

THE ITALIAN TRANSHUMANIST MANIFESTO

1. PREAMBLE

We, the transhumanists, have had a clear and ambitious goal since the establishment of our associations and movements: creating on this planet the conditions for a moral and intellectual revolution with a promethean orientation, a revolution capable of producing radical changes in both our everyday world and our cultural landscape.

In particular, we see human race as protagonist of a new phase of technological, scientific, industrial, cultural, and biological, development – given that amongst our fundamental values there are longevism, the slowing down of the aging process, the health of citizens, and the physical and mental enhancement both of disabled and “normal” people, which includes transcending the limits imposed by our current biological structure. The self-determination of peoples and individuals is also a fundamental value, so that we do not intend to *impose* our values on anyone, but simply to *propose* them. Similarly, we cannot tolerate that a different worldview is imposed upon us through force or threats.

It is best to make it immediately clear that by publishing this manifesto that we do not plan to found any new political party, which the already very fragmented world of politics and politicians would hardly feel the need for. Organized transhumanism is and remains a cross-party, plural movement and operates with the typical tools and methods of social and cultural movements: publishing, press releases, the organization of public events, boycotts, passive resistance, referenda and polling, subscription campaigns, lobbying, moral and monetary support to deserving individuals and entities, research grants, electoral support to specific candidates on the basis of their programs and irrespective of their political affiliations. The purpose of this manifesto is simply to explain more precisely the principles and the line of our movement.

The main idea behind transhumanism can be summarized in a single sentence: it is possible and desirable to switch from blind evolution to self-directed, self-conscious evolution. We are ready to do what science makes possible today, namely to take our destiny in our hands. We are ready to accept the challenges arising from the world of biotechnology, cognitive sciences, robotics, nanotechnology, AI, and to take these challenges to a political and philosophical level to give a sense and a direction to our path. It should be noted that this project does not have much to do with the negative and repressive forms of eugenics preached in the 19th century and implemented in the United States, in the Third Reich and social-democratic Scandinavia in the first half of the 20th century. Sterilization of inheritable diseases is a primitive and brutal response to a problem new technologies allow us to overcome without affecting individual reproductive freedom. In other words, it is grossly mystifying to identify the negative and authoritarian eugenics of the past with the contemporary transhumanist model of self-directed evolution, which is aimed at positively ensuring the health and the enhancement of individuals and of their offspring while protecting the freedom of choice and the health of our descendants.

Even though it is possible to deal with these problem for the first time in those terms today, it would be equally wrong to see the overcoming of current human limitations as a plan dreamed up by improvised apprentice sorcerers. Such idea has on the contrary a sol-

id tradition in the history of European thought, and is suggested or reflected in the works of thinkers of the caliber of Francis Bacon, Tommaso Campanella, Jean Condorcet, Friedrich Nietzsche, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Leon Trotsky, Julian Huxley, Jacques Monod, Francis Crick and Jean-François Lyotard, just to mention a few of the best-known amongst them. Now, we are simply bringing forward their discourse.

The advocates of self-directed evolution, more than challenging "nature", intend to favor the deployment of its possibilities. The sense and the direction we refer to are ultimately those at the origin of our species, our emergence as more sophisticated organisms in comparison with our immediate predecessors. This is the reason why, if we reason in evolutionary rather than static terms, transhumanism cannot be considered as "unnatural". We are rather trying to establish a new harmony between culture and nature. It is then hardly surprising that those who see us as dangerous foes are primarily enemies of evolution and of knowledge, which is the fruit of our evolution as a species.

The charge of hubris – arrogance, trespassing, crossing the Pillars of Hercules – that is often brought against us reflects pre-Darwinian worldviews; the transhuman cannot go against the dictates of nature because nothing technoscience can perform happens outside of physics and biology. "Human nature" has always been a product of a self-domestication, combining the "human" with the "living" and the "technological", and human nature was therefore already, to some extent, a self-directed evolution, albeit at an unconscious level.

2. A POLYMORPHIC, MULTICULTURAL MOVEMENT

As it can easily be seen from our Pantheon, the central transhumanist idea can be coupled with different political, philosophical and religious opinions. Accordingly, we have observed individuals and groups joining us from very different persuasions. On one hand such diversity may be an asset in terms of ideas and stimuli, but on the other hand it may involve a practical paralysis, especially when members give priority to their existing affiliations over their belonging to organized transhumanism. In order to remedy this inconvenience we have engaged for years in a debate aimed at finding a positive synthesis of different transhumanist tendencies and philosophical propensities. In fact, this manifesto, even though materially drafted by a single person, is the final result of long discussions with AIT members, and accordingly owes much to several different minds.¹ And while it is a manifesto of *Italian* transhumanists, we do not make it a secret that we hope to contaminate with the ideas expressed herein other organizations that are active abroad or internationally.

In the World Transhumanist Association, of which the Associazione Italiana Transumanisti is the local chapter, different ideological orientations persist, as it is appropriate for an umbrella organization of an explicitly apolitical and undenominational nature. The awareness however exists that single affiliated organizations may require stronger identities, depending on geopolitical imperatives, different cultural heritages and their own philosophical preferences, while adhering to general principles.

¹ This manifesto has been compiled by Riccardo Campa, president of the Associazione Italiana Transumanisti (AIT). Amongst the many members of the association who have contributed suggestions, ideas, comments, and amendments, a special mention goes to Giuseppe Lucchini, Alberto Masala, Giulio Prisco and Stefano Vaj. The manifesto has been unanimously approved by the AIT National Board on the 11th of February, 2008.

