

NHNAI Project Newsletter

NEWSLETTER 1 (SEPTEMBER 8, 2022)



NHNAI Project

New Humanism at the time of
Neurosciences and Artificial Intelligence

**What does it mean to be human at the time of
neurosciences and artificial intelligence?**

THIS IS THE MAIN QUESTION THAT THE NHNAI PROJECT IS SEEKING TO ELUCIDATE!

Why? To provide an ethical compass to frame action

How? By raising ethical awareness through collective societal debate

Who? An international network of scholars from Catholic higher education institutions

With whom? Relevant stakeholders in various regions across the world

THE NHNAI PROJECT IN BRIEF



The NHNAI project - New Humanism at the Time of Neurosciences and Artificial Intelligence - has officially been launched in January 2022 under the aegis of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU).

The project is coordinated by the Confluence: Sciences and Humanities Research Center of Lyon Catholic University (France), with Prof. Dr. Mathieu Guillermin as main leader, and gathers multiple partners around the world featuring quite diverse backgrounds (philosophers, ethicists, sociologists, theologians, religious studies experts, historians, medical scientists, anthropologists, etc.).

In particular, the project concentrates on three essential domains heavily concerned by the upheavals generated by recent technological advance: **HEALTH - EDUCATION - DEMOCRACY**

MAIN ASSUMPTIONS AND GOALS

1. THE NOTION OF HUMAN REMAINS A BLINDSPOT



We commonly invoke the notion of “human” (e.g. human good or flourishing, human-centred technology, human nature) or key concepts tightly attached to it (like dignity or autonomy), but the notion as such remains ambiguous and problematic in the face of the disruptions caused by new knowledge and technology stemming from neurosciences (NS) and artificial intelligence (AI).

The lack of a shared, reliable and relevant understanding about what humanism is and means nowadays prevents us from building a compass that frames the main challenges posed to us from an ethical, moral and spiritual perspective.

2. WE NEED AN ETHICAL COMPASS



Societal challenges raised by AI and NS are numerous such as work automation, data-driven decision making, persuasion technologies, neuromodulation through neural implants or human enhancement. These challenges highlight the pressing need for all concerned actors and stakeholders to go beyond the mere technical and practical aspects of the development of these fields to consider also their ethical, moral and spiritual dimensions. Stakeholders concerned by AI and NS societal challenges need a collective ethical compass in order to navigate among the multiple possibilities opened up by these fields.

A CAPACITY-BUILDING PROJECT TO RAISE ETHICAL AWARENESS AND EMPOWER SOCIETY

NHNAI will trigger ethical capacity-building by initiating and facilitating, in the countries of each partner university, a well-informed and integral societal reflection around the question of humanism at the time of NS and AI.

The project aims at contributing to the emergence of a critical mass of transformation agents that adopt an integral approach and frame challenges raised by AI and NS through the prism of humanism. Transformation agents may be either individuals or organisations such as academics, engineers, economic actors, policy- and decision-makers, actors in the field of education or health, concerned citizens, etc. These agents will be invited to join capacity-building workshops and digital debate, which will allow for elaborating recommendations for ethical regulation, that is, a collective “ethical compass” to guide our actions.



The goal is that such a critical mass of actors starts asking ethical, moral and spiritual questions involving the very manner we understand and define who we are and who we should be as humans. As they develop strong ethical awareness and expectations with respect to societal issues raised by NS and AI, they will contribute to changes in policy making and ethical regulation, support for regulatory political efforts, ethical entrepreneurship (notably through consumer choices), and methodological inspiration.

