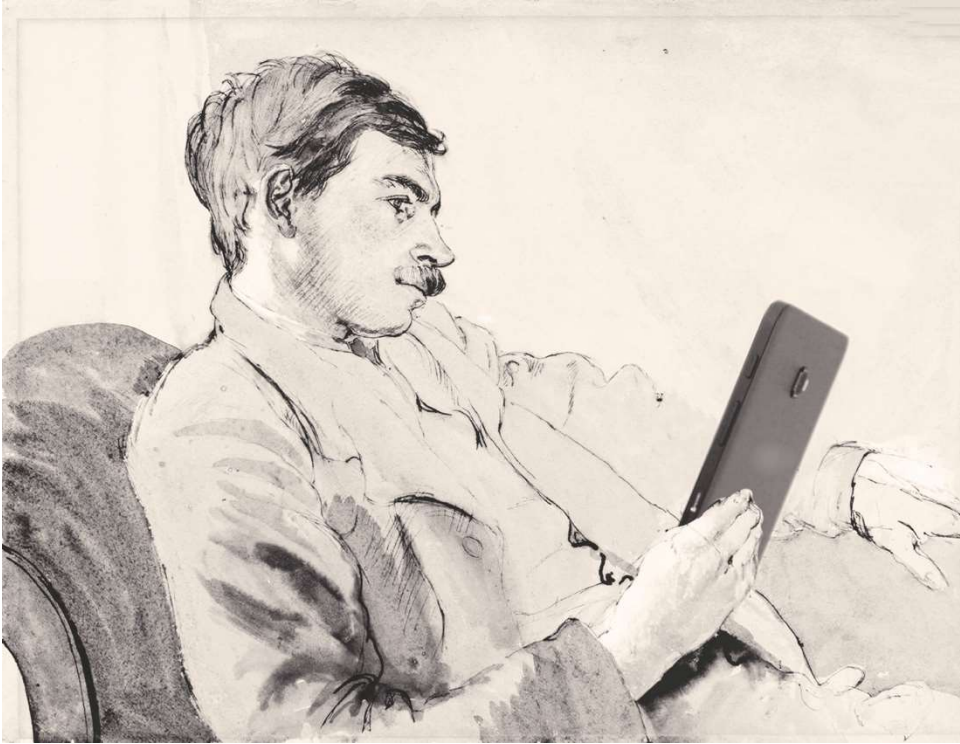**WEBFARE: A Manifesto for Social Well-Being**

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PROLOGUE. WHY WEBFARE?

Webfare, or digital welfare, aims to bring about a Copernican revolution, one that places at the centre of society not merit but need, that which makes humans equal with a force equal and inverse to that with which merit differentiates them. For if merit entails controversial choices and rests on criteria that are more often than not evanescent, there is no doubt that he who is thirsty is thirsty and he who is hungry is hungry, and every human, just like every organism, has to reckon with the imperium of metabolism. Born as an organic dimension, however, need possesses the extraordinary capacity to evolve and become sophisticated. It can become desire, will, intention, taste, that is, it can define the character of people and, most importantly, introduce the only possible infinity into a finite being.

For it is indisputable that while even the most sublime merits are subject to limitation and finiteness, need and will are the infinite and insatiable in the human, and only end with the cessation of life. Consumption is the specific way in which metabolism is embedded within the human form of life. The principle 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs', in a society that focuses on production, will always tip the scales in favour of abilities, and needs will be taken care of, at best, by charitable agencies. Precisely the very ancient democratic nature of consumption, i.e. of need, coupled with its very modern productivity, entails an epochal change in the way we look at the world. As long as capabilities have been distinct from needs, the latter have always taken second place. But in a world where production is increasingly automated, needs, that which cannot be automated and which constitutes the ultimate goal of production, become decisive, indeed, they are the only thing that matters. Thus, at a time when the Web seems to be interested not in what we do as bearers of strength, intelligence and ability, but in what, rightly or wrongly, we desire, focusing on needs becomes not an octative of the heart, but the fundamental economic law.

The idea behind 20th century welfare that allowed the Left to socialise the surplus value of industrial capital was to see savings and investment as two sides of the same coin. If we look at capital as a totality, we must overcome the moralistic belief that he who puts money in the bank is rewarded because he saves. This is not the case: he is rewarded because he makes money available that will be invested, sustaining in the long term the consumption that is the ultimate goal of all production of goods. And investment constitutes the royal road to achieving what - in an era of still imperfect automation

- constituted the fundamental objective of Welfare, the attainment of full employment. For this to happen 'the carefree individuals of tomorrow are absolutely necessary to create the raison d'être of the serious and thoughtful ones of today'[1] . How much to say that one saves today only to spend tomorrow, and savings without spending is meaningless. If I put money into a mattress and this mattress is found centuries later, it was never a capitalising gesture, but an unconventional way of stuffing a mattress. Similarly, **in the Welfare of the 21st century it will be a matter of considering consumption and production as the two faces of the same reality**. We produce with a view to future consumption, and the only animals truly capable of consumption are human animals.

It is precisely the possibility of creating new value that is the distinguishing feature of Webfare as opposed to Welfare. The latter was the most equitable allocation of existing value, so it had to make painful choices (health care or social support?) and in the long run it could not protect against those forms of restoration of equality that, for example, are wars, in which, not being able to share abundance, humans are made equal in destitution. Wars, in fact, are not stopped by eliminating weapons. To claim, for example, that it would be enough to invest 2% of global GDP by reducing military spending to solve the environmental crisis is to propose a wrong option for reasons of fact and law. In fact, it is not feasible, and therefore not a solution: I do not doubt that we would all prefer war to disappear from the theatre of human affairs, but I doubt that this wish has the remotest influence on the course of the world. By rights, when even for a unique case in history humanity would disarm, putting itself at the mercy of the bully on duty, it would be a regressive solution, because it would affect existing value (a morally problematic value, but still a value) instead of creating new value. Webfare, on the other hand, can count on a capital that did not exist twenty years ago, although its contents, the variety of human life forms, have existed since human beings have been human. From time immemorial, humans have been making deals, consuming goods, cultivating interests, i.e. manifesting specific forms of life; but for the past couple of decades, these forms of life have been automatically fixed by transforming themselves into data, which are not merely a reflection of humanity's needs, thoughts or behaviour, but generate a new, autonomous, rich and promising territory.

1. FROM THE TYRANNY OF MERIT TO THE DEMOCRACY OF NEED

As we shall see, this new and unhoped-for capital transforms into value what was once pure loss, i.e. consumption, the organism's ever-losing struggle to counteract entropy. This new capital, the patrimony of humanity, can now be intercepted, valorised, and redistributed to those parts of humanity that need it, implementing, again for the first time in world history, a primacy of need over the tyranny of merit[2] […]. To understand the Web thus becomes to open up a political perspective […].

1.1. NATURE AND SOCIETY

Nature is unfair, at least to us who have the concept of 'justice', since humans are born with different physical and psychic gifts. Even more so, nature is not democratic. After all, why should it be? What does nature know about parliamentarianism or distributive justice? […] **Culture and society, in turn, try to mitigate injustices, but introduce others**, even more odious because they are blamed on humans and not on nature. Society, far more than from the greed of the few, is born from the desire to remedy the differences in nature, and it succeeds in part; […].

But how does one redistribute wealth and even out differences if the goddess is not blindfolded? Reacting to the tendency of traditional societies based on birth-related privilege (or hardship), starting with the French Revolution, what was later, and not without a polemical and ironic aftertaste, called **meritocracy took hold,** and whose principle is anticipated by Napoleon's saying that in every soldier's giberna you could hide the French marshal's staff. But the enterprise is less easy than it appears, if only because not all sables are equivalent, and merit is an aleatory and fickle notion; …

[…]

Therefore, it is first of all on the conditions that one must focus. For the human animal, like any other animal, is not naturally good, or bad; but, unlike any other animal (because it is the only one that can be educated), it must be put in a position

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[1] J.M. Keynes, *The General Theory of Emplyment, Interest, and Money*, MacMillan Cambridge University Press, for Royal Economic Society 1936, Chapter VIII.

