

Human Futures seminar: Truly Human?

Nicholas Agar:

Good Philosophical Advice about Enhancement

Abstract: It is important to distinguish advice about the prudential rationality of enhancement from advice about the morality of enhancing humans. The focus of this talk is on the former. I argue that useful advice about which varieties of enhancement are good for us should reflect facts about what human beings typically value. Investigation of these values reveals that there can be such a thing as too much enhancement. It is a mistake to suppose that if some degree of human enhancement is prudentially good then a greater degree must be even better. I investigate this pattern of valuing human enhancement in the context of a discussion about radical enhancement as a transformative change – alterations to us that significantly change how we value our experiences, beliefs, or achievements. There are prudential grounds to reject some changes that we predict we will be satisfied about once we undergo them.

Robert Sparrow

Yesterday's child

Abstract: Despite the advent of CRISPR, gene editing for human enhancement remains well beyond our current technological capabilities. For the discussion about enhancing human beings to be worth having, then, we must assume that gene-editing technology will improve rapidly. However, rapid progress in the development and application of any technology comes at a price: obsolescence. If the genetic enhancements we can provide children get better and better each year, then the enhancements granted to children born in any given year will rapidly go out of date. Sooner or later,

every modified child will find themselves to be “yesterday’s child”. The impacts of such obsolescence on our individual, social, and philosophical self-understanding constitute an under-explored set of considerations relevant to the ethics of genome editing.

Jonathan Pengelly

Machine freedom and the divided self

I am interested in understanding machine freedom and exploring the connection between freedom and forms of intelligence. In this talk I would like to concentrate on the constraints placed on individual freedom within oneself. I argue that the divided self is an essential component of what makes us truly human. This is interesting in that it highlights a fundamental difference between human and machine intelligence, while also identifying where there is potential to find common ground.

Mads Rosendahl Thomsen

Errare humanum est: Notes on the aesthetics of pretending to be human

Abstract: Ideas of the transhuman are often concerned with improvement and perfection. Art, literature, film and other forms of fiction are rife with non-human beings. What also shows in these representations is what I would call a revaluation of the imperfect. The stereotypical robotic voice vs. the pausing, irregular human speech, and the flawless smooth surface of a robot vs. the complexity of human skin are just two examples of sensible expressions of a preference for the flawed rather than the perfect. My presentation will follow this motif in two directions: firstly, in an analysis of less obvious ways that imperfection plays a role in producing human value (narratives, memory, sports), and secondly, in a reflection on whether the ability to be imperfect is a new frontier in replicating humans.