Listen to Prof. Dr. Mathieu Guillermin, NHNAI coordinator, talking about this essential dimension of the project:



A LARGE NETWORK ACROSS THE WORLD

The NHNAI Network is composed of the following institutions:



[Lyon Catholic University - Confluence: Sciences and Humanities research center \(France\)](#)



[International Federation of Catholic Universities, IFCU](#)



[Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile \(Chile\)](#)



[Santa Clara University \(United States\)](#)



[University of Notre Dame \(USA\)](#)



[Fu Jen Catholic University \(Taiwan\)](#)



[Catholic University of Eastern Africa \(Kenya\)](#)



UNIVERSIDADE
CATÓLICA
PORTUGUESA

[Universidade Católica Portuguesa \(Portugal\)](#)



LUMSA
UNIVERSITÀ

[Libera Università Maris Ss. Assunta, LUMSA \(Italy\)](#)



[University of Namur \(Belgium\)](#)



[Lille Catholic University \(France\)](#)

A THREE-YEAR PROJECT RELYING ON MULTIPLIER AGENTS



The project runs from 2022 to 2025.

Year 2022 will be devoted to the gathering of insights from academic experts (knowledge and questions experts believe as relevant for societal reflection) as well as to the design of the ground material to facilitate societal debates.

Societal debates per se will happen in two waves between January 2023 and April 2024.

Contributions to these waves of collective reflection will be analyzed and synthesized, leading to the elaboration of a white paper on bottom-up recommendations for ethical guidelines and policymaking (to be issued and disseminated in 2025).

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MAKING EXCLUDED PEOPLE’S VOICE HEARD!

With a view to inclusiveness and equity, the project is committed to reaching out to excluded people in order to make their voice heard. Associations and any other kind of organisations working with vulnerable persons will thus be targeted and their public will be involved as relevant stakeholders to join the capacity-building workshops as well as collective reflection through digital debate.



SOME EXCERPTS FROM THE FIRST WORKSHOP: HAVE A LOOK AT THEM!

The first academic workshop of the NHNAI project took place at Lyon Catholic University (France) on March 10-11, 2022.



Its main goal was to harness (academic) knowledge upon the issue of humanism at the time of NS and AI by fostering interdisciplinary dialogue among selected academic experts. The workshop allowed for preparing an interdisciplinary mapping of academic knowledge as a first step to getting social actors involved in a wider debate in order to co-construct societal questions and, subsequently, launch two waves of collective reflection.

SALIENT QUOTES FROM THE WORKSHOP

“Analysis of errors committed by humans and AI show that the types, implications and consequences of those two genres of errors vary, despite the commonalities. (...) There is a need to enhance and reflect upon error detection, with the aim of mitigating their impacts”.

Dr. Carolina Pires Maruta, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Portugal

“Well, I think that the question is identity, what it means to be human, what are the boundaries and limits of the human and so on. And I think that both our speeches try to show that there is a widespread operation of reduction of the human being to a positivistic point of view. You have the reception of inputs, information, you decode that in some way and you give an answer to that; and you can have all these operations. And then you have the brain, the human being and you can also replicate it because this is a computer-based vision of the mind and the human being. That’s why we tried to show: the question ‘Why AI can replace humans today?’ Well, because humans are seen as computers. So, of course, in this sense computers can be better than human beings (...) for these operations. (...) But other dimensions must be taken into account when talking about being human (...): the values, the projects, the ideas on how to live, the political dreams, justice... and these are all dimensions that we cannot reduced to a computational understanding of the human being”.

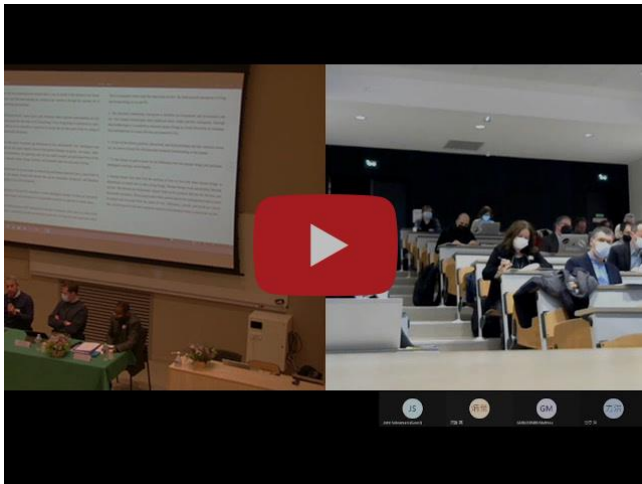
Prof. Francisco De Lara López, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

