

THE CITY OF GOD

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As Augustine taught us, investigating the philosophy of history means asking ourselves: is humankind going in the right direction? For Augustine the answer was yes, as it later would be for Kant, Hegel and Marx, but for quite some time now, under the influence of Nietzsche, Spengler and Heidegger, even formally progressive thinkers have become convinced of the contrary. The direction taken by humankind is wrong, they say: it is absolutely necessary to get off this train before it's too late and we end up in an economic, ecological and social catastrophe. I have nothing against this vision, in principle, as long as it is proven to be true. However, I am not so sure it is. If it were, then humankind would be behaving in a totally inconsistent manner, creating the conditions for its own destruction and indulging in its inclination towards imbecility. However, there are good reasons to think that the real imbeciles (or scoundrels, because this is also possible, indeed probable) are the catastrophists. This is already a good thing. An even better thing would be if, in addition to noting the errors of this negative philosophy of history, we built a positive philosophy of history. That is what I intend to do.

The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer

The test of any philosophy of history is a version of falsificationism, and sounds like this: is it true that we are going from bad to worse? It is important to note that we're talking about "from bad to worse", as "from good to better" is all too easy to refute: it only takes a rheumatic pain afflicting the philosopher of history in question for them to paint a rather bleak picture. Well, if it is proved - which, of course, is possible - that humankind is really running towards a catastrophe, or at least that it is receding or lingering in a morose stillness, then we should stop everything we're doing and take a radically different direction. But if that is *not* the case, i.e. if some kind of progress (though not quite the kind we dreamed of) has and is taking place, then we have to continue along the path we have taken, without listening to the catastrophists and the retrotopists who conjugate utopia to the past, and more precisely to a past that has never been present, and on this basis alone criticize the present that is and the future that could be.

The main argument used by retrotopists (I'm sure you've heard it) is: the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. So, progress is actually regression, because our model of development realizes the opposite of the precept "to each according to their needs", and it has to be thrown where it belongs, to hell or its temporal equivalent. Retrotopists usually assume this principle as evidence that does not even deserve to be discussed, and in doing so they implicitly issue a condemnation without appeal against our time, against the future that awaits us, and against the idea that history has a meaning. But what if the opposite were true, namely that the poor are getting richer (though still being poor) and the rich are getting poorer (while still being rich)?

Let's verify this by falsifying the opposite thesis, supported by retrotopists. The gap between rich and poor *has* widened in recent decades, but only in relative terms: the rich have become richer than the extent to which the poor have become richer, but the latter are still less poor than before, at least as far as we are told by statistics (which, of course, are always difficult to verify: living in a nation of tax evaders like Italy, for example, I have learned to handle with great skepticism the declarations of absolute poverty

in which sometimes my countrymen indulge). But alongside the empirical difficulty of measuring how rich the rich are and how poor the poor are, there is a transcendental difficulty to which, in my opinion, insufficient attention is often paid. If the rich really were ever richer, Jeff Bezos, who is currently the richest man on earth (at least as far as we know... maybe there are even richer Narcos), would also be the richest man in history: but this is not the case. The richest man in history, as far as we know, was Mansa Musa Ire of Mali in the fifteenth century. Then there were many others, including Augustus, Caesar, Napoleon, and Genghis Khan. And generally speaking the richest men in history are all dead, and the rich living today are much poorer than them.

On a more serious note, what criteria are used to make these calculations? Which authorities certify them? How are comparisons made between an absolute sovereign who has an entire state, a constitutional sovereign, and a captain of industry? Not to mention that, of course, wealth is not necessarily synonymous with power, or with particular well-being. Gangsters have to always fear for their lives, and the billionaires who fall under the blows of sex scandals made possible by a more severe and active public opinion have objectively less power than the tycoons of the generations that preceded them, and all of them have less money and less power than Attila. These common-sense considerations, which I have rarely come across, suggest that the thesis that the rich are always richer is non-falsifiable and, strictly speaking, nonsensical. It expresses a state of mind, not something that can be regarded as a serious argument: we struggle to establish, in the same culture and even in the same district of a city, the real estate value of a house, yet we would be able to exhaustively compare the assets of an oriental despot, a nineteenth-century captain of industry and Alexander the Great? Ironically, those who argue that the rich are getting richer are often the same people who have spent years splitting hairs in a doctorate devoted to some very specific cross-cultural thesis, such as that cockfighting on the island of Java should be interpreted in a very different way from how we conceive it in the West, where we are inclined to compare it to a gambling practice once in use among us. In other words, for these people the incomparability of cultures is unquestionable, even beyond common sense, yet for some reason they claim that we can draw a straight evolutionary line from Croesus to Besos.

If the thesis of the increasingly rich is non-falsifiable, and therefore nonsensical, the correlative thesis of the increasingly poor is very falsifiable indeed. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was one billion of us, now there are seven billion of us, and the number of the living currently exceeds that of all the dead in the history of humankind (again, I'm not sure how these calculations were made, so I'm going to take them with a pinch of salt). This means that the poor are getting richer, because a growing (and seriously impressive) number of human beings today live above the threshold of absolute poverty, which is the lack of means of subsistence. More significantly, in developed countries such as that where I was lucky enough to be born, people's average lifespan has increased dramatically. Not to mention the availability of consumer goods, such as clothes, food and low-cost technologies (for the first time in the history of the world the number of overfed children is twice that of underfed ones) which means that often even homeless people have a mobile phone (which completely changes their quality of life). Even if we (irrationally) disapprove of the greater availability of consumer goods (the island of plastic in the Pacific can be avoided, the hunger that the food industry has alleviated cannot), the fact remains that in order to address the issue of "the poor getting poorer" we cannot neglect the benefits that every human being derives from scientific and technological progress, i.e. less infant mortality, greater civil protection, more effective medical treatments, greater literacy - in other words, all the factors that explain the impressively positive demographic curve of the last two centuries.

Similar considerations can be made for proverbs that come and go in public space to certify how low we have fallen and how fast humankind is heading for the worst. Just as the rich would be richer and the poor poorer, wars would be more and more warlike: more bloody, more deadly, more ruthless, more

savage. But of course this is not true either: today we are talking about five or ten dead per “battle”, whereas once it was normal to have ten thousand fallen, and I'm not referring to Zhukov (under whom hundreds of thousands were killed) but to Frederick the Great or Napoleon. Surgical strikes undoubtedly make victims, but these are infinitely fewer than those caused by carpet bombings, which have been abandoned essentially because of a more evolved, critical and demanding public opinion (further proof that humankind is now at its best). There is much indignation about the treatment of the prisoners of Guantanamo, but no one, not even the maniacs who tortured them, ever thought of impaling them - which was normal practice for prisoners in Europe in the age of Raphael, Tasso and Descartes. And as for less spoken-of wars, such as that in Rwanda, they would no longer be possible today, because they would be immediately tweeted and re-tweeted (these unknown wars, on the other hand, remind us that the worst slaughters in history were made with machetes, not thanks to some advanced technology). And to claim that trade and financial wars are worse than military ones is a sign of a dramatic insensitivity to the victims of Gettysburg and Verdun, Hiroshima and Dresden.

Coming to civil life - except in politics, where incompetence seems to be a virtue - today positions of power cannot be achieved without skill, and therefore they appear to be highly requested, paid and sought after. Obviously this circumstance does not entail social justice, but at least involves the reduction of another type of injustice and risk: that of an incompetent leader. If an heir to the throne does not promise too well, he does not have his eyes blinded and his nose cut off, as was the custom in Byzantium, but he is excluded from the succession with some ploy. In a less demanding field, even university professors are asked, at least *pro forma*, to show a degree of intelligence. So where do we get the idea that things keep getting worse? Perhaps from the fact that the progress of modernity and the dictatorship of technology have homologated us? According to this view, we are now all the same, both inside and outside, which was the destiny of humankind according to Zarathustra, Pasolini and many others. Well, I would like to point out that fifty years ago it was very common for entire towns in southern Italy, Greece and Portugal to be populated by women dressed in black and by men in white shirts, a natural continuation of traditional costumes (in fact, there is nothing more homologating than folklore). Today, in those same villages, everyone is dressed differently, except for the few who have decided to strictly follow the aesthetic canons of Dolce & Gabbana.

On a similar note, television used to offer one or two channels, while now Netflix and similar providers offer thousands of films. Were we more homologated then or now? Did the factory canteen offer a wide choice of options? Vegans, fruitarians, Muslims, Jews etc. are now catered for: isn't this progress? These things are little-noticed mostly because people are working less and less, and yet the same children who a hundred years ago would have eaten chow during their military service (another homologation that has disappeared, and is not missed) today are all about sushi. So where is this homologation supposed to lie? It seems to me that the meaning of words is being lost when making such claims. Rather, what is happening is a convergence between profit and happiness: it is better to multiply the sphere of tastes and desires, because it produces more income, now that we know how to predict them through the algorithms that monitor consumption. (If someone were to say that this is a privacy infringement, then they should also make the same accusation to the librarian who keeps note of the books they borrow, not to mention bird watchers.)

