

Human dignity versus transhumanism

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Abstract

This article proposes a reflection on human dignity in the face of transhumanism, a current that defends the idea of human enhancement through the use of biotechnologies. Even if said improvement means transcending the threshold of humanity to reach a stage of posthumanity, in which framework the notion of posthuman dignity, as advocated by transhumanism, could have presence and meaning. This will be answered negatively, based on the debate between different authors who highlight the centrality of the human person, with emphasis on the perspective of justice and gift.

Keywords: Dignity. Biomedical enhancement. Humans. Social justice. Aptitude.

Resumo

Dignidade humana versus transhumanismo

Este artigo propõe uma reflexão sobre os direitos humanos e a dignidade humana diante do transumanismo, corrente que defende a ideia de melhoria humana por meio do uso de biotecnologias. Mesmo que essa melhoria signifique transcender o limiar da humanidade para alcançar um estágio de pós-humanidade, em cujo quadro a noção de dignidade pós-humana, tal como defendida pelo transumanismo, poderia ter presença e significado. A resposta será negativa, a partir do debate entre diferentes autores que destacam a centralidade da pessoa humana, com destaque para a perspectiva da justiça e da dádiva.

Palavras-chave: Dignidade. Melhoramento biomédico. Ser humano. Justiça social. Aptidão.

Resumen

La dignidad humana frente al transhumanismo

Este artículo propone una reflexión sobre los derechos humanos y la dignidad humana frente al transumanismo, corriente que defiende la idea de mejora humana a través del uso de biotecnologías. Incluso si esa mejora significa trascender el umbral de la humanidad para alcanzar un estadio de poshumanidad, en cuyo marco la noción de dignidad poshumana, tal como defendida por el transumanismo, podría tener presencia y significado. La respuesta será negativa, a partir del debate entre diferentes autores que destacan la centralidad de la persona humana, con énfasis en la perspectiva de la justicia y el don.

Palabras-chave: Dignidad. Mejoramiento biomédico. Ser humano. Justicia social. Aptitud.

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Certainly, human dignity is an indispensable field of reflection if it is a question of talking about human rights. This presence and relevance are undisputed in any current debate on ethics, bioethics, politics, law, or other spheres that reflect it.

References to human dignity in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) of 1948¹ are found from the beginning of the text, when the following ideas are alluded to in the Preamble *whereas freedom, justice, and peace in the world are based on the recognition of inherent dignity, and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. (...) Considering that the populations of the United Nations have reaffirmed in the Charter their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women; and have declared themselves determined to promote social progress and to raise the standard of living in larger freedom.*

Then, and in the general articles of the UDHR, the first mandate establishes that *all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and, endowed as they are with reason and conscience, must behave fraternally towards one another* (Art. 1)¹. Subsequently, two other specific references appear *every person, as a member of society, has the right to social security, and to obtain, via national effort and international cooperation, considering the organization and resources of each State, the satisfaction of the economic, social, and cultural rights indispensable to their dignity and to the free development of their personality* (art. 22)¹; *Every person who works has the right to fair and satisfactory remuneration, which ensures for them and their family an existence in conformity with human dignity and which is supplemented, if necessary, by any other means of social protection* (Art. 23)¹.

Since human dignity is an inherent topic of human rights, its presence will be visible, after the Declaration, in practically all instruments, such as international human rights law (declarations, conventions, covenants, optional protocols, etc.).

Although the first use of transhumanism dates back to an earlier era, it developed especially in the last decades of the last century. In fact, the biologist Julian Huxley used this concept for the first time when he stated that *if they wish*

*to, the human species can surpass itself, but not sporadically, an individual here, in one way, another individual there in a different way, but in its totality, as humanity. We need an individual for this new creed. Perhaps transhumanism is useful, that is, an individual remaining an individual, but going beyond, surpassing themselves by realizing new possibilities of their human nature and for their human nature*².

Certainly, it is a controversial current due to approaches such as the overcoming of the human, the arrival at a stage of posthumanity or the defense of a possible posthuman dignity, among other ideas. Regarding the latter, an intense debate has unfolded, to which these lines are added.

