NHNAI :
New Humanism in the time of Neurosciences and Artificial Intelligence

Septembre 2024
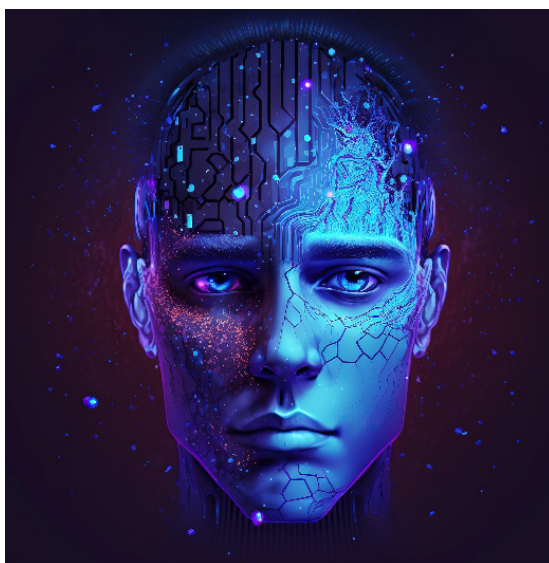
NHNAI is an **international multi-actor capacity-building project** coordinated by Dr. Mathieu Guillermin at the Confluence: Sciences and Humanities Research Center of Lyon Catholic University (France), under the aegis of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU). It now gathers 12 academic partners and multiple communities of societal actors in 9 different countries.

The NHNAI project, which was officially launched in January 2022, puts academic resources at the service of collective and societal reflection upon the core question of *humanism* or of *what it means to be human in the time of artificial intelligence (AI) and neurosciences (NS)*, especially though not exclusively in the key fields of Education, Health, and Democracy. It thus aims at *fostering the ethical capacities of communities of concerned actors* in the different participating countries, to help framing the societal challenges raised by AI and NS from an ethical, moral and spiritual perspective, and to contribute to the co-construction of a collective compass for meeting these challenges raised by AI and NS from an ethical, moral and spiritual perspective, and to **contribute to the co-construction of a collective compass for meeting these challenges**.

To explore these questions and support ethical capacity-building, NHNAI organizes and facilitates *societal discussions* in the different local communities, through *face-to-face events* and *online exchanges* on **CartoDEBAT** digital platform. More than a mere international debate reducing to the confrontation of various individual opinions, the goal is to open spaces for collective exploration of the *complexity and richness of what it means to be human in the time of AI and NS*. Rather than being treated as simple subjective disagreement, divergences are explored as potentially signaling intrinsic and significant tensions or dilemmas permitting to deepen and refine our understanding of *who we are* and who *we should be as humans* in the time of AI and NS.
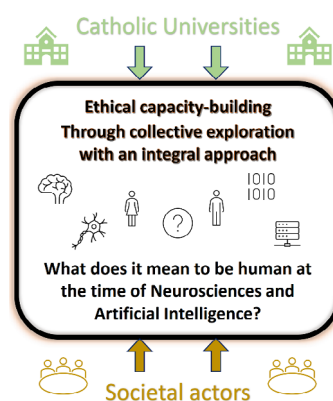
NHNAI NETWORK

Under the aegis of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, NHNAI operates in 9 different countries: *Cégep Sainte-Foy (Canada), Santa Clara University (USA), Notre Dame University (USA), Fu Jen Catholic University (Taiwan), University of Namur (Belgium), Universidade Católica Portuguesa (Portugal), Libera Università Maria Ss. Assunta di Roma (Italy), Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (Chile), Catholic University of Eastern African (Kenya), University Catholic of Lille (France), International Center for Research and Decision Support (IFCU - France), Lyon Catholic University (France)*

THE NEED FOR AN ETHICAL COMPASS

Societal challenges raised by AI and NS are numerous (work automation, data-driven decision making, persuasion technologies, neuromodulation through neural implants or human enhancement, ...). They highlight the pressing need for all concerned actors and stakeholders (such as public and private institutions, academic experts, engineers, economic actors, policy- and decision-makers or any concerned citizen) 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 with these fields.

THE PROBLEMATIC BLIND SPOT OF HUMANISM

Many (public or private) ethical initiatives strive to meet these challenges and cover an impressive range of questions linked to AI and NS. Nevertheless, such ethical analyses and guidelines commonly invoke the notion of "human" (human good or flourishing, human-centered technology, human nature ...) or key concepts tightly attached to it (dignity, autonomy ...). Yet what it means to be human in the time of AI and NS, the question of humanism, of who we are and who we should be as human in this new technological era, is left largely uninterrogated.

This blind spot may prove extremely problematic as AI and NS comes with a highly disruptive potential with respect to our understanding of what it means to be human (**notwithstanding the preexisting difficulties and subtleties of the question**). Is intelligence not one of the defining characteristics of humans? What becomes someone's identity with respect to the technological possibilities of neuromodulation (up to the modification of subjects' emotions and personality)? Is it our fate to become obsolete and to clear the space for post-humans or artificial superintelligences? It seems dangerously optimistic to assume that a shared, reliable and relevant understanding about humanism and about what it means to be human in the time of NS and AI, is ready-made, available for straightforward ethical orientation.

PUTTING THE RESOURCES OF CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES AT THE SERVICE OF SOCIETY

Bringing in spiritual and existential dimensions and looking for integral development, NHNAI intends to foster dialogue "in generous and open cooperation with all the positive forces that contribute to the growth of universal human consciousness" (Pope Francis, Veritatis Gaudium, Foreword 4-b).

