

# Transhumanism and the emancipation of human nature

## Our lecture about [transhumanism](#) at European Parliament session

The backdrop to our conference this week is a reflection on the risks of abandoning our model of development to technological compulsion. The array of scientific-technical advances in areas such as [genetic engineering](#) and biotechnology has certainly expanded the horizon of our goals, but it has also increased the magnitude of some collateral effects that could even reduce human nature to irrelevance.



In what follows, I shall address this issue from the perspective of Bioethics. I will not pause, therefore, to assess the fiscal, social-occupational and legal challenges posed by the transition of the workforce from the human to the artificial. These issues are already in your agendas, and will be discussed I'm sure in due course. What I propose now, instead, is to draw your attention to the signs that point to the slide of Europe towards the transhumanist dystopia.

In fact, today, it is not hard to find proposals that exhort legal regulation of the “quality” of human life, restoring to the discussion concepts as exclusionary as those of a life “worthy” or “unworthy” of being lived. Likewise — and paradoxically — we find people who demand legal status for the bionic person, whilst condoning, for example, colonisation of the blastocyst of farm animals with human embryonic cells to produce chimaeras,<sup>[1]</sup> or extending the use of abortion as a tool for social engineering.

In a situation like this, which allows the objectification of human beings and the humanisation of the artificial, I believe it appropriate to demand that it is an anthropological reflection and prudential-ethical instance that inform the praxis, and not scientific-technical praxis that dictates a new anthropology and a new ethics. I also understand that the sciences do not have their own tools to impose ethical limitations on themselves or to ask themselves about the meaning of human life. What man is, and what he is allowed to do, is not the result of scientific reflection, but is a question of ethical and anthropological order. For that reason, I propose to reinstate the questions of ethics and anthropology to assess the situation we face: What is personal dignity? What does the word “progress” mean when we refer to human beings? Are we on the path of true “human progress”, or instead, on the path of regression to our primitive state of nature, in which praxis was ordered to the subjugation of nature and the imperative of self-preservation?

With respect to the first question, those of us here present share an essential premise: that personal dignity is not a quality comparable to other qualities, or to the qualities of other entities. Neither is it an honorary title that can be bestowed or taken away. It is, rather, the most fundamental and inherent quality of human beings, of the transcendental basis that justifies the fact that all human beings are persons, and we have rights with regard to our fellow men. Dignity cannot be legislated but can be presupposed as a source of Law.[\[2\]](#)

There is no doubt that dignity has to do with the intentional structure of our nature, i.e. with our ability to distance ourselves from the ends to which our impulses predispose us; with our ability to conduct ourselves without obeying our instincts. If we can do so, it is because we do not live “trapped” by them. Instead, we can leave our organic centre and occupy an “eccentric position”, a place from which we speak of ourselves in the third person, and we can see ourselves through the eyes of others. This allows us to assess things in accordance with our desires, but also to assess those same desires and even refuse them. Nevertheless, just as dignity urges us to freely assume our nature, it also prevents us from denying it. There is no dignity in the denial of our nature.

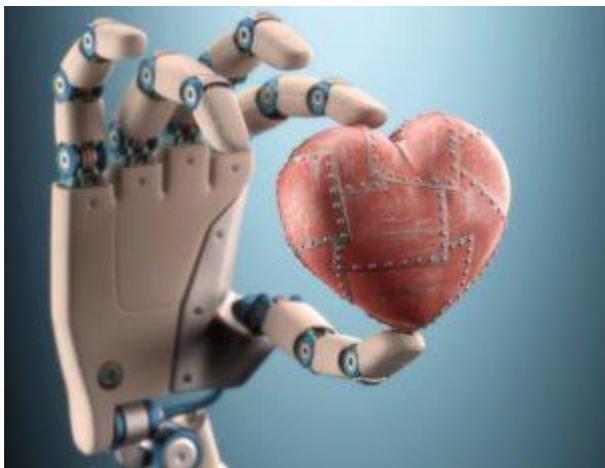
The previous ideas allow us to properly assess a concept that will be fundamental for understanding transhumanism: the concept of “emancipation”. It is fair to acknowledge that the emancipatory impulse allowed the eradication of political absolutisms. But it is also fair to say that, taken to its logical conclusion, it could lead to a loss of trust in that established by tradition, customs and nature itself, calling man to insurrection against all “the given”. The idea of “emancipation” could also lead us to consider nature as an inconsequential realm, as mere exteriority that lacks essence; as a “utility” that we can instrumentalise.