These circumstances, in my view, are crucial to the philosophy of history. It was once thought that the society of technology coincided with dehumanization (an interpretation which, moreover, stemmed from a misunderstanding of the notion of "technology", which is actually part of humanity). Yet never before has so much humanity been produced as today, never before has there been so much attention to humanity as today. And what happens on the internet is the most obvious manifestation of this: fashion, travel, lifestyles, pornography, nutrition, answers to the most curious questions (I found a

tutorial on how to tie a bow tie and another on how to use a Greek *komboloi*). Those who miss the closed commercial state would be the last to give up this wealth for an old Trabant (which, incidentally, they could buy on Amazon). And above all, nothing seems more inappropriate than the alleged characterizations of humanity in the technological world of the twentieth century - the one-dimensional man, the loneliness of human beings in the age of technology, etc. What is that all about? We know how lonely one can be in a village, how much human noise surrounds us and how difficult it is to manage, because it is the noise of individuals that are very different from one another.

Yes, but what about the human soul under the whip of Kapital? Of the flattening produced by Americanized mass culture? Horkheimer and Adorno deplored the latter, except that if they were in the United States it was because in Germany a more imperious and not-too-intelligent mass culture was in force by law, not to mention that there are no serious musical or ideological reasons to prefer the *Horst-Wessel-Lied* to *Tutti Frutti*. Marcuse complained about the one-dimensionality of man (which as we have just seen is anything but true) and with the "repressive desublimation", but that did not prevent him from teaching in La Jolla, on the Pacific coast, surrounded by bougainvillea, hedonism and pacifism, when he could have gone back to teaching Hegel in Germany, perhaps in the Karl-Marx-Stadt. There is no need to embrace an unreserved panglossism to conclude that mass culture - often much more intelligent and amusing than that of the elite, especially if the latter takes on the ultimately fascist contours of the *Sociology of Music* - is still better than illiteracy or forced indoctrination, and that repressive desublimation is still preferable to repression without sublimation. All this supports a philosophy of history that is anything but Spenglerian. We are not decaying, on the contrary, we are progressing, and the comparison with the heroes of critical theory shows this. Adorno despised jazz as "nigger music" (I quote); Horkheimer compromised the health of his listeners by imposing on them the passive smoke of his cigars; Marcuse imagined a sexual liberation that today would lead one straight to court. If none of this seems acceptable to us now, it depends much less on their theories (which were often reduced to stalking the Enlightenment) than on the actual Enlightenment brought about by technical progress, which has demolished the need for slavery from which derives the contempt for the blacks, proven the harmfulness of smoking, and promoted - reducing the importance of muscles and the male primacy that resulted from it - the emancipation of women.

Communism realized

At this point you might think I am a sort of watchdog of Kapital, happy with bones and crumbs, etc. Yet it is not so, and not because of any merit of mine, but for reasons that will become evident once we adopt a philosophy of history that is a little less "unkempt". When I was a child, over half a century ago, people kept talking about the coming collapse of Capitalism under the weight of its contradictions, and of the imminent advent of Communism. This repeated announcement was messianic and a bit boring, in addition to justifying right-wing governments that were supposed to save us from the Bolsheviks. After 1989, the refrain changed: Capitalism had won and was claiming one victory after another (which was a frustrating position, because it presupposed a very intelligent Capital and a very stupid Communism). The situation was made possible, paradoxical as it may seem, by a philosophical error: in deference to Hegel, Marx had seen contradiction as the engine of history, so he expected that Capital would collapse under the weight of its own contradictions thereby leaving room for Communism. The supporters of Capitalism then argued that there were no such contradictions, but what they did not foresee is that the new capital (the documedia capital) would actually realize communism (one can excuse them, since not even the supporters of Communism seem to have noticed this circumstance).

It's not just a matter of personal memories. If we were to believe the philosophical literature that has characterized the last quarter of a century (let's say from *Spectres of Marx* onwards), it is difficult to escape the impression of an irrecoverable defeat. Marxism, a messianic promise referred to without too much conviction, is now behind us. Conversely, the undisputed winner of the battle between capital and labour - it is said - is capital, which won every clash and proved immune to all those insurmountable internal contradictions that were supposed to bring about its collapse. This position lies halfway between the messianic transformation of socialism in Hermann Cohen and the spirit dance, i.e. the melancholy "ring a ring o' roses" inspired by the peyotes of the last Native Americans now locked up in reserves. In addition to being melancholic, this perspective is limited to messianism, that is, to the most deceptive of perspectives, the one that postpones the achievement of the objective ever further. The spirit dance is politically useless and socially harmful. It generates depression in the reader: Capital has not lost a single battle, its antagonists have lost all of them. It generates euphoria in the writer: everyone has abandoned the struggle, only I continue to stand firm, together with a number of deceased important authors. To go back to Adorno's categorizations, one could take the position of the resentful listener, the one who only listens to baroque music. But then one leaves everything unchanged. And that's the problem.

The spirit dance regrets a world that not only is no longer there and cannot be restored, but is not even worthy of regret, since it was a world of alienation and toil that no one can seriously miss. The situation, it is said, is quite discouraging, but at least it guarantees a consolation in the catastrophe: it is not our fault if the world is going wrong, the fault lies with capital and its actors. Indeed, if there is one principle that reigns unchallenged in every public speech it is precisely this: *le capital c'est les autres*. And we cannot even say that communism is us, because communism has failed. I think that what we need is not a revenant, something that comes back from the past to remind us of justice and humanity. No one has forgotten about these things, and the point is rather that they are nothing but cheap ideals until one finds the way to implement them and elaborates the categories to understand them today. In short, we need a twenty-first century Marx. Instead, the world is full of imaginary Marxists who understand nothing of the present and who propose (or pretend to propose) nineteenth-century remedies - more or less as if Marx had suggested the conquest of Mexico as a solution to the working-class issue of his time.

In any case, no one, as far as I know, is taking the trouble to reflect on the words with which Marx, in *The German Ideology*, sketches the difference between the alienated condition of the worker in bourgeois society and the finally liberated world of communist society. In bourgeois society, we read, human beings, transformed into prostheses for the machines, are forced to repeat the same meaningless gesture ten hours a day, six or perhaps seven days a week, and for life. But in the communist society promised at the end of the liberation struggles, anyone can do whatever they want, whenever they want: they can go fishing in the morning, write critical essays in the afternoon, and rear cattle in the evening. No to mention that one will be able to do one thing today and another tomorrow, based on one's mood. So the question is very simple: are we not those liberated workers? Of all the evils that afflict us, should we not bid farewell to at least one, namely alienation? We are obviously talking about the lucky part of the world, the part with a fully developed capitalist economy, in agreement with Marx's perspective. In this part of the world you can hand over the keys of your house to someone who contacted you on Airbnb, go to the airport with a car driven by an underemployed paramedic through Uber and take a low-cost flight to Barcelona where, in another house rented on Airbnb, you can binge watch ten episodes of a series while eating a pizza brought to you by a Deliveroo rider, who will probably also binge watch some Netflix as soon as he's done with his deliveries.

Indeed, in our Uberized world, the same person can have a shift in the middle of the night and then edit a Wikipedia entry - or more likely update their status on social networks - during working hours. And above all their work, if and when there is any, is nothing but an island in a sea of mobilization where

today you update your status and tomorrow you answer your emails, in the morning you attend a master class and in the afternoon you write a critical essay (probably very stupid and full of hatred, but then again the theorists quoted by Marx and Engels did not seem to shine for intelligence either), while in the evening you participate in a talent show. So, instead of alienation, which comes from performing repetitive gestures for hours over an entire working life, what we have today is the realization of communist humanity. Isn't this the way we live? And isn't this the paradigmatic life of communism? To say that it is not much of a life (while still being better than before), to deny that it is a realization of communism, to see it as a cruel manoeuvre of capitalism, is like blaming hate speeches (which result from the universal and sacrosanct freedom of expression) on the declaration of human rights.

Alienated o imbeciles?

Here, too, I imagine that some will evoke Plato and his cave: we are the prisoners, the victims of Imbecility (according to Plato), of Metaphysics (according to Heidegger), or of Alienation (according to Marxists, but not according to Marx), we seem fine in our Truman Show but we are actually alienated, etc. But, again, it is not so obvious that "Alienation" is the right answer here. Are we sure that we are alienated by Kapital? What if we are just poor imbeciles (which does not mean poor *and* imbeciles)? One suspects that the abuse of the term "alienation" might stem from a linguistic misunderstanding that is not always taken into account, and which, on the contrary, is perpetuated by misleading examples. "Alienated", in common parlance, means madman, maniac, someone who needs compulsory health care, demented ("mental alienation"), etc. And then, by extension, it refers to people like fashion victims, those who enjoy karaoke, the members of the "excited society", the victims of the cultural industry, and probably also violent football fans, those who kill passers-by because they look happy and so forth - they are all alienated.

But these alienations have nothing to do with Hegel and Marx. The first thing one should do is differentiate between alienated as mad and alienated as exploited. But most of the time this is not done, generating a confusion in which all, some more or less, are alienated and therefore all are victims, except for a few executioners who are very far away and are not part of our professional routines. The second thing to do is to distinguish between alienation and imbecility, which is and remains no less serious than alienation. It's significant that some people were surprised that I wrote an essay on imbecility, while they would have found it normal, even if a bit *démodé*, if I had written an essay on alienation, as if the latter were a serious philosophical problem and imbecility were something to laugh at. On the contrary, when factories disappeared, alienation ceased to be a serious thing, even though many continue to take it seriously, claiming that if one spends too much time watching porn it's because of Kapital, while the truth is that he is simply an imbecile who has nothing to do and, even more seriously, he has nothing to do because he is an imbecile. How can we deny, at this point, that imbecility is a serious thing, perhaps one of the most serious issues there are?

I guess very few people will agree with me on this view. Which, in my opinion, shows (if one excludes, for hermeneutic charity, that I am mad) that today more than ever we need a deconstruction. This may seem strange, after five decades in which we have spoken of nothing other than deconstruction, but as we know saying is not always the same as doing. In particular, there are categories that go through centuries unchanged, without anyone noticing or dreaming of deconstructing them. Those who observe these things are often accused of being integrated, if not optimistic. Yet consider social grooming, which consists in sharing the superstitions of one's own tribe, such as embracing a monumental anachronism that claims that alienation is still among us, offending the memory of those who really knew and suffered

it. Is there a greater and more comfortable form of integration than that? And, conversely, what optimism would there be in an anthropology that recognizes imbecility as the fundamental character of the human being, and as a power that, unlike alienation, is eternal, or at least attested in the whole of human history so far? The deconstruction that I propose therefore takes on the guise of philosophy of history (in short, things have always been like this, but for inscrutable reasons only the history of metaphysics was ever deconstructed) and of speculation. It affirms that *humanity is heading for the best, and that one can only come to different conclusions by imagining humanity to be much better than it is.*

Let's try to overcome our prejudice. We have just stopped deploring the lobotomized masses of television and we are already deploring the lobotomized masses of the mobile phone. Yet television and smartphones are technical inventions just like writing and books. And if in modern times only Quixote was alienated by books, it is a fact that among the ancients it seemed normal to attribute alienation to writing (just think of Plato's *Phaedrus*). Far from being a curse, technology is our fundamental resource. Humans, born defenseless and in need of prolonged parental care, as well as of an uninterrupted relationship with the social world, are naturally submissive and dependent. This circumstance is mystified by the hypothesis that man was born free and is now in chains. The human being is born in chains, which are, in the proper sense, the set of technical devices that allow him to survive, to mitigate his constitutive imbecility (in the philosophical and etymological sense of the word: *in-baculum*, without stick, without technology, defenceless, featherless, inept). Of course, man can (and must, from a moral point of view) become free, as long as he becomes aware of his chains and their constitutive nature.

In the same way, one cannot speak of alienation in reference to those who have long lost their chains, or perhaps whose chains are more like de Maistre's *chaîne souple*, which unites us all, not by enslaving us to God (as he thought) but by enslaving us to technology and society. Only with unforgivable foolishness can one compare these "chains" to the chains that once tied convicts to their benches. We travel, buy products, taste wines and foods that are incomparably better and more abundant than in the past, our life is longer than in any previous age, yet victimists claim that we are alienated, that is, that we travel, buy, taste, and often live as best we could by mere external coercion and forced by some implacable law. This is not the case, and here too the proof lies in the fact that we *pay* to travel, consume, taste, and live; if our performances were alienated, we would at least have the foresight to charge for them. The use of the notion of "alienation", from this point of view, constitutes a capital self-deception, because it attributes to humanity a virtuousness that it does not have by nature, and that it must conquer through technology and culture. Aesthetic pleasure, the need for the superfluous, vanity, the inability to keep still and do nothing, therefore mobilization, as well as dependence on technical prostheses (sticks, drugs, society): all this is Humanity, not Kapital. The mechanism at play is not that of Alienation, but precisely that of Imbecility, which is a much more useful category than Alienation, also because it does not absolve us of our faults by attributing them to Kapital.

The end of alienation, after all, is only the most conspicuous of the signs of communism as it was realized through the capitalism that characterizes our time. Other signs include the end of private society (from data ownership to goods that are used rather than owned), the new international (globalization), the classless society (differences exist in terms of income brackets, but not of class, and this is why society can only be known through big data), the stateless society (we see the privatization of state functions such as the mint, the army, the post), and the dictatorship of the proletariat (TV, press and now digital populism). I do not expect you to take my word for it, and I will devote long and - I fear - lengthy analyses in this book to demonstrate what I am now stating with seeming peremptoriness, but I beg you not to dismiss the hypothesis of realized communism just yet. Rather, dismiss all forms of realized communism that we have known so far, whose comical side has escaped us because of their overwhelming tragicness. It seems obvious to me that the winner between communism and capitalism is

the latter, because capital is the inventive and Faustian element, while communism is the bearer of needs that may or may not be satisfied, and which I think are better satisfied today than in Ulbricht's DDR, just to give an example. But it's Marx who first saw communism as strictly dependent on capitalism, and let us not forget that what most interested Marx, precisely because it embodied the real process of innovation and dynamics, was capitalism, and not communism.

What happened?

In a nutshell, this is what happened; in other words, this is the philosophy of history that I propose. In the late eighteenth century we saw the world of industrial capital: it produced commodities, generated alienation, and made lots of noise - the noise of factories. Then it was the turn of financial capital: it produced wealth, generated adrenaline and still made some noise, that of stock exchange sessions. Today a new capital is coming forward, the Documedia Capital: it produces documents, generates mobilization and makes no noise. This capital is richer than the financial one, and, what's more, it is having and will have an unprecedented impact on the creation of value, on social relationships and on the organization of people's lives - and I don't just mean their professional lives.

The revolution that generated this new capital comes from the encounter, made possible by the internet, between the constitutive power of documents, now enhanced by their boom and automation, and the horizontalization of communications in social media. We are witnessing a boom in the recording of acts and, consequently, in social objects: indeed, there have never been so many documents, including unintentionally produced ones. This mediality - again by virtue of the boom in recording - has determined a transition from one-way communication (from a sender to many receivers) to two-way and multi-way communication (every receiver is a potential sender). The result of all this is a new world that is the contemporary equivalent of the manufacturing industry of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the revolution, for now, is taking place in developed countries, but it will inevitably extend to the whole world, as was the case with the industrial revolution.

The new world that awaits humankind in the coming centuries resembles the one we know now as little as the industrial age resembled the feudal era. This is why it is so frightening and so hard to interpret. What's certain is that the new world will be characterized by the technological enhancement of human memory just as the industrial world was characterized by the mechanical enhancement of human strength. Everything will be recorded and archived, everything will turn into documents, statistics, knowledge, and humanity will become a dochumanity - i.e., a document-producing humanity (through a production of value and meaning). This new dochumanity will replace the commodity-producing humanity (let's call it prohumanity) that we have known in its industrial paroxysm and that seemed, but only seemed, to define the essence of the human being as condemned to toil and alienation ever since the biblical curse.

Not only is the documedia capital the true capital of our age but it also sheds light on the nature of every previous form of capital by revealing its document-like nature: over time, capital has always been nothing but a particular form of archive. And now that all social interaction can be archived, it is clear that what we are witnessing is the capitalization of social interaction and, more precisely, of what I call "mobilization," i.e. the system of actions we all perform on the internet. The documedia revolution, therefore, like all technological and social revolutions, enables the emergence of fundamental structures that have always been present in human civilization. This may seem like a wonderful, or at least interesting, thing, but it comes with many issues, not least because we naturally tend to see the present through the eyes of the past and thus to interpret the new world through the parameters of the old world of fields and factories.

On the one hand, there seems to be a total mobilization: a colonization of time is in place that seems to realize, albeit not too harshly, the fear of non-stop labour (quite simply, we may have to respond to an email at any time). Therefore, no moment in a worker's life can be free from alienation. On the other hand, however (and this is an evident contradiction), there seems to be no trace of alienation in any of this, since, as mentioned, the variety of tasks and the lack of schedules turn the worker (whom we continue to call by this old name only in lack of a better alternative) into the free labourer envisioned by communism. Therefore, mobilization is not a new version of technological alienation, on which millions of pages have been written - only to increase deforestation and thus the production and sale of chainsaws. Mobilization has generated revelation rather than alienation. The transformation underway has been a revelation of human nature. In fact, technology - far from distorting it - manifests human essence, because there can be no human being without technological supplements. If this is the case, then there is no reason to feel surprised that the enormous increase in the means of recording produced by the internet has brought about the gigantic social change that we have before our eyes. This is the dialectic that we must understand to begin with.

To consider the internet does not mean to deal with technology any more than to look at a sports center means to show interest in sports. To consider the internet is to deal with humanity: long before being a rational animal (the psychology of thought, as well as economics and everyday life, reveal how little rational we are by nature), and a social animal (sociality seems to be a precarious imposition dictated by evolutionary needs), man is a mobilized animal, and precisely through this mobilization he enters rationality and sociality, which he does in a non-sovereign, submissive, and subordinate fashion. Long before we reason, we act. And above all we act without reasoning through most of our lives. The ontology of social being is an ontology of action much more than an epistemology of reflection. This is why both the interpretations of human conduct in terms of rationality and the theories about the incidence of conceptual schemes on reality do not explain our behaviour. To understand human beings, one does not need to look inside them (according to the hypothesis of introspection), nor to simply study their behaviour (according to the hypothesis of behaviourism): one needs to understand what mobilizes them. Weak by nature and in need of parental care for far longer than all other animals, the human species has invented not only technology and culture but also, and above all, mobilization, i.e., the availability to a complex strategy that involves memory, responsibility, and time deferral. It is here that we must seek the origin of phenomena like religion, economics, law, and strategy.

Life without labour

The surplus value generated by the exploitation of human labour is destined to disappear because automation is now proving ever more profitable. Call centers are vanishing because of chatbots, and drones will soon replace both riders and tomato pickers. It won't make sense to produce shoes in Malaysia once they can come out of a 3D printer, home-produced and tailor-made. The growth in automation constitutes the foreseeable goal of the enormous enterprise of data collection which we often misunderstand and reduce to a mere question of privacy and artificial intelligence. Data is collected not so much to learn about our private beliefs but to foster automation processes in robotics and in civil and military domotics - processes that will soon allow us to reduce human labour in key sectors. The boom in recording breaks down all traditional distinctions and productive characterizations. As computers can do almost anything, so recording allows the conversion of anything into anything else: commodities become documents, commodities become documents and traditional activities disappear: you pay your traffic tickets at the tobacco shop, Amazon becomes a bank, Google a library and a travel agency, your

iWatch a diagnostic centre... This is the new capital we are dealing with. What is Amazon's major market? The boom in recording breaks down the notion of specialized activity that was once prevalent in capital, work and knowledge, and this derives from the same principle by which the computer is a universal machine that can replace all other machines - that is, a universal machine that represents recording as the essence of technology. Capital no longer needs specific realizations when it has fulfilled its essence: it can dismiss any form of prevailing activity and determined intermediation to present itself as the universal intermediation.

Once automation has become perfect (this moment has not yet come but is the end goal of the whole process) human agents will shift from the production of objects to the production of documents; that is, they will produce certificates of their own mobilization as users, consumers, creators, and communicators. We will thus witness the unveiling of the mystery of commodities. It will then be clear that documents manifest relationships between people (if they are strong documents; i.e., recordings of acts - even acts as simple as a like on Facebook) or the actions of a person (if they are weak documents; that is, recordings of facts, like our browsing histories). The reification that Marx attributed to commodities in industrial production - that is, the concealment and removal of relationships between people in favour of the production of impersonal objects - will come to an end, and thus the mystery of commodities will be solved. One could ask what's the point (excluding the cognitive gain) of recognizing the human origin of commodities (we appreciate organic products precisely because they carry the promise of the minimization of human intervention). Well, Marx has already anticipated the answer to this question in a passage to which not enough attention has been paid: "it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and wealth."

Document-commodities are extremely valuable because they talk about people, their tastes, predilections and beliefs. Therefore, they help create and, above all, distribute at a low price and without waste - i.e. in a fully efficient planned economy thanks to which Walmart and Amazon triumph where five-year plans have failed - all kinds of products: jogging shoes, capsule coffee, electoral programmes, books, television series, and so forth. This is why producers of traditional secondary commodities buy document-commodities at a high price and try to create their own platforms to keep track of consumption. The interaction between humans and machines - usually, that between me and my mobile phone, which takes place in times of leisure and consumption, not of labour, toil and alienation - thus proves to produce value precisely because data is valuable. So much so, in fact, that it is sold and bought.

Most services today still come at a price because of our reliance on a market in which classic paid labour survives. But the increase of automation will produce two results: lower costs of services and goods, and the disappearance of most productive labour. It is thus necessary to conceptualize consumption as labour, since labour-as-production will become a phenomenon too rare to be of any economic significance. Data is not a commodity in itself, but it is useful to sell goods or services. In fact, no exchange value - not even money - is a commodity in itself (actions are not commodities in themselves, nor is Chanel No. 5, nor is *War and Peace*...). But the value of data, which is relational like any other value in the social world, becomes enormous when the costs of production collapse as the result of automation. So the real advantages derive, as mentioned, from acquiring knowledge of the market for productive and distributive purposes.

Yet data is not the oil of the twenty-first century: it is not extracted from ancient deposits but produced by human mobilization in action; that is, by the existing free energy that manifests itself in actions and that is recorded in documents. It is thus much more appropriate to say that data is the *capital* of the twenty-first century. Also, data is much richer and more informative than financial capital because, while the latter limits itself to giving us price information, data tells us something that, by definition, is beyond all *Marktpreis*: who we are and what we want. People say that you get to know a person by what

they like on social media more than you would by spending an entire year with them, and I don't see why one should be surprised. Of course we all discover ourselves through our actions on the internet, but there is nothing new here (Goethe said: "you come to know yourself only through action") except that now we record every action: this is the difference.

In our essence, we are mobilized, we are consumers (I will justify later this blunt proposition) and we are capitalizers (we need to accumulate because, without energy, we die - we don't just remain static like machines). After all, it is precisely the urgency of consumption that makes production necessary, and on this basis one should defend the thesis that production and consumption are two sides of the same coin. To develop this dialectic one must reconceptualize capital as a universal board on which humankind records all human actions and whose effects become manifest in various ways: as capitalization of energy in technology, as capitalization of knowledge in epistemology (without capitalization of knowledge there can be no cultural progress), and as capitalization of social acts in the enormous board of the internet (which we must socialize, not erase). The data boom in documedia capital will, I think, free us from the exceptionalism of money by revealing that money is a document like any other and that any other document can, under the right conditions, perform the function of money as currency unit, means of exchange, and value reserve. As a result, we will finally be able to remunerate the labour of living.

Why aren't we happy?

If all of the above is true, then the question becomes inevitable: why aren't we happy?

First, because we worry about disappearing jobs and we are skeptical, with good reason, about their ever coming back. The conspiracy theorists who accuse Soros of organizing migrant deportations from Africa in order to lower wages and to reinforce the masters' reserve army of labour forget about two clearly relevant facts. For one thing, defining migration as the result of a new kind of slave trade is questionable because migrants, unlike actual slaves, are not in chains (to disregard this fact is to insult both the slaves of the past and the migrants of today) - plus, to state that there is no difference between being forced to leave your country in chains and leaving by choice is like claiming that we are all slaves, if only to our wishes. Likewise, it is questionable to speak of migrants as a reserve army when capital (supposing, for the sake of argument, that it bears intentionality) doesn't even want nor need an army of labour: it has no use for infantry or lieutenants (these days, even generals are at risk), and the few remaining corporals should find another job because drones will soon be the ones picking tomatoes.

Second, who said we should be happy? Saint Just once declared "let Europe learn that you want not a single unhappy man or oppressor on French territory," forgetting that he himself had caused great unhappiness to at least one man (i.e. Louis XVI, whom he beheaded). He then went on to say that "happiness is a new idea in Europe". Well, perhaps happiness is not a good idea after all and, most importantly, perhaps we are not made to be happy. Abd al-Rahman III, emir of Cordoba in the tenth century, only counted fourteen happy days in his life and, in *The Leopard*, the Prince of Salina's count is even more depressing: two weeks before and six after marrying, thirty minutes after the birth of his firstborn (but those were illusory because the son turned out to be a fool), a couple of conversations with his second-born before the latter's death (perhaps illusory as well, since they may have been mere monologues), and many hours spent in the observatory watching the stars (but these may have only been "some sort of anticipatory gift of the beatitudes of death").

Third, we kind of cheat. Technology asymptotically achieves the only possible equality between human beings, who are otherwise extremely unequal and often sociopathic. And to those who say that our true needs are quite different, I reply that it is not at all clear what our needs are (especially primary

ones), since human nature is bottomless and insatiable. While to those (and there are many, which is why mainstream philosophy of history is deceptive) who indulge in unfavourable comparisons between the past and the present (and thus display a lack in critical thinking), I propose one simple thought for consideration: no one would want to go back to life as it was even just forty years ago; we neither want the life of a line worker nor that of a miserable employee *à la* Akaky Akakievich. The same applies to family, civil society, and the state - all these are profoundly transformed, to the point that they perhaps no longer exist or are, rather, incorporated in and restructured by the documedia revolution. Thus, they will never come back - just like full employment -, and they won't be missed, much as traditionalists may lament their disappearance and wish for their return. The injustice we detect is not real injustice, and this is why no one would ever be willing to go back. We all perceive, whether unconsciously or in full awareness, the benefits of the current situation as compared to the past, but no one wants to admit it because that would entail acknowledging one's weakness, mediocrity, and appreciation for the state of affairs one so likes to criticize.

Fourth, and above all, we are ignorant and take issue with the wrong things. We ask ourselves (and the answer is of course always negative) whether sex robots will ever feel authentic feelings and whether interaction with them would be permissible or disrespectful of the human ideal, yet in the eighteenth century both aristocratic and peasant marriages had none of the internal purpose, respect, idealized sentimentality, and romantic sexuality that characterize bourgeois marriage today, i.e., the ideal that we posit as universal and timeless. Or we debate the reliability of algorithm-driven cars, perhaps while noting the disappearance of yet another professional figure: that of lawyers specialized in the defense of people accused of driving under the influence. More seriously, we denounce the lack of long-term projects caused by algorithms that are constructed for instantaneous calculation so as to reflect the immediate impulses of the anonymous multitude. And yet we forget that Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, and Pol Pot all had very powerful long-term projects. Mostly, though, we complain that these powerful machines (which are both fallible and perfect, objective and subjective) are nosy things that peek into our privacy. We construct *ad-hoc* authorities and focus our entire attention on privacy as if that were the whole problem, and we don't even consider that half of the population willingly renounce their privacy and give away their personal data to social networks, while the other half of the population mindlessly enables cookies because they so deperately need whatever information or service they are dealing with.