With a view to this, this article is structured in four sections. The first refers in an introductory way to human rights and human dignity in the face of the enormous techno-scientific advances that are being observed and that are shaping new ways of approaching these constructs. The second delves into the perspective of transhumanism and the possibilities of configuring notions such as posthuman dignity under its protection. The third section is located as a response to the previous one, while the fourth section addresses the discussion by incorporating two relevance notions, that of justice and of gift. A set of transversal reflections, in a recapitulation way, closes everything exposed.

Techno-scientific advances

Human rights and dignity

Regarding concrete forms of life that are shaping certain *ethos* towards the end of the twentieth century, and with greater clarity in these first decades of the 21st century, technology is practically ubiquitous in the lives of human beings, from the most everyday issues to the development of technologies that are unexpectedly changing the forms of human existence until now.

As it is well known, technology as a field of study—not only technological development itself—has been an object of concern for philosophy since ancient times. A noteworthy consideration regarding this is the one from Ortega y Gasset in his *Meditación de la técnica* (1939 original), in which he warns that *one of the topics that will be debated with greater vigor in the coming years*

is the meaning, advantages, harms, and limits of technology³. Along with this, his basic approach pointed to the consideration of technology as a supernature for human beings, since it is not a matter of adapting to their environment, but on the contrary, of adapting their environment to their life.

These clear ideas are undoubtedly present in the current reflection on human rights, technologies, and human dignity, especially in terms of a technological supernature, since the relationship of human beings with technologies is no longer expressed in the form of entering and leaving networks in cyberspace, or in spaces of biotechnological intervention, for example, but in the form of a daily living in them.

In this framework, a subgroup of prerogatives or rights related to a new legal status for human life emerges because of the development of new biomedical technologies that affect both its conservation, extension, and production. One of the most significant milestones in this area is the deciphering of the human genome in 2003 and the discussions around the development of biotechnologies, genetic manipulation, especially in relation to human enhancement—a trend known as transhumanism—and the possibilities of biological-genetic intervention that would enable us to reach a post-human stage.

There is also the molecular nanotechnology field—usable, among others, for the abolition of most diseases and ageing, or in the resuscitation of cryogenic patients; the rise (uploading), i.e. the transfer of a human mind to a computer, for example, in a robotic body; or the development of artificial intelligence and its contributions to human enhancement. There is the need to differentiate between interventions in the bodies—prosthetic, for example, either to make up for deficiencies or to increase capacities—and interventions in the brain (prosthetic brain) in a human-machine symbiosis. All of this can be read from a human rights perspective, especially regarding its implications for the prevalence of human dignity.

Despite the great changes and progress registered in the technological field—with expressions that until a few decades ago could have seemed simple science fiction—experts in new technologies predict a time of a true technological revolution, because *not only will it increase our ability to manipulate matter to limits*

*that are simply unbelievable nowadays, but, above all, we will be able to technologically transform human nature itself for the first time*⁴.

Given this, and by virtue of the examples mentioned above, it seems that the concern about this new technological revolution is not so much directed to the question of whether *it will or will not transform the future of our species, our planet, and our society, but rather when and how it will do so, what its limits are and what should be, and, above all, what are the problems that it poses and that we should address before it becomes a fait accompli*⁴.

This implies, among others, establishing regulations from the research phase in science and technology, in which ethical safeguards are already a clear need. Indeed, precisely because the origins of what is known as bioethics – and within this the ethics of research – are based on the highly questionable examples of studies that later became paradigmatic, as unacceptable practices beyond the results they reached.

Thus, experiments in the context of Nazism gave rise to the Nuremberg Code⁵ and the *Declaration of Helsinki* (1964, with successive subsequent modifications)⁶; pioneering documents in the field of establishing limits to scientific work in its research aspect. In 1978 the so-called *Belmont Report*⁷ as a response to the critical cases that represented Staten Island⁸, Brooklyn⁹, and Tuskegee¹⁰.

The reference to these first examples is important, given that all the techno-scientific advances that can be found nowadays, in the most diverse fields, have their origin in research that also requires a regulatory framework, both ethical and legal.

Disastrous consequences such as those reflected in the cases indicated, to which are also added the results of techno-scientific applications with negative effects, that is, not only from research activity, reaffirm the understanding of this field as insufficiently self-regulated and lacking strong ethical-normative references. Human dignity must be at the center of the regulations in this regard.

