

STOA-NEWS

The New You: A European Approach to Human Enhancement Report on the STOA workshop in the European Parliament

Brussels, Belgium, February 24, 2009

This workshop was part of the project *Human Enhancement*, which is being carried out for STOA by ITAS and the Rathenau Institute of ETAG. The final report of this project is expected at the end of March 2009. The workshop was organised to inform MEPs about the progress of the project and to discuss the project with various European experts on human enhancement.

Approximately 45 people were present at the workshop. Participants can be divided into two groups: the MEPs and the present experts. The following MEPs attended the workshop: Dorette Corbey (chairwoman during the working lunch), Jorgo Chatzimarkakis (chair, first part of the debate), Malcolm Harbour (chair, second part of the debate), Philippe Busquin, Marco Cappato, and Paul Rübig. Expert participants travelled to the European Parliament in Brussels from the UK, Austria, Italy, Germany, Denmark, Belgium, France and other countries.

The first session of the workshop, a working lunch, started with a little delay at 1 pm. This delay was caused, amongst other things, by the fact that the international train with many participants and one of the speakers on board, didn't ride. Over lunch, the chairwoman Dorette Corbey and the participants listened to four presentations.

1 Presentations

In the first presentation, Martijntje Smits (Rathenau Institute, NL and project leader of the STOA project) explained what human enhancement is, and why this trend is urgently in need of regulation. Characteristic of human enhancement technologies is that they all aim

to change the human body *beyond* what is normal. While these technologies might seem attractive to the individuals wanting to use them, they have also potentially severe consequences for health (physical risks as well as high pressure on budgets for health care), research, economy, or solidarity. Challenges like these, which are posed by human enhancement technologies, are also important on the level of European policies on research, health and medical tourism, and the economy. After this introduction, three invited speakers presented three strategies to deal with the challenges.

The first speaker, Andy Miah (University of West Scotland, UK), showed the audience that human enhancement technologies can be used for therapeutic as well as enhancing purposes. As stated by Miah, a much more sophisticated distinction between sorts of (enhancement) technologies is necessary for any policy making. Such a classification also shows that many enhancement technologies are not visionary technologies that fundamentally transform mankind, but rather technologies that can be quite useful and beneficial for human beings. Deciding which technologies are beneficial and thus to be allowed, and which harmful technologies are not, is easier if the EU would use such a classification. A *moderate pro-enhancement approach* is thus the best approach the EU could take, according to Miah.

Roberto Mordacci (Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele, IT) took another approach to the challenges for the EU raised by human enhancement technologies. He tried to find a criterion that can be used to decide whether enhancement technologies could be allowed to alter the human condition. This criterion is meant to protect what is valuable about the human condition and respect the integrity, freedom and equality of individuals. Such a criterion could be: "A technology or treatment aimed at enhancing the human condition can be permissible if, and only if, it does not intentionally disrespect the human body, desire, rationality, freedom or equality", argued Mordacci. If the EU would explore the road Mordacci presented further, it would take a *reasonable restrictive approach* towards the challenges raised by human enhancement.

A third approach was presented by Tsjalling Swierstra (Universiteit Twente, NL). He

starts from the idea of a mutual influence of values and technologies, which develop in a co-evolutionary way. Values partly determine or help shape (acceptable) new technologies, and new technologies can transform existing values. This fact should be used for techno-moral learning by asking ourselves what morals we should aim for, and what technologies? Policy makers deciding on the allocation of research funds or whether the use of a technology is to be allowed, should not cling to the ideal of the natural, given world – for there are fewer and fewer of such “givens”. They should instead allow reversible experimentation with new technologies. These experiments have to be evaluated also with regards to the effects such a technology would have on the world, rather than a confined setting. This will lead to as much political struggle as there is ethical debate about these issues, but perhaps thought-experiments could play a useful role in this. By using techno-moral imagination, the technological as well as moral issues of a technology can be explored, which will provide valuable information for policy makers. The third presentation can be labelled *a systematic case-by-case approach*.

After the four presentations, the participants were left with three possible strategies to deal with human enhancement technologies. Mrs. Corbey opened the floor for a quick first debate. Questions were answered and some critiques given to which the speakers reacted. Unfortunately, it was not long for the first session of the workshop had to be finished.

2 Summary of the debate

After the break Jorgo Chatzimarkakis opened the debate session of the workshop. The debate itself was chaired by Jan Staman, director of the Rathenau Institute, so Mr. Chatzimarkakis was free to participate in the debate as he did. In the fruitful discussion, many issues regarding the regulation of human enhancement were addressed.

Participants acknowledged the importance of the theme human enhancement and the importance of regulation, because human enhancement technologies can have far-reaching consequences. The development of all kinds of human enhancement technologies directly

touches upon and even challenges the human values, as they are recognised, cherished and protected by the EU. This is the reason why any approach to the challenges posed by human enhancement will need some kind of participation of (the) European citizens.

All this means for the participants that a working group installed by the European Commission will have to take next steps, which include the articulation of the issues related to human enhancement technologies for the EU as well as the participation of citizens in both the debate about and regulation of these issues. Human enhancement technologies are here to stay, but if the EU would combine the powers of European politicians, experts and citizens into a working group, the use and the effects that those technologies will have on the European society can at least be anticipated in time.

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