Posthumanism, Transhumanism, and the New Materialisms

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 (or by appointment)   (or by appointment)

DESCRIPTION

"Posthuman" has become an umbrella term to refer to a variety of different movements and schools of thought, including philosophical, cultural, and critical posthumanism; transhumanism (in its variations of extropianism, liberal and democratic transhumanism, among others); the feminist approach of new materialisms; and the heterogeneous landscape of antihumanism, metahumanism, metahumanities, and posthumanities. The struggle over the meaning of "posthuman" can be seen as a way of coping with an urgency for the integral redefinition of the notion of the human, following the onto-epistemological as well as scientific and bio-technological developments of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Philosophers have taken note of these developments, but often invoke the label "posthuman" in a generic and all-inclusive way, to indicate any of these different perspectives, thereby creating methodological and theoretical confusion between experts and nonexperts alike.

In particular, an important ambiguity persists between posthumanism and transhumanism, a philosophical and cultural movement that began to gain popularity in the late 1990s with its distinct focus on human enhancement as a way of promoting human flourishing. Specifically, transhumanists advocate the use of applied science and technology to extend our current physical and psychological capacities, including our health span, with the goal of overcoming biological barriers of aging, sickness, disease and death. While there is some common ground between posthumanism and transhumanism, posthumanists do not advocate human enhancement but seek to promote human flourishing primarily through building complexified interrelationships between human and greater-than-human ecologies, emphasizing co-constructive identities throughout. Posthumanism emerges from the new materialisms and conceptions of gender construction that draw on insights from quantum physics, complex dynamical systems, and ecological thinking, as well as concepts of cyborg life, hybridization and theories of embodied-embedded-enactive cognition. (Perhaps characteristically, the "extended mind" thesis seems to harbor both posthumanist and transhumanist aspirations.)

Posthumanism raises a number of theological questions, particularly the orientation toward flourishing life. The plasticity of human personhood raises questions about the soul, the notion of image of God, sin and salvation. Further, theology is a function of anthropology and we will consider posthumanism in terms of theistic evolution and emerging life.

GOALS and OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: To understand the nature of human personhood

Objective A
- To appreciate the fundamental theological and philosophical characteristics of personhood.

Objective B
- Formulate advanced, interdisciplinary, integrative, and/or inclusive approaches to the analysis of science, philosophy and theology with regard to personhood

Goal 2: To appreciate how technology and information theories are shifting anthropology

Objective A
- To engage an understanding of transhumanism and its implications with regard to personhood

Objective B
- To critically engage the new materialisms and the implications for posthumanism

READINGS

Required texts

Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

More, M. & Vita-More, N. (eds.), *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future.* West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

All other readings will be posted on Blackboard.

REQUIREMENTS and GRADING

1) Class participation. Successful participation involves regular attendance, class discussion, and written contributions to an online discussion board (created on Blackboard).

- **Discussion** is encouraged as an integral part of the learning process. The pedagogical method of this course is a combination of lecture and dialogue. The breath of maturity and experience that students bring to the classroom can provide for meaningful discussion, and students are encouraged to relate the subject matter to their own experience.
- Prior to each class meeting, students are required to post a **one-page commentary** on the assigned readings on our discussion board. The point of writing these commentaries is to deepen our understanding of the readings, exchange critical ideas about the material, and facilitate subsequent in-class discussion. You are encouraged to take into consideration and refer to each other's postings, including those of previous weeks. You may elect to remain silent for no more than two weeks, without it adversely affecting your grade. Commentaries should be posted no later than **4:00 pm** on the day of our meeting.

2) Position papers. Throughout the semester, you will be required to submit three short essays, each addressing a specific topic at hand with a cogent, thoughtful response based on the readings.

3) Final paper. The final paper is to demonstrate clear, critical thinking of a particular question or thesis relevant to a topic of interest related to course materials and discussion.

How your overall course grade will be determined

Class participation   20%
Position papers   30% (10% each)
Final paper   50%

How your position papers will be graded

Each position paper is worth a maximum of 10 points, assigned on the following basis:

Score	Description
10	Excellent understanding of the material; makes a creative and substantive point/argument that extends beyond the reading; written in a concise, clear, and accessible style; provides evidence that strongly support the main position; insightfully connects readings with related sources and topics
8	Good understanding of the material; content is factually accurate, but does not add any new points or nuances to the discussion; certain parts are underdeveloped with respect to more complex concepts, have weak argumentative ties, or show a lack of independent reasoning; connects readings with related sources and topics
6	Reactions are mostly summaries, or repetitions of points already made that do not advance the discussion; misunderstanding of more advanced ideas; either states opinions without reasons, or argument has severe flaws; problems with organization and unclear writing; little or no connection is made between readings and related sources and topics
4	Only superficial understanding of the material; key points of the material are either not addressed or thoroughly misunderstood; no evidence of independent reasoning; little or no evidence is offered to support one's view; no attempt is made to connect readings to related sources and topics
2	Reaction is entirely off-topic, incoherent, and/or does not address any material from the readings. Writing is unclear, disorganized, unedited. No engagement with related sources and topics

COURSE EXPECTATIONS and POLICIES

Attendance Policy: Because of the expectation of student participation, attendance is a requirement. If for serious reasons a student is going to be absent, it is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor of the reason for absence. According to University policy, a first-year student will receive a failing grade whenever the number of unexcused absences in a course exceeds twice the number of weekly class meetings for the course. For this class, *all* students are subject to this policy. Five *unexcused* absences will result in the grade of "F" for the entire

course. Four *unexcused* absences will result in a reduction of one full letter grade for the course. Exceptions will be made only in extraordinary circumstances.

It is each student's responsibility to keep track of his/her attendance status and to communicate with the instructor concerning any questions or possible misunderstanding. Even in the case of *excused* absences, it is the student's responsibility to know what was missed and to be prepared for the following class. Consult the Office of the VPAA for procedure on excusable absences: http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/vpaa/studentservices/policies/attendance.html

Note on excused absences: In certain circumstances, absences may be excused. These include:
- **Absence for religious observances:** Students must notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with classes. Students who cannot be accommodated should discuss the matter with a dean.
- **Absence for athletic travel:** Student-athletes must provide their professors with a travel letter at the beginning of the semester which highlights potential absences. Students who cannot be accommodated for some or all absences should discuss the matter with the relevant Academic Coordinator for student-athletes.
- **Absence for documented illness:** Students who miss multiple classes due to prolonged illness should seek medical care and provide documentation of such to the Dean's Office, which will communicate with the student's professors. A prolonged absence may necessitate the student's withdrawal from the course or from the University for the semester.
- **At the discretion of the professor:** There may be cases where an absence is undocumented but is, nevertheless, excused by the professor (e.g., absence due to a death in the family). Students should initiate a conversation with their professors about the nature and duration of the absence, in advance of the absence whenever possible. Students who anticipate missing multiple classes should inform the Dean's Office.

When absences are excused, students remain responsible for all assigned work, and shall be provided with the opportunity to make up, without penalty, any work that they have missed.

Class Decorum:
- Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class session. Habitual lateness is disruptive to both the professor and classmates. Please make every effort to be on time.
- Laptop and tablet devices are permitted in class with prior approval of the professor.
- **Cell phones must be turned off prior to the start of class.** Text messaging is not permitted during class; the student's participation grade will be lowered for any failure to comply.
- No eating or drinking during class.
- Above all, mutual respect among students and toward the professor, and from the professor toward students, is to be observed at all times.

Academic Integrity: Students are responsible to be familiar with and abide by the University's policies on academic integrity (http://library.villanova.edu/Help/AcademicIntegrity). Plagiarism of any kind is not tolerated in the University or this class. Words or ideas that are not your own must be cited according to the Chicago Manual of Style, 16/17th edition (or equivalent). If a student is found to be plagiarizing or cheating, including unsanctioned collaboration on

out-of-class assignments, a failing grade will result for the assignment in question. As honesty is a central quality of personal integrity, please adhere strictly to this policy.

Note on Controversial Material and Discussions. Students are asked to approach the course material with an open mind and respect the various scholarly perspectives on it, as well as one another's opinions. Some of the materials and discussions will be challenging, both intellectually and emotionally, and some of them you might even find offensive or inappropriate. Part of our goal will be to elucidate why this is the case, and what the philosophical implications are. However, if you anticipate feeling unusually uncomfortable discussing any of the material or if you need to leave the room at certain critical moments for justifiable reasons, it is my role to accommodate students and make the classroom a secure and hospitable environment for everyone.

Special Needs and Accommodations: Students with disabilities who require reasonable academic accommodations should schedule an appointment to discuss specifics with me. It is the policy of Villanova to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. You must present verification and register with the Learning Support Office by contacting 610-519-5176 or at learning.support.services@villanova.edu or for physical access or temporary disabling conditions, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 610-519-4095.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Note: *All readings will be posted on Blackboard unless it is a required book*)

Aug. 19   **Introduction to Transhumanism, Posthumanism, New Materialism**

Read: H. Tirosh-Samuelson and J. Hulburt, "Introduction: Technology, Utopianism and Eschatology," in *Perfecting Human Futures* (Springer, 2016), pp. 1-32.