Towards a post-human dignity?

Transhumanism perspective

A paper from 1999 reflected on certain techno-scientific advances such as the development

of new sources of energy, organ transplants, the reserve of eggs and spermatozoa or embryos, or the improvement—in the biomedical area—of diagnostic techniques, healing systems and new treatments. In light of these examples, *it was supported that everything that tends to improve individuals today, in fact, it is managing to transmute them, with important moral, psychological, social, and political repercussions*¹¹. One can see in this idea, in the making, the notion of transhumanism that already has a charter of nature nowadays, although the approach to the repercussions alluded is still in full debate.

Indeed, it is possible to consider the human being as part of an immense evolutionary chain, but it is undoubted that their particularity among all species lies in the fact that they are endowed with reason and conscience. This awareness unfolds in at least three areas: self-awareness, awareness of the future, and awareness of death. Only they can reflect on their own evolution, consider ways to pursue it and even think of ways of life that mean an overcoming or transmutation of the human, as is seen today.

But before continuing, how will the very concept of transhumanism be understood in these lines? To this end, the following formulation shall be adopted *transhumanism could be defined as the position of those who believe that it is possible to deliberately bring about an improvement (enhancement) of human beings, with a view to attaining a higher state, sometimes called transhuman, or even posthuman*¹².

In Bostrom's view, transhumanism would be a consequence of secular humanism and the Enlightenment, so that human nature nowadays would be perfectible using applied science and other rational methods, aiming to increasing human health, extending our intellectual and physical capacities, and giving us greater control over our own mental states and moods¹³. Savulescu, meanwhile, will distinguish some concrete expressions of transhuman practices, among them: 1) medical treatment of certain diseases; 2) the increase in natural human potential (for example: the elevation of a person's IQ from 100 to 140, that is, within the average range of the species); and 3) superhuman enhancements (e.g., raising IQ above 200)¹⁴.

As can be seen, these improvements in the human condition go beyond increases that were achieved in the educational system, or via specific socio-environmental modifications, for example, due to certain economic or cultural measures. Transhumanism is all about the use of technical means aimed at directly intervening in the human organism—its physiological-bodily substrate—to achieve the improvement of its functions and capacities.

From the prism of transhumanism, the idea supported is that the human condition, as it is known until now, would not be a culminating point or maximum development, but only a phase in its becoming, therefore, also surmountable, for example, by the advent of a posthuman stage. This means crossing the threshold of humanity and facing clearly disturbing questions such as— if it is already technically possible—should such a step be taken?

Trying to answer, it should be noted that here the debate basically oscillates between transhumanist positions and bio conservative positions, poles between which the gradations can be summarized in the following points. First, as has been pointed out, from the prism of transhumanism, the defense that the human condition as it is known until now would be nothing more than a stage in a greater becoming or evolution that supposes, among others, its own overcoming, to give way to another transhuman phase. This is where authors such as Nick Bostrom are located¹³, Julian Savulescu¹⁴, David Pearce¹⁵, Julian Savulescu and Nick Bostrom¹⁶, Gregory Stock¹⁷, and FM-2030¹⁸. This group includes the reflection on the possibilities of configuration and the need for extension of a concept of posthuman dignity, defended by Nick Bostrom¹⁹.

Second, without declaring themselves precisely in favor of transhumanism, but rather assuming it as a reality that is already present, there are those who emphasize reflection on the consequences of this step, the questions that arise, the possible scenarios, and the articulation between what can be done and what is due. Authors such as Raúl Villarroel¹², Rosi Braidotti²⁰, José Ignacio Galparsoro²¹, and Juan Bautista Bengoetxea²² are located here.

Third, positions that are openly contrary to and/or critical of transhumanist practices that

imply an overcoming of the human that ends up undermining human dignity. Here, the horrors of Nazism regarding genetic experimentation on humans hover as a background and bring together authors such as Jürgen Habermas²³, Francis Fukuyama²⁴, Leon Kass²⁵, and Hans Jonas²⁶.

