

THE PLACE OF HUMAN BEINGS IN THE INFOSPHERE ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEW PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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Abstract: On the basis of the philosophical tradition of the last century, we can define philosophical anthropology as that discipline which adopts a philosophical reflection on the human being based on scientific knowledge and beyond any metaphysical–theological vision, in order to offer a plausible view of the “place” occupied by human beings in nature (in being) and, contextually, a theoretical basis for their ethical orientation. The place determined and occupied by human beings in the cosmos is to be understood as a free and continuous action on the context and as an interaction between the subjects involved (nature included).

The issue of the infosphere can be dealt with as an issue of philosophical anthropology. In the case of the “place” of the human being in the infosphere there is, indeed, the risk that the context created is such as to progressively limit the freedom of the agents involved, who would no longer have an open world (*Welt*) in front of them in which it is possible to act freely, but rather an environment (*Umwelt*) to which one must necessarily (and simply) react. The challenge is to think and ethically design the infosphere while constantly keeping the conditions open for a free “positioning” of human beings and therefore for an action not necessarily bound by the context.

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In his book *The Fourth Revolution* and then again in *The Logic of Information*, Luciano Floridi insists that philosophy in the current era, that is, in the midst of an unstoppable digital revolution that particularly concerns information and communication technologies (ICT), must rethink its own assumptions, as well as review the specific fields of its reflection and consequent methodologies. In particular, several times Floridi puts forward the idea that philosophy must be understood above all as “conceptual design”, that is to say as «an activity aimed at creating, improving, and adapting our semantic capital (our conceptual artefacts), in order to give an answer to open questions, that is [...] to those questions to which it is not possible, in principle, to provide answers in empirical or mathematical terms» (Floridi 2020a: 113)⁽¹⁾. In this sense, philosophy assumes a decisive role precisely in correspondence with an event that is completely new in quality and dimension, and which cannot in any way be inserted into old categories, but rather demands a new definition and therefore a general re-conceptualization.

Now, beyond the specific meta-philosophical proposal put forward by Floridi⁽²⁾, which certainly deserves a careful and broader reflection aimed at clarifying whether philosophy can actually be resolved in the so-called “conceptual design”, it seems necessary to dwell on the general consideration advanced by the philosopher, namely the idea that an overall rethinking of the mission of philosophy is required, precisely in consideration of the epochal changes caused by the spread of digital ICT that overwhelm and literally “envelop” the lives of all of us. This rests on two fundamental assumptions: on the one hand, as has been said, on the incontrovertible fact that we are faced with an epochal revolution of hardly negligible dimensions and which impacts on our lives in a pervasive and binding way and, on the other, on the assumption — this certainly more questionable — that philosophy must direct its energies and resources first of all to understanding (or reconceptualizing) actuality, in agreement, one could say, with the Hegelian claim that «philosophy is its own time comprehended in thoughts» (Hegel 1820).

Therefore, in the face of the digital revolution, Floridi feels that a general rethinking of the categories of philosophy is required to the point that its sub-disciplines should be redefined in consideration of the change of their objects of reference as well as of the process from which these new objects emerge: the

(1) See also Floridi 2019.

(2) A proposal that is in some respects in continuity with the theses of Deleuze–Guattari 1991.

philosophy of history should therefore turn into a sort of philosophy of hyperhistory, the philosophy of nature should convert into a philosophy of the infosphere, and philosophical anthropology should turn into a philosophy of the “fourth revolution”, *in primis* understood as that further step taken, through the large-scale introduction of AI, on the path — reconstructed by Freud — of the so-called «narcissistic wounds inflicted on man by science» (Freud 1916).