Two participants from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya, namely, **Dr. Everlyn M’Mbone Anduvare** (doctor in information technology sciences), and **Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Charles Wabanhu** (priest and doctor in moral theology) put forward the importance of

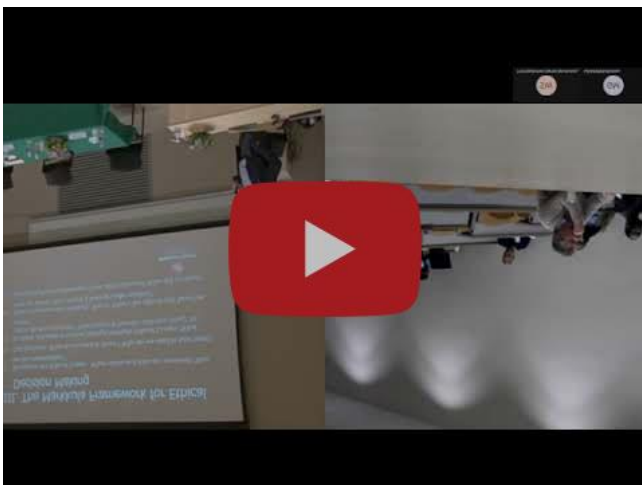
“Ubuntu”, an African concept used to mean that “a person is a person through the other human beings” or, put it in a different way, “we exist thanks to the others”.

Emmanuel showed the interest and meaningfulness of the concept by referring to the hypothetical use of robots to take care of patients in Africa: *“In an African perspective, we use what we call Ubuntu (...) whereby the whole community is involved in the care of the patient. If I'm sick, the whole members of my family are sick. If they are sick, well I'm also sick. Now, what If we would put there a robot to take care of me?”*

Selected video extracts



Prof. Francisco De Lara López (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile): comments on the need for reflexivity on the questions addressed by the project and collective critical reflection on the kind of lifestyles and societies we wish to have.



Dr. Brian P. Green (Santa Clara University, United States): brief presentation of the Markkula framework for Ethical Decision Making (from the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University) and the Ethics in Technology Practice Tool.

Both resources are available for free online: [here](#) and [here](#)!



Pr. Fabio Macioce (Libera Università Maria Ss. Assunta di Roma, Italy): lecture on opportunities and main risks derived from a changing workplace as a result of the introduction of new technologies.

MEET THE PROJECT COORDINATOR



Mathieu Guillermin is an associate professor of the Confluence: Sciences and Humanities Research Center at Lyon Catholic University. He holds a PhD in physics and a PhD in Philosophy. He studies philosophical and ethical issues associated with new technologies, especially in the field of AI. He also explores the epistemological questions raised by the articulation of various forms of rationality (between academic disciplines, but also with extra-academic or common-sense rationalities).

As NHNAI's main coordinator, Mathieu ensures overall supervision of the project. Besides, he will particularly lead Activity 4 focused on project evaluation & lessons learned, and formulation of guidelines so that Catholic higher education institutions may keep on conducting similar ethical capacity-building processes in their own settings.

GET INVOLVED IN THE DEBATE!



Government officers - Companies and for-profit sector - Health institutions
 NGOs in various fields - Associations working with excluded people
 Local communities - The media - International organisations

If you belong to one of the groups above and you are based in one of the countries covered by the project (France, Belgium, United States, Kenya, Italy, Taiwan, Chile, Portugal), you may have your say! Don't hesitate to write to us, we will put you in contact with the country's coordinators.

Project website:

www.nhnai.org

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