Fourth, linked to the latter perspective, reflections on the political implications of transhumanism or the arrival of a posthuman phase emerge. This is due to the break with a human nature that would determine and limit the possible models of political regimes, with harmful consequences for liberal democracy and for the nature of politics itself; here Fukuyama stands out again²⁴.

If one of the crucial questions, as shown, points to what is due from what can be done, the answers necessarily refer to the field of the normative, especially in relation to possible transgressions of certain prerogatives of human beings, both present and future, that may be conducted. In a 2015 article, Villarroel¹² wonders whether transhumanism could lead to absolute control of life by virtue of the biotechnological potential for action. In this regard, it should be recalled that as early as 2001, Habermas²³ had raised some questions about the possibilities of an eugenic action that, operating without any regulation, could translate into a mere perfection of the species guided by mercantile criteria, what in his work he called a “liberal eugenics” (for example, being able to choose the eye color of our future children, their IQ levels, or their endowment for sports).

However, what from the Habermasian point of view might be unacceptable, from transhumanism would reflect the expansion of the notion of freedom, at least in two senses: as morphological freedom to decide which technology(s) to apply to oneself and as reproductive freedom to decide as parents which reproductive technologies to use in relation to children²⁷.

Would that mean crossing the limit of what human rights have so far prevented or represented? Bostrom will negatively answer this question, emphasizing the need to leave behind the unfounded fears and misgivings regarding transhumanist practices, to embrace them by virtue of their possible benefits for humanity and *encompassing technological progress, strongly*

*defending human rights and individual choice and acting specifically against concrete threats, such as military or terrorist abuse of biological weapons and against unintended environmental consequences or social side effects*¹³.

In this regard, Bostrom¹⁹ clearly identifies two fears in relation to the possibilities opened by transhumanism. On the one hand, that a posthuman state could be degrading, which would be harmful to ourselves. Nevertheless, posthuman beings constitute themselves as a threat to ordinary humans. However, the bio conservative response in relation to an overvaluation of a practically untouched human nature is insufficient as an alternative, both for dialogue and for action. Examples of “natural” manifestations that are likely to be eradicated from that source also emerge, such as cancer, diabetes, cognitive impairments, unnecessary suffering, etc.

In this sense, it is logical then that debates such as these have both detractors and defenders, but not always or not necessarily with clear foundations and contributors to the debate, but sometimes the result of pre-established doctrinal positions that instead of opening the debate close it in advance. This happens, for example, with the poles of technophilia and technophobia. Thus, the way forward is the promotion of an active, informed, and deliberate citizenry on these issues, since *information, public debate, and education are the appropriate means of encouraging others to make sound decisions, not a blanket ban on a wide range of potentially beneficial medical and enhancement options*¹⁹.

However, from a perspective of rights, it is possible to ask about a possible notion of rights in relation to transhuman or posthuman beings and what would be the prerogatives to recognize them. The discussion on this matter is enormous and there are no conclusive definitions. For the moment, it is enough to add another no less important issue: if the perspective of transhumanism is accepted, in the not too distant future, it will imply, at the same time, a probable redefinition of the status of the human being in the world.

Faced with possibilities such as those alluded to, concern in this regard has arisen from various spheres (academic, religious, animal rights activist, etc.), which was configured *an*

*unprecedented observation platform of our own species*¹². It makes sense, then, that the field of human rights should take up this reflection, given the role of watchdogs that they play, aiming to safeguarding and specifying living conditions in accordance with human dignity.

The field of debate is open and boiling, even more so if the question about possible transhuman rights is added to Bostrom's question about a notion of posthuman dignity. Strictly speaking, more than a question, it is already an affirmation and an interpellation, when it titles one of his texts *In defense of posthuman dignity*¹⁹. In this article, one of the sections refers to a specific question: whether human dignity and posthuman dignity are incompatible. Aiming for an answer, Bostrom first dwells on the two basic senses of the idea of human dignity that recur in the literature on the subject, which allude to: 1) Dignity as a moral state, in particular the inalienable right to be treated with a basic level of respect; and 2) Dignity as the quality of being worthy or honorable, in an association between concepts such as dignity, value, nobility, and excellence. Then, his answer is categorical *in both definitions, dignity is something that a posthuman might possess*¹⁹.