In the transhumanist movement, there are three main areas where ideological differences exist, both at the global and at the Italian level: politics, religion and science. We shall discuss the outlines of those internal differences, and then indicate how we intend to overcome them in the framework of the Associazione Italiana Transumanisti.

As far as politics is concerned, a recent WTA member poll shows that transhumanists exist of many traditional political persuasions, from the far-left wing to the far-right wing, with everything in between. In terms of numbers, however, a prevalence of self-defined left-wingers can be observed (47% in total), with a preponderance of members identifying themselves as “socialist” or “progressive” as well as small fringes of anarchists (2%) and communists (1%). The libertarians are also numerous (20% the total percentage) with a smaller more radical (Randian-Objectivist, anarcho-capitalist, minarchist) component. Members also exist that support conservative, religious or nationalist ideas. Christian democrats are around 0.5%, as are self-defined right-wing extremists. Among WTA international membership, 14% already declares, however, to support an upwing position (neither on the left nor on the right, but “upward”), while 11% says that they are not interested in contemporary politics. It should also be noted that the overwhelming majority of transhumanists support democratic self-determination, while – and this detail is equally interesting - critics of democracy are spread across the entire political spectrum.

With regard to religion, 64% of transhumanists are atheists or agnostics, while 31% adhere to some form of spirituality or religious persuasion. Amongst the latter, 9% are Christian (Protestants, Catholics and Mormons), 4% are Buddhists, 2% are Pagans, 1% Jewish and 1% Muslim - just to mention some well-known religious denominations. There are also members that identify transhumanism as their "religion."

Coming to science, we have two main propensities. On one side, we have transhumanists careful to remain within the boundaries of official and academic science, and accordingly inclined to consider science fiction, utopias and futurism little more than a pastime or useful thought experiments. On the other, there are transhumanists ready to consider possible technologies and events yet to take place as articles of faith, only because they have been predicted by some eminent futurists or science fiction novelists. Those differences concern mostly subjects such as mind-uploading, immortality, the coming of a Singularity. It appears here that 19% of WTA members deem its discourse too oriented in a utopian, futurist and science-fictional direction, while 8% believes on the contrary that the WTA is too focused on short-term, uninspirational, prosaic issues. The remaining 73% believe instead that the existing WTA approach is sufficiently balanced in this respect. Now, this does not tell much, until one considers how respondents interpret the WTA line. It is therefore more significant to observe that only 7% proclaim themselves “immortalist”, that is believers in an earthly immortality. The remaining 93% confine themselves to a much more pragmatic and realistic stance, defining transhumanism under this aspect in terms of longevism, extension of the human lifespan and life expectancy within the limit of the opportunities increasingly offered by biological and physical sciences.²

3. MEDIA AND BIASES

² The data are significant, because they imply a sub-optimal communication between the transhumanist movement and the external world. Many people who come in contact with transhumanist ideas derive as a consequence a wrong impression, an idea often very remote from what real transhumanism actually is. This is true for the US movement, but even more for European transhumanism, not to mention Italian transhumanism.

As far as Italy is concerned, we have enjoyed a remarkable attention from the local mass media. We have been discussed by newspapers, radio and TV broadcasts, magazines and webzines and blogs of every cultural and political areas. Coverage has been obtained by Italian national press, including by *Il Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica*, *l'Espresso*, *Panorama*, *Libero*, *Linus*, *Il Foglio*, *il Sole-24 Ore*, *Avvenire*, *Il Tempo*, *Il Secolo d'Italia*, *Il Manifesto*, *MondOperaio*, *L'Unità*, *Rinascita*, *La Stampa*, *Agenda Coscioni*, *Letteratura-Tradizione*, *La Padania e Il Federalismo*, as well as by many local organs, such as *Il Giornale di Bergamo*, *La Voce di Mantova*, *La Gazzetta di Mantova*, *La Cronaca di Mantova*, *La Libertà of Piacenza*, and *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*.

The same happened with TV networks, such as RAI 2, which devoted to our themes a monographic documentary, "Il Mutante: il futuro postumano che ci aspetta" (The Mutant: the Posthuman Future that Awaits Us), while RAI 3 broadcasted a documentary on AIT itself, "Nascita del superuomo" (Birth of the Overman). In addition, the subject of transhumanism has been dealt with by many Italian Web sources, such as Notizie Radicali, Fondazione Bassetti, LibMagazine, Resistenza Laica, Futuroprossimo, Enterprise, Fantascienza, l'Uomo libero, Ulisse, Bioetiche, Aprile, La Destra, Cuorelettrici, Digitalife, Indymedia, ECplanet, Luogocomune, Punto Informatico, plus innumerable personal blogs. By now, there are as well hundreds of books and essays in several languages, many of which in Italian or translated in Italian, focused on transhumanism or related thereto, for which we refer our readers to the extensive bibliography published by our Web site at www.transumanisti.it, probably the most complete currently available worldwide.

In this blizzard of bits and paper, there were those who made no secret of sharing our ideas, those who restrained themselves to mere impartial reporting, and those who extended criticisms and doubts. If most of those sources presented an image substantially acceptable to our movement, there were also many distortions and mystifications. From a page of *Il Corriere della Sera* Francis Fukuyama, member of the US Presidential Council on Bioethics, defined us as the most dangerous organization in the world. *Avvenire*, the daily newspaper of the Council of Italian Catholic Bishops, did not refrain from presenting us as dangerous extremists, sometimes far-right extremists, sometimes far-left ones, according to what was more expedient in the circumstances. Giuliano Ferrara, a well-known Italian journalist and politician, from his newspaper *Il Foglio*, spent a great deal of ink and many vitriolic comments on us, as if we were the swing factor in Italian politics. The Rebecchini Foundation even organised an anti-transhumanist conference, inviting as speakers Mr. Fukuyama, Mr. Ferrara and Monsignor Fisichella. Marcello Veneziani labelled us as enemies of the human species and of religion. We do not know whether Mr. Ratzinger is wondering whether to reactivate the Inquisition to take care of us, but the commentaries heard sofar are not sounding too reassuring in this respect. And attacks do not only come from the Right. Many leftist bloggers and mainstream journalists racked their brains in the creation of elaborate conspiracy theories, presenting us as a kind of Spectre or Masonic league engaged in occult world-domination plans.