This articulation of philosophical knowledge based on the redefinition of the object under investigation is based on a strong fundamental assumption, according to which the new digital information and communication technologies highlight the dependence of (human) reality on its own informational character. And thus history, understood as being «synonymous with the information age» (Floridi 2014: 5), which comes after a prehistory where not even rudimentary technologies of communication and information (such as writing) existed, prepares the ground for hyperhistory, in which digital ICTs «record, transmit, and, above all, process information, increasingly autonomously, and human societies become vitally dependent on them [ICT] and on information as a fundamental resource in order to flourish» (Floridi 2014: 6). The same goes for the hoped-for transition from a philosophy of nature (here in fact exclusively understood as “ontology”) to a philosophy of the infosphere, a transition that is legitimate only to the extent that the informational character of reality is assumed to be decisive, since otherwise one could easily misunderstand the boldness and expediency of the proposal as an unjustified delimitation of the ontological field. Therefore, if we accept Floridi’s suggestion and focus in particular on the rethinking of philosophical anthropology as the “fourth revolution”, understood both as a re-dimensioning of the centrality of the human being and as a “fourth economic revolution”⁽³⁾, as a growing interpenetration between the physical, digital and biological worlds that takes place in societies that have already entered the so-called hyperhistory then it may be useful to reconsider the discipline, its theoretical assumptions, and its methodology to verify both what contribution this tradition can offer to the understanding of the essence of human beings in the current era, and the possibility of it offering a key for an ontological, epistemological, and ethical “orientation” within the new reality with which we are dealing. Here we are simply dipping our toes into a general discourse that certainly deserves

(3) With the expression “fourth economic revolution” we in general refer to the sum of advances in artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, the Internet of Things (IoT), 3D printing, genetic engineering, quantum computers, and other technologies.

a very different and much more in–depth examination, however we can — I believe — lay the foundations for a broader and more fruitful reflection precisely by investigating some fundamental aspects that are at the basis of modern philosophical anthropology, which took its first steps in the 1920s.

Broadly understood as that discipline that adopts a philosophical reflection on the human being based on scientific knowledge and beyond any metaphysical–theological vision, anthropological philosophy can offer a plausible view of the “place” occupied by human beings in nature (in being) and, contextually, a theoretical basis for their ethical orientation.

According to this definition, which summarizes the novelty of philosophical anthropology in the last century and differs from a generic philosophical reflection on the human essence, something that is constantly present in the history of thought, the application to the current context and to the “fourth revolution” (in its dual meaning) requires a clarification of no small importance. In Floridi’s proposal, which we here welcome as a starting point, philosophical anthropology understood as the “fourth revolution” could legitimately be assumed to be a form of research aimed at investigating and highlighting the “position” of the human being in that particular context, namely the *infosphere*, within which, in addition to human beings, there are other informational organisms (called “inforG” by Floridi) equipped with an AI increasingly capable of autonomously recording and processing data. This definition requires some further clarification. First of all, of the idea that the human being’s “position” (a term which, as we will see, certainly has a passive meaning referring to the right “placement” of the human species within the wider sphere of the living, but which also has the active meaning of “positioning” and alludes to the active/positive capacity of the human being to “take a position” within a context/environment, thus determining and modifying it) must take into account the progressive abandonment of the presumed centrality of the human being. Secondly, regarding the (necessarily provisional) definition of the reference context, namely the *infosphere*. Here, as we will see, it is necessary to examine the deeper meaning and legitimacy of the transition of the philosophy of nature to a philosophy of the *infosphere* to which Floridi refers, since a crucial passage is involved here in order to understand the peculiarity of the human being in relation to his position in a given environment and his openness to a world that is an environment to be determined, structured and reconstructed.

