

**THE END OF HUMANITY**  
**University of Toronto**  
**POL 381 H 1 (S)**

Winter 2009  
M 6:10 PM – 8:00 PM  
SSH 1087

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Office Hours: Wednesday: 2:00-4:00 p.m.; Thursdays 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  
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Grading TA: TBA

**Human**

A. *adj.*

1. Of, belonging to, or characteristic of mankind, distinguished from animals by superior mental development, power of articulate speech, and upright posture.
- 2.a. Of the nature of humans; that is human or consists of human beings
- 3.a. Belonging or relative to human beings as distinguished from God or superhuman beings; pertaining to the sphere or faculties of mankind (with implication of limitation or inferiority); mundane; secular. (Often opposed to *divine*.)

This course examines the question of what it means to be human in an era when that concept's traditional boundaries are increasingly porous. Deep Ecologists claim that humans are merely co-equal members of the biotic community, sociobiologists see humans in an evolutionary continuity with the rest of nature, the Great Ape Project proclaims the equality of simians and humans, and the leaders of the Genomic Revolution and Transhumanism offer the promise of near limitless genetic reconstitution of the non-materiality of the human body. What then does the concept "human" mean, and what values or norms does it contain within it? Should we give in to endless re-creation of ourselves? Or have we reached a point that is unique in our evolution, given that technology now presents us not just with an accelerated pace of change, but with a kind of change so radical that our entire way of being is threatened?

**Class Style:**

Please come prepared to discuss the materials each day, and this means arguing about them in a thoughtful manner with your instructor and fellow classmates (both in open discussion, as well as in more structured settings such as role-plays, debates, and group-work). These discussions should be respectful of others' views, but in no way does that suggest that we paper over our differences with others. We will learn from each other precisely to the extent that we can figure out exactly how much we disagree with one another.

Please make sure you check email daily, and make sure that your email is up-to-date in ROSI, as I will be emailing the class through Blackboard.

*Ridiculousness:*

If it seems odd to have a section of the syllabus with this label, well, that is not surprising. Let me explain. Part of learning political theory, in this class or elsewhere, is learning to be comfortable in uncomfortable situations. What is uncomfortable, you ask? Any intellectual community worth its salt, I answer. We will be confronting radical ideas in the texts in this course, and more than that, your fellow students (and instructor) will espouse ideas that seem, or perhaps really are, ridiculous. It is uncomfortable to disagree with the strongly held beliefs of others. It is uncomfortable to risk exposing one's ignorance in class, when attempting to answer a question posed by the instructor or another student. It is uncomfortable to argue, and uncomfortable to be wrong (or seem wrong to your peers). What then to do? In this class we will be learning how to become comfortable in our discomfort, and like any skill this requires practice. Therefore,

*we will be practicing how to actually be wrong or ridiculous.* We will cultivate the practice of public ridiculousness by engaging in a little competition during each class period. Every day we will keep track of avowedly ridiculous statements, to which you should preface your comment to the class with something like "I know this sounds ridiculous, but I think..." I will note such statements, and at the end of each class we will vote on which is the most ridiculous for the day. The "winner" will receive our acclaim, as well as a nominal prize (though will be disqualified from winning more than once, in the interests of inviting more to participate). But more than that they will be benefiting the class by pushing us all to think outside of our conventional boundaries, to see the ordinary in ways that are novel or shocking. I encourage every person to submit at least one openly ridiculous remark over the course of the semester.

#### *Office Hours:*

Please do come to them. Though I do not require you to see me for a formal visit, I encourage every student to schedule an appointment with me as early in the semester as possible. The more we know each other, the better we can create a learning community in which we can challenge each other to rise to the level of the readings in the course. More than that, we become better students, better thinkers, and better citizens when so engaged in what philosopher Jacques Derrida has called "the community of the question."

#### **Assignments and Grading:**

##### *Basics*

- 1) Postings to Online Discussion Board (10 X 2% each), due by 8 a.m. on the day of **every class** (except Jan. 4 and March 29): 20%
- 2) Essay One (4-5 pages), due in class on February 8: 20%
- 3) Essay Two (7-8 pages), due in class March 15: 30%
- 4) Final Exam (date TBA): 30%

All late essays will incur a penalty of 3% per day, up to 8 days.