[2] M. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 2020.

where it can afford to have a conscience, and only then can it decide what moral temperament to give to its thinking and acting. […] Contrary to what the nostalgics of hunter-gatherer frugality or the theorists of happy degrowth suggest, poverty does not produce virtue, but oppression and war. And it is only growth, economic, social and technological, that can guarantee these conditions.

1.2. NEED AND CONSUMPTION

But if we cannot appeal to the dubious virtues of merit, or dream of a perfect origin to return to, on what can we base social justice? And what hope can we offer to the many who feel lacking in merit, but who are not immune from need? The proposal I am making consists precisely in **transforming need, that is, the great leveller that unites humans, into a productive element**, capable of generating new wealth and thus of implementing, for the first time in the history of the world, the saying 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs'. How? Let us start from a state of fact. Just as merit is inherently undemocratic, because it leads directly to an *elite*, so does need affricate the human animal to the non-human animal, and is equal for all, like death. […]

[In] **the specific case of the human life-form, [need] requires a connection with one or more technical apparatuses**, the tuna can, the can opener, the rocket, the space capsule. [H]uman need, insofar as the human life-form is systematically connected with technology, is naturally consumption, on a scale ranging from the most trivial material consumption to the highest consumption of cultural goods. Precisely insofar as it is composed of organisms systematically connected with mechanisms, including the symbolic and social apparatuses that qualify human nature as second nature, humanity is inherently **techno-human**. Humans are organisms dominated by need and metabolic urgencies like any other organism, but which, unlike any other organism, make use of technical supplements to remedy their deficiencies […]: we are what we are not in spite of technology, but thanks to it; […].

Here is a point that humanity tends to forget, at a time when its concerns are polarised not only by the urgency of personal destinies, but also by issues such as the environment, war, and artificial intelligence: dealing with consumption may appear futile or lateral, but this impression is unfounded. In fact, it is all too evident that it **is consumption that is the element to which the fundamental characteristics of the human life-form**, for better or for worse, **must be traced**. […]

It is precisely this circumstance that determines the characteristics of human life. **We cultivate hopes, fears, urgencies, precisely because we have needs, and these needs can ultimately be traced back to the need to respond to the urgencies dictated by our metabolism**. When, in the early days of Brexit, a food crisis loomed in the UK due to the long queues of TIRs waiting for new customs controls, these problems were serious and urgent precisely because they concerned the fulfilment of organic needs: neither the Metaverse nor ChatGPT would be seriously threatened by a food crisis, and both can happily wait for the return of electricity after a blackout, provided, of course, that there are surviving humans interested in the use of artificial intelligence. We realise, thus, that the supposed virtual world to which we would have ascended, leaving material life behind, is anything but an *onlife that* wanders the world like a spirit, but is terribly material, albeit in two different senses depending on whether we are dealing with mechanisms or organisms.

As far as mechanisms are concerned, matter is that of which they are composed (even the most immaterial of algorithms needs a computer to run it, and the often rare materials that make it up) and that which powers them, such as the enormous quantities of electricity that artificial intelligence needs. As far as **organisms are concerned, however, matter and its power supply exert an even stronger hold than for mechanisms, precisely because these are metabolic needs that cannot be deferred**. In both cases, what dictates the law, beyond appearances - of the virtual, the posthuman, the immaterial - is need, and its most concrete manifestation, namely consumption. Here is the point on which, perhaps, not enough thought has been given, since, for decades, consumption has been given a bad press, rising to the status of eighth capital vice and the synthesis of the other seven, from gluttony to greed via lust, with the exception, perhaps, of acedia (the abstention from doing, which could perhaps be recovered within a programme of happy degrowth).

This is because consumption is immediately linked to 'consumerism', the result of the industrial boom in which boomers grew up and which successive generations have inherited. A distortion, a hyperbole and a parody of consumption, an uncontrolled, greedy and wasteful bulimia. **Of course, it may also be the case that consumption is squandering and**

vanity. **But we must not forget that, properly speaking, consumption is simply the opposite, and, above all, the end, of production**. And that therefore, although the producer seems more important and noble than the consumer, one can well imagine a producer of shoddy, or dangerous, or silly and futile objects and a consumer not only of exquisite food and wine, but of works of art and philosophical theories. Above all, what one cannot imagine is a production in the absence of consumption. This circumstance is capital. At a time when the spectre of artificial intelligence seems to be projecting itself onto the world and replacing any human production (of course this is not the case, but let us assume for the sake of argument that it could be), there is something that no artificial intelligence will ever be able to do, and that is to watch a film, eat a pizza or want to go to a concert.

Let us never forget this. **It is need, much more than production, that constitutes us as humans from the very beginning**. […] Material needs and activities define a fundamental economy decoupled from income[3] . This is an urgent need that cannot be overridden and, at the same time, can form the basis for a new economy based no longer on production, but on the capitalization of consumption.

1.3. THE MAGIC HELPER

To do this, we need a magic helper, technique. The **only ones among organisms not to die (they all die) but to defer death by means of technique, humans are precisely for this reason the lords of technique, which without them would make no sense and go nowhere**. […] As we have always suspected - but as is now more evident than ever, due to the transformations we are subjected to - there is **no human per se, and the source of our humanity lies not within but outside of us, in technology and culture**. […] **we are what we are much more because of what is outside of us than what we possess as a natural endowment**. […]

That is why the division between humanism and technology has never had any reason to exist, since humanism is a technology and technology exists only as a function of human consumption. This is the fundamental point. Consumption is not an accessory or extrinsic element with respect to the human but, on the contrary, it is its essence (before language or thought also because, unlike the latter, it cannot be automated). And this is where the Web comes in with a radical innovation, the valorization of humanity as documanity, that is, as a producer of data and values much more than of material goods[4] . For the first time in the history of the world we have an apparatus that systematically and programmatically values humans not for their merits but for their needs. Better still, it recognises in need the most sublime merit of the human. This was already the case with the market: it doesn't matter if a genius or a cretin buys what I produce, as long as they buy it. Moreover, the Web enforces this principle not at the end of the process, but from the beginning. For the Web, and for its goals of automation and profiling, it is necessary to intercept not creativity or strength, not beauty or intelligence, not virtue or wisdom, that is, what makes humans different, but the continuous low that makes us the same even before death, the need, or more precisely the imbecility, the constitutive lack that determines the recourse to technology. It is therefore a matter of recognising the value that humans produce on the Web, which would not exist without their needs. And this gives humans incalculable power in the face of technology, and its current manifestation, the Web.

1.4. THE NEED FOR A THEORY

What I propose in this booklet is a theory, or at least a theoretical proposal, which, speaking of the Web, may not be obvious. In fact, it has been argued[5] that, as soon as data began its upsurge, its very volume, ensured by the ubiquitous recording capacity of the digital and the increasing calculation capacity provided by ultra-powerful computers would render the theory useless. What is the use of those imperfect shortcuts that are hypotheses and concepts, when we have a 1:1 map of the empire and artificial intelligences that can measure it far and wide in seconds? And why should we waste our time searching for causal relationships that explain what is happening in the world, while exposing ourselves to the possibility of error when it is far more profitable, and intellectually far less demanding, to entrust machines with the search for efficient and irrefutable correlations? Now, the opposite is true. It is **precisely the immense growth of data and the fragmentation of knowledge and practices that characterise our time that imposes the creation of a theory** in order to be able to govern what would otherwise be chaos not only from a cognitive point of view (this is the lesser evil), but from a historical and political point of view, where it is a question of deciding what direction humanity can take. This is in the persuasion

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[3] J. Dagnes and A. Salento (eds), *Prima i fondamentali. L'economia della vita quotidiana tra profitto e benessere*, Feltrinelli, Milan 2022.
[4] M. Ferraris, *Doc-Humanity*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2022, to which I refer for all theoretical and bibliographical details.
[5] C. Anderson, 'The end of theory: the data deluge makes the scientific method obsolete', *Wired*, June 23, 2008.

that all the data and many of the processes described in these pages will soon change; what I claim are therefore the reflections of a humanist who has dealt with technologists to the extent possible but is painfully aware of his own incompetence. However, I nurture the conviction, which prompted me to compose this manifesto, that **constantly changing data and processes find meaning within a reflection about the characteristics of the human form of life (and of technology as an integral part of it) that can help shape, make sense of, and give political direction to the enormous process underway.**

Data, indeed, is a life-form, but in order to trace it back to a meaning, an interpretation is indispensable, and a human interpretation at that […]. **That is why at a time when human life can be recorded in minute detail by data, there is more need than ever for theory, for understanding, for conceptual schemes, for interpretations.** […]

2. FROM ANALOG TO DIGITAL

Let us start with the magic helper, the Web. **If it may seem that the Web, a technical apparatus, is too little to generate a transformation that is not only material, but spiritual and affecting our values, it is precisely because we have too limited a concept of the Web**. […] Only ten years ago, it was said that the capital of the 21st century was financial.[6] In other words, no one suspected the existence of documentary capital. Times have changed. Since the Web records the forms of human life by transforming them into data, there is a new form of data capital[7] .

