

Kircher Network Online Lecture Series

Human Enhancement: Myth, Ideology and Utopia

17th of June, 2021, 5pm – 7pm CET (lecture and discussion)

Prof. Anna Bugajska, Jesuit University Ignatianum, Kraków, Poland.

Prof. Bugajska is the Head of the Institute of Modern Languages and the Head of Language and Culture Studies Department. She conducts interdisciplinary research in philosophy, bioethics, literature and collaborates with the Institute of Philosophy of the Jesuit University Ignatianum.

Abstract (long)

The idea of enhancing humans with the use of existing and emerging technologies over the last couple of decades has captured the attention of philosophers, scientists, sociologists and cultural critics all over the world resulting in a multidisciplinary pool of commentaries, either praising or condemning the idea. Human enhancement is closely linked to the rise of the transhumanist movement (Humanity+), which actively propagates radical techno-transformation of humanity, and the host of associated ideas, e.g. morphological and reproductive freedom, techno progressivism, functionalist approach to the body, or extropian mindset, inviting expansion and the pursuit of unspecified happiness. The representatives of the movement frequently use tropes known from mythology, construct utopian visions of a hedonistic paradise or a morally perfect utopia, sometimes veering in the direction of religious and ideological discourse, which may occult the actual promises and perils of the technological interventions in the human body.

The talk concentrates on three aspects of discourse surrounding human enhancement: myth, ideology and utopia. The myth here will be understood as a specific fiction legitimating and codifying unfounded belief in human enhancement as the way to salvation or goal of life. It will be related to the studies by Michael Hauskeller (2014, 2016), Calvin Mercer and Tracy J. Trothen (2014), and Ernst Bloch (1992). The ideological dimension will be taken to mean the construction of a system of ideas as part of a plan of action and will be presented with reference to the studies of Karl Mannheim (1992) and Mariano Asla (2018, 2020). Finally, the utopian character of human enhancement discourse will concentrate on the idealized bio-political vision and the expression of the contemporary perspectives on bio power. It will draw from the theories presented by Lucas E. Misseri (2016, 2019) and Andrew Pilsch (2017). It will be seen that although the three aspects are coexistent and sometimes overlap, they are not self-same and that the debate over each of them enriches the knowledge about the human enhancement phenomenon and enables the more profound understanding of transhumanism as one of the dominant movements of the present times.