be presented in teams and distributed (if printed). Credits: up to 5%.

Workshop

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, conducted by a team of 5 leaders, we will discuss crucial topics such as human diversity (Politics), the pros and cons of human enhancement (Bioethics), space migration (Ethics & Pragmatics), and how to move towards a posthuman society (Futures Studies).

Computer & Electronic Devices Policy

No computer or other electronic devices allowed during student presentations (except for students with documented special needs).

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.

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

Mondays and Wednesdays: 5.00 – 6.00 pm
or by appointment.

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