Although it is quite clear that *the exploration of the notion of humanism requires expertise from multiple disciplinary horizons* (AI, NS, anthropology, philosophy, theology, political science, economics, law …), such an interdisciplinary interweavement (among scholars and researchers) may not suffice. One can exclude neither *the relevance of common sense and the ordinary life point of view* (who we are and should be as humans is also a deep political question), nor the *role of societal actors* (too technocratic approaches raise the risk of a lack of trust and societal support, as illustrated notably by the French "Gilet Jaunes" movement). Tackling ethical challenges raised by NS and AI thus demands that all concerned societal actors *develop strong ethical awareness and expectations*, to contribute to changes in policymaking and ethical regulation, and to support regulatory political efforts as well as ethical entrepreneurship (notably through consumer choices).

According to this line of thought, NHNAI academic network accordingly aims to 1) gather and refine expert insights upon what it means to be human in the time of NS and AI, and 2) to foster ethical capacity-building of all concerned actors by putting these insights at the service societal questioning.

NHNAI ACADEMIC NETWORK

NHNAI PROJECT ORGANIZATION

Overall, the NHNAI project unfolds in three successive phases:
1. Problem-framing with societal communities and gathering of relevant academic insights.
2. Collective discussions with societal communities through face-to-face and online discussions.
3. Analysis and synthesis of collective discussions and dissemination of most salient outcomes.

In the background, NHNAI teams will ensure to lay infrastructure that will allow the pursuit of this capacity-building mission in years to come.

The project, which is now in its third year, has accomplished several milestones, including the organization of the first academic workshop that gathered academic experts across the world at Lyon Catholic University on March 10-12, 2022. On that occasion, scholars looked into what means to be human at the present time, going beyond purely technical issues in order to integrate ethical, moral and spiritual dimensions. Some extracts from the workshop may be viewed hereafter to learn more about ethical issues raised by the AI and NS era:

- **Reflection on the kind of societies we wish to live in** by Prof. Francisco De Lara López, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile
- **Presentation of existing tools for ethical decision-making** by Dr. Brian P. Green, Santa Clara University, USA
- **Opportunities and risks derived from a changing workplace** by Prof. Fabio Macioce, Libera Università Maria Ss. Assunta di Roma, Italy

After that first academic workshop that provided preliminary material, academic partners organized **problem-framing workshops** in the different countries to **co-construct with the local communities of societal actors questions that should be explored during societal debates**. On this ground, experts of the academic network have been asked to enrich and complement the academic insights and inputs to maximize their relevance and usefulness at the service of societal debate. This approach allowed to bring in and to interweave various cultural experiences and questions on humanism. Among the numerous co-constructed questions animating societal debates, one can mention:

- In what sense or dimension could the comparison between humans and machines be legitimate and meaningful? Can we learn from our interactions or confrontations with AI systems?
- What are the core traits of the human that should be preserved or reinforced in the age of AI and NS? Is there a need for a consensus about what it means to be human?
- What is the place of AI systems within the network of human relationships?
- Should the present human being be considered as the end point of evolution? Can or should humans intentionally guide their evolution? How far can we go in our movement to integrate technology while respecting human life?
- Does the development of AI and NS risk depriving humanity of its autonomy and freedom, of its ability to slow down or even stop what we have initiated? Can persons decide to live outside such technological developments when their deployment is decided at the collective level?
- What becomes human responsibility when more and more tasks are delegated to AI systems and when distances between humans constantly increase because of technology mediation?
- Should data for training AI programs be a private good or a common good (like a common legacy)?

This international work of problem-framing with societal communities and of collection and alignment of relevant academic insights led to the elaboration of a first major deliverable, whose **first version can be downloaded here**.

SOCIETAL AND ACADEMIC EXCHANGES

During 2023, NHNAI teams organized a first wave face-to-face workshops and online discussions (on **CartoDEBAT** platform) with their local communities in the 9 participating countries. Drawing on the outcomes of the problem-framing phase, participants from different domains and statuses were invited to exchange and debate upon the co-constructed questions on what it means to be human in the time of NS and AI and upon the associated societal and ethical stakes (especially in the fields of education, health and democracy).

Face-to-face workshop in Taiwan

Face-to-face workshop in Canada

Face-to-face workshop in Portugal

NHNAI teams have then conducted analyses of this first set of corpuses of contributions, with a specific interest to pointing tensions between expressed ideas, in order to map the subtlety and complexity of explored topics. To better grasp what it may mean to be human in the time of NS and AI, it is essential to begin by recognizing all valid and sound ideas, even if (or better, in particular if) they diverge and point tensions. In fact, valid ideas in tension may well signal very important questions necessitating further exploration. Syntheses highlighting main ideas and tensions of this 2023 wave of societal discussion are **available on our website**.

NHNAI project also facilitates academic networking and collaborations, in particular with:

An international conference "Human Freedom at the Test of AI and Neurosciences" hosted by LUMSA in Rome (2nd to 5th September 2024) in collaboration with the International PhD program "Contemporary Humanism" and the Ecumenical French-speaking Association of Moral Theologians and Ethics Experts (ATEM) – program available **here**.

MAIN DELIVERABLES

Among the various outputs of the NHNAI project, one can notably mention:

- Synthesis of most relevant academic insights aligned with co-constructed societal questions – (delivered)
- Analyses and syntheses of the two waves of societal discussions – (1st delivered – 2nd by 2025)
- White paper on bottom-up recommendations for addressing challenges raised by AI and NS – (2025)
- Academic publications on what it means to be human in the time of NS and AI, including a collective book – (2025)
- Knowledge base and academic publications (including a PHD thesis) on how to foster ethical-capacity building at the university-society interface – (2025)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CONTACT

Videos of presentation of NHNAI project

NHNAI website

Online discussions

Tutorials for online participation

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