

Human Enhancement Technologies Workshop's Summary

September 21-22, 2018

Johns Hopkins University, United States

A workshop was hosted by the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (APL) in Laurel (Maryland) on the 21st and 22nd of September 2018. It was organized by Erin Hahn of the APL, and Prof Noam Lubell of the University of Essex. The Hebrew University Cyber Security Research Center hosted one of the panels. The workshop was multidisciplinary in essence and brought together experts from various backgrounds (law, politics, physics, philosophy, medicine) and institutions (Johns Hopkins University, the University of Essex, the Swedish Defence University, the University of Minnesota, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and others). Two legal experts from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem were present: Professor Yuval Shany and Dr Thibault Moulin.

The discussion started around a draft paper on a definition of human enhancement and an approach to creating a new taxonomy of enhancement technologies. Some of the questions at stake were the following; what is the line between human and non-human? How can we define enhancement as opposed to therapeutic technologies? Should we even look for an overall definition of enhancement?

Throughout the workshop presentations were given by scientists and engineers from the APL, followed by discussion among the experts. Presentations included subjects such as exoskeletons, enhanced perception, brain-computer interfaces, and pharmaceutical enhancement. Key issues – both ethical and legal - were raised during the workshop, such as: what are the challenges with regard to consent and privacy rights? When does a soldier turn into a weapon? How does it affect the application of international law and the law of armed conflict in particular? Should something be called an enhancement if the same result can be reached by other means? Can enhancement be the suppression of a characteristic? How should 'normality' be assessed? On an individual or species baseline? All these questions and more are the subject of continued work and collaboration between all involved and will be examined further at a workshop to be held in Jerusalem in February 2019.