

# DEBATING THE HERMENEUTIC CRITIQUE OF TECHNOSCIENTIFIC FUTURES

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## **Abstract:**

A discussion about Politics of Technoscientific Futures must commence by critically asking why and how public discourse refers to technoscience futures at all and whether technoscientific governance can do without such reference. These questions have been taken up by a hermeneutic approach to technology assessment (TA) and the various attempts to conceive the future as an object (of design, of technical, intellectual and political control): In the last decades, it has been shown that thinking about the future has been reduced to thinking about technology, and inversely, that technology is the answer to the global challenges for the future. For better and worse, the future is presently conceived and imagined largely in relation to science and technology. Furthermore, the most prominent views on those technoscientific futures are elitist; they are conceived by a small fraction of people whose values are expressed in them. Another characteristic of this discourse is the inability, impossibility, or unwillingness to distinguish the perfectly sensible method of extrapolating the present („where are we heading?“) and the perfectly sensible interest to posit a vision of the good life („how shall we live?“) from the almost unintelligible project of anticipating the effects of radical transformation („how will it be once a radically new future world has been created?“). In pursuit of a hermeneutic critique of technoscientific futures, our panel will discuss the roots of conflating these different questions and the normative and political implications of their elitism and focus on science and technology.

- The future exists only aspirationally as a powerful image of another world, but it is nevertheless taken as a given object of planning and prediction, design and contemplation.
- Consequentialism is only one approach to ethics, and yet it is predominant in technology assessment and public discourse - even though the consequences in question are hypothetical at best. In contrast, a virtue ethics of technological research programs would engage with presently operative value commitments.
- The art of anticipation involves a sensitivity for what can happen in the world as one knows it, and yet there is a demand for anticipation of what can happen in a world that is decisively different from the known world because it has been radically transformed through technological innovation. The proposed panel will explore this predicament and strategies for dealing with it. It thereby probes the limits of the hermeneutic approach by asking the following questions and more: 1) Is a hermeneutic approach to technoscientific futures dedicated merely to self-understanding through discourse analysis or does it have normative dimensions which afford a critical assessment of emerging technologies? 2) Is it addressed only to texts or does it involve a hermeneutics of technological systems and technical practice? 3) Can it serve as a corrective to the misplaced ambition of taking the future as an object of design or control, or does it provide a humanities perspective as a methodological complement in the toolset for shaping or modulating the future? 4) If hermeneutics can help us understand and criticize an elitist sociotechnical orientation of discourse, can it also be productive for fostering and strengthening alternative imaginaries?

**Key words:**

Hermeneutics, Technoscientific Futures, Technology Assessment