

U3A Port Phillip

Term 4, 2018

Philosophy of humanism and the posthuman

Notes on Classes 4 – 7 (30 October – 27 November 2018)

The Posthuman – what does it mean?

No single coherent definition; understanding of this notion is further complicated by the introduction of related terms like anti-humanism, transhuman, inhuman, humanimality,...

Key figures in the posthuman include Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Luce Irigaray; Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, Rosi Braidotti, Jay David Bolter

Our focus is on a critical examination of the main characteristics of humanism (or “what it means to be human”) and some new sites of contestation which have come to constitute the “posthuman”. That means asking: What are the boundaries of ‘the human’?

Evolutionary biology, ethology and ecological thought have blurred the boundaries between humans and animals, and culture and nature. On the other hand, recent technologies in the biological sciences and in computing and AI have blurred the boundaries between the human and machine (e.g., electronic implants, robotics, etc.). Biological enhancement, genetic modification, etc., have further complicated our understanding of the nature of being human?

Other questions include: What is excluded from ‘the human’? What form does this exclusion take? What is the role of implicit or systemic bias in this? What are the responses to this?

Philosophical responses have included moves to re-conceptualise what we mean by “the human.” We have seen how some of the feminist and ecological approaches to this question have emphasised a *relational view* of the self in place of the older concepts of autonomy, independence, etc. That is, the idea that the human ‘self’ cannot be considered as bounded and existing in isolation from its connectedness with other people and with nature more generally. Other philosophical approaches include developing more inclusive notions of concepts like reasoning, freedom, agency, etc.

New forms of political and social action can also be seen as a move to posthumanist thinking: E.g., public activism (e.g., #Me Too movement); legislation (e.g., anti-discrimination laws); policy change (e.g., diversity policies in organisations; affirmative action and quotas for under-represented groups); formal apologies from those in power; public protests and social media campaigns, etc. These, in turn, have generated slogans such as “identity politics”, “virtue signalling”, “culture wars”, “political correctness,” etc. We ask whether slogans like these mask some kind of bias.

Themes and suggested references for Classes 4 to 7 are as follows:

Class 4 (30 Oct): What is the posthuman?

Find out what you can on Michel Foucault (a difficult writer)

On characterisations of the posthuman see:

- Rosi Braidotti: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3S3CuNbQ1M> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNJPR78DptA>
- Jay David Bolter: *Posthumanism*, First published: 03 March 2016. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781118766804.wbiect220>
- Deleuze_Minoritarianism: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minority_\(philosophy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minority_(philosophy))

Class 5 – 6 (13 Nov; 20 Nov): Other voices; the politics of exclusion

- Listening and responding: Program on future Tense, ABC RN Sunday 14 October 2018 10:30AM <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/futuretense/listening-and-responding/10222168#transcript>
- The #Me Too movement – you can undertake your own research on this
- Uluru statement from the heart:
[https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru Statement From The Heart 0.PDF](https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru%20Statement%20From%20The%20Heart%200.PDF)
https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1617/Quick_Guides/UluruStatement
- Racism - *White Fragility* by Robin diAngelo - argues that the overt racism of individuals is a smaller part of the problem than we realise. A more pernicious form of racism, she argues, is the lack of consciousness that progressives have about their own white privilege. Her book is called: [White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism](http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/latenightlive/white-fragility/10122818)
<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/latenightlive/white-fragility/10122818>

Also reviewed at <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-sociologist-examines-the-white-fragility-that-prevents-white-americans-from-confronting-racism>

- The Lionel Shriver Incident and the Donald Horne Prize:
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/10/as-lionel-shriver-made-light-of-identity-i-had-no-choice-but-to-walk-out-on-her>
<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/festival-outrage-why-the-shaming-of-lionel-shriver-leads-to-a-literary-ghetto-20161013-gs1dza.html>
<http://theconversation.com/lionel-shriver-and-the-responsibilities-of-fiction-writers-65538>

The Donald Horne Prize: <https://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/the-saturday-paper-alters-prestigious-award-after-judge-s-resignation-20180924-p505m9.html>

- Speciesism; relations with nature
- Disability;

Liz Jackson, <https://www.disabledlist.org/>

For further leads, Google: *Liz Jackson disability list*

Eva Kitay <http://evafederkittay.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/The-ethics-of-care.pdf>

Further reading on care Ethics:

<http://www.reallylearning.com/two-kinds-of-care-transactional-relational/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carol_Gilligan

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics_of_care

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nel_Noddings

Class 7 (27 Nov): Technology and the transhuman

Art; genetics; neuroscience ‘extended mind’; AI; cyborgs; VR; etc.

Nick Bostrom; Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto”:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Cyborg_Manifesto

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