Thus, the explosion of recording that characterises our age has profoundly changed ontology, as it has multiplied social objects. We have an unprecedented wealth of documents, and their number is destined to grow (probably, the docusphere is the only entity destined to grow more than the anthroposphere). **For the first time in the history of the world, social objects outnumber natural objects by an increasingly powerful and rapid progression.** These have a unique characteristic. While many of them (what I will shortly refer to as 'semantic data') continue to be the fruit of a deliberate production process, a much greater quantity of documents (what I will shortly refer to as 'syntactic data') are the simple, automatic record of human mobilization, and first and foremost of its fundamental motive, consumption. Since production, precisely because of the interpretation of data, is increasingly automated, and since enormous profits are derived from it in terms of profiling, **for the first time in the history of the world consumption is more valuable than production**.

To understand the transformation, it is necessary to replace the Ptolemaic Web, interpreted as information and communication, with a **Copernican Web**, interpreted as registration and capitalization. […] **If digitalization has changed the world so profoundly, it is because of a minimal and apparently irrelevant technical feature**. In the analogue, communication takes place first, and then possibly (and this is a very rare occurrence, because it does not go without saying) recording, which usually depends on a technical apparatus distinct from the one in charge of communication. We communicate with our mouth, but we record with our hand, assisted by pen and paper. This is no longer the case: all communication generates documents, i.e. data. Rather than bringing us into a world beyond the world, in fact, the Web introduces new objects - an immense quantity of documents - into our world, and that is why its action is so decisive. Therefore, the radical novelty brought by the Web is not the growth of information, but the automaticity of registration [documediality].

[…]

But before addressing the characters of the new capital that has been formed by the Web, it is worth recognising a sphere of spheres that, in their connection, constitute its premises. The first is the ichnosphere, the sphere of traces that mankind has accumulated and capitalised on from the beginning, finding in this activity the specific difference from non-human animals. So we have the infosphere, which did not originate with the Web, but with culture […]. Then we have the docusphere, as old as writing but greatly enhanced, this one, by digital, which has transformed recording from a rare and expensive activity into a ubiquitous and systematic process. […]

2.1. ICNOSPHERE

[6] T. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2013.
[7] MIT, Oracle Report (2016), *The rise of Data capital*, available at http://files.technologyreview.com/whitepapers/MIT_Oracle+Report-The_Rise_of_Data_Capital.pdf; V. Mayer-Schönberger, and T. Ramge, *Reinventing Capitalism in the Age of Big Data*, London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd. 2019; P. Sonderegger, 'Data hits peak metaphor', https://paulsonderegger.com/2021/03/04/data-hits-peak-metaphor/.

Before the Web and before history there is a more original and fundamental sphere, because it is metaphysical, which concerns the universally attested phenomenon, even outside the technological sphere although it constitutes one of its conditions of possibility, namely what I have tried to determine as 'hysteresis,'[8] that is, the survival, and potential capitalization, of an effect, even when the cause has ceased to act. […] [T]he sphere of hysteresis is called the 'icnosphere,' i.e., the sphere of the trace (ἴχνος in Greek).

Registration is the fact that a trace becomes fixed. The principle of sufficient reason of both the natural cosmos and the social world and individual psychology therefore sounds *nihil est sine* hysteresis: nothing exists without hysteresis. […]

Once the track is fixed, **it** can undergo **iteration**, i.e. a process of capitalization begins that is typical of technology. In other words, the icnosphere is the necessary, though not sufficient, condition for technology. […]

Alteration is, then, a modification that can take place in the course of iteration, for instance the shift from quantitative to qualitative, from sign to meaning. A process that, as we shall see, plays an essential function in the genesis of so-called 'big data.' Iteration can thus undergo a qualitative change, for example praxis can convert into poiesis. The paradigmatic sphere of alteration is epistemology, […].

[…]

Every process has an end. And it is in this **interruption** that we recognise the *telos*: the series comes to a halt, and meaning, purpose, emerge. This last function of hysteresis concerns everything that is, but it has an evidence that is quite peculiar to humans. Hysteresis is not an infinite process, which manifests itself in the current experience that everything that is end […]. Only that which has an *end* can have an *end*, since it feels the uniqueness of choices and the historicity of existence, if it is a professor, and the pressure of food and life needs, whether those of a professor or a duck.

2.2. INFOSPHERE

[…]

[From] the point of view of **realism**, [which I propose as an alternative to idealism and skepticism], semantic capital, with its contents and services, gives humans good reasons to access the Web by receiving information, but releasing much more. It is a polariser of needs, much more than a receptacle of ideas. The function of semantic capital is, therefore, to be an attractor, that is, it aims to provide good reasons for human users to access the Web. It follows that, as such, it is not a guarantee of truthfulness, but is solely aimed at arousing interest. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that the infosphere is the breeding ground of post-truth, precisely because it is the realm of attractions, opinions, innuendo and social exchange. Hence, I think, the confirmation of my fundamental thesis about the infosphere: far from constituting the totality of the Web, it motivates humans to access the Web by providing quality services for free. But once they are drawn into the infosphere, humans produce an enormous amount of data in the docusphere. It is here that the platforms acquire documents that, when compared to billions of other documents generated by mankind as a whole, and if interpreted correctly, produce inestimable value in terms of automation, profiling and advertising revenue.

2.3. DOCUSPHERE

The docusphere is the ocean in which the island of the infosphere rises. […]

The docusphere is, specifically, the structure in which **syntactic capital is** generated. It is the new form of capital, at the same level as financial capital in terms of generating new digital products and services. However, this capital has its own rules.[9] In particular, unlike financial capital, it does not require a deliberate intention to capitalize (we produce it by doing something else). From this point of view, the metaphor of data as 'new oil'[10] appears misleading for at least two reasons. The first reason that differentiates data from oil is the fact that it is renewable energy: data, just like ideas, can be shared and reused as much as we want. The second reason is that oil was produced by dinosaurs millions of years ago, through their decomposition; therefore, there is no one who is entitled to demand its return, whereas we produce data and we have every right to demand that it be returned, not to us individually (individual data has little value) but rather to humanity, i.e. to the

[8] M. Ferraris, *Hysteresis. The External Worls*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2024.
[9] P. Sonderegger, 'Three things you should know about the hidden data economy', https://paulsonderegger.com/2020/11/23/three-things-you-should-know-about-the-hidden-data-economy/
[10] C. Humby, 'Data is the new oil', avalible at https://ana.blogs.com/maestros/2006/11/data_is_the_new.html.

totality that is the real reason for the capitalization of this new value. […] The politically decisive aspect here is therefore to recognise the processes of surplus value formation. […]

But why do we provide data for free? Because of a **capture** process. While I search the Web for evidence that the earth is flat and the moon is made of cheese, I am releasing to platforms potentially rich information about the behavior of a flat-earther. The platform will use it to sell me books on my favourite topics (if it is an American platform) or to send me to a re-education camp (if it is a Chinese platform). But this does not detract from the fact that, as we will see more clearly later, European platforms, on the strength of the law on data portability, could use that treasure trove of information to promote a new prosperity and social justice, removing the reasons for the discontent that led me to the flat-Earth sites. […]

If this is the case, if capture gets diamonds in exchange for coloured beads, then it is a matter of **recognising the unfairness of the relationship that currently takes place between the paradigmatic form of technology, the Web platforms, and the users**. […] On the one hand, leveraging the critical function of humanistic knowledge allows us to **recognize the surplus value** that humanity produces, most often unconsciously, on the Web. On the other hand, leveraging the practical function of technological knowledge is necessary to identify the tools to turn to for a **fair redistribution of value**.

