Department of Systematic Theology and Ethics
Faculty of Catholic Theology
at the University of Vienna
Schenkenstraße 8-10

The Future Human Being

WHAT
Two-day workshop

WHERE
Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Vienna

WHEN
September, 26-27, 2022

DESCRIPTION

It is a truism to state that technology has been changing and shaping human being and his/her world from the very beginning of the human race. Nevertheless, the rapid pace of development of modern and expected future technology and the amount of power and control it places in human hands, raise perhaps an entirely different issue of interventions (into the human world) of such a scale that displaces the metaphor of continuous development and progress and suggests the metaphor of discontinuous evolutionary jump. No matter how credible one finds that thesis and where one lands within the spectrum delineated by these two metaphors, it is beyond doubt that the future human being will be different from the present human being. Whether that transformation can be, and if so to which extent, controlled, depends epistemologically on three moments. First, establishing, as far as this is possible, a normative account of what human being is, second, detecting significant areas in which s/he is being transformed by technology and what that transformation consists of, and, third, evaluating that development or transformation.

The epistemological ordering of these three moments should not be confused with their chronological ordering. Thus, while we might be able to sketch a normative anthropological account of what human being is and even argue that a particular account or accounts enjoy a significant level of theological/philosophical consensus, constructing such normative accounts depends on particular judgements that presuppose both deductive and inductive reasoning. In terms of the latter, this would mean that our second epistemological moment chrono/logically proceeds not only the third epistemological moment, but, to an extent, also the first.

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Bearing that in mind, at the beginning of the workshop the participants will engage with the task of sketching a normative anthropological account as the starting point of discussion and as a helpful (preliminary) tool of assessing significant technological developments that are changing the human being. Because of this, sessions 1-5 will pair an expert in one of the areas of technological development and an ethicist/philosopher in order to describe and evaluate. The last, concluding, session will, then, not only engage with a comprehensive evaluation of how technology influences the emergence of the future human being, but will also employ insights that emerged along the way in order to revisit the normative anthropological sketch from the beginning of the workshop.

METHOD

The main goal of the workshop is to foster discussion among the participants on a level that is usually not possible at conferences. In order to achieve this, the whole event is divided into a preparatory phase and the workshop itself. During the preparatory phase all participants are asked to write a paper on the topic of their (assigned) thematic session, whereby the first participant in each session will write a position paper (**deadline**: June 15, 2022), while the second participant will write a reply paper (**deadline**: August 31, 2022). The papers are limited to maximum 6 pages (Times New Roman, font 12, spacing 1,5) and ought to be submitted at an agreed upon date, as to allow all participants to read all papers before coming to the workshop.

During the workshop itself, each participant will have 10-15 minutes to present the key ideas of his/her paper in a given thematic session, while bearing in mind that all participants have already read all papers. After that the group will engage in a discussion, but those who presented papers in that particular session are not allowed to take part in it for the first 10 minutes, so that these discussions do not turn into defence of presented papers or q&a discussion.

POST-WORKSHOP PHASE

After the workshop, the authors are asked to develop their position/reply papers to full articles, taking also into account insights that emerged during the workshop. The specifications of these contributions will be discussed at the end of the workshop and they will be published either as an edited book or as a special issue of a journal.

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STRUCTURE

1. *Introductory session: Who is the human being?*

2. *Session: Communication in the future*

3. *Session: Future work environment*

4. *Session: Future living environment*

5. *Session: Artificial Intelligence*

6. *Session: Medical possibilities of the future*

7. *Session (concluding session): Transformation of the human being*