Our ears are still ringing from such vibrant denunciations. We have been stigmatized as "lunatic adepts of materialist future-scientism", "technologically advanced, and spiritually putrefied, humanoids", "biotech Talibans", "extremists of human manipulation", "advocates for an aseptic, emotionless world", "enemies of the human species", "weird cultists", "eugenic totalitarians", "devil's agents", "devisers of monsters", etc.

Even though the latter voices are not predominant, they are nevertheless very vociferous. Thus, a resolute and clear response is required to clear away a few negative stereotypes.

Given the extraordinary parallels of this situation, we cannot resist the temptation to paraphrase the preamble of a famous 19th century manifesto, the one signed by Marx and Engels: there is a ghost wandering throughout the world, the ghost of transhumanism. All the old-world powers-that-be have formed a coalition to witch-hunt this ghost. Hence two consequences: transhumanism is now recognized as a powerful myth by world powers; and the time has come that transhumanists openly present to the world their perspective, their worldview, their propensities, and that they oppose to the ghost stories about transhumanism a manifesto of their own ideas.

The most widespread biases are at least three, precisely concern the movement's internal differences, and it would be foolish to indulge in self-victimization, limiting ourselves to blame them on victimizing by our adversaries and bad press. Our internal divisions objectively play here a negative role, at least as much as they hinder a clean and unitary response to those unfounded allegations.

3.1. The accusation of plutocratic elitism

According to this critique, transhumanists are elite members of the upper middle classes, who plan to enhance themselves at a mental and physical level, becoming immortal demigods, a new superhuman species, in a best-case scenario ignoring the rest of their communities, and in the worst aiming at enslaving them. They would do that without openly resorting to violence, but simply working in order to have market laws to become the only universal law. The strategy of transhumanists would be one and the same with that of international megacorporations and with the establishment of a world government, which would be nothing else than a single planetary market ruled by the US of A, the new world policeman, the new Empire.

In this scenario, once the national health services are demolished, and the nations themselves with their welfare policies are dismantled, the painless access to power of such an evil élite would take place. If biotechnologies are going to be expensive, and nothing suggests they are not going to be considering how much reconstructive dental care costs today in Italy, only the rich will be able to enhance themselves, and accordingly what is today class struggle will become a species struggle. And such struggle could not end otherwise than with the total victory of the superhuman species over the weaker human species.

An additional instrument to this goal would be the establishment of an Orwellian State. Transhumanists would strive to persuade citizens to take psycho-active drugs or to install subcutaneous chips so that they could be better controlled. In other words, the transhumanists would launch new fashions, after networked computers and mobile phones in order to improve this unconscious slavery.

Information and communication technologies already allow authorities to spy on and control citizens' thoughts and movements. The citizen still believes himself to be in a position to protect his privacy and to enjoy secure communication by switching off computers and mobile phones and meeting outdoor. But this is a delusion. We have already entered an era of control and repression through new devices: a cloud of orbital satellites, from which it is possible to read a car plate or the labial movements of an individual; videocameras at every street corners and in every building in the name of national security; drug treatments aimed at creating addictions or at making people less restless, and thus more pliant and compliant, children included; and artificial insects, or "smart dust", made of spying nanobots that can control us in any location, including our own home.

Thus (for those who hold this paranoid analysis) invasive and pervasive technologies, microchips under the skin or directly in the brain, would simply represent the last stage of that Machiavellian project. The transhumanists would be nothing else than agents at the service of the Big Brother.

3.2. The accusation of cultism

For those making this accusation, transhumanists are just a new sect, in the pursuit of the abovementioned evil goals, but also in order to replace existing religions with a new universal cult. Essentials of this new theology would be the existence of a spiritual God whose servants would be preparing the final Coming, the Incarnation, through the development of ever-more-sophisticated computers and robots. When AI implementations are infinitely more powerful and intelligent than those currently in existence they will all be connected in a single planetary network and the resulting supernatural entity will enter its machine triumph, become synthetic flesh, and reinstate heaven on earth. At that time, the human beings shall be invited (or compelled) to upload their mind in the Supercomputer, and live their life in the form of disembodied avatars, a little like our alter egos in Second Life. Even the dead would be resurrected in this form. And the Computer-God will probably reserve the right to judge the dead and the alive, and to modify slightly the most dangerous humans (Hitler, Stalin, Saddam Hussein), so that any harm to the System would forever be avoided.

This is an eschatological event that many confuse with the Singularity, even though the latter has no univocal definition. Then, the Computer-God would expand in the universe, converting all matter and energy into computation, until the entire universe or multiverse is nothing but a grand computing machine. Thus, the ultimate aim of Being shall be reached: the absolute self-awareness of the universe.

Of course for atheist critics this Computer-God is nothing but the God of monotheist religions under a thin technological veneer. For Christian critics this (alleged goal) can only be blasphemous - unless the Computer-God is to be considered the Devil himself.

