TRANSLATION FROM THE ORIGINAL SUMMARY IN SPANISH

Seminar 'Digital Footprint: Servitude or Service?'

Shifting Frontiers of the "Enhanced Man"
(Summary of the session of April 15, 2021)

On April 15, the expert committee of the Seminar 'Digital Footprint: Servitude or Service?' held its eleventh session by videoconference, now in the final stretch of the program, dedicated to critical issues of digital ethics. From the two previous sessions emerges a broad description of artificial intelligence systems - a combination of software suites, human design, and decision-making strategies that occupy a growing place in exploiting “big data”, in fact nothing else than our digital footprint. The additional explanations provided by members of the expert committee have also clarified doubts about the operation of the advertising business model fed by these data, the existing possibilities of independent certification of the processes, and their energy consumption. A document by Raúl González Fabre on the topic, mentioned several times, of the "neutrality of technology" has also been circulated among the experts: in it, he observes that technology is not an instrument external to the human being, but a force, driven by economic or political competition, which has always modified our "moral operation" through new forms of social organization, new modes of decision, and even by changing the human subject himself. These thoughts lead to the theme of this session: the moving frontiers of the "improved man."

The presentation was given by Albert Cortina, lawyer and urban planner, an expert in transhumanism, and commented by Javier Prades, Dean of the San Dámaso University. This was followed by a discussion involving many of those present (list of participants attached).

The enhancement of the human being: "do yourself"

We all want to improve: throughout the centuries, man has sought to increase his performance in many ways. The desire for improvement translates into an attempt to enhance constantly, and that today goes further and explicitly sets goals in the human transformation itself. Emerging technologies (such as nanotechnology, biotechnology, information, and communication) open the possibility to improve human capacities, and with that appears the "human enhancement" that is already known as a discipline.

The proposals around "human enhancement" are aimed at biotechnologically accelerating human evolution, which in the eyes of some will lead to the alteration of the condition of the person: the desired result would be a "new man" design that forms a "new humanity," composed of posthuman beings with physical and cognitive capacities superior to those currently known.

The question is inevitable: what is meant by "enhancement"? Transhumanist and posthumanist theorists speak of an evolutionary process induced by emerging biotechnologies. In this future, desirable for them, the transhuman and the posthuman would achieve, thanks to the technique, a superintelligence, a super-longevity, and a superior, currently unknown well-being. These proposals for overcoming human defects or limitations evoke the risk of dystopian scenarios exposed to inhumane manipulations. However, quite to the contrary, transhumanists present their theories as an extension of humanism, which stem from a genuine concern for humanity and individuals.

For Nick Bostrom, a philosopher and one of the leading defenders of this current of thought, transhumanism is "a cultural, intellectual and scientific movement that affirms the moral duty to improve the physical and cognitive capacities of the human species, and to apply new technologies to human beings, so that undesirable aspects of the human condition can be eliminated, such as suffering, illness, aging, and even mortality."[1]

By referring to a "moral duty," transhumanists advocate not only a "culture of enhancement" but an "ethic of enhancement." In this position, man would have a moral obligation and a responsibility to improve himself. The underlying idea, defended by transhumanist organizations such as Humanity Plus, is that since the human species in its current form does not represent the end of our development, it is a preliminary stage, the evolution towards an improved species is in man's hands.

[1] Bostrom, N. (2005). A History of Transhumanist Thought. *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, 14(1(, 1-25.

These premises raise many doubts. First, the real possibility of overcoming the natural limits of human capabilities (or the limits of sex and species) through emerging technologies is questioned. Furthermore, these proposals relate to the possible limitation of our right to intervene on the body itself. We are thus in the moving borders that would imply crossing two possible red lines: on the one hand, the genetic manipulation that brings human enhancement. On the other hand, the hybridization of the human body and mind with the machine, especially with artificial intelligence.

Beyond the proposals for human enhancement as a philosophical doctrine, practical suggestions that could appear as science fiction have already been presented. Such is the case of biohacking and DIY (do it yourself) biology or garage biology. Biohacking is a supposedly scientific trend inspired by the transhumanist movement.

Biohackers, such as the activist and former NASA worker Josiah Zayner, propose modifying the human body to grant different capacities to the organism. Composed of the words "biology" and "hacking" (like computer hacking), biohacking is an anarchic-inspired practice that proposes the management of one's biology through a series of medical, nutritional, and electronic techniques to expand the physical and mental health of individuals. Behind these proposals, there is an aspiration of "citizen science" to develop an accessible and low-cost version outside the conventional environments of biology such as universities or large biotechnology companies. Indeed, there are already concrete proposals from biohackers such as Josiah Zayner, who promotes editing the genome with a vaccine to grow muscles.

