Man and Superman

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Human Enhancement in Fiction

We humans have always dreamt of overcoming the limitations that nature imposes on us, of acquiring abilities that go far beyond anything currently possible, of being so strong, clever and superior that we can achieve anything we want, even conquering death. Modern technology, we imagine, will one day grant us everything we have ever dreamt of: superhuman strength, unlimited knowledge and understanding, hitherto unimaginable pleasures, and a life that will extend indefinitely into an increasingly glorious posthuman future.

Such developments have been foreshadowed in the stories that we have told ourselves. Our literature is rich with accounts of radical human enhancement, right from the epic of Gilgamesh and Homer's Iliad to China Mieville and Robert Sawyer. To examine such accounts helps us to understand the cultural roots of certain goals and arguments that inform current discourse surrounding human enhancement and the positions of both those who support the project and those who are suspicious of it. By stimulating our creative imagination, those accounts may also shed light on the complexity of certain envisioned developments and the very desirability of the projected outcomes. Fiction is, as a hermeneutic space, a valuable source of, and tool for, philosophical reflection.

We are inviting contributions to a planned volume on "Human Enhancement in Fiction", in which several publishers have indicated an interest (but we haven't decided with which one to go yet). Articles should engage with a work of fiction that addresses some aspect of radical human enhancement. Titles can be chosen from the following tentative list, but other suggestions are welcome: The Epic of Gilgamesh; Genesis; Iliad and Odyssey (Homer); Icarus and Dedalus (Ovid); Somnium (Kepler); The Other World. The States and Empires of the Sun and Moon (Cyrano de Bergerac); New Atlantis (Bacon); Frankenstein (Mary Shelley); The Birth Mark (Hawthorne); The Picture of Dorian Gray (Oscar Wilde); Man and Superman/ Back to Methuselah (Bernard Shaw); Brave New World/ Many a Summer (Aldous Huxley); Funes the Memorious/ The Immortals (Borges); The Boys from Brazil (Ira Lewin); A Clockwork Orange (Anthony Burgess); The Possibility of an Island (Houllebecq); Oryx and Crake/ Year of the Flood (Atwood); Neuromancer (William Gibson); Snow Crash (Neal Stephenson); Accelerando (Charlie Stross); Perdido Street Station (China Mieville); Mindscan (Robert J. Sawyer).

Deadline for abstracts and proposals – 15 FEBRUARY 2012

If you are interested in contributing, please send an abstract of 200-400 words by and a short bio to Curtis Carbonell:

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