3.3. The accusation of quackery

According to these critics, transhumanists, rather than referring to official, mainstream science, prefer to believe in utopian, futurist, science-fiction fairy tales. The abovementioned (transhumanist) scenarios can only be believed by taking liberties with both the natural sciences and social sciences. A serious analysis must in fact take into account all the available information and data, including feedbacks and built-in limitations, and not just extrapolate trends from a few discoveries and inventions according to what would conform best with one's desires and hopes. But, these critics maintain, transhumanists are either naive or charlatans. They equally ignore science and philosophy.

Thus, from the fact that the implanted Braingate chip allows electric signals to transfer from the brain to a machine, (transhumanists supposedly) hasten to conclude that all individuals will be soon uploaded on a digital computer, thus resolving forever the problem of death. From the fact that the processing power of computers doubles every eighteen months, according to Moore's Law, (all transhumanists supposedly) infer that some kind of Singularity is not only possible, but certain and very imminent.

Now, needless to say, there appears a rather sharp contrast between the poll results reported above and these three accusations. And there are also blatant contradictions between these accusations: e.g., either we are a group of ridiculous charlatans, or we are a dangerous elite secretly ruling the world. We can hardly be both. But all these accusations

are made possible because some fringes of the transhumanist movement do adopt far-fetched or less plausible positions. Although these fringes are a minority within transhumanism they are more newsworthy. The “crazy techno-maniac plutocrat” is a juicier character, for traditional mass-media and blogs alike, than a citizen demanding access to technologies, irrespective of how radical and revolutionary the latter may be. Thus, the former image is more likely to be stuck on transhumanists than the latter.

4. STRATEGY

As a consequence of all that, we are persuaded that it is necessary and urgent to codify the principles and the goals of the Italian transhumanist movement in order to communicate a clear and sharp image of the same. This means that choices have to be taken, a shared program has to be defined, first of all to clear away the three abovementioned misconceptions. In doing so we do not intend to distance ourselves from the WTA and from the global transhumanist movement. We intend exactly the opposite, to make more explicit what already appear to be the dominant views within the transhumanist world, which are too often hidden behind a ***well-intended but misleading idea of pluralism.

It is obvious that the first goal of transhumanism is to favor scientific and technological developments, and in that we do not depart in the least from the line of other transhumanists and extropians in other countries. But *the cultural and social conditions where such developments can or cannot take place are not a marginal or secondary problem*. On the contrary, it is exactly at the level of cultural and social engagement that the *raison d'être* of our movement is situated, given that many other subjects are involved in those developments.

Accordingly, we have resolved to put on paper our own three main battlefields:

1. the struggle for access to technologies and information;
2. the struggle against cultural and political clerical hegemony;
3. the struggle for the diffusion of the technoscientific worldview.

Those priorities, which will presently be better explained, represent a careful synthesis of the different “souls” of the movement - i.e., a synthesis that takes into account the substance and the weight of our various propensities and concerns. This is for us *transhumanism without further qualifications*.

5. ACCESS

If we consider i) that the vast majority of transhumanists identify themselves as left-wingers or upwingers; ii) that most non-libertarian right-wingers, as well as religious moderates, have, especially in Italy, a communitarian orientation iii) that in Europe even libertarians (those who in Europe are called “liberals”) are not prejudicially against social and public policies in the fields of research, education and health services - we can conclude that the bias of “plutocratic élitism”, that is the suspicion that transhumanism is an upper middle-class conspiracy against their fellow citizens, is purely a (false) caricature. In other words, an image created by a minority of minarchist and anarcho-capitalist transhumanists has stuck to on the entire world movement.

We explicitly declare hereby that *Italian transhumanists* - who happen by the way to share this view with the majority of transhumanists worldwide - *support the efforts of all*

those struggling against the exclusion from current and future technologies, at a social as well as at an international level.

The transhumanist commitment to technological and informational empowerment can be defined at three levels of intervention: freedom, development, access.

Freedom. If the struggle to increase the human and economic resources devoted to technoscience and research is a fundamental step, it is equally obvious that without real freedom of research, as defined by the scientific method and ethos, such a fight would be futile. The resources would be simply wasted. Our priority is therefore for an anti-prohibitionist fight in order to obtain the freedom for the scientific research in all fields, plus the freedom to mutate, to evolve, to transform one's phenotype and one's genotype. To be more specific, the optimal employment of already meager available resources is today seriously hindered by illiberal laws such as (Italian) Law no. 40/2004 on procreative technologies, cloning, genetic engineering and stem cells research. The abrogation or radical reform of this statute is the top specific goal of Italian transhumanists.

Development. At a second level, we find the issue of development. Once promethean technoscientific research has been liberated from religious, political and economic hindrances, a plan must be established to stimulate research programs that, with all due respect to researchers' autonomy, should not lose sight of priorities related to the improvement of societal and individual conditions, starting from health, quality of life and life expectancy. In this context, Italy, while being a relative forerunner in the field of robotics, does not invest enough in the biotech area, starting from fundamental biological research up to gerontology and cutting-edge medical research. On the other hand, it is obvious that any efforts in this direction would not make sense without a reform of the Italian research and academic system towards greater transparency, meritocracy and efficiency.

Access. But we do not stop here. We should not be contented with formal freedom and effective public support for technoscientific research programs, we also demand *substantial* freedom. Which means we must demand and obtain social policies and guarantees so that one's income does not end up being the only parameter deciding who has the actual chance of enhancing oneself, of slowing down aging, of postponing death. It means popular sharing of benefits of scientific research and technological innovation. It means a socialized access to technologies. A citizen may be entitled to decide what to do with his or her own life, but citizens must be supported in such choice by the community they belong to, last but not least because it would be very myopic to show any ambiguity on this point, an ambiguity that would throw into the bioluddite camp the mass of those excluded.

