

SUPER-MAN SYNDROME: VULNERABILITY(IES) AND ENHANCEMENT(S)

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ABSTRACT: The dawn of the new millennium is well-marked by an incessant search for new means to overcome the intrinsic vulnerability of human beings. In this specific scenario, the so-called “GNR Revolution” – Genetics, Nanotechnology and Robotics – is being enthusiastically proclaimed by scientists and futurists, who dream of a world constructed and planned by humans, who are now, perhaps, elevated to the category of omnipotent “*Homo Deus*”. Therefore, human beings want to be able to, technically, overcome any of their limitations and weaknesses, controlling everything around them and surpassing their naturally fragile condition. Although, until recently, such claims were nothing more than pure science-fiction, the incredible advances in the fields of genetics and nanotechnology are, gradually, revealing new and revolutionary possibilities, which can be both astonishing and terrifying. In this presentation, we will focus on the possibility of editing the human genome, for example through the use of the CRISPR/Cas9 technique or through the possible use of nano-robots specifically programmed to add, cut and/or erase any specific genes which compose the individuals’ DNA. Although these techniques can be used for therapeutic purposes, allowing people to get rid of a wide panoply of heinous genetic transmissible diseases, they can also be used to allow the birth of “improved humans” – we mean, Supermen! -, each and every of them endowed with all the desired physical and psychological characteristics, such as increased physical strength, higher IQ, more accurate senses and an incredibly high resistance to any kind of infirmities – and here’s what some people wish to call the forthcoming “era of the designer babies”! Despite the fact that the possibility of enhancing human beings through the edition of its genes sounds quite revolutionary and appealing at first sight, one must ask which can be the costs of carrying out such practices and what do Law and Ethics have to say about them. This said, in my intervention, I wish to explore some of the ethical and juridical challenges involved in this practice, which can, with no doubts, both mean a huge advance in the history of mankind or a regression without return. Also, I will take, specifically, into account how these huge scientific advances can pose new challenges to human rights and its doctrine. And note, one must not forget that even the character created by Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel becomes more vulnerable when exposed to kryptonite. Can it be possible, then, that this unstoppable will of the human being to become invincible is, after all, another failed (and, perhaps, too risky) attempt to overcome an ineliminable trace of its natural condition? Or, on the contrary, can we say that the criticism to this promising practice is nothing more than a mere moral discourse against perfection? We’re sure that the search for answers to these questions is urgent, especially if we consider, as said by Nick Bostrom, that the “future billions of years from now might be determined by events happening over the next decades”.

KEY WORDS: Human Enhancement; Vulnerability; CRISPR/Cas9; Gene Editing.