As regards the first issue, following Freud, one can think of philosophical anthropology as that discipline which, in defining today the essence of the human being as the so-called “narcissistic wounds inflicted on man by science”, cannot be ignored. After the Copernican revolution that had removed humanity’s illusion of being at the center of the universe, Darwin’s evolutionism helped to erode the belief that the human being was at the center of creation, being indeed the result of a process of natural selection common to every other living species. Then discovery of the unconscious took away the human being’s conviction of having clear and integral access to his mental contents and consequent domination over his choices. Finally, following this reconstruction, we can spot a fourth “narcissistic wound” in the form of the wide-scale introduction of artificial intelligence, which prevents the human being from thinking of himself as belonging to the only living species endowed with intelligence — even though this faculty is not very easily defined given its complexity and its different articulations. A new form of philosophical anthropology must therefore reconsider the essence of the human being on the basis of this progressive downsizing and in a particular context such as that described by the infosphere. In fact, if we can speak of a discipline that investigates the *Sonderstellung*, the special position, of the human being, then an investigation into the context which, from the perspective we are following, seems to be constituted by the so-called infosphere cannot be avoided.

As mentioned, twentieth century philosophical anthropology is aimed at investigating what the “place” of human beings is in nature, or if we want, in the cosmos (that is, in being in general).

The possible replacement of the context, that is of the concept of “nature” (cosmos or being) with the notion of infosphere, directly depends on Floridi’s claim that philosophy of nature today can only be a philosophy of the infosphere: this is an assertion that rests on a by no means obvious extension of the concept of infosphere, which depends on the idea, indeed yet to be demonstrated and in any case dependent on an information theory extended to general ontology, that, as Floridi says — paraphrasing (partially ironically) Hegel —, «What is real is informational and what is informational is real» (Floridi 2014: 41)⁽⁴⁾. Furthermore, by Floridi’s own admission, the concept of infosphere, which he takes up and develops in an original way, is certainly a rapidly evolving concept. It is a neologism coined in the 1970s based on the calque “biosphere” and, at a minimum level, it can indicate «the whole informational environment constituted by informational entities, their properties,

(4) See Hegel 1820.

interactions, processes, and mutual relations». In fact, Floridi does not intend to refer only to cyberspace within this meaning of infosphere, since he also includes offline and analogic information spaces. Moreover, at a maximum level, the concept of infosphere can even be used as a synonym for reality, insofar as we — as mentioned — interpret reality in informational terms, thus evidently leading to a sort of extended information ontology. It is in this broader sense that we must assume the concept of infosphere as being a “context” in which to define the “position” of the human being in the new anthropology. In fact, if we were to assume the minimum definition of infosphere we would immediately have to deal with an environment — as the result of the sum and combination of different informatic environments — that (however extensive) would present evident limits for a general anthropological definition, and could, if anything, be useful for sociological or psychological considerations of the relationships human beings have, for example, on the web and with the web, as a subject external to that reality which it instrumentally use. Floridi feels that this instrumental attitude could have been valid in the past for other kinds of technologies, but not in the era we now live in, nor in the future, where we will probably live within a more and more structured context based on ICT.

At the same time, however, the extended concept of infosphere, which Floridi suggests we assume, presents many problems of a conceptual nature: what does it mean to understand reality in informational terms? Whatever definition of information we choose to assume, do we not always and in any case unduly reduce the ontological field? On this point, Maurizio Ferraris recently intervened with his book *Documanità*, to try to clarify the problems related to the concept of infosphere, which are clearly revealed in this (excessive?) extension of the concept to reality as a whole: problems that Ferraris thinks he can address simply by referring to the web, an area certainly included within the definition of infosphere. For Ferraris, in fact, the concept of infosphere presents a certain ambiguity generated by the «confusion between information in the ordinary sense of the term and information in the technical–informatic sense» (Ferraris 2021: 23), since not all entities and processes referring to the infosphere can be attributable to the notion of information given that, as Ferraris argues, «it is one thing to talk about information that is available to everyone, another to say that the web book is written in characters accessible only to a few humans helped by very powerful automata» (Ferraris 2021: 23). With his clarification, Ferraris does not intend to weaken the relevance of Floridi’s proposal, but rather to warn against the use