In contrast to this position, a prominent bio conservationist such as Fukuyama²⁴ will be categorical in not admitting the extension of the idea of dignity to posthuman beings, worried, apparently, about the possibility that this step will mean—in turn and in the opposite direction—a loss in terms of moral status of certain groups, for example, children or people with mental disabilities. The concern focuses on the political dimension of this issue, by virtue of the understanding of equal dignity of all members of a given political community as a fundamental requirement or precondition of today's liberal democracies²⁴.

Thus, concerning the valuation and potential acceptance or rejection of certain biotechnological advances, Fukuyama is clear in delimiting the role of politics: *countries must politically regulate their development and their use by creating institutions that distinguish between technical advances that promote human prosperity and those that threaten human dignity and well-being*²⁴.

Bostrom's reply to this approach will aim to visualize in the emergence of a concept of

posthuman dignity as a continuation of the movement to extend human dignity, for example, to historically disadvantaged groups or considered to be of inferior moral status, such as *people with disabilities, women, Afro-descendants, people in poverty, migrants, the prison population, etc.*¹⁹. Moreover, he emphasizes the leading role of humans in this path of extension of dignity, whether human or posthuman, when he states: *our own role in this process is not to be passive spectators. We can work to create more inclusive social structures that grant appropriate moral recognition and legal rights to all who need them, whether male or female, Black or White, flesh or silicon*. All this, as can be observed, is especially linked to the first sense of human dignity alluded to (as moral status).

With respect to the second, as it is worthy of social evaluation, Bostrom considers that *it is also applicable now in the form of a posthuman dignity to posthuman beings*¹⁹. In his opinion, there are no univocal or even static definitions regarding the attributions of value in a society, so that it is not possible to maintain that every individual human being evokes the same social valuation, for example, because of immoral, selfish, criminal behaviors towards his fellow men, nor is it possible to think that this will happen among posthuman beings.

It seems that the path of reflection and taking a well-founded position is the right one, moving away from polar positions that, sometimes due to the lack of arguments and/or evidence, announce horizons of glory or apocalypse. Bostrom, a moderate and realistic transhumanist, suggests the possibility of debating without positioning what he considers to be mutually exclusive false alternatives, such as human dignity or posthuman dignity. On the contrary, it raises the possibility of considering both as compatible.

The following quote, although extensive, clearly reflects the author's position (...) *dignity, in its modern sense, consists of who we are and what we have the potential to become, not our pedigree or our causal origin. What we are is not only a function of our DNA, but also of our technological and social context. Human nature in this broader sense is dynamic, partially made by a human and improvable. Our current extended phenotypes (and the lives we lead) are markedly*

different from those of our hunter-gatherer ancestors. We read and write; we wear clothes; we live in cities; we earn money and buy food at the supermarket; we call people on the phone, watch television, read newspapers, drive cars, pay taxes, vote in national elections; women give birth in hospitals; life expectancy is three times longer than in the Pleistocene; we know that the Earth is round and that stars are large clouds of gas illuminated from the inside by nuclear fusion, and that the universe is approximately 13,700 million years old and enormously large. In the eyes of a hunter-gatherer, we may already look "posthuman." However, these radical extensions of human capacities—some of them biological, some external—have not stripped us of our moral status or dehumanized us in the sense of making us generally unworthy and basic. Similarly, if we or our descendants ever succeed in becoming, by today's standards, something we can call posthuman, this need does not mean a loss of dignity either¹⁹.

Idea of posthuman dignity

Response to transhumanism

In contrast to Bostrom's approach to understanding the emergence of a concept of posthuman dignity as a continuation of a movement for the extension of human dignity, it should be noted that the examples he provides are not consistent to the ideas he defends. Women, people with disabilities, African descendants, or migrants have historically been discriminated and advances in inclusion do not mean recognizing (recently) the dignity that is proper to them, but—in the name of that dignity—advancing in the realization of their human rights. Along with this, such examples refer to disadvantaged groups, a condition that would not be shared by transhuman beings, who would already be improved and, therefore, with obvious advantages over human beings.

