Call for papers

Conference: Human Freedom at the test of AI and Neurosciences

Rome, 2–5 September 2024

What is humanism? What does it mean to be human in an age marked by the rapid developments of scientific knowledge and technological applications, especially in the fields of AI and neuroscience? The category of humanism, as well as the fundamental question of human freedom, face enormous challenges in such a technoscientific era. Large algorithmic systems make millions of decisions every day without any human mediation, and those decisions impact millions of lives. Large machine learning and neural network systems that "feed" on data have reached a level of pervasiveness and ubiquity that makes them capable of influencing any type of social phenomenon, from financial transactions to electoral campaigns. Entanglement becomes sometimes so deep that it can prove hard to distinguish the social phenomenon from the technical device intervening in it (hence the notion of socio-technical systems). The algorithms suggest which music to listen to, which films to watch, and what to buy. Furthermore, various information intermediation services work on the basis of algorithms that highlight what (according to them) is the most interesting news for us to read. However, algorithms are not neutral. They can replicate social biases on a large scale. What ethical limits should be inserted into algorithms to preserve the freedom of judgment and action of the human subject? If it is true that "software is eating the world," as software engineer and entrepreneur Marc Andreessen claims, perhaps it is time to start asking the right questions about how to build, "feed," and use these new and very powerful tools.

Parallel to this phenomenon is the radical transformation of the image of the human brain and its relationship with the body and the environment. Many approaches to neuroscience and cognitive science today question the actual freedom of choice of the human agent, reducing the brain to a set of chemical and physical reactions that leave little room for concepts such as autonomy, deliberation, choice, and interaction. Many questions arise: How are ethical decisions made in the brain? Are they different from other decisions? What are the mechanisms or structures that make self-control possible? Does studying the brain mean studying the self? From this perspective, is it still possible to use the concepts of free will and responsibility? Are there ethical limits in neuroscience research? Beyond questions neuroscientific knowledge raises, one can also wonder about the new applications it opens such as the use of this neuroscientific knowledge and techniques of neuroimagery in justice, education or health, as well as the growing possibilities in terms of brain-computer interfaces. What happens to the identity of an implanted human, and how is their autonomy affected? Should humanity seek for technological augmentation of its cognitive abilities? Is there a transformation of what it means to be human at work here?

This conference aims to develop these (and other) questions concerning the impact of the recent developments in AI and neuroscience on humanism and on the manner we understand ourselves as free subjects. The conference intends to explore these topics through a resolutely interdisciplinary perspective, fueling a new philosophical and anthropological reflection that can facilitate a broad debate between institutions, academics, and social agents. For instance, how social and human sciences, philosophy and theology are put at work through questions and issues raised upon

freedom with the recent developments of AI and neuroscience? Can these domains (including the Bible or the Christian social teaching as well as other religious sources) offer insights to better understand what it means to be human in this new technoscientific era and to thereby better identify the ethical uses of technology and its limitation?

Any proposition of contribution addressing such issues from the perspective of human and social sciences, of philosophy or of theology as well as through the lens of natural and computer sciences or healthcare and medicine fields are very welcome.

Keynote speakers

The problem of freedom and today's challenges: Mario De Caro, University of Rome "Roma Tre" (Italy)

Ethics of AI: Dominique Lambert, University of Namur (Belgium)

Christian thought, AI, and neurosciences: Thierry Magnin, Catholic University of Lille (France)

Neurosciences and the problem of freedom: Patricia Churchland, University of San Diego (USA)

Democracy and Education: Fiorella Battaglia, University of Salento (Italy)

Health at the time of AI and neurosciences: Laura Palazzani, LUMSA-University of Rome (Italy)

The conference will be hosted by LUMSA-University of Rome within the framework of the international project New Humanism at the time of Neurosciences and Artificial Intelligence (NHNAI – coordinated by Lyon Catholic University under the aegis of the International Federation of Catholic Universities) and in collaboration with the International PhD program "Contemporary Humanism" and the Ecumenical French-speaking Association of Moral Theologians and Ethics Experts (ATEM). The last session of the conference will take place at the Rome Global Gateway of the University of Notre Dame.

The conference will be held mainly face-to-face. However, a live stream will be provided for all major events.

Submissions

Submission of abstracts for presentations addressing the main issues raised by the conference is welcome by email (**umanesimo@lumsa.it**). The presentation of panel proposals on specific topics in the indicated lines of research is also possible. **The deadline for submitting proposals is April 30, 2024**. Responses will be given by May 31, 2024. The deadline for submitting papers for publication is September 30, 2024. The accepted papers will be published in the conference proceedings.

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