



MODULE SPECIFICATION

Part 1: Information			
Module Title	Post-Humanism		
Module Code	UZRK9X-15-3	Level	Level 6
For implementation from	2020-21		
UWE Credit Rating	15	ECTS Credit Rating	7.5
Faculty	Faculty of Health & Applied Sciences	Field	Philosophy
Department	HAS Dept of Health & Social Sciences		
Module type:	Standard		
Pre-requisites	None		
Excluded Combinations	None		
Co- requisites	None		
Module Entry requirements	None		

Part 2: Description
<p>Educational Aims: See Learning Outcomes</p> <p>Outline Syllabus: Humanism, for the purposes of this module, can be understood as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The claim that there exists some fundamental essence or set of characteristics that defines the 'human' in contrast to the rest of the world/nature. (There are some supposed non-essentialist forms of humanism but post/trans humanist critiques are directed at the, much more widespread, essentialist varieties.) 2. That this essence or set of characteristics places the human in a privileged position with respect to the rest of the world/nature. 3. That normative criteria can be derived from an acceptance of this privileged character of the 'human'. <p>The emergence of this humanist world view and basis for normativity has arisen as religious bases for normativity have fallen into decline. In particular the so called Age of Enlightenment brought the peculiar qualities of rationality and freedom to the fore – as essential characteristics of the human. Most of our political discourse today makes little sense outside of this context. The</p>

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assumed importance of human rights, social justice, egalitarianism, democracy, together with most aspects of modern jurisprudence etc. is all predicated on the assumption that the 'human' is the fundamental validating principle of social and political normativity. What is good for humans, is what it good. This, for example, is why we have no difficulty eating animals, but regard eating humans as an unspeakable crime – even in a secular society.

Three important avenues of critique of humanism have emerged however. This module is intended to examine these critiques and assess their implications – including the potential dangers inherent in the critique of humanism.

Firstly, the late 20th century saw a variety of critiques of humanism from a philosophical, theoretical and ideological point of view. Thinkers such as Michel Foucault argued that humanism was in fact implicated in a whole range of regimes of power. This ran from the ideological justification of colonialism (the conquest of the savage by the civilized), to the normalisation of various categories of deviant (the insane, the delinquent, the perverse) in light of 'humanist' norms. In this account the 'human' is not a given, but a construct, and humanism (the normalising of this construct) emerged as an exercise of power (always in relation to the savage, non-human, inhuman, less than human etc.) - to be critiqued and resisted as such.

Secondly, and much more recently, a whole range of technological developments have eroded the basis upon which humanist assumptions were made. Artificial intelligence threatens to erode both one of the key characteristics of the uniquely human ('rational' and intelligent decision making), and the assumption that humans are best placed to know what is good for them (since AI already knows much more about us than we do). As Yuval Noah Harari points out - we can no longer sustain the self-delusion of free-will when we know very well that our behaviour is being modified and manipulated by algorithms processing our personal data. And in such a context why is democratic political decision making a good idea? If the AI knows what we want and need better than we do - why not leave decision making to the AI? This may be especially the case if we find ourselves falling further into a spiraling epistemic crisis brought on by algorithmically engineered disinformation and manipulation. Furthermore progress in technologies such as biotechnology (genetic engineering, artificial life etc.), machine learning, and various forms of technological human enhancement (including immortality and super intelligence) have made the prospect of post-human, autonomous, life forms a real possibility. Some have posited the inevitability of a 'technological singularity' in which autonomous post-human machine and/or biological developments surpass what is understandable, let alone controllable, by humans. We will no longer be capable of knowing what our creations are doing? Does this call for a post/transhumanism in which social and political values and priorities are revised? What are the implications/opportunities/dangers of this?

Finally there is the question of the relationship between humanism and environmental sustainability. Is the continued elevation of the human as the ultimate normative measure compatible with the continued existence of the rest of the natural world? Many critics have argued that humanism makes nature a mere collection of resources for the satisfaction of human needs and desires. In this light, nature has no value beyond its utility for the human. This instrumental approach to nature is what has brought us to the brink of ecological catastrophe it is argued.

This module will aim to touch on all three of these critiques of humanism – and assess their potential implications. It may shift its main focus between them from year to year however.

Teaching and Learning Methods: See Assessment Strategy

Part 3: Assessment

This module will be assessed by a briefing paper and a portfolio of discussion board contributions/reflections.

Both assessment points are designed to allow students to demonstrate philosophical knowledge and skills, and research skills, and thus both allow students to demonstrate learning outcomes 1 and 3-6. The discussion board portfolio includes the opportunity to show the subject expertise involved in an awareness of different interpretations and the rationale for them (learning outcome 2).

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<p>The briefing paper will aim to convey to a lay person, who has responsibility for decision making in a political or organisational context, some aspect of the critique of humanism, its sources, and its potentially practical consequences. The student will be required to elaborate and clarify aspects of the briefing paper where necessary. It thus provides the opportunity to demonstrate 7 and 8, which are important transferable skills supporting our students in becoming ready and able graduates.</p>			
First Sit Components	Final Assessment	Element weighting	Description
Written Assignment - Component B		50 %	Briefing paper (2000 words)
Portfolio - Component A	✓	50 %	Portfolio of discussion board contributions/reflections
Resit Components	Final Assessment	Element weighting	Description
Written Assignment - Component B		50 %	Briefing paper (2000 words)
Portfolio - Component A	✓	50 %	Portfolio of discussion board contributions/reflections

Part 4: Teaching and Learning Methods

Learning Outcomes	On successful completion of this module students will achieve the following learning outcomes:	
	Module Learning Outcomes	Reference
	Demonstrate knowledge of philosophical critiques of humanism and/or post/trans humanist arguments relating to new technologies and/or ecological critiques of humanism	MO1
	Show an awareness of different interpretations of primary texts and debates in the secondary literature	MO2
	Demonstrate the ability to pursue independent research	MO3
	Understand the broad philosophical implications of post/trans humanism	MO4
	Critically engage with arguments or theories of particular philosophers and writers in this area	MO5
	Succinctly and clearly develop a philosophical argument	MO6
	Articulate philosophical concepts to non-experts	MO7
	Relate the practice of philosophy to problems we confront in life with a critical awareness of the conceptual complexity involved	MO8
Contact Hours	Independent Study Hours:	
	Independent study/self-guided study	117
	Total Independent Study Hours:	117
	Scheduled Learning and Teaching Hours:	

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	Face-to-face learning	33
	Total Scheduled Learning and Teaching Hours:	33
	Hours to be allocated	150
	Allocated Hours	150
Reading List	<p><i>The reading list for this module can be accessed via the following link:</i></p> <p>https://rl.talis.com/3/uwe/lists/BC82FD03-47A0-A6CE-7F88-39BF394D791D.html</p>	

Part 5: Contributes Towards

This module contributes towards the following programmes of study: