Ethics and responsibility in information and communication: suggestions for a discussion

Throughout the year, *AIB studi* has published a number of papers concerning a wide spectrum of issues connected to the close relationship existing between digital resources accessible online and the use that libraries make of them in providing services granted in serving their specific mission. Recently media have given us an alarming insight into that digital universe that we commonly use to be kept informed, to purchase products and services, to foster friendships and contacts. In parallel, this same problem was consistently addressed in discussions within AIB-CUR and forums of a similar nature. This is why we decided that this editorial should focus on ethics and responsibility in the digital world.

Two initiatives, among the many that have been taken worldwide, are sufficient to emphasise the crucial and unavoidable role played by ethics in this respect.

Tim Berners-Lee, the creator of the world-wide web, has launched a campaign aimed at rescuing the web from the destructive consequences of abuse and discrimination, from political manipulation and other threats of various kinds. In his opening speech at the "Web Summit" held in Lisbon (5th-8th November 2018), Berners-Lee invited governments, corporations and individuals to support a 'New contract for the Web', which aims at safeguarding the principles of human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the world. Not without reason this document is dubbed the 'Magna Charta of the Web'. On signing this agreement, governments commit themselves to ensuring that citizens have full access to the entire web and that their privacy be respected so that anyone can feel 'free, in the clear and without fear'. The World Wide Web Foundation is expected to publish the 'New Contract' within the month of May, celebrating both the thirtieth anniversary of the World Wide Web and the year in which it is estimated that half of the world population will have access to the web. Over fifty institutions have already signed the contract and many others have declared their intention to do so in the short term.

The ethical issue, focused this time on the very delicate matter of robotics and artificial intelligence, was addressed in the course of the "Roboethics: Humans, Machines and Health" workshop organized by the Pontifical Academy for Life (25th-26th February 2019). Speakers and participants convened from all over the world with all kinds of views due to their individual religious or secular, philosophical or technological sensitivities, have discussed on the basis of a common ground: potential benefits deriving from the increasing presence of robotics in our lives are incalculable. However this implies that the human beings' responsi-

bility is at stake right now. We are at a crossroads: the path towards shared responsibility and human ecology versus unrestricted technocracy threatening to put mankind at the service of machines.

To offer our readers further inspiration we are publishing the text of the *Padua Declaration, towards a new horizon in digital ethics*. This document was presented at the Conference "For a digital ethics" held in Padua in May 2018, within the framework of the 14th "Biblical Festival". Promoters and first signatories of the commitment were Festival biblico, Ufficio comunicazioni sociali della diocesi di Padova, DIGITALmeet and #Digitaletica, together with Luciano Floridi and Derrick De Kerckhove, who took part in the event as guests.

The text implements indications provided by the other speakers, Paolo Benanti, Mauro Conti and Mons. Lucio Adrian Ruiz. The *Declaration* describes the commitment on which education agencies, public and private institutions and organizations, corporations, religious entities as well as those engaged in training young people will hopefully agree.

The *Declaration of Padua* is shared on change.org and was published in appendix to the volume *Istruzioni per chiudere il vostro ufficio stampa* by Letterio Scopelliti and Gigi Bignotti[1].

The Padua Declaration, towards a new horizon in digital ethics

The onlife dimension of our daily life, which overcomes the initial distinction between online and offline experience, is gradually but significantly changing us and our approach to the world. Internet and technology promised to free us from the chains of work and regimes, not to do business with our identities. Nevertheless, we have positive and hopeful feelings and, at the same time, we are seriously concerned about what is happening.

That is why, on this premise, the underwriters of the Padua Declaration set six principles, which want to be a minimum common denominator that comes from below, hoping that they will soon become a strong trace towards this new horizon of ethics:

1. We consider it appropriate to reflect and do everything possible to control and govern our behaviour even within the infosphere so that responsibility for our words, actions and silences is full even in electronic and technological mediations. In this perspective, we strongly ask that, in digital-mediated interactions, respect for the person and his reputation are always guaranteed and we forcefully reject any attempt to damage this inalienable right.

2. The digital dimension of our daily life is not only made up of the Internet but includes, just to list some examples, the vast continent of videogames, the field of information, integration with everyday objects (IOT), home automation, public services offered by smart cities, robotics, telepresence, work automation. For this reason, developing ethics of the digital environment means activating a constant reflection and a sense of responsibility on a vast spectrum of daily interactions that challenge us very concretely right now and not in an indefinite future.

1 Letterio Scopelliti; Gigi Bignotti, *Istruzioni per chiudere il vostro ufficio stampa*. [S.l.]: FDL Communications, 2019, <http://www.fdlcommunication.it/libroufficiostampa>.

3. We feel the duty to work together, share and protect a knowledge at the service of mankind, especially for the little ones who observe our behavior to draw ethical indications for themselves and for the future. Being correct and consistent, focusing on the common good, restores integrity and greater dignity to us and can support the young in their education of conscience and in making choices for the common good.

4. We are aware that the search for truth, while remaining an ideal tension never fully reached, engages us in a constant activity aimed at crumbling prejudices and preconceptions and stimulates us to a greater responsibility in accepting any information published in the infosphere and the constant respect of any person, even in its extensions of presence in digital mediation.

5. Genetic and biometric data and any other sensitive information relating to each individual are part of a personal heritage that must be protected with the greatest possible guarantees, especially when it comes to minors and the elderly who often lack the tools necessary to defend and protect their own personal data, sometimes unknowingly extorted.

6. We warn that what has been done so far for the education of consciences in living the digital environment is significant but it is not enough.

We therefore launch the appeal to all training agencies, institutions, organizations, companies, religions and their guides and to those who care about the formation of the youngest so that we can work with creativity and vigor in a work of education of consciences and of general formation that always has as its horizon the promotion and respect of the common good and of every human being in all its expressions and extensions of presence within the digital environment.

Padua, 12th May 2018

We then asked Marco Sanavio, professor of multimedia production Iusve of Mestre and Verona, who played a fundamental role in collecting the indications that emerged in the preliminary works and in the sessions of the conference, and in giving them the final form of the text of the *Declaration*, a comment that briefly contextualises it and summarizes its spirit and purpose:

When we talk about presence, today, we cannot but include its extension in the infosphere, that is in all the digital forms that today define its profile, including personal identity, which is increasingly becoming a precious value. One can, for example, pay by the simple fingerprint recognition on his or her smartphone, in other words one of the biometric identity parameters directly connected to the personal bank account. Actually, algorithms governing the digital environment can do much more than just a payment: from giving us back short and long term perspectives about our health to taking partial or total control of a vehicle. This pervasiveness of electronics in our daily life questions us with respect to an ethical dimension, both on the part of the programmer and the user. At an ICT fair, it took me thirty seconds of my time to watch four spots on a 40' monitor. When finished they explained to me that a tiny video camera integrated into the frame of the screen had recognized my approximate age, gender and had proposed me four spots suitable for me and placed side by side in four quadrants. A sophisticated eye-tracking procedure, or pupils motion tracking, had then revealed which of

the four products I would have purchased. I wondered what would have happened if, even unknowingly, I had seen the faces of four candidates in the political elections. Our relationship with the digital environment, which does not only include the Internet and textual exchanges, seems to require more and more of an ethical dimension and awareness that allows us to avoid the worst risks. The Padua Declaration of May 2018, signed by authoritative people and institutions in the field of ethics, aims precisely to arouse this awareness in the constant attempt to protect personal data especially regarding children and the elderly.

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