Francesca Ferrando, "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations" *Existenz* 8/2 (Fall, 2013): 26-32.

"Transhumanist FAQ Live," H+Pedia, accessible online at: https://hpluspedia.org/wiki/Transhumanist_FAQ_Live

James Hughes, "Transhumanist Politics, from 1700 to the Near Future," *Re-public* (2009), available at https://ieet.org/index.php/IEET2/more/hughes20090409/

William E. Connolly, "The 'New Materialism' and the Fragility of Things," *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 41.3 (2013): 399-412.

Aug. 26   **Evolution and the Emergent Human**

Read: John Passmore, "Progress by Natural Development: From Darwin to Teilhard," in *The Perfectibility of Man* (Scribner, 1970), pp. 378-412

Tom Gundling, "Human Origins Studies: A Historical Perspective," *Evolution: Education and Outreach* 3 (2010): 314-321.

David S. Wilson, "Evolution, Religion and Other Meaning Systems," in *Darwin's Roadmap to the Curriculum: Evolutionary Studies in Higher Education,* ed. G. Gehr et al, (Oxford, 2019), pp. 1-13.

Daniel Brannan, "Darwinism and Original Sin: Frederick R. Tennant's Integration of Darwinian Worldviews into Christian Thought in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal for Interdisciplinary Research on Religion and Science,* 1 (2007): 187-217.

Sept. 2   **What is the Human Person?**

Read: Philip Hefner, "Imago Dei: The Possibility and Necessity of the Human Person," in *The Human Person in Science and Theology*, ed. N. Gregersen et al., (Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 73-92.

Philip Clayton, "Conceptual Foundations of Emergence Theory," in *The Re-Emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis from Science to Religion,* ed. P. Clayton et al., (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 1-32

Heidi Russell, "Quantum Anthropology: Reimaging the Human Person as Body/Spirit," *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 934-959.

Sept. 9   **The Human as Created Co-Creator**

Read: Francis Kadaplackal, "'Creator Co-Creator' as a Source of Inspiration for a Sustainable Corporate Environmental Responsibility," 1-14.

Dan Horan, "Beyond Essentialism and Complementarity: Toward a Theological Anthropology Rooted in *Haeceitas*," *Theological Studies* 75.1 (2014): 94-117.

Philip Hefner, "Technology and Human Becoming," *Zygon* 37.3 (2002): 655-665.

Declan Marmion, "Between Transcendence and History, Trauma and Grace: Rahner's Anthropology Revisited," *Louvain Studies* 37 (2013): 309-326.

Lambros Malafouris, "Metaplasticity and the Human Becoming: Principles of Neuroarchaeology," *Journal of Anthropological Sciences* 88 (2010): 49-72.

Sept. 16   **Religion and Technology**

Read: David Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (Knopf, 1997)*,* pp. 1-67.

John Hedley Brooke, "Visions of Perfectibility," *Journal of Evolution & Technology* 14.2 (2005), 1-12.

Ron Cole-Turner, "Going Beyond the Human: Christians and Other Transhumanists," *Theology and Science* 13 (2015): 150-61.

Position Paper #1 DUE Sept. 23

Sept. 23   **Mind, Media, Technology and Religion**

Read: Kirkwood, Jeffrey and Weatherby, Leif, "Operations of Culture: Ernst Kapp's Philosophy of Technology," *Grey Room* 72 (2018), 6-15.

Arthur Kroker, "Technological Humanism: The Processed World of Marshall McLuhan," in *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant* (Palgrave, 1984), pp. 52-86.

Zeynep Merve Iseri and Robert Logan, "Laws of Media, Their Environments and Their Users: The Flip of the Artifact, its Ground and its Users," *Philosophies* 1 (2016), 153-161.

Richard Cavell, "Prosthetic Aesthetics," in *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography* (University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp. 69-90.

Devin Fore, "The Entomic Age," *Grey Room* 33 (2008), 26-55.

Sept. 30   **Transhumanism and Human Enhancement**

Read: Max More, "The Philosophy of Transhumanism," *Transhumanist Reader,* pp. 3-17.

Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanism," *Journal of Evolution and Technology,* 14.1 (2005), 1-25.

Peter Harrison and Joseph Wolyniak, "The History of 'Transhumanism'," *Notes and Queries*, 62.3 (2015), 465-467.

