How do forests think? What are the multiple existences of an ordinary disease such as atherosclerosis? Is capitalism a form of sorcery? What political role can Gaia play in environmental debates? This course departs from foundational questions in the field of Philosophical Anthropology in order to explore different facets of the more current intellectual production around issues of ontology and cosmopolitics. Students are expected to conclude the semester being more capable to consider important anthropological questions such as: What sort of beings exist? What are the consequences of accepting certain beings as political agents, but not others? Should humans always be granted a privileged place in our discipline?

Learning Goals

By the end of this class students will be able to:

• Display general knowledge about the field of Philosophical Anthropology and understand concepts such as: humanism, anti-humanism, and post-humanism.

• Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of current anthropological debates around the following themes: metaphysics, ontology, cosmology, and cosmopolitics.

• Understand the connection between traditional and more current discussions in the field of Philosophical Anthropology that connect a general concern with the nature of being and the nature of humanity with very practical and current political concerns such as the environment, health, and the economy.
Course Structure and Requirements

The class will be a combined lecture/seminar format. The instructor will introduce the day’s topic with a brief lecture, then lead discussion of the material for the remainder of the class. Students are required to do the assigned readings before each class. This is essential for the engagement in class discussions. Coursework must reflect careful consideration and understanding of the issues, topics, and authors discussed during the classes. Failure to attend classes and engage in discussion will influence the final grade by lowering the 20% of the grade assigned for participation. The overall grade breakdown is as follows:

80% Four 1,000 word papers (20% each);

20% Class participation: This grade will depend on the assessment of your preparedness and contribution to class discussion. Please consult the instructor personally if for some reason you do not feel comfortable participating in class discussions.

The penalty for late work will be -3 (minus three) points per day, or fraction of a day. After 7 days late, the work will no longer be accepted. In exceptional circumstances, extensions can be granted but only if requested well before the due dates. For each essay, the penalty for going over the maximum word limit will also be -3 (minus three) points (words beyond 20% over the ideal will not be read). Students are responsible for any use of technology and no extensions can be granted due to IT problems. All possible measures will be taken to detect plagiarism, which is considered a very serious academic offense and will be dealt with following established university procedures.

Basic Readings

The following books (listed in the order that they will be used) will be on reserve and available at the Brandeis Bookstore:

Michel Foucault. *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*. Semiotext(e). 2008.


Disability

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, you should contact the instructor, and present your letter of accommodation, as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations, you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in Undergraduate Academic Affairs at 736-3470 (brodgers@brandeis.edu). Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to be familiar with, and to follow, the University’s policies on academic integrity. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures. All policies related to academic integrity apply to in-class and take home projects, assignments, exams, and quizzes. Students may only collaborate on assignments with permission from the instructor. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university.
Course Contents

PART 1: Humanism, Antihumanism, and Posthumanism

In this first part of the course, students will be introduced to the field of Philosophical Anthropology. They will be presented with understandings of anthropology as discussed in the work of selected philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, Michel Foucault, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Building on this initial philosophical contact, during the second half of Part 1, students will be exposed to more current debates in Philosophical Anthropology and will learn about consolidated perspectives currently defended by authors that tend to question (or support) the centrality of “the human” in anthropology (humanism, antihumanism, and posthumanism).

Week 1

January 12:
Welcome and course overview.

January 14:

Week 2

January 19: No class.

Week 3

January 26:
Michel Foucault. *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*. Foreign Agents. 2008. [BASIC READING]

January 28:
SNOW DAY

Week 4

February 2:
SNOW DAY

February 4:


Week 5

February 9:
SNOW DAY

February 11:


Olli Pyyhtinen and Sakari Tamminen. We have never been only human: Foucault and Latour on the question of the anthropos. *Anthropological Theory*. Vol. 11 no. 2 135-152. June 2011. [LATTE]


*** [1st PAPER DUE FEB 20 BY 6PM] ***

[Week 6: Midterm recess - no classes.]
Week 7

February 23:


Donna Haraway. We have never been human. In *When Species Meet (Posthumanities)*. University of Minnesota Press. 2008. [LATTE]

PART 2: Ontologies

Building upon previous discussions of what it is to be human (and of humans as some sort of beings), in this second part of the course, we will turn our focus towards a deeper exploration of the latter term of the compound “human being”. How exactly could the questioning of the very existence of things help with a more comprehensive understanding of the world (and the cosmos)? The concept of “ontology” will be introduced and students will be invited to consider questions such as: Is ontology another word for culture? What sort of beings exist and for whom? What significance does ontology have in practice; such as for life in a medical practice, life in a computer game, or life in a tropical forest?
February 25:


Week 8

March 2:


March 4:

Week 9

March 9:
Annemarie Mol. *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*. Duke University Press. 2003. (Chapters 4-6) [BASIC READING]

March 11:

*** [2nd PAPER DUE MARCH 13 BY 6PM] ***

Week 10

March 16:

March 18:
Week 11

March 23:

March 25:

Week 12

March 30:

James Laidlaw. *Ontologically Challenged*. Anthropology of This Century, no. 4. 2012. [LATTE]


*** [3rd PAPER DUE APRIL 3RD BY 6PM] ***
PART 3: Cosmopolitics

In the last part of the course, we will bring together threads developed in the first two parts. We will question the political significance of different understandings of humanity, the consequences of accepting certain ontological arrangements as more real than others, and will reflect on the political agency that different beings have in the world. We will look into different cosmologies and their practical implications in terms of power. This is meant not only in terms of what it takes in terms of power to maintain certain cosmological visions at the expense of others, but also in terms of what is the power that certain cosmological visions may have over the life of future generations and the future of the planet.

Week 12 (continuation)

April 1:

Isabella Stengers et al. **Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell**. Palgrave. 2011. (Introduction and Parts I-II) [LATTE]

[Week 13: Passover - no classes]

Week 14

April 13:

Isabella Stengers et al. **Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell**. Palgrave. 2011. (Introduction and Parts III-IV) [LATTE]

April 15:

Week 15

April 20:

April 22:

Week 16

April 27:

Conclusion and Revision.

*** [4TH PAPER DUE MAY 1ST BY 6PM] ***