Regarding assuming an active role in this process of extending dignity, Bostrom argues that it is feasible to generate "more inclusive" social structures that provide moral recognition to various groups. However, this statement appears as an island in a sea of assertions and

proposals with a marked individualistic stamp, mainly due to the author's staunch defense of morphological and reproductive freedom and which is the identity of transhumanism. Moreover, this perspective is not characterized by developing any specific proposal for a society that institutionalizes equality and justice, and/or that proposes a serious political approach to the inequalities and injustices that already exist among human beings.

But there is an even more questionable aspect in Bostrom's approaches to his evolutionary understanding of human dignity. This is because we are talking, in the case of human beings, of a certain human nature that is proper to them, while it would be a matter of another configuration in the case of posthuman beings. Here, it is assumed that dignity does not come from a special nature of the human, but from what is special or valuable in this natural endowment and that it remains despite the changes operating in humanity over time.

Thus, when this endowment changes, the concepts and characteristics that outline such posthuman beings will be different, not necessarily the notion of dignity. A posthuman being would not be more or less worthy than a human being, because dignity would be reserved for the latter. Barraca wonders if *our human dignity would endure or not if, leaving behind the human nature in which we participate today, we would reach another nature or reality different from the human one?*²⁸

On the way to an answer, it should be noted that, for this author, *the personal subject as such never ceases to be and cannot cease to be a person*²⁸ nor—therefore—to participate in their own value or dignity, despite multiple transformations, unless their personal being is completely extinguished. In accordance with this, a transhuman, as an improved human being, would still retain a special dignity, but a posthuman would not. But does personal value lie in human nature? No, as it has already been pointed out, since *this personal character, of the individual affected in this transformation, has a key constitutive note, indissolubly linked to itself, which is its "uniqueness," the unrepeatable and irreplaceable tenor of its own being*²⁸.

In this way, the possibility that, for example, *artificial intelligence entities (AI) could emulate the human mind, acquire personal consciousness, and we could thereby recognize their dignity, turn out to be simplifications, since the human mind is not a mere disembodied machine or something that has knowledge without relation to our personal corporeal substratum*²⁸.

Julian Savulescu, who could be placed as a staunch transhumanist, takes up the question of what we owe to other non-human animals, based on the debates on animal rights, to go further in consideration of the technological advances of the twenty-first century and ask himself *what do we owe to human beings radically altered and with technology, or posthumans? And what would we have to owe to other non-human intelligent life forms, such as aliens, intelligent robots, or other non-carbon-based life forms?*¹⁴.

This author recognizes that the human being has a special importance, but he also stands against the so-called “human prejudice”, a term used by the English moral philosopher Bernard Williams. The latter says that *a central idea implied in the supposed human prejudice is that there are certain matters in which creatures are treated in one way rather than another, simply because they belong to a certain category: the human species. At this basic initial level, we do not need to know more about them. If we are told that there are human beings trapped in a burning building, just by force of that fact, we mobilize as many resources as we can to rescue them*²⁹.

Human dignity, justice, and gift

As noted above, transhumanism does not offer a fully developed proposal for a society that, in our opinion, can safeguard the value of human dignity. Even less, then, to try to sustain a notion such as that of posthuman dignity.

This derives from the lack of references to a world of life as an infrastructure or backdrop where the existence of trans or posthuman beings is located. Why this world-life consideration in relation to dignity?

First, because the latter is not in an abstract space where its mere conceptual relevance is what matters. On the contrary, dignity is at stake

in a concrete world where its factual correlation is the realization of human rights as a minimum that enables us to speak of a dignified life with meaning.

Second, and because of the above, because transhumanism embodies a staunch defense of the value of freedom—in its morphological and reproductive versions—but not of social justice. Indeed, in the face of the certain possibility that improvement practices end up being restrictive for most of the population due to their high cost, transhumanism only offers general answers that point to the unfounded expectation that this will not happen.

There are, therefore, no clear or solid projects for the institutionalization of justice that address the inequalities referred to. The defense of the rights of posthumans and therefore of such dignity only emerges as a demand of an abstract and individualistic nature.

On the contrary, this article defends a consideration of the thickness of a justice endowed with a triple dimension: subjective, intersubjective, and universal, where the first level refers to the possibility of building a project of self-realization that must be conducted in the face of others; the second, to the need for recognition of such realization as worthy by others; the third, to the institutionalization of a dignified life as a universalizable value that *opens up to the question of justice, insofar as a dignified life is possible only in relation to other dignified lives because they are fair*³⁰.