of the term “infosphere”, which could easily lead to a fundamental misunderstanding: «identifying the web with the infosphere», writes Ferraris, «is a Platonism, which sees the tree — undoubtedly there is information on the web, just as it is not excluded that there are needles in haystacks —, obscuring the wood. Friends of the infosphere are aware of this, but at this point there are two options: either we find another name, or we engage in a losing fight from the start, namely a fight aimed at moralizing the infosphere, exhorting to parrhesia, teaching us to all become truthful and polyglot» (Ferraris 2021: 30). To get out of this possible misunderstanding, Ferraris suggests rearticulating the space described by Floridi through the use of the concept of infosphere in its broadest sense, that is making use of two other “spheres” that envelop the infosphere (which at this point would be understood as the informational rest). According to Ferraris’ proposal «the infosphere would rest on a docusphere, that is, on documents that record human actions without necessarily bringing information, and the docusphere, in turn, would rest on a biosphere, that is on the world of life» (Ferraris 2021: 22), namely — to clarify — on the life of human beings, which are those subjects without whom the system would end up running in vain. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, Ferraris believes one should think of the infosphere as the «superficial foam of a much vaster sea», which he calls “docusphere”: that is to say the sphere of “documentality” in which we find every act, every document, any procedure that cannot immediately be thought of as “information” intended as an effective and efficient tool for communication. In any case, according to Ferraris, «infosphere and docusphere lose any meaning if they are not animated by the biosphere, [that is to say] by the needs that humans have always mobilized» (Ferraris 2021: 55). Indeed, Ferraris’ clarification has two basic objectives: firstly, to free the space determined by ICT from the risk of thinking of it as starting from the assumed centrality of “information”, with the consequent ethical burden connected to the intelligibility of communication that would somehow be involved in the expression “information”; secondly, to reaffirm the centrality of the human being and his needs in this context in the face of a progressive but, in Ferraris’ opinion, completely unjustified marginalization of the human “engine”.

Beyond Ferraris’ clarification, which can certainly be discussed by bringing in arguments in defense of the legitimacy and appropriateness of using the term infosphere (which Floridi seems to me to adequately justify in several places⁽⁵⁾), there remains the basic problem of understanding the place and

(5) See for example Floridi 2010.

role occupied by the human being in the context described and defined by the massive presence of digital ICT.

A clarification on the “position” and “positioning” of the human being in the infosphere may perhaps come from the reclaiming and deepening of the classical (even if widely questionable) distinction on which twentieth century philosophical anthropology rests: that is, from the well-known distinction between world (*Welt*) and environment (*Umwelt*), introduced by the biologist Jakob von Uexküll in his *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere* (1909) and widely taken up by the fathers of twentieth century philosophical anthropology, such as Scheler, Plessner and, later, Gehlen. This distinction, which obviously aimed to clarify the difference between human beings and other living beings, can be useful for the general understanding of human beings’ peculiarity and therefore understanding their resources in the context of the infosphere and the risks they can easily incur therein.

As von Uexküll observes, the human being, unlike other living beings, does not have a specific environment (*Umwelt*), that is a context of reference within which he is inserted and to which he must necessarily respond in order to keep himself in balance with it, but rather he is open to a world (*Welt*) and is capable of (re-)creating, building a world, or a special environment that can always be reviewed and redefined. This tacitly implies that the human being’s ability to structure an environment by virtue of his openness to the world, can however easily decline into the creation of an environment that can become so enveloping and comfortable as to prevent that openness (to the world and its infinite possibilities) that must instead be guaranteed in order to preserve the peculiarity of the human being. The distinction between environment and world introduced here is certainly susceptible to criticism, and von Uexküll himself was aware of this⁽⁶⁾. However, this distinction, which can also appear to be an undue simplification, has made it possible to highlight a certain ability on the part of the human being to distance himself from his own context of reference.

To describe the human environment (or its ecological niche), one can make use of the human being’s cognitive character, the mental capacity of representation and manipulation of information, his ability to formulate hypotheses, and in particular the human being’s capacity to recognize the limits of his environment and then eventually exceed or rethink them. These are

(6) In several places von Uexküll himself clarifies how even animals are capable of technically creating their environment; see for examples his 1934 book *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen. Ein Bilderbuch unsichtbarer Welten*.

characteristics that on the one hand converge in the direction of defining a specific environment, but on the other highlight its limits and the need for constant rethinking and overcoming.