Along the same lines, there are other examples of biohacking, such as "Circadia," an implantable device that can read biomedical data and transmit it to the Internet via Bluetooth, or projects of animal implants in the human body. Although at first glance all this provokes skepticism, the first technological proposals often seem impossible to put into practice. This was possibly the case with companies such as Google, Microsoft, or Apple in their early days.

Economic interests and social inequality

Transhumanist/posthumanists currently bring with them essential questions regarding human beings and nature, but they also have various practical consequences. In the first place, we run into the political and economic interests that promote the development of "enhancements" in our nature. On the other hand, it is necessary to always bear in mind the possible social inequalities in which all these technical proposals may incur: "human enhancement" will not be accessible to all, and this could lead to an insurmountable inequality between some "discarded" humans, on one side, and the transhumans or posthumans on the other.

Technological innovations are expensive, and they also have an economic incentive for the profit they can bring to those who commercialize them. Hence, there are already cases of great fortunes investing in them. Elon Musk, for example, invests in brain implants on monkeys who experiment by playing video games, but which could serve to prevent attacks of pain in the future. These implants could be used to treat chronic patients but also to implant in soldiers, or worse, assassins. Such innovations can be extremely dangerous in the wrong hands, and limits need to be placed on their use. However, the imposition of limits on technological innovation always raises the challenging problem of international competition and possible unmatched competitive advantages for those countries that do not want to impose such limits. As already seen in previous sessions, regulation must therefore protect the citizen in every way: it must respect and ensure his dignity as a person but must at the same time promote innovation and business competitiveness.

On the other hand, the social inequality that the so-called "enhanced man" may imply is possibly unprecedented. We would be talking about a few: those who can afford it in economic terms (either socially or individually) would be at an insurmountable advantage over those who cannot access the same possible benefits. Suppose a brain implant gives a few the ability to learn multiple languages without difficulty or a memory impossible to match. All those who are part of these privileged groups will find themselves in an advantageous position impossible to reach.

These cases are a call to caution and the understanding that any step in the direction set by this ideology can lead us to a situation from which we cannot turn back.

A new secular religion?

In his book, *El mito del hombre nuevo* (The myth of the new man), Professor Dalmacio Negro presents transhumanism/posthumanism as an authentic secular religion based on faith in the power of knowledge. For this scientific-technical belief, it is knowledge that will save man, thanks to the impulse that it can give for the radical transformation of human nature. This new secular religion, which is more than a simple secularization of the Christian faith, would replace religion as such. The divine is abandoned and replaced by the power of knowledge, which is sacralyzed. Furthermore, it rejects transcendence, and its referent is the earthly future, not eternity. Thus, man's salvation is in overcoming the natural, through which a new man appears. A step is taken from politics to biopolitics that supposes a new identity construction. It entails nothing less than a direct transformation of human nature and its de facto denial.

The abolition of human nature goes beyond gender to even conceive the notion of transspecies, not limited to the idea of cyborgs. This notion of transspecies has followers such as the founders of the Transpecies Society, who promote a supposed non-hierarchical vision of nature, which aims to give voice to non-human identities.

Then appears again the question about how to understand the right that an individual has over his own body. Although the existence of such a right is not debatable, there seem to be many ways of understanding it. Is human enhancement admissible when it proceeds from integrating biotechnologies into the body itself to increase our physical and cognitive capacities? The legal world appeals to the idea that these rights cannot be understood without a moral theory that considers the concepts of person and of dignity.

In this debate, dignity cannot be understood as a mere reduction to the concept of autonomy. In Albert Cortina's opinion, it is necessary to bring Kantian ideas, precisely the second formulation of the categorical imperative: "act in such a way that you use humanity, both in your person and in the person of any other, always as an end to the same time and never only as a means." Although not easy to pin down, the concept of human dignity implies much more than unbridled individual freedom; it has a social dimension and is necessarily related to responsibility.

In turn, the right to one's own body and its consequences are determined by the idea of human dignity. In addition to personal implications, the right to one's own body has a social significance; there is an obligation concerning others. Thus, the foundation of morality resides in human dignity, which has a necessary relationship with equality and autonomy. But the transhumanist/posthumanist theories do not participate in this philosophical conception of human dignity, much less in the Christian vision that has its model in the figure of Jesus.

Along with the idea of overcoming nature and the human species, there is the claim to transcend the human geographical limitations on earth. It is intended that the enhanced man could leave this planet and populate interstellar spaces in search of resources and almost unlimited wealth. They would be the descendants of the present man, the posthumans, who could live outside the earth.

