Posthumanism

Philosophy 5310.66087
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Fall 2019 at MUR 239
MW: 4:00-5:15
Office Hours at 258 Murray Hall: M & W, 11:30-12:30 and appointments

Course Description

In this class we will engage both posthuman and transhuman perspectives on knowledge, ethics, technology, subjectivity, digital communication, embodiment, the singularity, and what it means to exist after the seeming demise of “the human.” We begin with Nietzsche whose philosophy of the Übermensch (signifying the “overman”) anticipates many of the critical motifs found in more contemporary posthuman literature. For Nietzsche there is no single, predetermined trajectory of human identity according to which we must always adhere, but instead he challenges us to find ways of overcoming stagnant morals and beliefs in an effort to create ourselves anew. As we move forward with Herbrechter it becomes clear that there are risks accompanying contemporary social changes in which the boundaries between science, technology and culture have become nearly invisible. In today’s “technoculture” we must therefore be vigilant against new forms of injustice that take advantage of our infinite malleability for purposes of control and profit. Rosi Braidotti celebrates the end of traditional humanist dichotomies including self and other, man and woman, life and death, man and animal, and so forth. By knocking down the anthropocentric models of old, we open ourselves up to becoming more inclusive toward a wider array of life forms that have been traditionally marginalized. And lastly we end with Kurzweil who is known for his many predictions concerning human technological progress. He optimistically argues that we will soon be able to create a digital brain more advanced that our own, and that we should look forward to this event in the next few decades as it will allow us to merge our minds and consciousness with our own technological inventions. Whatever one’s personal opinions about each of these authors and their views, it is my hope that we can open-mindedly explore all of their insights so that we all grow in the process.

Required Texts and Materials

Nietzsche, *A Nietzsche Reader*, Penguin
Herbrechter, *Posthumanism*, Bloomsbury
Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Polity [handout]
Kurzweil, *How to Create a Mind*, Penguin

(Note on texts: Whatever publisher you use, you should be able to provide proper citations. If you cannot cite either the publisher or page references with certain electronic sources, then you should avoid those sources.)
Disabled Student Accessibility

If you have a learning disability or will need special accommodations for any other reason, please bring documentation of this need to class. Alternative arrangements for fulfilling the course requirements will be made as necessary.

Weight of the Assignments

Throughout the semester your progress will be graded according to 1 in-class exam, 2 essays, as well as several participation assignments. The in-class exam consists of several true or false and multiple choice type questions. The take-home exams will range from 8 to 10 pages each for a total of 16-20 pages. In them you will answer questions on the main ideas and views of our readings, how those ideas are defended and justified, and possible objections to such arguments. Most of the in-class participation assignments will be given on random dates. Here then is a breakdown of the weighted distribution given to each of the categories:

10% In-Class Exam (Nietzsche)
35% Essay #1 (Nietzsche, Herbrechter)
35% Essay #2 (Braidotti, Kurzweil)
20% Participation

Participation

As mentioned above, there will be several participation assignments. Some of these will take place in the classroom while others will take place either online or during my office hours. The in-class assignments, which in most cases will be given on random dates, will involve practice retrieval essays, pop quizzes, creative activities, learning games, and debates. As there will be 10 of these participation assignments they will add up to 20% of your final grade.

Grading

The following grading scheme indicates a typical percentage for each kind of grade unless the grades in this class are such that require a curve (e.g., if they are lower than expected, then I may institute a curve which bases your final grade on how well you fare in relationship to your peers). Such a curve will either maintain or help your graded percentages, but it will never hurt them.

A 90%
B 80%
C 70%
D 60%

Plagiarism

All acts of either cheating or plagiarism will automatically constitute a failed grade.
The Writing Center

Many students benefit from talking with others about their writing, especially when they go to the OSU Writing Center. The Writing Center has four campus locations and you can make an appointment either at the Morrill Hall office or online. They are open every week day from 9:30 to 5:30.

Late Assignment Policy

There are no grace periods. All essays should be submitted through OSU’s Online Classroom on the dates listed below (in the schedule). Late essays will be marked down by 7% each day after the due date. Do not submit exams via email. Since in-class participation is intended to measure your participation on a given day, it cannot be made up on a later date and must also be submitted in class (not online or via email). Exceptions to this late policy shall be granted to those with good reasons and proper documentation (e.g., notification from a family doctor). Also, remember to double-check submissions to be sure the digital process is completed. It is recommended to take a screen shot of the accepted submission in case you need proof that it was indeed submitted.

Schedule

Week 1  Introduction and Nietzsche, 29-52
Week 2  Nietzsche, 53-70
Week 3  Nietzsche, 215-231
Week 4  Nietzsche, 232-262
Week 5  Herbrechter, ch. 1
Week 6  Herbrechter, ch. 2
Week 7  Herbrechter, chs. 2 and 3
Week 8  Herbrecher, ch. 7
Week 9  Braidotti, ch. 1
Week 10 Braidotti, ch. 2
Week 11 Braidotti, ch. 3
Week 12 Braidotti, “conclusion”
Week 13 Kurzweil, “introduction” and chs. 1 and 2
Week 14 Kurzweil, chs. 3 and 8
Week 15 Kurzweil, ch. 9 and Thanksgiving
Week 16 Kurzweil, chs. 10 and 11

Important Dates:

September 16: In-Class Exam
October 11: Essay #1 Deadline
December 14: Essay #2 Deadline