

## **Humanities and Global Scientific/Technological Challenges**

You must care about the world around you to really want to bring the principles of philosophy to bear upon the world, rather than simply seeing the world as fallen.  
Seyla Benhabib, 2004

In a globalized context, applied sciences and technologies while having a potential to create practical answers to some of the fundamental problems that affect humanity on a world scale, also have the capacity to challenge the values and references that have constituted our identity as humans. Against this background, Helga Nowotny, Chair of EURAB, wisely stated that social sciences and the humanities have an important role to play at the heart of these changing human circumstances: “They help us understand how the ‘future generating machinery’ which is so successfully and efficiently fuelled by science and technology, will actually work, what kind of economic and social impact it will have and how it will transform our societies.”

In this context, there is a crucial urgency to reflect upon the pressing problems of the contemporary and future generations, by actively addressing some of the fundamental questions in the fields of humanities and applied sciences, integrating the inherent technological and human dimensions of the scientific undertaking. While developing specific inquiries, it is equally important to reflect upon and anticipate the way in which technological and scientific developments can alter the human condition, in particular the quality of life, the environment and the dignity of humankind, foreseeing possible answers to the radical changes operated in a global context.

As society develops into increased levels of complexity, the implications of questions posed by technology, advanced computation, life sciences and bio-engineering impinge upon areas of knowledge traditionally related with human studies, such as philosophy, theology, and legal, political and economical thought. Thus, recognizing that some of the main challenges to humanity in the coming decades will be transversal to these fields of knowledge which for a long time have trailed separate paths, it is crucial to create an international platform, around which scientists from different institutions can congregate to study specific questions and topics, in an interdisciplinary environment.

Aware that one of the greatest challenges of our times consists in preserving and translating for future generations the values that have shaped our communities and civilizations through renewed enrichment and creativity, it is important to yield particular attention to the process of creation, development and communication of the rights and fundamental values that have grounded life in a democratic framework.

Acknowledging the unprecedented powers of creation and destruction that are at the disposal of increasingly interdependent societies, with profoundly different cultures, religions and ideologies, it is equally important to find ways to bridge between those differences, and create the conditions that will enable future generations to preserve the human characteristics of our civilizations.

Also aware that the rapid developments in science and technology, which increasingly affect our understanding of life and life itself, result in a stronger demand for a global response to the ethical implications of such developments, and acknowledging that the ethical issues raised by these developments must be examined with respect to the dignity of the human person, universal rights and fundamental freedoms, it is crucial to foster a multi-disciplinary approach to the ethical challenges posed by the pursuit of frontier scientific and technological research.

Some of the topics to be approached could include the following questions:

- Impact of radical technologies on the human future and time-scale of such developments;
- Long-term consequences of changing human nature;
- How different cultures evaluate possible changes in the human condition;
- Ethical and philosophical implications of applied artificial intelligence.
- While cities account for large percentages of global energy use, and house an ever-growing portion of mankind, the challenges of understanding and controlling urban energy use in an encompassing way are not being addressed as broadly as they need. A global study should be conducted in a search for the scientific basis, practical tools and strategic guidance towards the mitigation of this problem.

Additionally, in its research and public discussions, particular emphasis can be placed in questions such as the following:

- How the values of dignity, freedom, equality, and justice will be conceived and evolve in the future, and their consequent impact in social and political structures?
- How fundamental rights can be developed, implemented and preserved and in the diversity of human communities in a global context?