But where can one find the foothold for reversing the balance of power? In a simple consideration: **the Web will cease to exist one second after the disappearance of mankind, and therefore depends on it in every way, like viruses on living beings. This circumstance is the foundation of a fair use of surplus value**. […]

2.4. ANTROPOSPHERE

The condition of possibility of the docusphere is thus the anthroposphere, that is, the circumstance whereby, in the absence of human users, the entire process of capitalising consumption in the docusphere would have no reason to exist. […] In the interplay between the anthroposphere and the docusphere, a capital is generated that is far greater than both industrial capital (which can increasingly be provided by machines trained by knowledge of the human form of life) and financial capital (which merely speculates on the hopes for the future of a tiny part of humanity). This because **documentary capital**, the data collected in the docusphere under the impulse of human behaviour, is the most faithful portrait that we have so far of the real present of humanity, as well as, as the years go by, of its past. This new capital will thus draw a natural and social history of the human race that, if properly studied, would have no precedent or rival not only on the economic level, but on the - purely theoretical - level of 'know thyself.'

Human capital is, in a very real sense, the record of the human form of life as such and in its infinite variety. But, at least for the moment, the prevailing image is that machines make use of human input in an imperious but residual way. Either in an explicit form, as in the micro-work aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the Web[11] ; or in an implicit form, when the work is done by the user, for instance with the enhancement of image recognition systems through CAPTCHA systems[12] ; or, again, by self-learning, through the sophistication of work management and control systems made possible by digital technologies. But this is but the surface effect of a deeper, radical, and - if understood - promising reality: the production of value of the human as human. The point to be grasped and valued is another. Useless as appendages of spades, of lathes, of typewriters, humans are irreplaceable as appendages of knives and forks, of cinema, of concerts, of novels, and of course of many other less commendable, but exclusively human, entertainments.

Discovering the value of human capital and drawing its logical consequences for the benefit of the few has been the great advantage of commercial platforms; it is now up to us to draw the political consequences for the benefit of the many. […]

3. FROM ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO NATURAL INTELLIGENCE

No machine, just as no non-human animal, produces value. That of value is first and foremost a primary production, in which the human defines what it is worth. Here, the human constitutes not only the origin, but also the end, which is why **I propose replacing the syntagm 'human capital' with 'human heritage,' to emphasise that the human is not merely**

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[11] https://www.mturk.com/
[12] Acronym for Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart.

the replaceable instrument of production and distribution, but the end and ultimate meaning of what takes place in the world. […]

3.1. WHAT IS LIFE?

[…]

The value of life has never been more evident than on the web, and particularly in the troubled boundary between the anthroposphere and the docusphere. Indeed, what is life? The shadow of a fleeting dream[13] or the struggle of metabolism against entropy[14]? Both: either an essential principle, the living as opposed to the dead, the ζωή, or that which is experienced subjectively, as a direct experience, the life we live, the βίος, existence. And, in both cases, **the distinction between automaton and soul lies in the fact that life, as a character proper to the soul, is characterised by the irreversibility of a metabolism, an absolute *on/off* that differs radically from the on/off, serial *on/off* of a mechanism**. […]

But why do our life forms suddenly become so important? The reason is simple. In *Existentialism is a Humanism,* Sartre wrote: 'we are on a plane where there are only men,' and of course one might have wondered what that plane might be. Less than fifty years later, the clarification came: the plane is the Web, as the great repository of human life forms. A **world of human life, that is, of the organism as systematically connected to the mechanism, the anthroposphere is thus the foundation of the docusphere, which would not exist if humans and their life forms did not exist**. On the level of the anthroposphere we observe a twofold movement: on the one hand, the web, which in this continues the fundamental tendency of technology, is moving more and more towards the organism, towards life as a genetic phenomenon of technology, which only has meaning for a living being; on the other hand, that living being has from the very beginning been in connection with technology, and for this very reason has qualified as 'human'.

[…]

[I]t is humans who give value and meaning to machines and tools: alarm clocks and frying pans have explicit and very clear purposes, they are *made to* respond to the needs of organisms, humans, who - as mere organisms - are *made for* nothing more than sustaining themselves and deferring death. […]

3.2. THE TECHNO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL CIRCLE

This constitutive nexus of the human forms a **techno-anthropological circle: humans attribute external purposes to mechanisms (including the general mechanism constituted by society), which in turn retroact on human organisms, defining the specific form of human nature, i.e. the second nature we receive from technology and culture**. This circle is, at the same time, the beginning of a capitalization and creation of values. […]

This capitalization has no end, it must have no end, unless we decide to write down somewhere the hour and day of humanity's death. We mean of humanity as a whole, and of the destiny of progress that defines it as such, not of individual humans, who unfortunately are only slightly less ephemeral than fruit flies, and whose passage on the world stage is always that of an extra. **Those who speak of 'limits to development'[15] often fail to consider that these are peremptorily inscribed in the brevity of life, and that there is nothing more futile and intimately presumptuous than to ask humanity to assign limits to itself, when these are imposed upon it insuperably by its organic nature**. […]

The inverse of degrowth is capitalization. **The great misunderstanding around capital is that it is exclusively industrial or financial capital (where the latter would be a degeneration of the former), whereas 'capital' is any form of accumulation of skills, whereby civilisation as a whole must be conceived as a process of capitalization, and the choice is not between capital and capitallessness, but between just and unjust capitalization**. […]

The great value of capital lies in making full use of the resources of hysteresis, the setting aside, the accumulation, but also and above all the reinvestment. For **this is the great secret of capitalization: once it is recorded, an event becomes an object that can be iterated upon, with a saving of forces and a growth of possibilities whose effects can be seen much more clearly in the cultural and generally human sphere than in the financial one**. […]

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[13] G. Carducci, Jaufré Rudel: "Contessa, che è mai la vita? / È l'ombra d'un sogno fuggente. /La favola breve è finita, /il vero immortale è l'amor."
[14] E. Schrödinger, *What Is Life? The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell*, MacMillan, London 1944.
[15] D.L. Meadows, D.H. Meadows, J. Randers and W.W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth*, Universe Books, New York 1972.

3.3. NATURAL INTELLIGENCE AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence, both natural and artificial, is the ripest fruit of capitalization. […]

In light of what has been said so far, there is therefore a myth to dispel. The myth that the growth of automation would turn us into automatons. […] So far […], the evolution of technology has required an automation of the human. But **when technology becomes effective to the point of being able to replace the human in functions that are not simply about strength or precision, then it becomes a priority to make the human more and more human**. The human is of interest as human and for no other reason because machines do not know how humans behave, but they are so refined that they can record their behaviour and therefore must learn from humans. […]

Machines do not know they are machines and have no intention of making anything of us. Those who make the machines that record our behaviour are interested in our behavior, not in standardizing it. […]

3.4. CULTURE AS SECOND NATURE

Here, then, is the techno-anthropological circle: on the one hand, what we are derives from technology; on the other, the automaton's will to live can find new life and new horizons precisely through technology. For it is the technical supplements that, by determining our form of life, will determine the specifics of the natural intelligence of humans, differentiating it from that of other organisms. […]

4. FROM HUMAN CAPITAL TO HUMAN HERITAGE

If recorded, the techno-anthropological circle transforms human capital into an asset of humanity. […]

This heritage is first of all *new,* because although the acts and consumption it records date back to the origin of the human species, until now they had not been documented and thus transformed into data, i.e. into potential capital. Moreover, the new patrimony is *rich*, because it does not document us on money or securities, but on the thoughts, words and deeds, dislikes and antipathies of humans, which at every moment enrich the archive from which artificial intelligence draws. Thirdly, it is a *renewable* asset, since the ownership of data has the characteristic of the publicity of ideas: unlike tangible assets, data can be transferred without the owner having to deprive himself of it. Finally, and above all, it is an *equitable* heritage, i.e. one that is constructed not by the always problematic and disputable phenomenon of merit, but by the inexhaustible and egalitarian function of need, which is then what makes all human beings equal.

4.1. A NEW HERITAGE

The heritage of humanity is ontologically new. Acts that have characterised the human way of life (walking, watching, consuming, appreciating, fearing) for millions of years, and that have so far left no or very few traces, usually in solemn circumstances, are now being recorded and transformed into documents. It is a qualitative and quantitative change […].