A policy of shared access to technology is legitimized by the collective nature of the scientific effort. Each and every discovery, invention, innovation, owes its existence to the joint effort of many minds, working in different places and eras. When we were born, our community made us to participate in its language, knowledges, information. Our personality does not come from nothing. This is true for citizens as well as for scientists and researchers. A quantum computer, for instance, manufactured by an international company would not be conceivable without the ideas of Democritus, Galileo, Leibniz and many other thinkers. Moreover, scientific research is often directly or indirectly financed or made possible by public funding. It would be unfair to take money from workers' and citizens' pockets to finance research programs if the ultimate result would be their social marginalization. The inventor and the discoverer deserve recognition, including monetary rewards, which may also be necessary to make possible the private funding of their efforts; but it is exceedingly inefficient to grant unconditional and monopolistic proprietary

rights on new technologies by the mechanical and ever more extensive granting of patent and other protections that may vastly exceed the abovementioned purposes and not recognize the collective contribution behind the relevant findings.

The negative side effects of this mistaken perception of science and technology as a proprietary product of private efforts are very visible. They take place in a world where, notwithstanding any technological progress, human beings are often still laboring the same number of hours in more precarious contexts than their fathers and without profiting from the developments taking place. In this we identify a flaw of current production systems which should be corrected.

What we do *not* want is a society where access to enhancing technologies would be decided exclusively on the basis of personal income. We are not against private enterprise in the field of new technologies. On the contrary, we should like to see it encouraged and supported, by - inter alia - the adoption of all regulatory measures required to allow the deployment of its full potential. We have no qualms in having confidence in the market whenever it can show better results at lower costs (may it suffice to mention here low-cost flights and consumer electronics). It is a fact that market liberalisations often favor the consumers, including what was once called the “proletariat” and is now more soberly defined as the “working class”.

Nevertheless, our trust in market mechanisms is not unconditional. For us "the market" is not an article of faith, an object of veneration, but simply a tool. More than once it has historically appeared not to deliver the desired results in the appropriate timeframe. To complete the electric grid of our country we had to wait for a crucial State intervention. The infrastructures of our transportation system, education system, health services, research programs, exists thanks to the fact that the State has acted. Space exploration and nuclear technologies have been developed, when and where they have, through public programs, and most often for reasons more related to national power and prestige than to immediate monetary profit.

Hence, whenever private businesses do not appear able to produce the necessary efforts in the sectors that we deem strategic, or fail in delivering the desired results, and by failure we also mean an inability to provide the related services at affordable prices to interested citizens, or to support adequately fundamental research in the concerned sector, the State shall act - or the community itself, according to cooperative models that technology may make possible as in Open Source software development. Or, in any event, we are engaged to make such actions take place.

As far as human biotechnologies are concerned in Italy we can take a more specific stance since we have a public infrastructure already in place that can be put at use for researching, testing and deploying new therapies and enhancing procedures: the Servizio Sanitario Nazionale, the Italian National Health Service. Certainly it does not work optimally, cases of corruption and negligence exist, waste and nepotism are far from unheard of, but several international agencies judge it comparatively one of the best in the world. Every time new therapies become available that slow down aging and increase life expectancy, if the private sector hesitates to make the necessary investments, or finds itself in a position to exact excessive profits to the detriment of their diffusion, public intervention must guarantee that Italian citizens are not just given a free and informed choice regarding their adoption, but also an actual access to such technologies.

And this is a commitment that may well start as of now, so that disabled and senior citizens may access the best therapies and prosthetic solutions. In fact, interestingly, 21% of WTA members worldwide have some form of disability, and in Italy and Europe we similarly feel the need to offer concrete answers to all those that, even though they may have

never heard of transhumanism, may find themselves in such conditions. The lack of resources is not an acceptable excuse, especially considering the enormous waste of public resources in our country.

We realize that in some countries millions of people are denied even basic health services. But if the excluded tolerate their predicament, possibly being consoled by the fact that they will be avenged by the fact that aging and death are still the common lot of humankind, the scenario might change radically when regenerative therapies based on stem cells or other technologies allow an actual rejuvenation or a significant life span extension. In this event, the excluded might even entertain violence against those profiting from medical progress without concern for others of their community. The desire to own a more expensive residence or car is not exactly the same as the desire to live in good health to 200, rather than dying at 70 from chronic illness. The scenario of a rebellion of the excluded should always be kept in mind in this discussion, and requires quick and concrete preemptive responses. The efforts to spread access to therapies should begin now, so that when radical new biotechnologies emerge a working model is already in place.

The same approach is applicable to the robotic, AI, and nanotech sectors. As long as private entrepreneurs make good-quality services and products widely available at competitive and affordable prices, public agencies and citizens may restrict themselves to a watching role. If, on the contrary, distortions and inefficiencies in the market are found, then Italian transhumanists would support direct State intervention, even though this might end up conflicting with the interests of international companies and big businesses. In other terms, we have confidence in the private sector, but only conditional confidence. If the market mechanisms do not deliver, we should have to consider socializing what are, from the transhumanist point of view, the key sectors, namely biotechnology, robotic and nanotechnology industries, to ensure results, popular control and social justice.