Even the text via which modern philosophical anthropology comes into being, that is Max Scheler's *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (1928), is based on this well-known distinction. The context of Scheler's thought is obviously far from ours, since he aimed to highlight the difference between the human being and other living beings, however his reflection can be useful to understand in general what the peculiarity of human beings is in relation to the context, which is what we are dealing with. For Scheler, the human being is not tied to "a tendency" to something, nor to a specific environment; compared to the animal he is free from it, and therefore always "open to the world": «Man is that X capable of behaving like an unlimited being "open to the world" [...] The animal does not know how to distance itself, it cannot distance the environment into a world (or into a symbol) as man is able to do, and it does not even know how to transform into objects the centers of resistance, affectively and tendentially circumscribed» (Scheler 1928: 33–34). A similar argument is present in Helmuth Plessner's book *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (1928), unjustly accused of plagiarism by Scheler himself, in which he insists on the "eccentric position" of man, that is, on his ability to distance himself, on his ability to not necessarily live in *immediacy* with his environment but rather in the *mediation* intended as the result of his own *action* (technical, in the broad sense of the term), since he is also capable of distance in terms of time, that is, of deferring the response from the stimulus of the context/environment in which he lives. From this approach Plessner derives the three anthropological laws which effectively summarize the relationship the human being has with "his" world and can in some way be applied to our contemporary context too: 1) the law of natural artificiality, according to which, not living in specific environments like other living beings, the human being can only "artificially" live the relationship with nature, through a "culture" that acts as a "second nature"; 2) the law of mediated immediacy, whereby the human being cannot do without what he immediately encounters in nature, but mediates what is presented to him, by virtue of the *formative activity* that recreates a sort of "human world"; and finally 3) the law of the utopian place, for which the distancing from the immediacy of which the human being is capable, as well

as the forming action of a second nature, determines a push towards transcendence, otherness, and forms of religiosity.

Similar reflections can also be found in Heidegger's work, which in the same years, in particular in the *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik (Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics)* — the course held in Freiburg in 1929–1930 — where he resumed the distinction between environment and openness to the world, insisting on the peculiarity of the human being as the “builder of the world” (man is in fact a *weltbildend* if compared to the animal, which is *weltarm*, “poor of world”, and to the inanimate, which is instead *weltlos*, that is “without a world”). In this sense, the world appears to be a less rigid configuration than the environment, since it is an “open” and built structure (by human beings themselves). For Heidegger, access to the “open” world is possible for the human being by virtue of his ability to “form the world”, a faculty that Heidegger recognizes as being primarily connected to language, which is proper to the human being. Heidegger clarifies this idea, in full conformity with the orientation of philosophical anthropology, and takes up the notion of the “open” (*das Offene*)⁽⁷⁾ described in the Eighth Elegy from *Duineser Elegien* by Reiner Maria Rilke, who certainly knew von Uexküll's work. In this elegy, however, the poet seems to overturn the approach of the Estonian biologist by assigning greater proximity to the “open” not to humans but to animals, which live a relationship of full adherence to the world (the openness of the absolute) that the human being is granted only during his childhood or when falling in love. In the 1946 conference *Wozu Dichter?* Heidegger takes up Rilke's thesis, who even with the aforementioned clarifications recognizes the possibility of access to the “open” for all living beings, but unlike Rilke, Heidegger insists — as mentioned — on the active, positive capacity to form the world, a faculty that is exclusive to human beings.