### **Transhumanism and human nature**

The epilogue of the emancipatory impulse is, without doubt, post-humanism, whose goal is to overcome our original vulnerability by transitioning our nature from the biological to the artefactual. This movement, more real and closer than we would like to believe, thrives on the belief in a radical freedom that implies contempt for the body and its natural constraints. In this sense, its foundation is clearly existentialist. In fact, Sartre described the body as pure facticity, as a coincidence that does not form part of the true “self”. The true “self”, he added, is nothing other than consciousness, absolute freedom and pure indeterminacy. For that reason, man would be nothing to begin with and would end up being what he makes of himself.[\[3\]](#)

The transhumanist emancipation must also be tied to the myth of a vectorial progress that converts the “to come” into necessarily better than the already happened. Now, if we call the changes that occur in an area that is defined by an end as progress, in relation to which these changes are interpreted as improvements, it is only right to distinguish, with Robert Spaemann,[\[4\]](#) between two types of progress: those that make sense thanks to the achievement of that end, and those that are “improvements” regardless of the end. The first type of progress is the one that takes place in the manufacture of an artefact, because no improvement would be understood as progress if the product is never finished. However, progress in a human being does not imply the achievement of a final state, but service to an end that already existed previously.

It is no trivial matter, therefore, that we ask ourselves about the subject referred to in transhumanist emancipation. Is it an artefactual entity or a personal being? A “what” or a “who”? The answer comes from Kant, who showed that, as beings endowed with dignity, we humans are not reducible to the condition of objects.



Is it, then, that subject of abstract freedom that we call “humanity”? It doesn’t seem like it. This, as such, is not the subject of a common desire to which progress or setbacks can be attributed.<sup>[5]</sup> Furthermore, in progress that we attribute to collective subjects, there is always one group that improves at the expense of the others.

Is it, therefore, pure consciousness? Because if the one who is emancipated were the *cogito*, a bundle of

perceptions, their emancipation would consist of leaving behind the shackles of the body. This is something that could be done using the techniques developed by neuroscience and nanorobotics, inserting, for example, the memories and experiences of the individual into artificial bodies immune to pain (cyborgs); or also by inducing pleasurable states of awareness through the use of drugs, as Julian Savulescu suggests. The administration of these drugs would, of course, be entrusted to entities outside the individual, who would control the doses using mathematical algorithms that would reduce the risk of addiction or overdose.

As we can easily surmise, both practices would negate the principle of autonomy that underpins the idea of emancipation, while they would abolish all links with the ethics of the human species, which has its basis — as Jürgen Habermas<sup>[6]</sup> suggests — in the moral autonomy of man and in the “non-dependence” on external decisions. In any case, when the natural is presented as something to be emancipated from, the normal thing is that it is “the artificial” who carries out the transformation of the natural into artefactual. And progress that consents to the submission of those who emancipate themselves to a lesser ontological entity can hardly be called progress.

Having said that: if progress refers to the human being understood in his entirety, it would correspond to the maturation of whoever is already, in and by himself, an end given from the outset; to the maturation of “someone” — and not “something” — whose essence is not independent of his natural conditions or of moral norms that continue to be, as well as a natural being, also a person. Being thus, we could not call any movement that would imply the rescindment of his nature “progress”.

### **Enhancement and human imperfection**

For the rest, the factors that contribute to the enhancement of man go beyond dismissing his biological vulnerability. Vulnerability is not the sad expression of our imperfection, but our constitutive quality. Precisely because we are vulnerable, because we know we are exposed and finite, we live without saving anything for the return, we join in solidarity as members of the same family and we can love each other.

**The emancipation proposed by transhumanism is not, therefore, true progress, but an instrument of self-alienation; a superstition that collides head-on with the universal thinking that has been characterised, from the beginning of history, by recognition of the dignity of man, of each and every man, regardless of his systemic functionality and his operating abilities.**

I apologise if my talk has been too theoretical up to this point. In what follows, I will come back down to earth by alluding to one of the current signs of transhumanism, the gender perspective and its “performative” root: *queer* ideology. I don’t have to say that, when I refer to the gender perspective, I am not referring to the legitimate claim of women with respect to their political and civil rights. The most elementary sense of justice unites me to their cause and makes me regret that the Seneca Falls manifesto came too late. Nor do I refer to the social and political movement that calls for non-discrimination and respect for the people who make up the LGTBI collective. The dignity of these persons is beyond all doubt, and the need to address their personal and social situation is a requirement for me. I refer, rather, to the ideology that, taking its claims as an excuse and using the legal framework as a tool, imposes an anthropology that emancipates the “self” from its biological nature.

### **Transhumanism and gender theory**

On the theoretical basis of post-structuralist deconstructionism, the term *queer* would say that people’s sexual identity does not result from their biological nature, but from their free self-determination. Thus, the classification into universal categories such as “man” or “woman”, “heterosexual” or “homosexual”, would convey non-definitive identities, while hiding many other identity variations, none of which would be more “natural” than the others. The natural, in fact, would be nothing but a cultural construct, a worn and irrelevant metaphor for the determination of sexual identity.