We overestimate humanity by seeing it as the bearer of an absolute freedom that is independent from all technology. Thus, we forget that Moses' tablets were inscribed with ten algorithms dictated by the Superior Programmer, and that (moving from myth to history) the events that led to the outbreak of World War I, or, for that matter, those that caused the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange, were all essentially algorithmic ("if x, do y"), even if computers had yet to appear on the face of the earth. Therefore, neither capital nor technology lead humanity astray: humanity is deeply flawed, and capital and technology (which are human products) reveal it for what it is. We have idealized human beings, considering them as far more just, reflective, and virtuous than they actually are and have ever been (notwithstanding, mind you, our tendency to claim that we, today, are worse than our ancestors), and this idealization continues to cause catastrophic misjudgments. This suggests that we won't solve the question of technology until we solve the question of humanity - the two have always been inseparable, ever since the age of clubs and fire - and that we won't solve the question of humanity until we solve the question of society and therefore of politics. As Aristotle suggested and Zuckerberg keeps proving: human beings are social animals.

The ideals of the new League of Nations are protection and transparency. Yet, human beings seem to not care about protection, and transparency concerns a process that is now opaque despite being once considered the transparent area *par excellence*. We cannot clarify this process through a couple of easy

procedures because, contrary to what many people think, it is not an intelligent process: when you look into it - into what, exactly? AI? Algorithms? The internet? - you can't see intelligence nor meaning but only a series of actions and electric discharges. After all, the same happens when you look into the brain: you can find neither thought nor, least of all, transparency in there. And if someone had suggested "It's the economy, stupid!" in 1919 or even 1929, we would have avoided the economic crisis that produced Nazism. Today, to be fair, the economy is at the centre of debate, but we're quite literally reckoning without the host because, instead of recognizing the radical economic and social transformations brought about by the internet, we pursue strategies like sovereigntism, which the internet has rendered impossible. Thus, while we implement the dictatorship of the proletariat, our anger is so fierce and widespread that we elect our governments only on the basis of our need to let off steam (we're angry at both the rich and the poor, and therefore at everyone). Two obvious factors influencing our behaviour are the increase in leisure time (it's difficult to write hate speech on the assembly line) and the unsociable character of human sociality. But the greatest factor is the enormous amount of labour provided through mobilization: unpaid labour that we don't even recognize as labour to begin with.

The mystery of labour

I have spoken about life without labour, which is our actual condition. Then I have spoken about getting paid to live, which is *not* our actual condition - and this is the banal cause of our unhappiness. Keynes once predicted a future when we would work fifteen hours a week, but now we feel like we're working fifteen hours a day even when we're unemployed. How can that be? We are facing a new mystery: the mystery of labour. Of course, when we ask to get paid to live we seem to be asking too much, but if our lives produce value, and if labour is the production of value, then why shouldn't we get paid for it? This new labour - despite no longer involving toil and alienation - produces wealth in a time when traditional labour has become a kind of useless sacrifice and machines (which Keynes thought would render fifteen hours a week sufficient) are not only available but also perfectly automatized (which is why, in principle, weekly labour is now entirely useless). So, we should be remunerated for it. And yet things are not quite so simple because, for all that, we are still as tired as if we were working fifteen hours a day, if only because life itself is labour and labour wears you out - even when the terms aren't those of physical exhaustion or repetitive alienation.

The point is that the documedia revolution involves a transition from labour to mobilization that solves the mystery of commodities but raises a new mystery - the mystery of labour. People work (i.e., produce value) through their mobilization on the internet, and therefore an exploitation is produced. However, we ourselves are commissioning our own mobilization, and therefore the responsibility is on us. We are thus both the exploiters and the exploited: we exploit ourselves. It is not very useful to look for the usual suspects and attribute the evil spell to Kapital and its strategies. This would only amount to unloading the burden onto others and to sparing ourselves the work of actual analysis. At first, not even Zuckerberg had seen that his real profit would come from users' data rather than advertisements, and it is ridiculous (or rather, wrongly nostalgic) to fear the panoptic action and espionage of the State - i.e. an entity that doesn't even matter much anymore. Rather than worrying about being spied on by The Coldest of All Cold Monsters (the Statal Panopticon) and being exploited by Kapital (both of which claims actually require a good deal of presumptuousness, like President Schreber's when, in his psychotic breakdowns, he imagined that God cared about his defecations), we should take advantage of the revelations that the revolution underway is presenting to us. Ultimately, the passage from labour to mobilization is bringing to light the intrinsically problematic nature of a concept that we usually take for

granted: “labour” itself. Indeed, while we take it for granted, “labour” has the same features that Augustine attributed to time: if nobody asks me, I know what it is; but if one asks me, plainly I do not know.

We should begin with a simple question: what is labour? To shake hands is to perform an intellectual labour that can, for example, signify the start of an employment contract, but nobody can deny that to shake hands is also to perform a kind of physical labour - since you perform it, indeed, with your hands (this applies to most intellectual work, which usually involves typing). Yet one could argue, with good reason, that often to shake hands is not to perform any kind of labour because it happens in a convivial atmosphere, except here the question becomes even more complex because the preservation of good relations can itself be labour (as when people shake hands during election campaigns or at the end of a business lunch). But then how can we distinguish working time from living time? What is the topic of disciplines like the sociology, psychology, and philosophy of labour? Traditional philosophy interprets labour as toil and alienation (philosophers are not the ones working anyway); instead, we should see labour in a broader sense as the production of value. But this doesn't mean that we can achieve realization and production without toil and alienation.

“Labour” is only one word, but it stands in opposition to many others (“leisure,” “unemployment,” “play,” “life,” etc.), and this suggests that what we usually call “labour” actually has many names, some of which differ greatly from one another. When faced with this complexity, we often overgeneralize and identify labour more or less with what our parents used to do in their jobs when we were kids. Then we take that kind of labour to be the norm, and since we have never experienced labour of that type (and since the past tinges our memories with nostalgia), our discussions often entail the assumption that we should go back to our parents' labour because that is the only “true” and “complete” one. Which, all things considered, is rather paradoxical, since for more than fifty years (and with excellent reason) leftist criticism has insisted upon the need to *overcome* the old organization of labour and, more generally, labour itself. Besides, this nostalgia of past labour is insincere. Who really wants to be a typist or an accountant, or to work on the assembly line like the characters in *Modern Times*? We must dismantle this nostalgia for lost jobs. Today's world longs for a past to which no one really wants to go back (and philosophers do so more than anyone else, as they risk far less than other people - unless they persist in working in factories like Simone Weil, provided they can even find that kind of job today). And what's worse is that this nostalgia is directed to a past that never actually existed. In this sense, one can't help but think of the situation Descartes describes in § 147 of *The Passions of the Soul*: “a husband mourns his dead wife, even though [as sometimes happens] he would be sorry to see her brought to life again.”

Problems and confusions have increased over time as a result both of the post-industrial and (more recently) documedia diversification of labour, and of the tendency to label as “labour” all kinds of activities - including all those intellectual and convivial activities that in the pre-modern era were categorized as leisure as opposed to servile toil and utilitarian tasks (this latter tendency is typical of modernity and is, in fact, correct in its recognition that labour is, above all, production of value). What's certain is that labour does not depend on our intentionality, on what we have in mind. Although the prevailing intuition is that in order to labour one must be aware of one's labouring, it doesn't strike anyone as odd that we call “labour” the tasks of loaded mules, plow horses, or sled dogs. But if we consider these activities as labour because they produce value then, again, we have to recognize that every production of value is labour. If we do that, though, we will have to acknowledge that (for example) a person watching porn is, in fact, performing labour - though unwittingly, unless they were a film critic - insofar as that activity produces data and therefore wealth. Accordingly, we would have to pay porn-watchers for the value they produce, because the more time they invest in that activity the more data (hence wealth) they produce, and unemployment (i.e., the lack of a traditional job and therefore of any

salary or wage) is, ostensibly, a necessary condition for the availability of time to invest. One may object that labour always involves alienation: if you have fun, it is not labour; if you follow your natural calling (as when you care for your children), again it is not labour; etc. But these assumptions are highly questionable and lead to conclusions as absurd as the claim that those who like their jobs don't actually work and therefore shouldn't be paid or the idea that mothers should "swap" their children to get paid as babysitters. In truth, this idea that labour involves alienation is itself inherited from modernity, but it also entails that payment is sufficient to transform anything into labour, which fact may provide us with an important conceptual advantage and ensure that, once mobilization is remunerated, then it will *ideo facto* become labour recognized as such.

This kind of oversaturation of labour is undeniable, and it is everywhere. If data is the most precious commodity, then every social interaction must be qualified as labour, provided that we record it and thus render it capable of producing value. I want to stress this point once again: if an act or fact is recorded (as, e.g., if my smartwatch tracks my sleep), then it produces value, and if it produces value, then it is labour (and therefore I have the right to be paid for sleeping, and mattress-testing becomes a less enviable profession). And I don't mean to insult the millions of people who still work with toil and alienation, but only to explain how even these jobs will disappear. In other words, I want to suggest that there is hope where we, in the West, see only despair. This perspective comes with many benefits: it teaches mobilized people that they have no reason to lament their past conditions of exploitation, it gives tangible hope to those who are still exploited today, and it guides both (those who were exploited in the past and those who are still exploited today) towards a conception of labour as consumption as well as production - a conception tied to a human trait so fundamental that no automation will ever be able to eliminate it.

We are not facing contradictions here (as Marx thought). We are facing revelations, i.e. the ways in which technology reveals the essence of social relations, which it makes possible and mediates. These revelations are about two contrasting phenomena. On the one hand, the vague perception that our labour is neither paid for nor acknowledged is causing growing discontent throughout our society. As the gap between data available to ordinary users and that available to corporations keeps increasing, we're observing the birth of what I propose to call "documedia surplus value," a quantitative and qualitative differentiation to which not enough attention has been paid. On the other hand, we're witnessing an average growth of individual well-being, and this is because the internet is really improving people's lives. This is the case in the West (at least), even though our impressions tell us otherwise. But then why do our impressions lie to us? In this sense, to insist that human beings are forever dissatisfied by nature is to grasp a general feature of humanity. However, we must acknowledge that the opposition between actual well-being and perceived discomfort cannot be blamed solely on human nature. The opposition is actually a warning that something mysterious, a specific circumstance, must be brought to light.

People complain because there are no jobs, and yet the level of well-being is far higher and more widespread than it was fifty years ago, if only because globalization and automation have significantly lowered the costs of consumer goods. People also don't like to admit that they have nothing to do all day, and so they say they're always busy and stressed out. There's no reason to think that they're lying, but if they aren't then this is proof of the wide unpaid mobilization of the natural human ability to produce value, which is taking place mostly thanks to the internet and its devices. This is where we should focus our attention. Alienation has bridged an otherwise unbridgeable gap ever since the doctrine of original sin was replaced by the belief that human beings are born perfect and free only to then be corrupted and led astray by society. This is why we keep talking of alienation even when there are no traces of alienation to be seen - i.e. even when we consume. In truth, alienation exempts us from

examining more complex structures, ones that do not allow us to dwell in the delusion that awareness will be enough to solve all of our problems.

If it is free, it means that you are the producer

Another refrain goes: if it's free, it means that you're the product. That's not true. If it is free, it means that you are the *producer*: you are not part of a slave economy, you are a worker whose labour must be recognized, and who therefore has no interest in portraying himself as a slave or, worse still, as a consumer good for other humans. After hailing it as the boundless prairie of human possibilities (without considering how uncomfortable life is in a prairie), today the internet is blamed for every evil, with the exception of the tennis elbow and the documedia surplus value. It is precisely on the latter that we should concentrate. We believe that between platform and user there is a fair exchange, in which the platform provides information and services free of charge and the user provides information in return, equally free of charge. Appearances are often deceiving, and the exchange is actually unfair because the data collected by the platforms are much more numerous, reliable, calculable and transferable than those collected by the user, who simply has access to data in the public domain, with very little competitive advantage. Also, the user can easily be a victim of manipulation or fake news, and above all does not have the technical and hermeneutical equipment to take advantage of the analysis of big data, which in many cases are accessible to the public, but not interpretable. So, although the documedia capital apparently requires very little labour (a few technicians, a few storekeepers, a few delivery men soon replaced by flocks of drones), it actually puts the whole world to work, and for free. If the industrial capital consisted of (paid) labour force and means of production (made available by the capitalist), the documedia capital consists of (unpaid) mobilization and the means of recording of this mobilization (bought by the mobilized). What the documedia capitalist provides are the means of interpretation, which really constitute the instruments of a cognitive capital that, however, does not consist, as one might think, in widespread knowledge but, on the contrary, takes advantage of the centralized and reserved knowledge of the total mobilization of the users.

This allows us to dispel a great illusion. The current era has been defined as that of knowledge workers, but it is not clear what such knowledge might consist of: true knowledge is that which is obtained from the analysis of data provided by the mobilized. So, we have knowledge produced by actors who do not know what they are producing, and who rather engage in a process of total mobilization that is not recognized as labour. This contradicts the hopes of the theorists of so-called "cognitive capitalism". For them (who really forgot about alienation), the growth of the internet was to coincide with a growth in the awareness of workers, who would become workers in knowledge, as such able to escape the mechanism of industrial surplus value. What has actually happened is completely different. Very few people are familiar with the operating principles of data collection, and in order to carry out their analyses they need tools capable of immense computing power. The others, i.e. the whole of humankind, as well as the platform operators themselves during their non-professional lives, are simply providers of free labour, a labour that in many cases they are not even aware of providing, and whose meaning they ignore. This does not depend on the malice of capital, but on the naivety of the theorists of cognitive capitalism, who have established an undue equation between the growth of technical competence and the growth of knowledge. As we know, the relationship, if there is one, is inversely proportional: the more technological competence grows, that is, the more things can be done automatically, the more epistemological knowledge decreases, since it is not necessary to know the underlying principles to obtain results.

But the false appearance of cognitive capitalism is amply compensated for by the reality of the documedia surplus value. After having reconceptualized labour as a production of value that is not necessarily accompanied by toil, alienation or knowledge, we must instead insist on the fact that the exchange between those who generate the data (the mobilized, the users) and those who collect and resell them (the mobilizers, the platforms) contains a particularly well hidden surplus value. Indeed, a serf knows very well when he is working for himself and when he is working for his master, since this entails cultivating two different fields. The industrial worker, on the other hand, does not know when he is working for himself and when for his master, since he is always doing the same thing in the same place. The mobilized person, then, does not even know he is working because he does not toil and is not alienated (unless you want to call alienation the parental saying "stop playing with your phone"). The lack of awareness of this process is emblematically indicated by a circumstance that deserves reflection. People show an often prejudicial hostility towards banks, to which they lend their money (and as we know, in Italy this happens more than in any other European country), and at the same time they show an equally prejudicial positivity towards internet platforms (which in some cases are even conceived as tools of direct democracy), not considering that in fact the data we give to these platforms are given *for free*. It is difficult to ignore the paradoxical nature of this situation.

Now, victimists who find toil and alienation even in mattress testing use their complaints to give vent to their discontent, which is one of the fundamental characteristics of the human being. However, in addition to being useless, these complaints are harmful, because they distract the mobilized from an impartial examination of their condition, which is not that of a worker who is tired and alienated, but of a consumer and user who may or may not be happy, but is certainly not alienated. The reference to this fetish-word "alienation", which offends the true alienation of those who break their backs under the sun, should be replaced by a different anthropology, or at least a new nomenclature. And this new nomenclature is emerging today, at a time when in many parts of the world need gives way to consumption, and therefore reveals aspects of human nature that were previously reserved for the elite, and erased in everyday life by the struggle for survival. So, once we understand that alienation is no longer a viable key to read the present, and that it is indeed a source of serious confusion, the best thing is not to go and look for alienation even where there is no trace of it, but rather to elaborate new categories to read the present.

What should we do (all day)?

For once let's take the question "Chto delat'?" not in Lenin's sense, but in the more prosaic sense of "what should we do?", and not just tonight, but on a working day, now that machines do everything for us. To answer this question we have to abandon anachronistic passwords (Taylorism, Fordism...), as they only feed a victimistic imagination that makes the new form of labour incomprehensible, generating resentment and imaginary enemies while losing sight of the real enemies, and especially of real opportunities. We have to break free of a great misunderstanding that consists in putting together, as if they were equivalent, the fear that machines could take over and the fear that they might take work away from humans. Will robots steal our jobs? Of course they will. Will they take over? In principle, no. The two things do not go hand-in-hand and we are wrong to associate them. In this respect, this misconception creates a chain of problems. Ethical issues often attributed to robots hide work-related concerns. The latter are much more important and well-founded than the former, except that for some reason we often assume that robotization is a bad thing, while for example the automation of domestic work, where talking servants (often female family members) are replaced by silent ones, is a sign of

progress and enlightenment, as demonstrated by the home automation promoted by Thomas Jefferson in Monticello for impeccable humanitarian reasons. And if machines will not take over, it is because they do not have a body, which is what makes us hasty, needy, bored, irritable, endowed with fears and purposes. These very flaws are the basis of our possibilities, our "what is to be done", which can be summed up in three words: invention, mobilization, consumption.

Let's start with the rarest and most difficult step: *invention*. Think of painters, who for millennia have had an obvious function, guaranteed by their manual ability to produce representations. At a certain point, machines entered the world of the living labour of craft, or rather, they were no longer just mills, looms and workshop devices but came into everybody's life, making handcraft obsolete. In particular, photography was invented in the mid-nineteenth century, depriving painters of their function. What could they do now? As we have seen, they have come up with many things to do indeed, and the art market has never been as thriving as it has been since the photo-camera was invented. Paradoxically, but not too much, it is the photographers who have disappeared, not the painters. The former, in fact, exercise a technical competence that is becoming increasingly easy, widespread and accessible, because it is now largely automated and made available by our smartphones. Painters, on the other hand, must think of new rules, or simply how to break the rules, how to shock, how to surprise - things which do not necessarily have to be done by a single inventor. One such surprise, against the producer's expectations, was the fact that mobile phones were used more to write (text, type) than to speak (this shift, which Jobs noticed, allowed for the birth of smartphones). Where is the human contribution here? In production? Obviously not: text messages have a human origin but were intended for more modest and functional purposes, just like Duchamp's urinal. The human contribution consists rather in consumption, which is the manifestation of needs and desires, and therefore entails giving objects a new purpose. In other words, the human factor is the creation of a teleology which, far from being suppressed, is strengthened by technology. That is to say, it is true that technology provides means and not ends, but the increase in means involves a multiplication of ends, that is, an infinitely greater human flourishing than that dictated by scarcity.