Returning to our problem on the basis of these ideas, if we understand the infosphere as our specific environment, then we are not able to see its resources and we stick to a mere description of what happens within the (inter-)relations that this environment ensures and guarantees. In this way we limit ourselves to passively responding to the stimuli that come to us from the context and to act as predictable and largely functional agents in the established environment. If we, instead, look beyond this boundary and look at the infosphere as, on the one hand, a certainly effective space which presents the

(7) See Agamben 2002.

characteristics of a special environment within which we reactively lead our lives, and on the other hand, as a largely potential space, all to be redefined both in factual and conceptual terms, then we finally have before us the possibility of a broad and fruitful reflection of an anthropological–philosophical nature linked to our peculiar capacity for “positioning”. In this way, the possibility of a concrete (dependent on our technological doing) and conceptual (linked to our theoretical doing) “orientation” opens up before us, that is an orientation capable of recreating the world to which we remain open; being in the condition of inhabiting it, recreating it. In this sense, it is easier to understand that the contribution of the human being is fundamental: far beyond the already high capacity of AI–enabled devices to process data, the human being remains potentially able to orient the context and (re)determine it again and again, because it is the context itself that requires the needs of human beings in order to be preserved and increased.

The peculiarity of the human being lies in his ability to distance himself from the context in which he is “thrown”, and in his ability to restructure and rearticulate that particular context, that is to form the world, to give shape to the world. In the case of the infosphere, we are faced with a sort of environment that is so enveloping and all–pervading that it limits the human being’s ability to recognize his partiality, yet he can still find within himself the resources to improve and recreate it.

Floridi himself sees the risk of the infosphere being perceived by human beings as such an enveloping and comfortable environment as to constitute a comfortable cage within which to passively/reactively lead our lives: «the digital has changed the vision we have of ourselves, our world, and our temporality. In the immediate future, will it lead us towards an expansion of our abilities and possibilities, or will we find ourselves prisoners within its borders?» (Floridi 2020b: 90). Moreover, already among the resources of twentieth century philosophical anthropology is an illuminating reflection by Gehlen on this risk of human beings becoming prisoner of the environment that they themselves can build. In his *Der Mensch. Seine Natur and seine Stellung in der Welt* (1940), Gehlen says that the human being, by virtue of his non–specialization, does not have an environment of his own but tends to technically construct it (that obviously means also culturally), and yet at the same time the human being — affirms Gehlen, in continuity and accordance with Nietzsche — is a *Zuchtwesen*, namely a being needy of discipline that easily lends itself to being raised. The configuration of a comfortable and enveloping environment is perfectly suited to this further disquieting characteristic,

which obviously must make us reflect.

What today in the so-called hyperhistoric societies appears as an all-encompassing world that limits the full freedom of the human being can increasingly take the form of the only environment within which it is possible for the human being to act — or perhaps it would be better to say to react; yet Floridi believes that within this same space there are all the resources necessary to find that active “positioning” that is typical of the human being. Indeed, what Floridi argues here is that the question must be answered with an ecological and ethical approach that «invests natural reality and the universe created by humanity at the same time», conceiving a sort of digital *e-nvironmentalism*: «How we are going to build, shape and regulate the new infosphere and our onlife life from an ecological point of view is one of the crucial challenges that the fourth revolution poses to us. The good news is that this is a challenge within our reach» (Floridi 2020b: 91). To guide these considerations, it seems to me there is a form of ethics of responsibility, which looks at the effects of our actions on the world to come, that has much in common with the theses supported by Hans Jonas, the author who in the 1970s, and in particular in his *Das Prinzip Verantwortung. Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation* (1979), worked on the foundation of an ethics of technology aimed at safeguarding «the permanence of an authentic human life on earth». Jonas’ ethical foundation, on whose metaphysical presuppositions we cannot dwell here, is based on the assumption that the technology of his time (but the judgment can be certainly extended to our age and the digital revolution we are dealing with) would be able to alter human life to such an extent as to deprive it of its authenticity, an expression with which he simply alludes to the freedom of the human being or, if we want to remain on the footing of philosophical anthropology mentioned above, to his ability to distance himself from the context/environment while remaining firmly open to the world and its multiple possibilities, that is, remaining capable of giving shape to the world. Jonas’ ethics of responsibility, which Floridi, albeit implicitly, seems to follow, is organized around the definition of an imperative that looks at the effects of our actions: «Act in such a way that the consequences of your actions do not destroy the future possibility of an genuin human life within its natural context». For Floridi there would be the risk of falling into a form of paternalistic ethic if such an imperative were to find translation in the very structure of the information environment, provided that this was actually