But transhumanists are able to look beyond traditional politics. The birth and the development of the Internet and of virtual communities encourage us to reconsider a number of issues such as the granting, the handling and the management of technological patents, the laws on copyright, the Open Source model, the digital and satellite surveillance systems, and citizens' privacy. The technological developments emphasize the inadequacy of a political class still reasoning in terms of private vs. public or within the limited viewpoint of Nation-States. It is not necessary to adhere to anti-political populism in order to note that, except for rare and praiseworthy exceptions, we are ruled by a political class that – in part because of their age and education – does not understand the revolutionary scope of the Internet and too often publicly associates the Net just with pornography and gambling, in order to exorcise its potential or to justify censorship and bureaucratization.

That transhumanists do not advocate Orwellian censorship and pervasive control, but instead fight it, is obvious for two simple reasons. First, Big Brother was already here before the birth of the transhumanist movement. Secondly, were we among the supporters and creators of an Orwellian State, why should we publicly discuss transhumanist ideas? Wouldn't it be more productive to conspire in the darkness? Let us say it loud and clear: our public action is obvious and glaring proof that those who concoct and diffuse conspiracy theories about us are either grossly mistaken or in bad faith.

Our enemies know only too well that we are here to mount a counteroffensive against all attempts to reduce the freedom of peoples and citizens. And such a counteroffensive can be put in place only through the re-appropriation of technologies, including at an individual level. If an evil global ruling class exists, its interest is to *restrict* access to

technology, know-how, and information, because, as Sir Francis Bacon's say goes, *knowledge is power*.

We do not encourage anyone to employ dangerous drugs or implant under-skin chips as a matter of course or for the sake of it. We simply maintain that *attempts to escape from technology, or to emphasize its negative potential, are naive and counterproductive since this means relinquishing power to others*. The trap of neo-primitivist sirens should be avoided. Those who spread the longing for a never-existed idyllic past or the desire for an impossible and philosophically unsound "return to Nature" weaken their peoples and deliver them to slavery. We should instead learn as much as possible, be open to the future, and accept the idea that freedom is conquered day by day, by upgrades and updates.

That the "System" may profit from more advanced technologies is only partly true. Everybody can see that technophiles and hackers are often more skillful than the ruling classes and their agents. Even admitting that ruling classes and countries have access to better technologies, to more advanced communication and surveillance systems, one should not forget that know-how, information, personal skills and motivation still play a fundamental role. The role of a technology also depends on our ability to make use of it. "They" (both very well-known agencies and possible occult entities) may spy on "us", the people, but it is also true that they can be similarly watched and checked by us - exactly as technology increases our ability to spread important data, news and information, including through unofficial channels. Knowledge is everything, information is everything.

The developments of communication technology are therefore heartily welcome, notwithstanding their many perils, because they favor the free circulation of information and knowledge, which used to be dominated by public and private monopolies. If with respect to tangible assets and services we try to go beyond the traditional dichotomy between the State and the Market, and to be flexible, we have a decidedly more communitarian view of information and knowledge. There is an important difference between tangible assets, such as real estate or commodities, and intangible goods like information or knowledge. While the transfer of a tangible asset from one owner to another is a zero-sum game, in that it impoverishes one and enriches the other, the free circulation of information and knowledge within a community enriches the receiver without depriving the sender. This is why we squarely support the wide and free diffusion of information and knowledge, an attitude which has always been common in the scientific community.

In short, our approach is denoted by strategic and value criteria that originate from different ideological components of transhumanism. Those who insist on the importance of market mechanisms and an open, free society are often extropians; technoprogressives tend to be concerned with social justice and State intervention; and those with a more Nietzschean or postmodern penchant are likely to emphasize the importance of empowerment, popular sovereignty and cultural and ethnic identities. Let us make it clear, however, that in the synthetic vision above the centrality is lost of the three grand idols of the ideologies of the XIX and XX centuries: the market, the State, the race. They lose their place in the name of a higher value, self-directed evolution. And they are made merely instrumental to that value. We cannot have any real synthesis without an overcoming of one's past. In all sincerity, we can do without sectarians perpetually turning backwards. We should like open minds that look forward and are ready to put themselves into play, to share their values, without demanding that they remain unique, hegemonic or unchanged.

6. SECULARISM

As far as religion is concerned, our current predicament is similar. Atheists and agnostics appear to be almost 70% amongst WTA members, but one should additionally consider that American transhumanists contribute a large part of the minority of “believers”. Indeed, in our experience the percentage of those who do not adhere to metaphysical denominations and creeds is substantially higher in Europe and in Italy. In this respect, it should also be kept in mind that pagans, pantheists and Buddhists do not believe in the personal God of monotheist religions, so that they can be counted as well in the category of “non-believers”. Moreover, only 1% considers transhumanism itself as a “religion” in the traditional meaning of the word.

In this framework, it is easy to understand how groundless the charge of cultism is. The factual truth hardly supports it. Italian and European transhumanists are not simply tolerant towards all religions, but rather basically indifferent, if not diffident, towards dominant religions. This indifference often translates into free-thought activism or militancy.

It should be stressed that this free-thought orientation has evolved spontaneously. Given that we were vehemently attacked by the Catholic church and by church-affiliated politicians and intellectuals since our very first public appearances, we have above all attracted, like it or not, atheists, agnostics or neopagans, with a generally secularist attitude. This certainly does not mean that we intend to close our door to those who adhere to a church. The problem does not consist in the metaphysical postulates that are still common in our culture, the problem is the constant attempt to make them hegemonic and even compulsory. The existence of the so-called “devoted atheists” (a group of intellectuals who, while not being Christian themselves, adamantly support Christian values, as well as the cultural and political power of the Catholic church in Italian society) shows that it is not only Catholic fundamentalists who do not recognize the need for a State really independent from clerical power, and that does not accord any preference or privilege to any creed.