If invention is for the few - and is rare - what do the many do? And what do the few do when they are not having a stroke of genius? They get restless, and for the first time in history that restlessness is not lost. For this reason, the second element of living labour in the documedia age is *mobilization*. Humans love to be mobilized, and the ongoing free mobilization on the internet is a clear proof of that. Only part of this mobilization is remunerated, very well when it comes to successful influencers, very poorly when it comes to performances like those of the Amazon Mechanical Turk, which serves to train artificial intelligence through the use of human agents. The misunderstanding here lies in thinking that only part of the mobilization produces value (much, in the case of the influencer, little in that of Mechanical Turk), while it is mobilization in general, as a producer of data, that generates value and demands to be remunerated. In particular, unemployment or the reduction of working hours, which in twentieth-century analyses appeared as an increase of free time to invest in other activities, has taken on a profoundly different meaning. In fact, today there is no free time whatsoever, because we are caught in a process of mobilization, which primarily involves interaction with internet platforms.

But this means, at the same time, that mobilization is not unproductive unemployment but involves the production of value, no less (and even more, from a qualitative point of view) than invention. The manager guided by the wolf of Wall Street does not necessarily produce more value in his professional activity than he does by wandering around TripAdvisor to reward himself for his hard work, around Amazon looking for self-help books to improve his performance or around Tinder - or even YouPorn - to console himself for his failures. *Così fan tutte*, after all. Each of us, working in the canonical sense or lazing about in the no less canonical sense, produces data that we did not produce before: this

is what I have called "mobilization", i.e. the incessant activity that we carry out on the internet. It might be ultimately a waste of time for us, but not for those who know how to collect data and interpret them. Because those data, produced by people who are convinced that they are producing nothing or anyway something else, answer essential questions for the production and distribution of goods: who can be interested in this product? Where? To do what? In what quantity? At what price? Now that automation has solved the problem of production, the greatest corporate value is no longer access to manpower, but to customers.

Beneath or above invention and mobilization there is something even more fundamental: *consumption*. This is something that we cannot do without, on pain of death, and that we therefore do as long as we live. Armies, which in World War II were made up of millions of people, are now reduced to limited numbers of mercenaries supported by drones. Factories have met the same fate a few decades earlier. Stock exchange sessions, which used to be a picturesque and noisy collection of shouts, are now replaced by algorithms that work 24 hours a day. The only area where the human contribution has not diminished is the sphere of consumption: stadiums continue to be full, and so do museums, beaches, trains, planes and restaurants. This situation is not exactly new, since it presents significant similarities with late ancient life, when huge masses of consumers in Rome and Constantinople lived without production needs, since the functions that today are carried out by automation were then solved by the slave economy. The urban masses of consumers, however, had only a marginal economic utility, since they produced political consensus. The documedia revolution, on the other hand, made it possible to transform consumption into not only political but also economic value, drawing free energy from consumption and from non-finalized activities. This free energy in itself produces value for the internet platforms, and determines precisely the genesis of an enormous documedia surplus value.

Consumption is a German master

With the documedia revolution the distinction between work and its opposite, between *negotium* and *otium*, has become extremely problematic: the internet has blurred the lines between intellectual labour and manual labour, as well as between working time and living time. If we rid ourselves of this misunderstanding, we will understand that today's supposed non-labour could positively be recognized as a real job, indeed the only irreplaceable job that machines have left us. Nietzsche placed the future of the human in self-surpassing, but unfortunately he was reticent as to how to do so, leading to deplorable conflicts based on the superiority of certain human types over others. More cordially and democratically, I would suggest that self-surpassing is within everyone's reach, and it is offered by the accessorization (or, more philosophically, the supplementation) that technology offers to humans through consumption - which has the advantage of not taking place in trenches and under storms of steel, but in air-conditioned supermarkets. The hero of transvaluation is not Zarathustra, but the real or presumed need (it is a precautionary measure to focus on need rather than on intelligence, heroism and holiness: it's much more of a sure bet). Creativity, I repeat, is something rare and reserved for the few. What is left to others (like myself) is the production of value both by consuming goods, and by generating data on the internet. This is an exquisitely human labour because it realizes the dream of Marx's liberated and humanist man, and involves neither toil nor constraint. Most of all, it is within the reach of any imbecile, and therefore promises social peace. The only thing it requires is the effort of a theoretical elaboration capable of transvaluing consumption into labour, and therefore a political elaboration capable of making the transvaluation operative.

A well known characteristic of the human being is that it depends on the gaze of the other, and it would be really difficult to determine, in this dependence, where need ends and where desire begins. Again, recourse to alienation is a way of avoiding the problem, refraining from analysis and looking for an easy culprit. In the context of this need for recognition, which pushes humans onto social networks, and of the need for knowledge, which pushes companies to collect data, let us not condemn the situation (which is useless) but rather ask ourselves: why should data be bad? Knowledge is always good, ignorance is always bad. But there is something even deeper than the dependence on the other's gaze, and it is precisely consumption. Man is what he eats, so man is what he consumes. That's the basic human structure. Then there may or may not be very sophisticated superstructures, but the starting point is always consumption. As an organism that must be fed, the human being constitutes the entelechy of the entire system, and I say entelechy, that is, internal finality, because it is the purpose of the entire capitalist system, made to respond to consumption and if possible to promote new needs.

A philosophical investigation into the transformation underway would be arbitrary if it did not seek to answer fundamental questions that, while arising in the present day, indicate an essence that transcends it. The first of such questions is: what is a human being? My answer to this question involves the notion of "responsiveness", which indicates our specific nature as beings that are midway between organisms and mechanisms, and that are structurally marked by consumption. It is not so much that the human being is *ni ange ni bête*. rather, it is an automaton subjected to the reversible rhythms of the mechanism, and at the same time a body subjected to the irreversible rhythms of the organism. If production, as the mechanical part of the human being, is destined for automation, consumption, as the organic part of the human being, cannot be automated in any way, for reasons that are not ethical but ontological. In short, I can imagine a machine that manufactures sushi and a drone that distributes it, but a machine that consumes sushi is nonsense, as it would be nonsense to produce sushi in the absence of sushi consumers. Consumption is not just the cooperation of users in production: it is the ultimate goal of every production. If all of a sudden humanity were to find itself free of needs to be satisfied through consumption, the whole industrial, financial and documedia apparatus would implode. The (relative) balance between production and consumption has so far been made possible by labour as remunerated toil and alienation. But we must prepare for a (fast or slow) transition whose end result will be this: the only labour will be consumption, and it will be crucial to pay for it, so as not to face the worst catastrophe that the history of humanity can imagine. And this consumption actually produces value, i.e. data, while the salaried idleness of the waiters of the DDR or of the Italian state functionaries did not produce economic value, but only political consensus. Within consumption comes the cure, which is precisely a form of consumption. Once we have recognised this fact, we'll see that it's false to claim that the ageing population does not produce work; on the contrary, it generates a growing quantity of needs and consumption.

What is the priceless part of humanity, which exceeds every *Marktpreis*? What appears to be priceless is what is in fact most appreciated and valuable: the need that gives meaning and direction to the whole system and puts it in motion. It is the other face of capital, and it only makes sense in the light of accumulation. Once we understand this, we will realize why a growth in recording has so powerfully changed the world we live in (and this change is nothing compared to the world our children will live in). And we will be able to conceive policies of justice and welfare, with knowledge and not with fear. And to look at the automation of labour that awaits us not as a leap in the dark, but as the possibility for the whole of humanity to enjoy the same *otium* that the perfect automation of the many (the slaves) once allowed the very few. Seeing the excellence of the human being in consumption may seem provocative, but there are solid reasons in favour of this thesis, which appear philosophical only because they refer to apparently higher arguments. Being for death, which for Heidegger was the characteristic trait of the

human animal compared to non-human animals, is in fact what distinguishes any animal from an automaton. The point is very simple, and it relates to the crucial fact that organisms have a metabolism while computers do not: banally, for computers the alternative is between on, off and then, potentially, on again, while for organisms the choice is only between alive or dead. The finalism of bodiliness depends on the fact that life has a direction, because it follows an irreversible process: at the end one dies and is buried. If, by hypothesis, a shut-down computer was buried next to us, in a dry and safe place, the following year it could be turned on again, while there is no way to revive the dead, as for them the on/off alternative is solved *a divinis* - it is always the latter option.

Unlike beavers, but like mobile phones, human beings can enhance their performance through mechanical processes and technologies provided with repeatable procedures (I can watch a football match as many times as I want). But, unlike mobile phones and just like beavers, they are composed of an organic part, subject to irreversible processes. The goal scored at that football match took place only once, and whoever scored it will age and then die, while a mobile phone dies only metaphorically, and no one would seriously think about burying it. This fact changes everything: owning a body means having needs, pursuing goals, being aware that time is limited and therefore precious (could a computer ever be bored? I don't think so, but we know how often we get bored). Consumption takes place in an organism inserted in a technological context. A mechanism may not be powered for a long time, and nothing happens, while in the same situation an organism will fall into irreversible entropy. But as said, with humankind the phenomenon of consumption takes place in an organism connected to a technological and social system with effects - which depend on what I have said about needs - of accumulation, supplementarity, and superfluity that give rise to culture and symbolic capacity. Humanity, just like consumption, is therefore a mixture of organism (which provides needs, i.e. internal purposes) and mechanism, namely technical enhancements with external purposes that find meaning in the organism. A circle is established between organism and mechanism: the organism determines the goals and urgencies, the mechanism (as an external or internal technique, like intelligence) realizes them, enhances them, and finally determines them (social needs).