As we can easily surmise, *queer* ideology constitutes an early example of transhumanism, because it rejects the natural determinations, and encourages actively redefining the “self”, starting with the sexed body and its functioning. Now, when it postulates the emancipation of the “self” from biological conditioning, the *queer* theory also demands the emancipation of subjectivity and relativism from the objectivity of scientific knowledge. In fact, it places the suspicion of their submission to ideological interests on the sciences. Thus says Arantza Campos, professor of Philosophy of Law at the University of the Basque Country, when she says that part of the discourse of the sciences — referring here to medicine and sexology — does not respond to interest in advancing knowledge of the reality, but to the control and pigeonholing of the reality in the ideological postulates imbued in those sciences.<sup>[7]</sup>

For the gender perspective, emancipation of the conscious self (or better, sentient) from its natural conditioning would be achieved with the repeated use of two very effective performative tools: language and deed. Both would allow the natural categories to be displaced and violated definitively. In their social aspect, being a man or a woman would be ultimately reduced to the adoption of a gender role, i.e. to “say”, “feel” and “behave” as a man or a woman. This is illustrated the famed *drag* strategy of Judith Butler, who so faithfully interprets the category “woman” – better even than women themselves – and suggests that the gender role is only a mask, a category more typical of “doing” than “being”.

### **Spain regulation regarding gender**

In relation to the performative function of language, I would like to draw attention to the semantic subversion that gender post-feminism has managed to impose on the education system and on the law, the main tools of the State to shape social awareness. Thus, in Spain, the Preambles of the regional and national regulations regarding gender include glossaries with a new nomenclature that they, in turn, impose upon the educational curriculum as mandatory content.

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These laws not only proclaim the emancipation of man from his biological nature and the emancipation of subjectivism from the scientific evidence, but also the emancipation of the human being from the family institution. Thus, Law 8/2017 of the Valencian Regional Government threatens to bring to court mothers, fathers or guardians who refuse to authorise hormone-blocking treatments in their underage children. That is, it criminalises parents who wish for their children the natural development that corresponds to their healthy body.

Along the same line, the national draft legislation on sexual identity and gender expression provides that, when the position of the parents is contrary to the will of the minor, he or she will be assigned a legal defender. And it adds that the measures taken on the transgender minor will not be conditioned by the previous authorisation of people who hold parental rights or who are their legal representatives.

However much they are justified by appealing to the freedom of the minor, these measures contribute to the demolition of the shields that protect him or her against State interference and the epochal conscience. They also suppose that the minor is in a position to emancipate themselves, ignoring that freedom requires that there be use of reason and that the subject can master themselves, i.e. that he or she is capable of careful deliberation that does not bend to impulses, lack of experience or lack of knowledge. And frankly, should we assume this capacity in those whom we would not allow to decide to leave vegetables out of their daily diet? Does anyone believe that a child is capable of understanding the implications and side effects of hormone-blocking?

### **Uncritical acceptance of the transhumanist postulates**

The implementation of this perspective in the legislative and school contexts could, in short, favour uncritical acceptance of the transhumanist postulates in an uninformed society. That is why from this forum we urge resistance against the ideological imposition of gender perspective, restoring discourse on the ends of nature. A discourse that grows with the contributions of the Biomedical Sciences, Philosophy and Natural Law. If we restore this discourse for European citizens, we will provide them with means to resist ideological impositions and totalizing political correctness.

To conclude, I think it necessary to underline that nothing discussed in this talk is directed against the members of those who, presumably, the aforementioned legislation protects. Rather, our intention is to prevent them being manipulated for ideological

reasons. It is very clear: for the Institute of Life Sciences at the Catholic University of Valencia, as for all of us present at this gathering, any person, regardless of their sexual orientation or other identity consideration, will always be, paraphrasing José Luis del Barco, a “who” with a greatness like a thirst for the infinite, someone whose value leaves the treasures of the earth in the shade; that is, a person, ONE OF US.



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## References.

[1] <http://www.bioethicsobservatory.org/2016/05/producing-human-chimeras-raises-ethical-problems/13528>

[2] Spaemann, R. (2012). *Love and the dignity of human life. On Nature and Natural Law*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: 27.

[3] Sartre, J. P. (1985). *El existencialismo es un humanismo*. Barcelona: Orbis: 70.

[4] Spaemann, R. (2004). *Ensayos filosóficos*. (L. Rodríguez, Trad.). Madrid: Cristiandad: 141-142

[5] Idem: 146

[6] Habermas, J. (2001). *Die zukunft der menschlichen natur. Auf dem Weg zu einer liberales Eugenik?* Frankfurt / Main: Suhrkamp.

[7] [https://xenero.webs.uvigo.es/profesorado/arantza\\_campos/identidad.pdf](https://xenero.webs.uvigo.es/profesorado/arantza_campos/identidad.pdf).