The human being and the loss of himself

Undoubtedly, the solution to the questions posed by transhumanism/posthumanism can only come from a "transversal" debate. This communication of the different knowledge is a necessary condition to respond to critical ethical questions. But the interrogation arises as to whether or not this communication is possible.

There is an evident fragmentation of the different knowledge, in part due to the increasing complexity of scientific and humanistic disciplines, but not only. According to Javier Prades, the 'Digital Footprint: Servitude or Service?' Seminar is an example that effective communication is possible between different disciplines that frame the current debate, although we are not talking about an easy task. Even so, this communication requires a "cognitive translation" of the terms of the various disciplines to make them universally understandable, in addition to overcoming the "secularist narrowness" (Habermas, *Between naturalism and religion*). These conditions are undoubtedly essential to find the solution to the significant challenges posed by transhumanist and posthumanist doctrines.

The challenge posed by these questions offers an advantage: it compels us to return to a proper understanding of what is meant by being human. As philosophers have indicated since Antiquity, the human being can and must distance himself to know

himself, to be able to reach a conception of himself, of what he is and what he must or can be. Key to this reflection is the evangelist's question (Mark 8:36): "What good is it to gain the world if you lose yourself?" What good is it to man to improve himself if he loses his own being, abandoning his luck to a currently unknown posthumanism, in which he would disappear or where he would seek to abolish everything that is most significant of the human being, that is, free decision?

Communication between different types of knowledge

This recognition of man about himself is possible from a perspective that is capable of being supported by scientific data and philosophical reflection, which incorporates scientific and experimental knowledge into consideration, and is open at the same time to science and to the meaning of elementary human experience. Knowledge must come from science and also from the "world of life" (Lebenswelt) . Man must be careful not to reduce his reality to a mere object of study or mastery, thus in fact remaining only on the surface of life.

The answers can only be found in interdisciplinary approaches, where the communication of the different knowledge is the basis of everything. Pope Francis in *Veritatis Gaudium* invites a multidisciplinary understanding of the objects of study from diverse points of view. The Pope invites the "strong form of transdisciplinarity," where knowledge is situated in the space of wisdom that springs from God's revelation.

Interdisciplinary understanding is only possible on an assumption of trust. In other words, for effective communication between different types of knowledge to take place, an exercise of confidence in oneself and others is necessary. Along these lines, Wittgenstein claimed the original role of trust for all learning (*On certainty*). Other philosophers, such as Ortega y Gasset or Habermas, have also stressed the importance of communication between human knowledge sets to achieve adequate technoscientific knowledge. Indeed, in addition to trust, the debate between disciplines and transversality requires an effort in terms of definitions. Possibly a minimum of common constitutive concepts will be necessary.

Self-determination and limits

The transhumanist/posthumanist movement implies a will for absolute self-determination, which seeks to emancipate itself from all transcendent dependence. Now, in this total demand, there seems to be intermingled a claim (it is not known whether human or divine) of an unlimited success that is always presupposed, and that is not subjected to experiment: the very idea of successful and absolute emancipation seems contradictory since it is taken as a reality from which there is no escape.

But without limits, it is not easy to understand the common good. The common good would be at the limits of politics, where the truth and the good are. When what has been said is forgotten, technocracy is mixed with techno-politics, and we are left with the current panorama: politics that look to science to self-justify what it is not capable of solving, and a science that is somehow delighted but can't provide the answers we need either. Thus, the search for truth is lost, the truth of being and good. We lose the idea that this same human dignity has to occur in a way of thinking where we cannot cross a series of borders on the reality of the human being and society without destroying the trust that is essential for living together.

In this scenario, digitization appears as a higher phase of modernity. The historical problems between modernity and human are exacerbated with digitization. The human being, as a species, has always fought around perfection and failure, hence the rejection of corporeality and Gnosticism, an ancient form of intellectual and spiritual illusion. Philosophers and anthropologists have made great efforts during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to move away from Gnosticism and claim corporeality. Now, with transhumanist/posthumanist theories, all that effort is put aside in search of an ethereal, hyper-technological, and utopian optimization.

The promised elimination of error, perfection, knows no limits. It is there, in defense of the technocratic paradigm, when humans enter the moving borders that can be dangerous, abandoning wisdom in search of maximum optimization.

The future of the human essence

The fourth industrial revolution brings with it overwhelming innovations, that with their promises, sometimes overshadow their impact on the person. But the real key to this revolution, also called bio-digital, does not lie solely in how society will be organized

economically or geopolitically. The key is in the question of what the human species will become and what effects this transformation will have on the consciousness of individuals and the whole of humanity.