This raises a reflection beyond questions of justice. Indeed, we could imagine a world in which enhancement technologies were available to the entire population, either via subsidies, taxes, and a strong state role in this regard. This being the case, then, the question posed by Michael Sandel emerges full of meaning: *Would they cease to be questionable, then?*

Accepting that there is an affectation to human dignity, this author goes a step further and affirms that *the challenge is to say in what sense these practices reduce our humanity*³¹. *What aspects of freedom or human development are threatened by them? [improvement technologies]*³¹. For Sandel, *the danger of such practices lies in the excessive extension of the field of human*

action, even towards the aspiration to remake human nature, reflecting an ambition for total domination and control³¹.

Thus, the author will place the notions of gift and openness to what has been received, as recognition of the aspect received from human life and of the talents, which can later be developed and exercised. If these are eroded because of the genetic revolution it will involve the transformation of three central elements of our moral landscape: humility, responsibility, and solidarity³¹.

As for humility, it is linked to the willingness to receive what is given to human beings through the life, or lives, of their descendants, whether they come from nature, God, or chance. This implies an openness to the unexpected and forces you to master the desire for control. However, the message of transhumanism is just the opposite: to take advantage of available technologies to control everything, including our lives and their own human configuration. It is the defense of the rejection of what is given and its reception as gifts.

In fact, what emerges is the image of humans who have made themselves and who are responsible for their achievements, producing a multiplication of responsibility, because *the more we take ownership of our genetic endowment, the greater the burden of responsibility we take on for our talents and our achievements*³¹. However, this extension of responsibilities occurs in an atomized way, each in relation to their own life and what they have achieved, and not in the form of a joint responsibility for the destiny of all.

Seen in this way, responsibility will also mean deflation in terms of solidarity with the most unfortunate, since only the awareness of the random and contingent nature of one's own destiny impels the human being to share it with others. This being the case, the question that Sandel asks himself makes sense: *why should successful people owe anything to the most disadvantaged in society?*

His answer assumes that *here, then, is the bond that unites solidarity with the appreciation of what has been received: only a keen awareness of the contingency of our gifts, that none of us*

*is fully responsible for their success, can save a meritocratic society from falling into the arrogant presumption that success is the crowning glory of virtue, that the rich are rich because they deserve it more than the poor. If genetic engineering enabled us to overturn the results of the genetic lottery, to exchange chance for choice, the received character of human talents, and achievements would lose ground, and perhaps also the ability to recognize that we share a common destiny*³¹.

In this regard, Savulescu will take charge of one of the ethical objections that transhumanist practices have received, concerning the decrease in solidarity, and will maintain that a quota of solidarity will always be required in interpersonal relationships, since improved beings will not be immune to misfortune, so that *improvement will never guarantee a perfect life. So, we will continue to need solidarity and insurance as well as we do now*¹⁴. But it would not be in the same way, but in the form of a sympathetic and punishing view of the other as a poor unimproved being responsible for their destiny in terms of being at a lower evolutionary stage.

Solidarity, nevertheless, requires a symmetry of relationships as an expression of a concern for the shared common destiny of which Sandel speaks³¹.

Final considerations

Undoubtedly, human rights and human dignity are issues that give rise to arduous debates. Even more so considering the rapid technological developments of the present and their future consequences. In this article, these topics have been taken up again to put them in dialogue with transhumanist ideas.

From this counterpoint emerge not a few questions about questions of thickness such as human nature, the value of human life, its most proper dignity, or the possible emergence of a concept of posthuman dignity. In this framework, transhumanism defends the latter idea from the perspective of an evolutionary consideration of dignity that can extend beyond the borders of the human.

This has been answered negatively, assuming that human dignity can only be conceived in

relation to a unique and unrepeatable personal nature, not with genetically enhanced beings with other configurations as an existential substrate.

In this direction, human rights and human dignity represent, on the one hand, unfinished projects in the sense that they are always in need

of their realization as a correlation, while at the same time reaffirming their own value. On the other hand, they can also be placed as those porous borders that guard life as a gift and that enable the prevalence of humility, co-responsibility, and solidarity.


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