This is where we find the foundation of twenty-first century welfare. Keynes' simple intuition, which underpins the twentieth-century welfare model and has allowed the left to socialize the surplus value of industrial capital, was to consider savings and investment as two sides of the same coin. If you look at capital as a whole, you have to overcome the moralistic belief that those who keep their money in the bank are rewarded because they are saving it. It is not so: they are rewarded because they make money available to be invested, while supporting long-term consumption, which is the ultimate goal of any process of production of goods. And investment was the best way to obtain what - in the era of nascent automation - was the fundamental objective of welfare: full employment. Keynes wrote that in order for that to happen, the carefree individuals of tomorrow were absolutely necessary to provide the *raison d'être* for the serious and thoughtful people of today. In other words, you save today only to spend tomorrow, and it makes no sense to save without spending. If I put my money inside the mattress and this mattress is found centuries later, mine won't be seen as a means for capitalization, but simply as a bizarre way to pad a mattress.

The same must apply to the general relationship between production and consumption. Production takes place in view of future consumption, and the only animals really capable of consumption are humans. In fact, on the one hand, they are capable of designing and interacting with machines that enhance production. On the other hand, they share with non-human animals the urgency of metabolism. The needs dictated by metabolism are annoyingly preemptory, cyclical and imperative. And the radical dependence of production on consumption emerges from this preemptoriness. We can easily see that in the real estate market. It doesn't make much sense to build houses if the population

decreases, so the *raison d'être* of house-building must be sought precisely in the need to protect oneself from the elements. Imagine a humankind that had no need for houses, restaurant lunches, mineral water, ties or books. Such a humankind has indeed existed, but it has disappeared millennia ago. Once it is recognized that consumption is the very essence of the human being, one realizes that between the production of goods and the production of value through consumption there is not simply a formal or nominal equivalence, but a profound and decisive reality. Plato expressed this very well, pointing out that the judgement on the validity of production must be made by the consumer: the quality of a saddle is judged by the rider, not by the saddler. For Plato, as well as for anyone until the advent of perfect automation, the centrality of consumption was hidden by the need for production. But as production moves towards total automation, it becomes clear that everything we have around us, and that makes our lives longer and more enjoyable than those of our ancestors, came not so much from Prometheus who stole fire from the gods, but from Epimetheus who wanted to roast a sausage, and for this very reason felt the urgency of mastering fire.

Who's to pay?

"From each according to his ability" is the first part of the biblical saying that constitutes the first precept of Marxism. As is well known, it is rather difficult to achieve. But what is even more difficult - indeed apparently impossible - to realize is the second part: "to each one according to his needs". This principle, which was already challenging at the time of Jesus Christ, seems absolutely unfeasible in this age of unleashed Turbo-capitalism. But are we sure that it is so? In my proposal for Digital Welfare I hope to demonstrate that, if we adequately understand our time and its characteristics, we will see that we are indeed in the most suitable conditions for the realization of a communism (or Christianity) of needs.

At this point, one might ask a question. Who should pay in this virtuous circle for which humans invent uses, establish behaviors and needs, and above all consume, while machines produce and distribute? The answer is obvious: those who accumulate the greatest surplus value, namely the data-collection corporations that give us information that is worth 1 (what's the weather like in London, what happened with the Notre Dame fire...) and in return collect information that is worth 1000: how many people have searched for the weather in London or the fire of Notre Dame, what other people have looked for, where they were located, and so on, classifying users not for surveillance but for sale purposes. Furthermore, in addition to the surplus value generated by the asymmetry of data, there is also the surplus value generated by the asymmetry of calculation. We are exposed to data overload, Watson is not - indeed, it can give meaning to data that are completely irrelevant from a human point of view because they are incalculable.

The socialization of this surplus value constitutes the purpose of digital welfare, which must be the goal of the left in the twenty-first century just as the redistribution of industrial capital was the ('achieved') goal of the left in the twentieth century. But to do this, it is necessary to analyse the ways in which documedia surplus value is formed as well as the new types of mobilization as production of value that will have to replace labour as toil and alienation. The basic intuition that underpins the welfare of the twenty-first century consists in considering consumption as the only non-automatable element. This element has always been the objective and the meaning of production and automation, but now it produces value (data) at the same time as it is exercised, thus becoming value itself. I repeat, we have to consider consumption and production as two sides of the same coin, just as Keynes's essential intuition was to consider savings and investment as two sides of the same coin. When voters who do not want to

work (and are not too interested in earning well) understand that they can be paid to consume, and those who want to earn well understand that the left favours consumption more than any other political power, with no union problems because most work is done by machines, the vote will return to the left not for some ephemeral electoral spell, but for structural reasons.

What I am proposing is not a carefree left, but a left that finally thinks, and is capable of truly reflecting on the difficulties that humanity is going through today and of conceiving effective solutions - which must be different from the past ones, because the world is different. On the one side, there is a noble wing of the left that is attentive to principles and rights: it is necessary and indispensable, but unfortunately easy to guillotine with a tweet against migrants. On the other side there is a conspiracy wing that speaks of exploitation and alienation as the result of Kapitalist manoeuvres, expressing a protest that has been capitalized by the right. In the middle, there is a third part that denounces the disappearance of work, except that it refers to twentieth-century work. Well, to the conspirators I simply say that there is no such thing as the evil Kapital because capital is all of us, who are part of a more complex and interrelated social world than in Marx's time. To the human rights aristocrats, I say that dealing with reality is the only way to protect said rights. And to the third side worried about work I say that the problem is indeed that of work, only that work has not disappeared, but has radically changed, and it is precisely this radicality that we now need to understand the present.

Now that the futile question of "who controls privacy and data ownership" is being replaced by the much more meaningful question of "who pays for the production of data? And how do we make them pay?", we need to develop a strategy for the taxation and redistribution of documedia surplus value. This is not a utopia: in China it is already happening, thanks to the power of a billion mobile phones and an authoritarian government that has nationalized internet platforms. Of course, it will be necessary to make this principle fit with the makeup of liberal countries, and in this regard there are some indications to consider.

First, fighting against technology by proposing to turn off mobile phones is a lost battle, just like all battles against technology and progress. As far as we know, the only nation that ever closed its door to progress was Japan in the sixteenth century, and that was because of rather un noble ideals, namely because it was aware that technology would put an end to feudalism. But we also know that after 1867 these doors were reopened, opened wide indeed. Therefore, throughout human history there is not a single example of rejection of progress, except, in fact, sixteenth-century Japan, *Orlando furioso* (Orlando destroys Cimosco's blunderbuss) and other examples of fantasy literature, including the theories of degrowth and the deprecations of the alienation of modern man in the age of technology.

Secondly, it is not consumers from all over the world who must unite, but European governments (i.e. the representatives of half a billion data producers, not little states squabbling with each other), driven by the interest of guaranteeing social peace in a context in which the growing disappearance of traditional (alienating and tiring) jobs is generating conflict and populism. It is they who must negotiate with the platforms a redistribution of the profits produced through mobilization, just as they negotiated with traditional industries in the past. To prohibit profiling, on the contrary, would be an impracticable and therefore useless precept. To conceptualise the present using examples from the past, one could conceive of Europe as a large factory, made up of platforms, and Europeans as workers who produce value, i.e. data, without being paid.

Thirdly, the taxation of documedia surplus value has a much stronger chance of success than a tax on capital. Because while the possibility of capital taxation would mean that capital would be transferred to tax havens, the taxation of documedia surplus value would rely on non-transferable capital, i. e. the data produced on a daily basis by mobilized Europeans. Without the knowledge that comes from this mobilization, the entire production system would be paralyzed just as it would have been in the case

of a general strike in the days of traditional industry. If the platforms were to decide to resist to the bitter end in the face of the mere possibility of a general strike (because in fact there is no need for such a strike to actually take place), it would be sufficient to proceed with the nationalization of the platforms following the Chinese model.

Fourthly, the resulting mobilization salary would have a triple advantage over a solution like the citizenship income: it would not be a subsidy, but a salary to compensate for an activity that is actually carried out, i.e. the great mobilization that produces data, and therefore value, on the internet; it would not feed the black economy: if one were a mafioso, and used pizzini instead of mobile phones, one could not access the mobilization salary; and the money would not come from the coffers of a very indebted state, compromising the future of future generations, but would be true new wealth that would enter the virtuous circle of the economy, by in turn relaunching consumption.

Fifthly, and above all, the creation of a mobilization wage by sharing a collective profit is a necessary but not sufficient condition for digital welfare. Indeed, it is necessary to conceive the labour of the twenty-first century no longer as the time-frame between education and retirement but as an alternation - or even simultaneity - between moments of production and moments of training, which in the virtuous circle that would come about would be guaranteed by consumption and mobilization, as well as by the value that derives from them. In short, the surplus value would be destined to create better citizens, who are the essential counterpart of any welfare worthy of the name. Alaska has paid its citizenship income with the profits of oil and it is said that data are the oil of the twenty-first century. But, as I said before, the analogy between data and oil is misleading, because dinosaurs have disappeared and we can do nothing about it, while data producers are here, they are human beings, they have spiritual as well as material needs, and they must share one world without coming to devastating conflict. So it is, and so it must be, from a cosmopolitan point of view, as Kant explains in *Perpetual Peace* (1796): “since the earth is a globe, [men] cannot scatter themselves infinitely, but must, finally, tolerate living in close proximity, because originally no one had a greater right to any region of the earth than anyone else.”