

THE NEED FOR COMMONS

Andrea Ciucci

Pontifical Academy for Life

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DATA AND FACES

In only the last hour Walmart has collected 2.5 petabytes of data relating to its customers, and yesterday 350 million images were uploaded to Facebook. What lies behind this enormous amount of data that we have learned to collect and manage in an extremely sophisticated and sensationally profitable way for those who own it?

What constitutes data, or a conglomeration of data, for an algorithm that is processed by a very powerful computer is actually a photograph of a moment in a person's life, a choice they have made, a necessity, a moment of joy or struggle, a routine gesture or an exceptional event. Whom did that Walmart customer, whom we profiled as a 44-year-old heterosexual white male, have in mind while buying a cake for eight people?

What was that 28-year-old woman from Los Angeles of Mexican descent feeling when she bought a pregnancy test: was it fear for an unexpected child (with the risk of losing an uncertain job) or joy for the confirmation of an event she longed for for months?

When we process data, with that unparalleled ability with which we can almost infallibly profile behaviour and predict choices, we must not forget that behind every line there are people, stories, loved ones, successes, tragedies. Our so-called artificial intelligence does not process simple numbers, our incredible machine learning does not play simulations: they deal with the reality of the billions of inhabitants of this planet whose life we have learned to record, at all times, in every choice: the public ones, and the private ones.

We must not, we cannot, forget people, names and stories.

We cannot do it, especially in this time when technology has a degree of pervasiveness that we would never have believed possible, one worthy of an unlikely science fiction story, both virtually frightening and concretely harmless.

We must remember the people behind the data that we continuously process to avoid the risk highlighted by Shoshanna Zubov when she wrote that: “surveillance capitalism appropriates our behaviour and absorbs all the meaning that exists in our bodies, in our brains and in our hearts. You are not even “the product,” you are the abandoned carcass. The "product" is the excess data torn from your life. "

People and their bodies, that cannot be reduced to any ideological framework, including that of an algorithmic matrix; people and their wounded bodies, more tragic and painful than the data that record them and at the same time surprisingly capable of recovering. People and their bodies filled with uselessness, discarded by predictive systems despite being an integral part of a human adventure

People and their bodies are the correct and first perspective with which we are called to re-interpret the themes of these two days and the entire conversation on artificial intelligence. Starting from people and their bodies, we must inspire a reflection on the selection criteria, the necessary need to take on responsibility, the elaboration and promotion of rights and responsibilities. Thanks to people and their bodies, we will be able to work together, safeguarding the necessary plurality (man does not exist, concrete people exist) and the necessary concreteness that our existence constantly requires. It is in fact for the sake of each of the 7 billion people inhabiting this planet that we are here today and we are here together, because only together can we try to govern (exactly: govern!) a technology that develops throughout the planet and is at the same time capable of impacting the fate of each individual.

COMMONS

The incredible technological-scientific ability, which has characterized these past decades and contributed decisively to the epochal change we are experiencing, requires an exquisitely human interpretation, cultural forms capable of diffusing the apparent inevitability of the power of the machine (algo-cracy) in favour of a

human possibility of living in the technologically defined world (info-sphere, as Luciano Floridi calls it) in which it is immersed: in classical terms it is called ethics or, as Pope Francis said a few months ago, an algor-ethics.

A cooperative approach, meaning the assumption of a common responsibility in the face of this phenomenon, is crucial, because only in this way can we make sure that artificial intelligence won't powerfully contribute to the expansion of that technological divide that characterizes the current human condition. It's not just a matter of using the powerful tools we invented for better or worse; we are called to a wider custody (common in fact!), a more conscious warning that may make us responsible for reality and allows us to reduce that apparently unavoidable divide between generations, between genders, between nations, between the rich and the poor. If what Johnnie Penn wrote a few weeks ago in the Financial Times is true, showing the artificial intelligence system as rooted in capitalism, we cannot fail to be alerted to the opportunities and limitations of this imprinting that the pervasive power of artificial intelligence dramatically multiplies.

The underlying understanding is to use artificial intelligence to collaborate, not to compete. We must and we can do it among men and women, specialists in the various sectors impacted by artificial intelligence, we must do it between humans and machines as well, overcoming the juxtaposing logic that still pervades the contemporary cultural debate, too often stuck on the Jeopardy game between the human champion and Watson, the supercomputer. The medical world offers interesting examples of how it is possible to use artificial intelligence in this way. Thus, work is underway for the introduction of Block chain technology to create a giant dataset, on which to test artificial intelligence systems. The goal is to share and protect patients' biodata, with the aim of reducing the cost of seeking treatment and at the same time improving access to care. Proceeding in a random way can be counterproductive, due to problems caused by the incompatibility of data if processed in different ways. By joining forces, the dataset under construction will be in a standard format that makes records and results transferable.

At the same time, our meeting here today, in this diverse and stimulating context, is necessary to understand together how we can safeguard the differences that make up the real richness of humanity. The western way of living on this planet, a

way that many of us come from, certainly offers a chance to experience this story in an authentically human way, but it is not the only way; we must remember it every time we put in the hand of an African teenager a smartphone that was designed in the West and introduces a completely western narrative and global outlook, and that records his data in a western framework.

CONCLUSION

Ethical reflection on artificial intelligence is no longer a novelty. In this room there are some of the minds that are contributing the most to reflection on this theme, achieving a certain consensus on a whole series of choices.

Perhaps today we are asked to carry out together, each with our specific point of view and with the gifts we have, a double step forward, a double challenge of spreading an ethical awareness on these issues and, at the same time, building a consensus capable of generating concrete decisions among the various players involved. Words such as Transparency, Inclusion, Accountability, Responsibility, Impartiality, Reliability, Security, Privacy, are now the titles of the chapters and recommendations of many documents on artificial intelligence ethics that have emerged in recent years, albeit not always with a unity of meaning that shows the need for in-depth work. These words must now become the patrimony of everyone and not only of the artificial intelligence ethics experts, they must become criteria for concrete decisions by all those involved.

The extent and depth of the upcoming changes allow us to show an analogy with what happened in other crucial moments in the history of humanity. We must learn from them. In particular, we can see an analogy with what happened after the Second World War. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was born from a unanimous reaction to the experience of totalitarianisms, which trampled on human dignity and its expressions. Now we mustn't wait for these devastating outcomes to occur, we can take preventive actions before disasters happen. We must first act as a human family, made up of peoples and persons, to reaffirm them, update them and eventually integrate them, in a balanced way into the different levels of authenticity, autonomy and sociability. Certainly, the dignity of

the person, which constitutes the crux of the entire system of human rights, is nevertheless open to different interpretations. It can be seen as the basis of respect for individual autonomy, which is achieved when the person asserts his or her own rights, or for the duties that must be taken on, constraining the person to deal with public order and the common good. Different views of the person underlie these positions, but this does not mean that universal rights cannot constitute a common reference point to awaken conscience and ethical commitment.

We must do it for those who in this moment are posting photos of their wedding on Facebook and for those who have just searched for the address of a hospital on Google Maps; for the generations to come and for those who are so far into the wildernesses of the earth that they cannot be identified in any database.

For me, for you, for us.

Contacts:

andrea.ciucci@pav.va

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