(TRANSLATION FROM THE ORIGINAL SYNTHESIS REPORT IN SPANISH)

Seminar on "The Digital Imprint, Servitude or Service?"

An interdisciplinary debate on Common Good and Governance of Technological Development

(Synthesis report of the introductory session held on November 14, 2019)

Around 30 experts in different areas of technology, philosophy, sociology, law, education, business organisations and workers' unions met on Thursday, November 14, 2019 at the Fundación Pablo VI in Madrid for the first session of a Permanent Seminar on "The Digital Imprint, Servitude or Service?" which will concentrate during two years on the aims and consequences of the use of 'big data' and discuss proposal on the governance of technological developments.

The Common Good and the Governance of Technology was the theme of this inaugural session, which was introduced by Julio Martínez SJ, Rector of the Universidad Pontificia Comillas and a member of the Seminar Steering Board. After comments presented in response by economist Professor Alfredo Pastor, there was a general debate among all participants, of which the present document offers a synthetic summary.

Philosophy and technology, is a dialogue possible?

A debate about governance of technological innovation requires serious dialogue among scientists, operators, politicians and philosophers, which does not limit itself to put different opinions, experience and rationales one next to the other. Without such a dialogue, philosophers and specialists in social ethics will continue speaking in a bubble while decision centres – public and private – will continue following their ways within strictly functional logics. The seminar organized by Fundación Pablo VI aims at exploring the possibility of a conversation of this kind in order to be able to offer some guidance, after eighteen months' work, on this: **Is a social dialogue possible on the use of technology? Under what conditions and format? And in the first place, what questions should be asked?**

In order to reach the proposed objective, the initiative is organized as a process during a length of time, with a permanent group of experts which includes representatives of many of the interested parties, led by a Steering Board of well-known personalities in philosophy, politics and business. The inaugural session was introduced by statements

from Julio Martínez SJ, Rector of the Universidad Pontificia Comillas, and Alfredo Pastor, Professor Emeritus at IESE, Barcelona.

A transformation without precedent?

The Seminar takes as its starting point the fact of huge data deposits of our 'digital imprint', which are being systematically treated and used by specialized operators, for whom this new raw material has a transformative effect. The following areas will be analysed: advertising; finance and insurance; media and politics; catastrophe risk prevention and climate change control; medical diagnosis and treatment.

However, it should be kept in mind that the technological transformation currently happening goes much farther than just data treatment: it is digital, but it also concerns biology, robotics, nanotechnology… All industrial revolutions were disruptive, from print, steam works and mechanical looms till today. A serene historical approach helps avoiding both pessimistic passivity and reckless activism. But this time, acceleration is higher and consequences probably deeper than in previous phases: technological change now directly affects human identity and the perception we have of that identity. Objective data of the Civil Register are being replaced, more and more forcefully, by an identity which is assigned to us and constructed out of the imprint of our preferences, our transactions and even our movements. *Sapiens Sapiens* from the beginning was a creator of virtual worlds; but this time, the 'alteration' due to our virtual constructs, instead of leading us towards social relationships, is being performed through 'drifting off' into oneself and, at the same time, through connecting indiscriminately with immense depersonalized groups: the far away connections keep us from commitments nearby. These changes in perception, as well as machine learning and growingly powerful prosthetic changes in the human body tend towards a new basic question: **not any more what are we going to do, but what are we going to be?**

An unstoppable evolution?

As any other human activity, technology does not need to be unstoppable. But today everything seems to lead towards maximizing the technological dimension: anything which is technically possible should be done. This 'paradigm' is based on a culture of progress and is materialized in institutions which favour a linear course. For example: it is commonly admitted that technology will always replace human labour with machine work, whereas in history, technical innovation often allowed, on the contrary, to reinforce labour by making it more productive. The unilateral trend is being supported by economic incentives which reduce the cost of capital vs that of labour, which bears a heavy tax burden.

The idea of course is not to hold back the immense present and future benefits deriving from discovery and applied science. More than a moratorium – which would

be unacceptable and counterproductive – there is need for discernment and reflection, today still stammering and insufficient, which take into account the social and sustainability dimensions of any technological decision. The debate is about the use of the tool, more than the tool itself. One should always ask: What does a given innovation solve? How does it do it? Who is operating it?

The horizon of common good

Discernment means to replace at the centre a concept which is currently discarded, the common good. In practical terms, it is not an easy concept to define. A step by step approach should be possible, with concrete and limited contents. At a time of such quick and unforeseeable change, the concept of the common good needs to be open, evolving, inspired by humanism with its antique roots, but reworded in today's terms. Everybody can find it reasonable to at least try to contain negative consequences due to bad use of advance technological tools.