Gennady II. Stolyarov, "Transhumanist Bill of Rights – Version 3.0," U.S. Transhumanist Party, accessible at https://transhumanist-party.org/tbr-3/

Nick Bostrom, "Why I Want to Be a Posthuman When I Grow Up," *Transhumanist Reader,* pp. 28-53.

Stefan L. Sorgner, "Three Types of (Post) Human Perfection," in *Perfecting Human Futures: Transhuman Visions and Technological Imaginations,* ed. J. Hurlbut et al., (Springer, 2016), pp. 141-157.

Oct. 7   **The Plasticity of Embodiment**

Read: Andy Clark, "Reinventing Ourselves: The Plasticity of Embodiment, Sensing and Mind," in *Transhumanist Reader,* pp. 113-125.

Georg Theiner, "The Extended Mind: A Chapter in the History of Transhumanism," in *The Mind-Technology Problem,* ed. I. Hipólito et al., (Springer, in press).

S. Jeffery, "The Perfect Body," in *The Posthuman Body in Superhero Comics,* pp. 69-91; ibid., "Animal Bodies and Artificial Bodies," pp, 137-154.

Movie: Advantageous

Oct. 14   **Digital Immortality**

Read: Jenny Hubermann, "Immortality Transformed: Mind Cloning, Transhumanism and the Quest for Digital Immortality," *Mortality* 23 (2018): 1-16.

Michael Cerullo, "Uploading and Branching Identity," *Minds and Machines* 25 (2015): 17-36

Ted Peters, "The Soul of Trans-Humanism," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 44 (2005): 381-395.

Ted Peters, "Theologians Testing Transhumanism," *Theology and Science* 13 (2015): 130-149.

Calvin Mercer, "Whole Brain Emulation Requires Enhanced Theology, and a 'Handmaiden,'" *Theology and Science* 13 (2015): 175-186.

Movie: Transcendence

Oct. 21   **Deification in the Age of Transhumanism**

Read: Philip Hefner, "The Animal that Aspires to Be an Angel," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 48.2 (2009), 158-167.

Michael Zimmerman, "The Singularity: A Crucial Phase in Divine Self-actualization?" *Cosmos and History* 4.1-2 (2008), 347-370.

Stig W. Jørgensen, "Our Serial (And Parallel) Selves: Identity in the Age of Transhumanism," in *Science Fiction, Ethics and the Human Condition,* ed. C. Baron et al., (Springer, 2017), pp. 85-93.

Diane Proudfoot, "Software Immortals: Science or Faith?" in *Singularity Hypotheses,* ed. A.H. Eden et al, (Springer, 2012), pp. 367-393.

Position Paper #2 DUE Oct. 28

Oct. 28   **Posthumanism and Deep Relationality**

Read: N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman,* pp. 1-25.

N. Katherine Hayles, "The Cognitive Nonconscious and the New Materialism," in *The New Politics of Materialism: History, Philosophy, Science,* ed. S. Ellenzweig et al., (Routledge, 2017), pp. 181-199.

Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward and Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28(3) (2003): 801-831.

Arthur Kroker, *Body Drift: Butler, Hayles, Haraway* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012), pp. 1-29, 63-137.

Nov. 4   **Cyborgs, Companion Species and Nomadic Subjects**

Read: Rosi Braidotti, "Posthuman, All Too Human: The Memoirs and Aspirations of a Posthumanist," Tanner Lectures, Yale University, pp. 1-48.

Donna Haraway, "Cyborg Manifesto, Science, Technology and Social Feminism," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, 1991), pp. 149-181.

Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman,* pp. 222-291.

Position Paper #3 DUE Nov. 11

Nov. 11   **Scientific Progress, Human Progress and Christian Theology**

Read: Brent Waters, "Whose Salvation? Which Eschatology? Transhumanism and Christianity as Contending Salvific Religions," in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. R. Cole-Turner (Georgetown University Press, 2011), pp. 163-174.

Thorsten Moos, "Reduced Heritage: How Transhumanism Secularizes and Desecularizes Religious Visions", in *Perfecting Human Futures. Transhuman Visions and Technological Imaginations,* ed. J. Hurlbut et al. (Springer, 2016), pp. 159-178.

Steve Fuller & Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, "A Debate between Steve Fuller and Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti on 'Scientific Progress, Human Progress and Christian Theology." *Church, Communication and Culture* 4.2 (2019): 123-136.

Nov. 18   **Transhumanism, Posthumanism, Ultrahumanism: What are we becoming?**
Read: Short presentations of student paper projects; concluding discussion