

Colloquium 2002: Technology and the Human Person

For its seventh annual colloquium series, the Institute is pleased to welcome six distinguished speakers to the University of Virginia to address the theme of "Technology and the Human Person."

New technologies have powerful and disturbing implications for our understanding of the human person. In the domain of computers, cyberspace and virtual reality immerse people in simulated environments, while innovations in artificial intelligence move towards the convergence of the human and the machine. In biotechnology, advances in genetic engineering, xenotechnology, and nanotechnology bring a new capacity to manipulate fundamental life processes. Scientists are moving genes across species boundaries, and promising profound transformations in the human experience of frailty, aging, reproduction, and disease.

Historically, the distinguishing qualities of the human person have been denoted by the natural and the real over and against the artificial and the virtual. However, technological advances are increasingly blurring and confusing these distinctions, raising new and troubling questions about what is unique to the human person and deserving of protection, and what is negotiable. Does human intelligence or embodied social interaction, for instance, lose an essential quality when artificially constructed or virtually simulated? What does the intermingling of the artificial or nonhuman and the natural or human mean for our experience and understanding of our embodiment? What visions of the human person are embedded in these technologies and what forms of social order do they push us toward?

To address how information and biotechnologies challenge our conceptions of the human person, the colloquium will be organized into three thematic sessions, with two presenters each.

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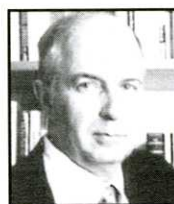
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February 7

Biotechnology, Medicine, and Ethics

Jonathan Imber, Professor of Sociology, Wellesley College.

- "The Twilight of the Prosthetic Gods"



Gilbert Meilaender, Professor of Christian Ethics, Valparaiso University.

- "Genes as Resources"

5:30 p.m. The Dome Room, Rotunda

February 28

Technology and Its Politics

Langdon Winner, Professor of Political Science, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

- "Are Human Beings Obsolete?"



Lori Andrews, Professor of Law, Chicago-Kent College of Law.

- "People as Products: The Conflict Between Technologies and Social Values"

5:30 p.m. Minor Hall Auditorium

March 28

The Nature of Technology and Being Human

Albert Borgmann, Professor of Philosophy, University of Montana.

- "Is There Hope for Technology? On the Blessings of Calamity and the Burdens of Good Fortune"



Anne Foerst, Research Scientist, MIT Artificial Intelligence Lab.

- "Human and Non-Human Persons: A New Concept of Ethics for the Technological Age"

5:30 p.m. Minor Hall Auditorium

For directions and more information on the speakers, see www.virginia.edu/iasc/colloquia.html.

The Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture is a non-profit, privately-funded research center at the University of Virginia. Through a wide-ranging and interdisciplinary program, the Institute investigates cultural change and its implications, works to foster dialogue, and offers resources to those who wish to respond creatively and constructively to the social, moral, and political challenges of our time.

