

Editorial

Technology and the self

The most exciting breakthroughs of the 21st century will not occur because of technology but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human

(John Naisbitt, futurist)

Technologies affect what we do, how we work, think and communicate. Mobile telephones, for example, have enabled *approximeeting*, “arranging to meet someone without making firm plans about time or place, and then finalising details via mobile phone while out and about” (The Phone of the Future, 2006). Another example is the Internet, which facilitates the creation of a new identity and the beginning of a new virtual life as a three-dimensional avatar, a representation of your person in the form of a model to be used to explore 3-D virtual worlds and socialize with other virtual persons. Additionally, current technological developments are increasingly triggering questions about selfhood and what it means to be human. Progress in genetics, for example, has prompted the question of what it means to be 98 percent chimpanzee (Jonathan Marks, 2002). Moreover, we are beginning to use technologies to change ourselves in accordance with our desires. At this early stage it is impossible to say just where our efforts at autotransformation for the purpose of enhancement will lead us to; but we will undoubtedly enter new territory – not only in a medical sense, but also anthropologically, psychologically and politically.

The current issue of *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* focuses on technology and the self. It starts with a thematic section on “Psychopharmacology and the Self”, which originates from a parallel session on psychopharmacology held during the 19th European Conference on Philosophy of Medicine and Health Care in Barcelona in August 2005. The topicality of the subject matter can hardly be overstated against the backdrop of the emerging neuroethics debate.

The first paper of the other Scientific Contributions focuses on nanomedicine. The pace of developments in nanomedicine is quite amazing. In March 2005, the first issue of *Nanomedicine: Nanotechnology, Biology, and Medicine* was published, the first international peer reviewed academic journal exclusively focusing on providing the latest information both in nanomedical research and clinical applications. Moreover, it is the Official Journal of the American Academy of Nanomedicine, the first professional academic society devoted to moving ahead research in nanomedicine. It was launched earlier in 2005 and held its First Annual Meeting at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, USA (August 15–16, 2005). In their paper “Nanomedicine – emerging or re-emerging ethical issues? A discussion of four ethical themes”, Lenk and Biller-Andorno analyse important ethical concerns associated with the further development of nanomedicine, such as the risks, issues of human identity and enhancement as well as implications for civil liberties. In doing so they clearly demonstrate the need for further ethical debate so as to form a basis for responsible political decision-making.

The next paper, written by Brassington, focuses on “Heidegger’s concept of technology and its application in medicine”. Drawing on the distinction between chronological and historical modernity, the author argues that medical technology does not incorporate the dangers that Heidegger regards as associated with modern technology. Subsequently, Tengland’s paper, “Empowerment: A goal or a means for health promotion?”, endeavours to explain what empowerment exactly involves. Moreover, it investigates whether empowerment is a goal or a means for health promotion.

In the next scientific contribution, “Disability and personal identity”, Edwards analyses the claim that the disabling characteristics of a disabled person are part of the identity of that person.

Drawing on an account of narrative identity, the author demonstrates that the identity claim can indeed be accepted. The final paper, “Edwards on disablement and personal identity” by van Hooft, is a commentary on Edward’s article.

References

The Phone of the Future: 2006, *The Economist* 381(8506), 14–16.

Marks, J.: 2002, *What It Means to Be 98% Chimpanzee: Apes, People, and Their Genes*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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