It is therefore of little surprise that transhumanists, in this desolate landscape, have been immediately pointed to by clericalism’s advocates as a threat. And this is why for us the material independence from religious denominations and clerical power of public bodies and agencies and services, especially those that are crucial for our goals, such as the school system, the universities, the research centers, the health services, the bioethics committees - is an absolute priority. In fact, pragmatically, we even tend to prefer open-minded Christians to atheist advocates of clerical power and cultural hegemony. Accordingly, the splitting line remains for us on the dichotomy of clericalism-vs.-secularism, more than the line of monotheists-vs.-atheists.

This does not imply that there are not profound philosophical difficulties between the transhumanist and Catholic worldviews. It is pretty clear that we adhere to anthropological views incompatible with an orthodox Christian anthropology and, especially, with that currently preached by the Vatican and by American evangelical Protestantism. If for Christians man is made in God’s image and we see, in a Nietzschean sense, that “the man is something that should be overcome”, it is obvious how hard it will be to conjugate our discourse with the Christian narrative. The problem with them is not really the embryo or the right to life but rather the idea that humanity be allowed to change itself and the world according to its will, that it can master its destiny using technoscience rather than trusting in faith and providence. Only with a radical reform of its dogmas can Catholicism integrate itself with the evolutionary development of humanity and its technologies.

Instead, at least for the time being, it appears that the Catholic church is regressing towards pre-modern and fundamentalist positions rather than reforming itself. But this is none of our business. What we care to emphasize is the fact that the allegation of transhumanist cultism is false. It is bizarre to suspect transhumanism of religious propensities or sectarianism, let alone of being theistic. Transhumanism is not and should not be defined as a religion, at least in the current meaning of the word, even though nothing prevents one from interpreting it as an alternative to traditional religions, or as a vision that may coexist with some sort of religious worldview.

Even though we are open to debate with anyone, we have to accept that for the time being an agreement on principles with the Catholic establishment appears impossible, especially with regard to issues such as reproductive technologies and biotechnological research.

Now, some kind of entente has been insistently promoted by a few Italians who claim to be inspired by extropianism, but appear to be closer in fact to neoconservative sectors of the Italian and American establishment. We do not believe that such proposals can be taken seriously, and are especially out of line with the spirit of extropianism considering that Max More, the founder of the Extropy Institute, has never made a secret of his positions, which appear not only secular, but squarely opposed to religious biases and clerical hegemony. In fact, “negotiations” cannot really take place with the Catholic establishment, if anything because it makes abundantly clear that their values are not negotiable. In fact, negotiations imply the idea of a possible compromise, of a mid-way meeting between two different positions. Thus, were we even willing to negotiate, if the other party assumes that it is indisputably and absolutely on the side of the angels and cannot imagine any kind of compromise, what would such negotiations be about? What they demand is unconditional surrender. And we shall not accept such a capitulation.

7. SCIENTIFIC WORLDVIEW

Transhumanists adhere to different epistemological doctrines. Amongst us, one can find critical empiricists and rationalists, neopositivists and pragmatists, inductivists and deductivists, realists and relativists, modernists and postmodernists. But whatever the image of science that our members espouse, they all share a confidence in science – in the broadest sense of the word, as the form of knowledge that is based on logic and experimental evidence.

There are those who see science as a value per se as well as those who consider it as a tool, those who are enthused by its cognitive potential and those who define it by its ability to create technologies. But there are no science enemies or deniers among the transhumanists. And when we say “science” we do not refer to any pseudosciences, but mean to official, established, mainstream science accepted by the academia and the international scientific community through peer-reviewed work and general consent, even though we would hardly deny that there are distortions, endemic conservatism, and cronyism that may affect the scientific process and unduly slow down or resist the success of new theoretical, methodological or technical breakthroughs and changes of paradigm, especially in the academia.

The synthesis of all our philosophical and epistemological positions is found therefore in a scientific worldview.

If this is the case - and considering that the leading and most influential transhumanists work in the best universities and research centers of the world, humanities departments

included - one cannot but be astonished by the charge of quackery that is often raised against transhumanism. Here again we have an obvious communication problem. In our view, this problem arises from the fact that transhumanist intellectuals have often been involved in sketching futurist scenarios and in the tentative extrapolation of current trends. This activity is perfectly legitimate, but the undesirable side effect has been that mass media tends to focus on the most curious or sensational aspects of such speculations, rather than the serious research projects that denote the everyday work of many transhumanists.

This is why it is urgent to make explicit that for us the border between science and science fiction is extremely well-defined. Scientific theories are one thing, and futurist speculations or engineering thought experiments are another. Those two areas have different purposes. Technoscientific research is aimed at elaborating, enriching and deepening our knowledge and power in the world, while futurist speculations - which cannot be considered as science, since they make non-verifiable, albeit more or less plausible, hypotheses on possible future events - is rather concerned with the mental exploration of different future developments of the present circumstances and of other, sometimes unexpected, factors, without any certainty or faith in things that are "bound to happen".

While transhumanists are perfectly clear on the hypothetical and speculative nature of futurist scenarios, misunderstandings continue to arise. A new communication strategy should be adopted in which transhumanists avoid mixing up of far-fetched speculations with the official transhumanist discourse. Once again, with this choice we do nothing other than give due prominence to what are majority views throughout the international transhumanist movement.

Let us consider the controversial issue of longevism and immortalism. From the WTA poll repeatedly mentioned therein, it appears, as already noted, that a mere 7% of WTA members believe in the possibility of an earthly immortality, while 93% believes in the more sober and immediate prospective of a radical extension of our life expectancy (a trend that is undeniably already in place) and of our species' lifespan.

