

European Churches: No Reason to Fear Human Enhancement Technology

Will humans in the future live 120 years, 250 years, or more? Will handicaps no longer occur? Will humans be able to see in the dark? Will Olympic records and world records continue to be broken? Will we be able to integrate computers into our brains, and to operate machines by our thoughts? And if these things become real, what will they mean for the quality of our relationships, our self-understanding, and our religion? Will human enhancement mean that humans can take their destiny in their own hands?

Initiated by the Conference of European Churches (CEC), a group of European scientists, politicians, and theologians have worked together to reflect on these questions. Jewish, Islamic, and secular voices were also represented. In the book *Human Enhancement* which is the result of this process, European Churches come to conclusions which may come unexpected to some: there are no objections to developing human enhancement technology beforehand. What can be done to improve the conditions for human life and flourishing, may be seen as God-given opportunities not to be missed. Effective treatment for handicaps and measures to prevent handicaps should be welcomed. Technical and biological means to better cope with genetic and other diseases are a blessing. Some of the most ground-breaking discoveries in history were made by people with deep religious commitments. The quest of scientists to discover and extend the range of human possibilities should be met with openness, not suspicion.

Certainly there are issues to be made. Sometimes the potential outcome of future research is portrayed in a too optimistic sense. Likewise, some sceptics of these techniques tend to ascribe much too much power to scientists. The European Churches advocate a balanced approach in which overheated expectations are corrected in the light of reality. They also point to the fact that what is called, 'human enhancement' is in most cases an attempt to *restore* natural human capacities. Human enhancement and nature may go better together than is sometimes suggested. Churches also point to the fact that the budget for human enhancement technologies may restrain other necessary investments in, e.g., social security, health care, and education. Doubts are also raised about technologies which include the instrumental use of human life. After all: true human enhancement is reached only when virtues of love and solidarity are brought to flourish.

Theo Boer and Richard Fischer (eds.), *Human Enhancement: Scientific, Ethical and Theological Aspects from a European Perspective*. Brussels: Conference of European Churches, 2013 (302 pp.) 26 authors contributed to the CSC of CEC book on "Human Enhancement". The book can be ordered in a printed form at CEC Strasbourg's Office, and can be downloaded from the website:

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