##### *Rubric:*

A basic rubric for the how the essay will be graded can be found here:

<http://www.bsu.edu/english/writingprogram/rubric.htm>

Please refer to this when writing your essay, as well as if questions arise after the essay has been handed back. Questions can be addressed to the instructor informally, but a formal grade challenge should be issued via a memorandum of no more than 250 words explaining the basis of the challenge.

##### *Online Postings:*

Prior to each class meeting, with the exception of the first day (Jan. 4) and the last day (March 29), each student is required to post one item to the Discussion section of Blackboard by 8 a.m. that day. This posting is to be no shorter than 50 words, but should be less than 150 words. The grade will be based on whether the posting meets these requirements – it will not be graded for content, though postings that are clearly not related to the week's readings, or that demonstrate a lack of acquaintance with the readings, will not be counted. As long as the basic requirement is met, each student will receive the full 2% for the posting, amounting to 20% for successfully posting all materials by the semester's end.

Each posting should address a question to the text, or to one of the other student's postings for that week. They can take many forms, and the following are just a few examples: 1) puzzle through what the author means... e.g. "Author X seems to state that Z is the case, but I cannot understand how this argument works, since the Author also says Y. One way to resolve this seeming dilemma is to include B in the argument, which removes the contradiction; 2) argue with the author... "Author M states X and Y, both of which result in a argument that is immoral (state why) and threatens democratic legitimacy (state why). Author M's position is of no use to us in crafting a theory of the ethical use of violence; 3) "Student U has posted that Author P is wrong because of K. While I agree that K is a problem, Student U does not take into account Author P's argument J, which answers the contradictions raised by Student U." Hopefully these dreary examples will give you an idea of the flavour of the postings, but please do make your commentary livelier than what I have just written above! I expect that these postings will facilitate class discussions by

placing a number of issues on the table well before the actual class session, and I will likely be responding to some of the issues raised in my lectures/group projects for the week.

#### *Essays:*

It is important that you cite the material you have relied upon in writing your essays, though for the online postings I am less interested in careful citation than I am in seeing your first-blush reactions to these texts.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com website.

If you have questions about when you need to provide citation for a source, please see the Toronto Libraries' guide on avoiding plagiarism. If you have questions about how to provide citation on your sources, please see the Toronto Libraries' guide on citation formats. Use any citation format that you like; the main thing is that you give credit to the sources you use.

#### **Accessibility**

For issues regarding this course and accessibility, please contact:

Accessibility Services, Robarts Library, 130 St. George Street, 1st Floor (ground entrance off St. George St.), North end of building, next to ATRC, Telephone: 416-978-8060, TDD: 416-978-1902, Email: [disability.services@utoronto.ca](mailto:disability.services@utoronto.ca)

#### **Readings (all books ordered at U of T Bookstore):**

Title: *The Island of Dr. Moreau*  
Author: H.G. Wells

Title: *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*  
Author: Ray Kurzweil

Title: *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*  
Author: Francis Fukuyama

Title: *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*  
Author: Rosi Braidotti

Title: *When Species Meet*  
Author: Donna Haraway

Title: *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*  
Author: Bruno Latour

#### **Schedule:**

January 4: Introductions:

Tell Me What You Don't Like About Yourself; The Meanings of Human; 1260, 1486, and 2050

January 11: Are these people nuts?

*The Island of Dr. Moreau*, entire

January 18: Transcending the Human

*The Singularity is Near*, 1-110

January 25: Transhumanism, Part II  
*The Singularity is Near*, 205-426

February 1: The Traditionalist Critique  
*Our Posthuman Future*, 3-18, 84-218

**ESSAY ONE DUE: February 8, hard copy due in class**

February 8: The Critique of Biopower  
*Transpositions*, 1-95

February 22: Nature and the Subject  
*Transpositions*, 96-203

March 1: Death, Etc.  
*Transpositions*, 204-278

March 8: We Have Never Been Human  
*When Species Meet*, 3-157

**ESSAY TWO DUE: March 15, hard copy due in class**

March 15: Tangles  
*When Species Meet*, 249-301

March 22: Science, Democracy, Nature  
*Politics of Nature*, 1-90

March 29: Political Ecology!  
*Politics of Nature*, 91-228

**FINAL EXAM: To Be Announced**