Now, as a first concrete stance, Italian transhumanists have decided to drastically limit the rhetoric connected with the use of the word "immortality." We do not promise immortality, nor do we indicate it as an item in our agenda. It is too far away from immediate possibilities offered or envisaged by mainstream science. Besides, even after an indefinite extension of our life span, many possible causes of death would remain, from a car accident to the exhaustion of our sun's nuclear fuel. Were humans or posthumans to quit the planet before its doom, there are obviously no certainties that every single individual may survive, let alone be resurrected from the dead, or that it would be possible in this universe to eternally process the information defining individual identity. Let us leave to the theologians and novelists concepts such as the conversion of all matter in the universe into a single thinking and divine being.

If we really should venture into futurist speculations, a more plausible scenario would be the one sketched in François Lyotard's *Moralités postmodernes*, in which our successors are compelled to relocate in order to survive the death of the planet Earth, a space caravan of cyborgs and mutants rather than a godlike supercomputer that contains all conceivable knowledge and expands triumphally out to the borders of our galaxy. While stronger and more intelligent than existing human beings, the sentient beings of the future will inevitably remain weaker than natural forces - which makes their challenge to nature only more interesting and worthy of living.

In summary, only when a technology exists and is experimentally proved should it become part of immediate transhumanist policies and action programs aimed at obtaining their implementation and broad accessibility. Until then, it can only be a working hypothesis for scientists in their laboratories or of science fiction writers in their literary works. Transhumanists are ready to recognize the importance of those speculations because they help to give sense and a direction to their action and offer a long-term vision allowing us to frame contemporary problems in a broader, more “cosmic” prospective. But we cannot base present policies on hypotheses that for the time being are only theoretically feasible, such as mind-uploading or an artificial-intelligence Singularity.

Such speculations risk making transhumanism a new “opium of the masses.” We do not want transhumanists to ignore the struggle for access to real or present technologies, such as IVF, cloning, cybernetic prosthetics, artificial organs, ubiquitous broadband, nanobots, genetically modified organisms, new sources of energy, etc., distracted by a promise of salvation or rapture by a future possible Computer-God, or the final defeat of scarcity thanks to the coming of the Universal Nanomolecular Assembler. Nor do we want such speculation to distract from the social, political, national, and economic context of emerging technologies, the “when, where, why, who” of future developments, which make all the difference for real peoples.

8. BACK TO ACTION

We are not deluded that, by making those three strategic guidelines public, the attacks against transhumanism will eventually cease. We expect on the contrary that they will take new forms, equally based on biases and falsehoods. But this is not a source of concern for us as it is part of the dynamics of the political and cultural debate. By acknowledging that we do not want to indulge in self-victimization, a stance hardly compatible with our fierce and joyful attitude, but simply to allow ourselves a touch of irony. Having invited the people to diffuse knowledge, to resist censorship, and to fight discrimination, we shall now be accused of anti-System revolution and subversion. Having demanded a non-confessional State and public life, we shall be accused of atheist fundamentalism. Having defended the cognitive possibilities of science and the usefulness of its applications, we shall now be accused of naive scientism.

“Scientism” has become a swearword, almost an insult, as in fact have “irreligious” or “revolutionary”. In general, both “atheism” and “scientism” are ritually followed by some reference to the 19th century to imply that they are useless out-of-fashion concepts. Unfortunately those who want to relegate these terms to the historical dustbin usually do so in the name of much older and more stale ideas, such as creationism or the Christian dogmas. If an idea is to be disposed of because it was born in the 19th century what should we do with ideas that became widespread in Europe in the 4th century? Besides, while monotheistic religions, being based on one “Revelation” or another, cannot change, secular philosophies evolve and adapt to times, to new knowledges, to new feelings.

Scientific worldviews have also evolved. Scientism used to be “naive”, assuming that science could reveal a final truth about the world instead of continually evolving. Naive scientism thought that science was the sole acceptable source of knowledge and that scientific methods had to be applied to all aspects of reality. But now scientism has become *critical*. “Critical scientism” acknowledges several diverse forms of knowledge, but maintains that science is a legitimate and even preferred form of knowledge, and it is

therefore possible, although not compulsory, to apply scientific methods to all aspects of reality.

Such an approach respects philosophical insights, since – contrary to 19th century scientism – its supporters are aware that the scientific worldview itself is a philosophy, is part of philosophy – as was the case, by the way, before monotheism came to Europe. In other words, science has profited from postmodern and critical studies. With anti-science postmodernism the debate may have been fierce, but it was precisely those “science wars” that allowed science to refine this position. As an army after the battle may incorporate the weapons and insignia of the enemy, many of those who nowadays give great importance to scientific worldviews do not hesitate to qualify themselves as well in a critical and postmodern fashion. If the uncritical scientist of the 19th century was persuaded that we can know everything, and the skeptical scientist of the 20th century was inclined to believe that nothing could be really known after all, the new critical position simply maintains that there are things which we can know with sufficient probability and for all practical purposes.

While this may also reflect a synthesis, this time in the meta-science field, we aren't trying to assert that this is necessarily the “transhumanist” position. On the contrary, it is our intention to let everybody define themselves as they see fit, as long as they adhere to the three agenda items defined above and contributes to their fulfillment.

Before getting back to action let us just conclude with a last remark, which is addressed to those who may be tempted to go on playing the game of labeling our movement. Let it be known to them that rather than being associated with "plutocratic élitism" we would prefer to be accused of being subversives; rather than being associated with religious cultism we would prefer to be accused of militant atheism; and rather than being considered quacks, we would prefer to be associated with scientism.

Be it clear, however, that we remain always and only transhumanists.