The critical and decisive area for the production of mankind's heritage is what I have called the 'docusphere', the enormous repository of human life forms that introduce into the world an infinite variety of objects that previously passed without a trace. […]

Indeed**, the new resources would be incomprehensible from a theoretical point of view if, following the mainstream perspective, one were to consider social reality as a mere reflection of what its actors do or think, a perspective I call *intentionalism.*** Intentionalism makes social reality dependent on collective intentionality, and thus revokes autonomous ontological reality from social objects, making them a reflection of mental operations. […] [I]ntentionalism gives birth to a nihilism in social ontology, the political outcome of which consists in not being able to rely on the heritage of humanity to solve the problems born of automation, and which from a theoretical point of view cannot answer the question: why are the services offered by platforms so often free? Yes, why? If there were no financial interest, the behaviour of platforms would be inexplicable. But if one considers data as the mere shadow of collective intentionality, one really does not understand why platforms should go to so much trouble to collect it, and above all, one does not understand how it is possible to collect something that does not exist.

To account for the existence and autonomy of data requires, within a realist horizon, a perspective of social ontology that embraces the thesis of *documentalism* according to which social objects are not merely a reflection of the intentions of social actors, any more than works exhibited in a museum can be considered reminders of artists' ideas. Within this framework, the Web is a huge machine for producing social objects, the outcome of which is the total archive of human life forms in which everything is written down, both what we intentionally want to communicate (even a vowel is writing, because it is repeatable) and what we do not even dream of producing, the mountain of data that keeps track of our behaviour. **The constitutive rule of social objects, and thus of data, from the perspective of documentalism, is Object = Recorded Act: social objects (data) are the result of social acts, i.e., human behaviour, recorded on some medium.[16]** The outcome of this constitutiveness is precisely the docusphere […].

In th[is sense], a consideration becomes necessary: claiming that nothing exists outside the text[17] is an ontologically false and epistemologically unoriginal statement, since it reduces to claiming that intuitions without a concept are blind and that conceptual schemes play a constitutive role in knowledge. It becomes **an ontologically true and epistemologically original assertion if one admits that *nothing social exists outside the text*, as the importance of texts in human civilisation has shown and as is confirmed by the explosion of recording on the Web.** It can be turned into an economically and politically interesting acquisition if, by transforming the necessary condition (nothing social exists outside the text) into a sufficient condition (if there is text, then there is something social), it is shown that recording is capable of bringing into existence objects that would not exist without it, and that therefore what is produced by the recording of human life forms is a completely new and ever-growing capital. […]

4.2. A RICH HERITAGE

The heritage of humanity is also *epistemologically rich* because, instead of informing us about the heritage of others, as in banking capital, or about the expectations of humans with respect to the future, as in financial capital, it provides us with a minute, varied and unprecedentedly extensive description of the greatest quantity of human life forms. This heritage, if properly interpreted, would be able to provide us with a social physics no less robust than natural physics. […]

There is therefore, first of all, an advantage in terms of **analysis**. Recording data, making it iterable, is, in the analogue world, an activity that requires deliberation, attention and energy. Not so in the digital world, where the energy required is only the electrical energy that powers the machines. Moreover, in the analogue world even the consultation and comparison of data requires skill, expertise, and above all patience, as well as time that, in the case of very large textual corpora, goes far beyond human existence. These recording and consultation limits do not apply to the world of data, which leads to a shift in scale. […]

[Furthermore,] [t]he encounter between machines and humans generates a very powerful form of **prediction**. Machines are increasingly infallible in repeating the past, and from this point of view they prove extremely useful for projections into the future, since nature, be it organic or spiritual, has a tendency to often repeat itself much more regularly than we think. What no machine can do, however, and this is trivially because it has never found itself in the situation of responding to the urgency of metabolism, is to project itself into the future […].

The overabundance of data also enhances **invention**, which is the natural result of the exponential growth of the archive. Vico observed that the archive of the moderns is much larger than that of the ancients, which means having a much larger quantity of models and examples. This is all the more true today: in the age of recording that we have entered thanks to the documentary explosion, an archive has been created that has no equivalent in history. And this too is an advantage we do not reflect on sufficiently, whereas it must be the starting point for a *Fourth New Science*, collectively constructed in times such as ours which, contrary to prevailing belief, have never been so friendly to humanism. […]

4.3. A RENEWABLE HERITAGE

[T]he heritage of humanity has the characteristic of **renewability**, in numerous senses. […]

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[16] M. Ferraris, *Documentality,* cit.

[17] J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London 1976.

From this consideration emerges a decisive element of the datum, namely **shareability**. Insofar as it is recorded, and therefore iterable, data accesses a level that likens it to ideas rather than to things. […]

Connected to the statute of iterability that characterizes them is the fact that data, in addition to being sharable, has the characteristic of **recyclability**, i.e. that they can be used for an indefinite extension of time, albeit, again, through the consumption, this non-renewable, of the electricity required for iterating the data. […]

A further aspect arising from iterability is **resemantizability**: syntactic data can become semantic (acquire meaning), depending on the treatments to which they are subjected. This is a process akin to the difference, but also the permutability, between strong documents (entries of deeds) and weak documents (records of facts) that I have addressed in earlier work.[18] […]

These characteristics can be summed up in the fact that the fundamental character of the goods that make up the heritage of humanity is **intangibility**. [Data is] not [a] physical goo[d] but a record of life forms; being digital, [data does] not require as onerous apparatuses for extraction, refining and distribution; finally, [it does] not produce energy, but requires it.

The latter circumstance, however, places a limit on renewability. The latter, in fact, applies to data, but not to its production and management. Intangibility, thus, does not exclude a link with **materiality**, which does not concern the content of the data, but the media that make its extraction, preservation and circulation possible. […]

4.4. AN EQUITABLE HERITAGE

With the heritage of humanity, a general economy is being designed, one that gives an economic value even to what was traditionally disvalue or waste. In this sense, we are dealing with a transvaluation preparatory to the democracy of need that animates Webfare. Heritage, in fact, makes no difference between rich and poor, beautiful or ugly, intelligent or stupid, because even those who do not possess a penny, and to crown their misfortune are ugly, wicked and stupid, generate (provided they are connected) a heritage of data that is not equal to and more important (because it is more representative of the average) than that of the richest, most beautiful, virtuous and *smartest* human on earth. […]

The politically decisive aspect of mankind's heritage is precisely that it places need in the foreground, contrasting it, in the formation of value, with capacity, which was central when capitalization was in the hands of production that was not yet automated. It has rightly been observed that need, and its amplified version, desire, is revolutionary[19] - and indeed in the name of what is revolutionary, if not to satisfy needs and desires? It has also been noted that desire constitutes a fundamental economic element[20] , and indeed there would be no economy when there were no needs to be satisfied. **What is new here is that need becomes a capitalizing factor, and takes on a culminating value precisely because it is the foundation of the whole process. If Greek man believed that in the beginning was logos, if modern man wrote that in the beginning was action, the humans of today and the future will have to recognise that in the beginning, and even more so in the end, there is passion, that is, need as the essential factor at the origin, development, and ultimate meaning of capitalization.**

[…] **In this framework, the patrimony of mankind is *teleologically, i.e. ethically, equitable*, because instead of being a sign of the divine election of the individual, as in the Calvinist genesis of bourgeois capital, this catholic capital in the etymological sense, because it is universal, is worth the more it is shared among all humans, regardless of wealth, intelligence, ethnicity or faith**: the free rider is a loser, and only cooperation wins. […]

This generates a system of valorization that does not privilege the individual and labor, but rather collectivity and need, with what some may be inclined to see as a repressive desublimation, because they do not realise that this is an enormous new possibility. Hence emerges a completely new purpose for philosophical and social reflection: to **design a capitalization operated by humanist platforms that is alternative and non-competitive to liberalist platforms**, which for their part have had the merit of intercepting a new source of value. In other words, if the revolutionary drive comes from capital, being revolutionary means not fighting against capital, but imagining alternative capitalization processes. […]

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[18] Ferraris, *Documentality*, cit.

[19] G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Continuum, London 2004; Á. Heller, *Towards a Marxist Theory of Value*, University of Southern Illinois, Telos Books, Carbondale 1972.