If one however tries to design a little more precisely what is intended with the idea of common good, a possible approach can be done by approximation:

- There are unequal situations in the way people enjoy the benefits of the current revolution, and these need to be corrected. The **digital divide** is geographic – between more and less affluent countries – but it is also generational, even within each family. Robotization increases inequality between highly skilled and unspecialized jobs. Digitization can be a strongly inclusive factor – for example, in facilitating access to financial services – but it can also aggravate pre-existing social disintegration trends.
- What we understand as work and employment is changing in nature. It is necessary to rebuild a valuation of human activity, whether remunerated or not, and open the debate on **universal income systems**, even if those probably risk aggravating despair and despondency.
- The future of jobs is monopolizing the public's attention, although it is probably not the most important aspect of the technological revolution. Many jobs disappear and others are created. More than a problem of distributing work – an erroneous idea which however remains persistently in public opinion – **there is a problem of inadequacy in education, lack of flexible coaching and unpreparedness for change**.
- The digital world in theory allows for intensive political revitalization, where the expression of opinion immediately runs into activism. Unfortunately, this same easy communication leads to a false construction of *demos,* misrepresented participation and emotionally pervaded behaviour, which demand severe criticism.
- The problems which derive form the technological revolution – as well as those of climate change – can't be solved at national level. Nation state structures can't solve them on their own. **The space where the common good and the**

'community' are constructed is situated primarily at levels closest to the people and, simultaneously, in the field of a supranational authority under construction. The State-centred view is insufficient, as appear clearly in current opinion movements around the world, and as shown in multinational business, for example, when Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) are taken as strategic reference points by large companies.

- The concept of common good is not satisfied by the utilitarian view of the highest welfare for the highest number. **It requires attention to all and not discarding anyone**. In the Catholic Church's social thought, one of the best definitions of the common good is a dynamic concept included in a pastoral letter from the US bishops of more than forty years ago[1]: "Basic justice demands the establishment of minimum levels of participation in the life of the human community for all persons".

The common good can be conceived as a horizon line, a trend, an aspiration which feeds itself from an active debate among citizens on all these themes, from the digital divide to the structures of national and transnational governance.

Transversal themes

To put the concept of the common good at the centre requires a cultural change, which is slow by definition; our debate can contribute if spread and amplified. In order to progress towards specific conclusions, it will be necessary to exactly define the focus of coming sessions. However, there are a few transversal themes which will continuously emerge in the discussion:

- Attention must be given to underlying anthropological questions: What is the human being? What is a natural hierarchy among human needs? What is the final aim of human activity? Up to what point can human reality be 'improved' through artefacts? What is unique in the development of human intelligence and its relational capacity?

- In our social market economies, what is the role of consumer in determining the use of technology? Can workers' organizations contribute?

- Governance of technological process implies setting limits, and everybody's first thought is 'regulation'. Economic life is in fact heavily and in many ways subject to regulatory control. However, law and regulation move with a certain delay and there are clear symptoms that present rules are inadequate to actual technological developments, be it in communications, data use or biotechnology.

[1] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All* (1986) n.77

- Regarding data treatment, the focus is on less than ten very large companies in the world, whose power is based on business models specifically aimed at big data and the development of algorithms for their treatment. Around those giants, there are large numbers of smaller companies which have been created in the new context. Can their activity be channelled through regulation? Or will it be necessary to act directly against new technological monopoly positions – as some would argue – by splitting them into parts through new anti-trust laws? In any case, it is necessary to listen to these big agents of current change as their views and their motivations are key to the process.

- Business – large, medium and small – need to include more and more social and sustainability elements into their decision process. This is happening already in different degrees according to areas and companies, and there is no way back. Reviewing technological investments with such criteria is on the agenda of many companies and it is likely that, in this context, proactive and constructive business attitude can precede regulation.

- Another strategic field for change is education. It is useful to distinguish between training (for work) and education (for life), even when educational institutions and even companies do combine both functions, with different degrees of success. The question educators must ask themselves is apparently simple: how can pupils, of any age or level, be led to ask not just about means, but about ends?

These more general transversal themes will be dealt with speficically in the second phase of the seminar, as from the fall of 2020.

The forthcoming session will focus on sectorial situations of treatment and use of big data. Sessions will be held approximately every 45 days as from January 2020.

Attachment: List of participants to the meeting of 14.11.2019