even possible. What he suggests, rather, is a lighter model of ethical intervention: namely the introduction of what he calls “infraethics”, that does not take a clear position and yet cannot be understood as merely neutral, since in some way it is in any case oriented towards an ethical ideal that may be realized or not, depending on the free choices of individuals, who are always left free to decide and act within this environment. Such an infraethics is limited to preserving for the human being the possibility of acting consciously and responsibly, and in this sense, it seems to be able to support that orientation that safeguards the peculiarity of the human being, namely his ability to remain open to the world, and thus to the solutions that the information environment proposes without being reduced to a mere passive–reactive subject of “his” environment. It is a sort of infrastructure of the information environment that does not abandon the infosphere to a sort of *laissez faire* but does not impose a precise ethics on it either. It seems to me that this proposal goes a long way in structuring the information environment, preserving as much as possible that necessary openness to the infinite solutions of human action. In this sense, the infosphere would not become more and more delimited in a form of comfortable *Gestell* which, however, progressively deprives the human being of his peculiar traits and reduces him to a being that is perfectly inserted in his artificial environment to the point that he cannot see the limits of that environment and all the possibilities there are beyond it.

As noted, the ethical issue with respect to digital ICT is particularly complex since in fact it concerns first and foremost the action that human beings can carry out in its design and implementation and, only secondarily, the methods of final use. This is its big difference from the classical consideration regarding the sense and limits of technique developed within the context of modern philosophical anthropology, for example in an author like Gehlen, who pointed out that the need for technique for human beings lies essentially in its organic deficiency, insisting in particular on the instrumental nature of the technique that integrates, enhances, or simply facilitates the deficiency of the organ. The digital reality we are dealing with today cannot in fact be simply understood as a tool to be used, we live in an information environment in which informational organisms endowed with artificial intelligence communicate with each other, exchange information, without humans being directly involved: «From this network, from the internet of things, the human being is largely excluded». In the information environment, the action of things responds to the criteria and principles of the effectiveness and efficiency of data transmission, and it is evident that the ethics that regulate the action of these

devices is only the ethics of utility. «All this», as Adriano Fabris observes, «raises a final and more decisive ethical question. How can we preserve our status as moral beings if we live in environments that organize and operate independently of our intervention?» (Fabris 2018: 118). The solution that Fabris proposes is to think of the responsibility of human beings in broad terms. The human being is not simply responsible for the effects of his actions, nor can one think that his responsibility is limited to the assumption of general criteria by which he chooses to act, since this could still come in the form of a planned procedure present in a machine: «the human being», says Fabris «[...] is responsible [...] for something more. Not only for the relationships that he initiates, or for the criteria on the basis of which these relationships are implemented, but above all for the relational context itself, that is, for the environment within which he finds himself operating» (Fabris 2018: 120). But this is only possible if the human being can recognize the environment in which he lives as a context that is the effect of his actual and potential action, «as a sphere with which to interact, also for the purpose of modifying it»; only then can the human being recognize his own responsibility. Only when he is able to perceive and recognize, beyond the boundaries of his environment, that natural border that leaves him open to the world, that is, only when he is able to recognize the partiality and infinite modifiability of his own environment, can the human being find the free possibility of an orientation, thus acting in it in this full awareness.

This is probably the principal task of contemporary philosophical anthropology: to work on an ontological reflection of the information environment, recognizing its limits and resources for the relational nature of human beings, in order to provide the possibility for an ethical and free orientation within and outside this context.

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