[20] J.-F. Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* (1974), trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1993.

The conceptualisation of the heritage of humanity makes possible what has long seemed merely chimerical, namely the recognition of needs on the same footing as merits.[21] […]

One may wonder whether this valorization of need only responds to a moral requirement, but it does not. There is a sound economic reason behind the proposal: because, when production is automated, necessity - intrinsically non-automatable – comes first, as the primary source of value. It is human needs that define the ultimate value of things. […]

5. FROM HOMO FABER TO HOMO SAPIENS

[…] One hundred years ago there was a widespread belief that we would see the end of capitalism and the triumph of labor. Exactly the opposite has happened: labor is disappearing […]. Before coming to the concrete proposal of Webfare, however, it becomes necessary to ask what will take the place of labor in the definition of human nature.

5.1. RELATIVIZATION

I define **'work' as any act of an organism (in the vast majority of cases, a human organism) capable of producing potential value by relating itself to technical apparatuses**: oars, ploughs, pens, computer keyboards. […]

Work is the production of value. **This suggests that the production of goods, the activity of the *homo faber*, is but one moment in the relationship of the human to labor or, conversely, that labor constitutes only one epoch of the human**. […] It is a situation that reproduces the classic relationship between capital and labor, with a very important variant, namely that here labor is not paid, and, before that, is not even recognised as such.

It is therefore necessary to relativize work as a supposed absolute of humanity. […]

5.2. RAREFACTION

What is being drawn is therefore a paradoxical situation: the 20th century as the century of work, that is, as the century that identifies formal engagement in production or service activities as constitutive of the identity of every adult human being, is also the century that ends with the prophecy of the end of work. A prophecy that, for once, is coming true […].

[Starting from the evident, it is clear that] **[m]ore and more robots, i.e., machines designed for work (работа), will be producing and distributing. And since data serve so well to automate work processes, it is the workers who will disappear.** […]

Rather than a disappearance of homo faber, we are dealing [thus] with a rarefaction. […]

Let us try to delve into the characteristics of this rarefaction, which is obviously also a transformation. Automation and digitalization have thinned out medium-paying jobs and widened the range between high-paying and low-paying jobs, because what is done at the two extremes cannot be automated. Faced with this situation, one would be tempted to say that few things seem as certain as these two axioms: the future of work lies in technical and scientific specialization, and the middle class, if it has not disappeared, will soon disappear. Now, both axioms are false. […]

[…] Strictly speaking, rather than a growth of the middle class we would be dealing with a universal misery. When humans counted as imperfect appendages to scythes, hammers, typewriters and bureaucratic counters, labor was an important commodity—not so anymore, and indeed those jobs are paid less. And it is also true that among the new jobs there are even simple tasks (e.g., delivering a pizza) that are not yet within the reach of a machine, and that give the impression of a future of work not very different from the industrial past, only with fewer rights.

It is doubtful, however, that it will turn out that way, and those tasks will be performed by drones and artificial intelligence, following investments in research and development determined by a simple and decisive argument: a machine, which does not die and has no rights, is cheaper than any human. This opens up an even worse dystopia, that of a world of outcasts, in

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[21] "At a higher stage of communist society, after the servile subordination of individuals to the division of labor has disappeared, and thus also the contrast of intellectual and bodily labor; after labor has become not only the means of life, but also the first need of life; after with the general development of individuals the productive forces have also grown and all the sources of social wealth flow in all their fullness, - only then can the narrow bourgeois legal horizon be overcome, and society can write on its flags: - 'Each according to his ability; to each according to his need': K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1891), PM Press/Spectre 2023 (transl. mine).

which machines will replace humans in everything, perhaps even in consumption. But to say this is not to understand what automation is. Let us think about it for a moment. **Automation is the response to human needs which in turn cannot be automated**; therefore, the more automation grows, the more machines become dependent on humans: a stick is a useful tool even for a chimpanzee, who would not know what to do with a mobile phone.

Hence the insight that allows us to understand the nature of the jobs of the future. In an influential 2013 article on the impact of computerisation on work, Carl Benedik Frey and Michael A. Osborne[22] examined 702 occupations, and an advantage for creative and specialised jobs emerged. This is to be expected after all: the invention of photography was supposed to make painters disappear; instead, in the medium term, photographers disappeared. But, for example, in the *Future of Skills in Italy*[23] there is much more. The most valuable assets of the future are mainly relational, and from this humanistic base, systematically intertwined with technology, new jobs arise according to three processes. The first is **the creation of jobs that were not there before**, for example the co-presence of psychological and technological skills needed to design the interfaces of self-driving cars or virtual assistants. The second is **the destruction of old jobs that disappear in favour of a new one**: the various specialisations of workers will be subsumed into the robot assembler. The third is **mutation**, in which a profession develops by copying the characters of other professions (we can be sure that without IT, vaccines would not have been found so soon).

If we have to resort to lengthy periphrases to name these new jobs, it is because they are all the result of hybridization…

One problem remains, namely that those with a low level of schooling and an obsolete education will struggle to fit into this new world of hybridization between complex technological and humanistic skills. But even here, the fact that one is a human and not a machine will keep one safe from being scrapped […] because [every human] possesses something irreplaceable and uniquely human, the organic necessity of consumption, and the production of value it generates through its mobilization on the Web. A priceless and irreplaceable value, if we know how to recognize it, at a time when humans have stopped imitating machines and machines cannot stop imitating humans.

5.3. MOBILIZATION

[…]

If we look at the direction taken by technology, we realise that, as mentioned at the beginning of this work, there is only one function in which humans, precisely because they are organisms, can never be replaced, and that is precisely need and consumption as the *exclusive* characteristic of the living. Now, if we want to fully understand this circumstance, we arrive at a revolutionary outcome: in the world of classical production, it was human effort and commitment, hence merit, that necessarily had the upper hand; but when production is automated or automatable, the most prized commodity becomes consumption, the goal without which the production process would be meaningless.

Less and less cogs, but now and always the origin and end of the mechanism, we mobilize, i.e., we exercise our normal forms of life which, however, recorded on the Web, produce data, i.e., value. Mobilization is the condition in which humanity in developed countries finds itself. […] [T]he time we spend on the Web is therefore productive time, not for us but for others. Because we can also occupy that time by writing nonsense, gorging ourselves, idling and tormenting others, and even then we would not be bored, because we would always have a mobile phone or something similar in our hands. The point is not the value of what we do, but the value that can be derived from interpreting and capitalising on the data we produce. Is it appropriate to call 'work' a mobilization that, as we have seen, can also take place *sur place*? For the moment, since we are in the middle of the ford, we would say yes.

[…]

One point, however, should not be forgotten. There is nothing noble or beautiful in toil, and when Gabriele D'Annunzio spoke of 'beautiful toil' or Leopardi of 'sweaty papers', meaning by this their literary endeavors, it remains that none of them would have been willing to sweat and toil otherwise than with the pen. And that those who want to return to the factories do not speak for themselves, but for others, and simply to fill an empty box, that of the human identified with the industrial

[22] C. Benedikt Frey and M. Osborne, *The Future of Employment: How susceptible are jobs to computerisation?*, Working paper, Oxford University, September 13, 2013.
[23] At the international level, see the data collected by the OECD, https://www.oecd.org/future-of-work/reports-and-data/data-infographics.htm.

worker. This is the only way to explain the stigma that today affects the '*shit jobs'*, placed who knows why one floor above the '*bullshit* jobs,'[24] as if writing under dictation for eight hours for a modest salary (it is called 'typing') was not a rubbish job, if seen through the eyes of today, and that the blissful years of the assembly line, or of rowing in a jail, were not much worse than rubbish. [But] there is also nothing beautiful about a dreamed-up primitivism[25] […].

5.4. VALORIZATION

"Consumers of the world unite!" In the light of what has been said so far, this is a message that is neither ironic nor paradoxical and is indeed the realistic slogan that is indispensable at a time when workers are disappearing, and their union would only give rise to negative capital, and a great liability, while the union of consumers generates the heritage of humanity.

