

Racing for (neurocognitive) enhancement: when the true human person is at the starting blocks

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Current and prospected applications of (neurocognitive) enhancement have the potential to undermine our comprehension of being human in post-modern societies by a lack of appreciation of an intrinsic value, acknowledged dignity and distinctive *telos*, all signified in the term “human person”. Scientific, ethical and anthropological issues justifying the use of (neurocognitive) enhancement are discussed together with our counterproposals. We also address the social transforming power that (neurocognitive) enhancing technologies have undertaken through a process of continuous innovation, emphasizing the hidden perils and propose a governance based on the principles of common good, subsidiarity and solidarity. From our perspective – if a never ending debate on neurocognitive enhancement is to be equated to a “race”, - the term “human person”, indicating a complex, succinct, relational subjectivity with an implicit, unavoidable dynamism, should be at the starting blocks. So specified, it would fail to fit in an abstract or generic definition of “substance” that hinders any possible individuation: the “human person”, therefore, as a category – not a prepackaged one - and as a standard of enquiry. The referent of this specification is the concept (interestingly enough, more common among its critics than advocates) for which the semantic of “human person” must necessarily imply, *sic et simpliciter*, a comprehension of her subjectivity as one enclosed, autonomous, and coincident with the rational nucleus that oversees the material substrate. In other words, what we contest is the identification of the “human person” with a solipsistically inclined subject of Cartesian ancestry: also, we advocate that the semantic of “human person” does not necessarily imply a dualistic or spiritualistic anthropology that situates the identity nucleus of man only in his “noble” spiritual dimension, reducing his corporality to a bare container. It is from this assumption and a personalistic perspective that the human body gains an ethical relevance, also in view of a critical estimation of (neurocognitive) enhancement which, by addressing a person’s full corporeal dimension involves also her dignity. From these theoretical premises, and a full appreciation of the dynamic nature of the human condition, we can infer that any enhancement is an anthropological phenomenon, against those who propose trans-humanism as a transition towards post-humanism (Farisco in press). Therefore, our claim is for a distinction between a humanizing and a dehumanizing use of (neurocognitive) enhancement, with a particular emphasis on the issues of personal

identity. We are, however, well aware of the intrinsic limitations of such a distinction, since definitions of health, disease and enhancement are far from being straightforward; in addition, if we define enhancement any improvement, a distinction from therapy would be indefensible and, as a consequence, to advocate moral issues for its ethical condemnation, impossible.

Farisco M. In press. The human in question. Towards a neuro-post-anthropology? Neuroscience, neurotechnology and neuroethics: toward an intersection of mind, machines and morality. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

Disclosures: none