

U3A Port Phillip

Term 4, 2018

Philosophy of humanism and the posthuman

Course outline

Week 1: Introduction: What does it mean to be human?

Weeks 2 – 3: Humanism - Renaissance/enlightenment/modernist values

Week 4: 'the other' – posthumanist thought

Week 5: no class – Cup Day

Weeks 6 - 7: the politics of exclusion

Week 8: technology and the posthuman

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Notes on Class 1

What does it mean to be human?

Can we, as humans, avoid being biased?*

What does “humanism” mean to you?

* *Implicit bias – the IAT (Harvard) “Implicit association test” – you can google this if you want to test your own biases;*

Relation between attitude and behaviour;

Systemic vs individual bias (e.g., racism)

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“God is dead” (Nietzsche)

“Man is the measure of all things” (Protagoras – Sophist, 5th cent BCE)

The “man of reason” (Descartes, Kant);

“Man as master of his own destiny”

Man as secular; rational; free; independent

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Humanist Values

individualism; separateness; independence

reason; rationality

freedom; autonomy; agency

human exceptionalism

universalism

hierarchical

exclusionary

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Preparation for week 2:

1. Over the next few weeks, look out for representations of humanist values in: art; architecture; institutions (law, education, commerce); urban planning; literature; film; media; science and technology; sport ...

2. Watch episodes of John Berger, "Ways of Seeing" (BBC 1972), or read the book version. See especially episodes 1, 2.

<https://app.visions.tv/sammyrynearson/rp4RPybNo67>

<http://waysofseeingwaysofseeing.com/ways-of-seeing-john-berger-5.7.pdf>

3. Read 'Kohlberg's ethical dilemma' and think about the questions below:

Kohlberg Dilemma

Source: <http://www.haverford.edu/psych/ddavis/p109g/kohlberg.dilemmas.html>

In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to make. He paid \$400 for the radium and charged \$4,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money and tried every legal means, but he could only get together about \$2,000, which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying, and asked him to sell it cheaper or

let him pay later. But the druggist said, "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So, having tried every legal means, Heinz gets desperate and considers breaking into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife.

Think about the following questions

1. Should Heinz steal the drug?
2. Is it actually right or wrong for him to steal the drug?
3. Does Heinz have a duty or obligation to steal the drug?
5. Suppose the person dying is not his wife but a stranger. Should Heinz steal the drug for the stranger?
6. Suppose it's a pet animal he loves. Should Heinz steal to save the pet animal?
8. It is against the law for Heinz to steal. Does that make it morally wrong?

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