[…]

The process of economic valorization is also a process of cultural enhancement, i.e., education. […]

The metaphysical significance of original sin is simple: **man is the unstabilized animal,[26] and is therefore intrinsically in need of progress.** […] The problem, today as always, is that we are not educated enough, i.e., we are not able to look at the present and the future without clinging to past habits, to old ways of seeing things, if not to conceptual errors and fine superstitions. So, what stands out as the fundamental necessity for the new world that awaits us, which may not be paradise (a somewhat boring place, after all) but which will certainly be better and fairer than the world we have left behind, is the shift from the concern for automation to the concern for education.

Thus, in order to solve social and environmental problems, we do not need less progress, less globalization, and less capital, but, just the opposite: greater progress because it is more conscious, a globalization that can respond to the fears of a humanity that feels marginalized with respect to the course of the world, and a new capital that allows us to counteract a nature that is so much stronger than we are. […]

6. FROM WELFARE TO WEBFARE

Who pays? That is, who can take charge of this virtuous process? Welfare as Keynes envisioned it imposed choices. For example, between social security and healthcare. The former was rightly favoured, but this weakened the latter. Webfare starts from a completely different premise: instead of drawing its resources from existing value […], we put a completely new capital to use. This is where the great game is being played in which the social, economic, and philosophical imagination will have to concentrate in the years to come, mobilizing, together with the intermediate bodies, the intelligence of researchers and universities to support those intermediate bodies in the elaboration of capitalization criteria. Having so far asserted the necessity of theory, I will dedicate this last chapter to the exposition of a practical proposal that is already being implemented.[27]

6.1. VIRTUE BANKS

[This proposal] is based on the European legislation on data portability, which was created for privacy protection purposes, but can be extended to a huge number of areas where protection is accompanied by capitalization. **Nowhere is it written that this value can be exploited, as is currently the case, exclusively by American liberalist platforms (with a privatisation of profits) or Chinese communist platforms (with a socialization of profits, but with a deprivation of the freedom of citizens, controlled by nationalized platforms).** In particular, European Regulation 679/2016 states that users have the right to request data from platforms.[28] In addition to this, on 25 March 2022, the possibility for users to also

[24] D. Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs. A Theory*, Simon & Schuster, New York 2018.
[25] J. Suzman, *Work: A History of How We Spend Our Time*, Bloomsbury, London 2020.
[26] Cf. A. Gehlen, *Man in the Age of Technology* (1957), Columbia University Press, New York 1980. Plessner, Darwin and Gehlen agree: we are more able because we are weaker.
[27] Within the research of Scienza Nuova (http://www.scienzanuovainstitute.com/).
[28] "The data subject shall have the right to receive in a structured, commonly used and machine-readable format personal data concerning him or her that have been provided to a data controller and shall have the right to have those data transmitted to another data controller without hindrance by the controller to whom he or she has provided them."

acquire syntactic data, which, as we have seen, are the ones that produce the authentic capitalization, was enshrined. Data portability includes syntactic data on social networks, shopping data, medical data, education data, and so forth.

At this point, an intermediary (bank, hospital, university, cooperative) intervenes, which I christen the 'Bank of Virtue' because it proposes to manage data for philanthropic purposes and asks its affiliates for permission to request their data from the platforms in order to create a data bank. The account holders authorize the bank to request their data on their behalf. The bank collects, interprets, and capitalizes the data, aiming to monetize the capital thus formed. The Webfare proposed by the banks of virtue consists of three interconnected parts: first, **a system of protection, whereby an intermediate body, the Bank of Virtue, offers itself to its account holders as the manager of authorizations for the use of data by commercial platforms.** What was a free and often unconscious cession becomes conscious and monetizable, because the platforms will be required to pay the bank for the cession of authorisations. For its part, the bank reserves the right to capitalize on the proceeds of the cession and to return them not to the account holders (these would be modest sums, if distributed) but, in terms of services, support, and training, to socially fragile individuals. **Secondly, the development of a data interpretation system that would allow any institution, if interested and motivated by clear philanthropic intentions, to acquire the data processing capacity that for the moment is largely centralized in American commercial platforms and Chinese state platforms.** This way, moreover, a virtuous circle of collaboration between academic research, industrial realities, and civil society would be established, which for the moment appears to be a largely unexploited and underutilised possibility. **Thirdly, a capitalization system, through the creation of an alternative platform with social purposes.** Once confirmed in their trust in the bank (with which, moreover, they already had a fiduciary relationship on a financial level), account holders, and hopefully an increasing number of third parties motivated by social sustainability goals, will be able to access an alternative platform by providing, on a voluntary basis and with motives similar to the 8 per mille donation, useful information for civic and philanthropic purposes.

6.2. PROTECTION

Self-awareness, hence the qualification of the origin of data, is the first step. Becoming aware that we produce value with data, and that this value goes far beyond mere privacy, is a fundamental first step. The options following this realisation are many: monetization, i.e., affirming the right to monetize one's data as an individualistic solution to the problem of value; finalization, i.e., affirming the right to determine the purposes for which our data can be used; and mutualization, i.e., promoting an action of social redistribution of the value of data that goes beyond private use and promotes the support of needy categories, which is the one that, in my opinion, is the most in keeping with the spirit of Webfare. By using explainable AI algorithms and responsible data collection, it will promote the digital knowledge of the social community and increase 'big data literacy,' i.e., the 'citizen's' awareness, understanding, and critical reflection on big data practices and their risks and implications, as well as the ability to implement this knowledge for a more informed use of interests.[29] **In this framework, the first step is to recognize that the value of data is equally dependent on the mobilization of humanity and the fact that this mobilization is intercepted and interpreted by platforms.** […]

Trading, by quantifying the value of data, is the second step. The digital data economy, with data currently freely accessible through social media, free apps, and Internet access data, reached EUR 94 billion in Europe in 2019 and continues to grow. This figure does not include personal information about users (e.g., account holders) in the form of *Structured Query Language* (SQL) data, such as financial information, access to which is restricted by data protection laws. By combining the structured data they hold with unstructured data (those about their members obtained from commercial platforms), **data cooperatives** will generate much greater market value. Furthermore, by acting as a trustee of people's data and their decisions about who and for what purpose can access their data, **Virtue Banks will negotiate the terms of access to data with industry partners, resulting in significant economic gain.** Within this framework, ways need to be developed to quantify the data we produce in our relationship with platforms. There are already proposals and initiatives[30] to demand control over one's own data[31] and to quantify it.[32] To this end, we are dealing with a case of *serendipity*: the rules drawn up at European level for the protection of *privacy*, which were based on a *civil law* foundation (the inalienability of the rights of

[29] I. Sander, 'Critical big data literacy tools. Engaging citizens and promoting empowered internet usage', *Data & Policy* 2, 2020.

[30] A. Lehdonvitra, *et al*, *Data Financing for Global Good: A Feasibility Study*, Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford 2016.

[31] J. Tirole, *Economics for the Common Good*, Princeton University Press, Cambridge MA 2017.

[32] L. Bolognini and I. de Michelis, 'An Introduction to The Right to Monetize', *Privacy Law, Economics and Technology,* 2018; R. Montes, W. Sand-Zantman and T. Valletti, 'The Value of Personal Information in Online Markets with Endogenous Privacy', *Management Science, INFORMS*, 65, 3, March 2019, pp. 1342-1362.

the individual), become the instrument for recognizing the amount of data produced. In the context of quantifying data, it is thus possible to formulate a law: the less *privacy,* the more data the platforms collect, and inversely. **But *quantifying data* is still not *quantifying the value of data***, and this is the big problem. Contrary to readings that see in the digital economy a prevalence of the market over the company,[33] here the company replaces the market and makes it impossible to determine a public value. What is the value of information that makes it possible to fly planes at full capacity thanks to data on passenger behaviour? This is a question that can never be answered if the purchase of the data is the result of a private negotiation between a platform and a company. If a market existed (and it cannot but exist with the entry of data investors other than platforms) there would be supply and demand and, on that basis, value would be determined. **The condition for the creation of a market for data, hence for a quantification of its value, is the development of public criteria for its interpretation.**