In the coming years, it will be essential to position ourselves on what we understand by human nature and on the ethical, moral, and legal limits that we adopt in common, in the face of the intention of altering or modifying said condition through human improvement. The debate will continue regarding what is understood as an "improvement" for humanity. Are we talking about an improvement in physical capacities or a holistic improvement that considers the person as a whole?

The consensus of the Seminar is aimed at enhancing all dimensions and human capacities, as well as the global project of humanity. In other words, it is proposed that there be three main areas of implementation of improvements: nature, our own body, and our interiority. Thus, it makes no sense to speak of progress and human dominance over nature around us if we do not advance in the improvement of nature within ourselves.

To speak of the perfection of man while ignoring corporality is a false humanism in which humans has sometimes fallen. Human nature has certain powers, organic and inorganic elements, but with them, the human being performs an exercise of dominance, as defended by Zubiri. In this exercise, man performs the action of making his own that what he has to constitute what he is.

Integrative humanism: person-centered

In the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI affirms that: "considering technical progress as absolute ideologically and dreaming of the utopia of a humanity that returns to its original stage of nature, are two opposite ways to exempt progress from its moral assessment and, therefore, of our responsibility" (Benedict XVI, 2009). Faced with the Promethean claim, we must strengthen the appreciation for a freedom that is not arbitrary but truly humanized by recognizing the good that precedes it.

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis already warns us of that technocratic paradigm that threatens an integral human and natural ecology (Francis, 2015). When the only criterion of truth is efficiency and utility, and improvement is proposed without meaning

or purpose, the person's integral development is being denied. Human freedom is fully itself only when it responds to the appeal of technique with decisions that are the fruit of moral responsibility.

An advanced and integrative humanism (centered on the person and their nature) appears to respond to transhumanist and the technocentric worldview. This is the only way to fully navigate the biotechnological society of the 21st century.

This humanism goes hand in hand with the anticipated construction of an ethic of virtues that can formulate universal ethical and moral principles, democratically accepted by a great majority of people, whatever their worldview, their vision of the human being, their religious belief, their spiritual conception, or secular conviction. This will be the basis for tackling the enormous challenges that the biotech society and "human enhancement" will pose in the coming years.

An integrative humanism must be formulated in positive terms, that is, as a proposal and not a (passive) response to transhumanist/posthumanist theories. We cannot make the repeated mistake of formulating the ideas of Christian humanism as simple answers. These proposals must incorporate scientific and experimental knowledge into reflection. Otherwise, they are only parallel speeches that do not interpenetrate.

Attendees:

1. **Albert Cortina**, Lawyer, Expert in Transhumanism Director of the DTUM study
2. **Alfredo Marcos Martínez**, Professor of Philosophy of Science, Universidad de Valladolid
3. **Ángel González Ferrer**, Executive Director, Digital Pontificial Council for Culture
4. **Carolina Villegas**, Researcher, Iberdrola Financial and Business Ethics Chair, Universidad Pontificia de Comillas
5. **David Roch Dupré**, Professor, Universidad Pontificia Comillas
6. **Diego Bodas Sagi**, Lead Data Scientist – Advanced Analytics, Mapfre España
7. **Domingo Sugranyes**, Director, Seminario de Huella Digital
8. **Esther de la Torre**, Responsible Digital Banking Manager, BBVA
9. **Francisco Javier López Martín**, Former Secretary-General, CCOO Madrid
10. **Guillermo Monroy Pérez**, Professor, Instituto de Estudios Bursátiles

11. **Idoya Zorroza**, Contracted Professor Doctor, Faculty of Philosophy, Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca
12. **Ignacio Quintanilla Navarro**, Philosopher, Educator, Universidad Complutense de Madrid
13. **Javier Prades**, Dean, Universidad Eclesiástica San Dámaso
14. **Jesús Avezuela**, General Director of the Pablo VI Foundation
15. **Jesús Sánchez Camacho**, Professor, Faculty of Theology, Universidad Pontificia Comillas
16. **José Manuel González-Páramo**, Former Executive Director, BBVA
17. **José Ramón Amor,** Coordinator, Bioethics Observatory of the Pablo VI Foundation
18. **Juan Benavides**, Professor of Communications, **Universidad Complutense de Madrid**
19. **Julio Martínez s.j.**, Dean, Universidad Pontificia Comillas
20. **Paul Dembinski**, Director, Observatoire de la Finance, Geneva
21. **Raúl González Fabre**, Professor, Universidad Pontificia de Comillas
22. **Richard Benjamins**, Data & IA ambassador, Telefónica