6.3. INTERPRETATION

Commercial platforms interpret data on the basis of algorithms, whereas Virtue Banks can couple structured data in their possession with unstructured data (those relating to its members obtained from commercial platforms) bringing about a much greater cognitive value. This makes it possible to address a legitimate concern: innovative technologies and knowledge are needed to extract information from big data. Public administrations, ASLs, cooperative banks, universities, and museums, i.e., the institutions that can be transformed into Virtue Banks are small compared to commercial platforms and less hermeneutically equipped; therefore, they are destined to succumb in the comparison. But if, as we have seen, Virtue Banks, unlike large commercial platforms, have sorted data (the account holders of a bank, the members of a cooperative), they do not need to resort exclusively to algorithms to calculate the social data of their affiliates, reducing the aleatory nature of abductive processes. As for innovative technologies and knowledge, they can, indeed must, be developed, by harnessing the intelligence of researchers and universities that will support the Virtue Banks in the elaboration of hermeneutic canons of which, fortunately, neither Silicon Valley nor Shanghai possess the exclusivity. For interpretation, **a fourfactorial theory of truth** is proposed, which I will outline in brief, having developed it more extensively elsewhere.[34]

The data, which constitute the ontological layer, are *truth-bearers* in the sense that, in themselves, they do not necessarily possess truth or meaning, but possess the decisive character of existing as documents, and thus of constituting the raw material of an interpretation. For a hermeneutic to be effective, it is first necessary to recognize the material basis of the datum, the literal level, that which constitutes the object of record, that which I call the bearer of truth. This material basis consists, as we have said, in the enormous variety of human life forms which, through registration, comes to constitute a new ontological level, that of data. All data, just like sensations, are real. Which does not mean that they are real. Hence the fact that the work of refining data is even more complex than the work of refining oil, only it requires much less investment and equipment, and often also simply intelligence and intuition.

The technological layer consists of the *truth factors*, i.e. the technical processes that are used to extract meanings and correlations from the data. It is at this level that the characteristic element of platforms with ordered databases plays a decisive role. They therefore gain a competitive advantage over large commercial platforms if they are able to effectively compare their own ordered data with the mass of big data obtained from commercial platforms. This step consists in cross-referencing the semantic data available to the institution with the data, both semantic and syntactic, produced by its members and obtained through the Data Portability Act. This intersection is, potentially, the greatest cognitive enterprise that opens up before humanity because it is within the reach of a large number of actors (unlike in the oligopoly of today's big players) […].

At the epistemological level, that of *truth tellers*, we need to go beyond the realm of mere interpretation in order to obtain explanations. Let me explain. Hermeneutics consists in making intersections and establishing correlations, and this is the task of technicians whom we can call hermeneuticians, or semioticians, or data scientists, or whatever you prefer, as the concept is clear: they are people who have acquired a peculiar competence in processing data and deriving meanings from it. […] But, it should be noted, **knowing how to interpret a code does not mean, as many semioticians and hermeneuticians of the last century have deceptively suggested (or at least as we have liked to believe in order to put our souls in peace), to possess a universal science** for the same reason that knowing the letters of the alphabet does

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[33] V. Mayer-Schönberger and T. Ramge, *Reinventing Capitalism in the Age of Big Data*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 2019.
[34] Ferraris, *Doc-Humanity*, cit.

not coincide with the possession of absolute knowledge […] For instance, Google has proposed to offer a national health service to the United States, and this will no doubt be a good thing, since it does not exist at the moment; but it would be of doubtful benefit to American citizens without health insurance if hermeneutics, semioticians, or data scientists, instead of doctors, were to take care of them. In short, **the possession of canons and methods of interpretation must systematically go hand in hand with the possession of scientific skills appropriate to the field of analysis: economic, medical, historical, legal, and so on for the entire encyclopaedia of knowledge**.

None of this would make sense, however, if there were not the ultimate recipients of interpretation, the *truth functors,* i.e. humans, who stand at the beginning and end of the process. Registration as a mechanical function generates, in fact, the system; consumption, as an organic function, produces value. […]

6.4. REDISTRIBUTION

Finally, we come to the redistribution of data. The picture is as follows: on one hand, **in the incipient post-fabrication condition we have an increased availability of goods guaranteed by automation; on the other hand, we have a rarefaction of jobs. But if consumers are unemployed because of automation, they cannot buy goods, and the system collapses, unless consumption actually constitutes the production of new value, of capital that can be put into circulation to sustain the system.** In fact, we have the most efficient and powerful circularity in history, which has not yet been sufficiently exploited.

As for trading platforms, it is the absence of a data exchange that makes it difficult to implement compensation policies aimed at redistributing surplus value. This applies, first of all, to the taxation proposals put forward by China[35] and already partly implemented by the United States and the European Union. Contrary to what has been suggested by some, these initiatives do not run the risk of passing on costs to users (platforms would lose all attractiveness if they stopped providing services for free), but find their greatest limitation precisely in the circumstance that, until there is a data exchange, it is very difficult to determine their value, and thus exert the right tax pressure on platforms. Compensation, however, is not limited to the redistribution of the tax levy, and in particular (enhancing the concept of 'world heritage') may consist in increasing the areas of free goods and services, which is moreover consistent with the commercial interests of the platforms. Consistent with the general approach we are following, according to which the users' contribution consists in mobilization, and that of the platforms in registration and thus production of data, gratuitousness should not be considered as a *common good*, but rather as a *cooperative product*. With this terminological differentiation we point to the circumstance whereby through gratuitousness users do not see a right to the wealth obtained from the *capitalization* of their data by the platforms (exercising levies on surplus value and redistributing it is a matter for state taxation), but rather the contribution of their mobilization in the *production* of data.

Within this framework, the virtue bank must engage in the sharing not of data, but of its value. If compensation consists in an intervention on already capitalized data, here we are dealing with two radically different processes. First, we are dealing with a production of value through an alternative and autonomous capitalization than that carried out by commercial platforms, whose contribution is limited to the sharing of data with Virtue Banks. Secondly, in order for the term 'virtue bank' not to appear abusive and unbearably rhetorical, it is necessary for virtue to be effective, i.e., for it to be clear that the **purpose of the virtue bank is not to remunerate depositors (for this the traditional services of the bank and the stock exchange must be used, which are valid for those who have money), but rather to bring into the economic game that vast majority of humanity that has no money but has data,** and that must be brought into the world of citizenship, not formal but substantial, through the opening of a bank account made first of data, then of money.

In the perspective of Virtue Banks, the proceeds of data interpretation will thus be redistributed to users according to their economic needs or, alternatively, reinvested in projects aimed at promoting the wellbeing of the local community (e.g., integration of vulnerable people, aid for local research), following the mutualistic nature of data cooperatives. The *rationale* for this allocation - unlike universal or citizenship incomes, which have been proposed over the last two centuries and with increasing intensity in recent decades (i.e., in conjunction with the employment problems posed by automation) - rests, as mentioned, on a principle of mutualization. By 'mutualization' is usually meant the distribution of a debt among many subjects; in this case, however, we are dealing with a mutuality that rests not on debt, but on credit. All the

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[35] N. Matsuda, https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Is-China-considering-a-data-tax-on-big-tech-Signs-point-to-yes, November 22, 2021.

subjects involved in the process of capitalization create value, but those who already have a source of income voluntarily renounce their profits in order to redistribute them—in an economically more substantial manner because it is not a scattershot redistribution—to those who do not have income but have provided it.

Is such an initiative possible? From my perspective, yes. The account holders who instruct the bank to retrieve and capitalize their *social* data already have money; so much so that they have a bank account. They are also supposed to be generous people, since they usually deprecate the greed of the *conquistadors*, the commercial platforms that keep for themselves profits that strictly speaking belong to the whole of humanity. It would therefore seem peculiar that they would demand a transfer resulting from the capitalization of their data, not least because the interesting thing about data is that it is worth more the more humans provide it. One supposes, therefore, that many of them, hopefully the majority, would be delighted if, say, the billion euros of the capitalization were not redistributed among the one million account holders (that would make one thousand euros a year, or less than one hundred euros a month) but were used to pay ten thousand euros to one hundred thousand poor people who do not have a bank account, but who do have a mobile phone, and who have opened a data account at the bank, increasing their data capital, and set off on a path to substantial and not just formal citizenship. Because rights and, at best, documents mean very little until one also has money. On the other hand, the voluntary renunciation of one's share of capitalization does not have a forced or illiberal character, since all those who have joined the alternative capitalization process have done so spontaneously, the way remaining fully open for them not to join, and thus either not to capitalize their data, or to capitalize it in the form of privatization.