

Artificial intelligence, the social consequences of the new era

by Vittorio Emanuele Falsitta – *Il Sole 24 Ore* – 15 July 2023 – All rights reserved

Artificial intelligence is beginning to find its place among humanity. It arrived in the manner of a pregnancy. We watched the abdomen grow, suspicious and idealistic but nevertheless admiring; we touched the roundness as it stretched forward. And now, here we are. It is now evident that a new routine is emerging for all of us: a synthetic and collaborative companion within reach for almost every need in our everyday lives, a "co-pilot" (as the false empathy of a search engine suggests). However, the increasingly fascinating and wonderful variety in the use of artificial intelligence (including actions that will soon verge on impositions), is a matter that concerns more than just our individuality. It looks at the State as such from close-up. This time, from deep inside its guts. Right where the devices that enable it to perform public functions are located. From this point of view, as AI applications pervade the manifestations of human life and as human action is a prerequisite for those functions, it seems the time has come to instigate a profound political reflection on the consequences of technology that are falling upon public functions.

Work, for example, plays an essential role in the tax and expenditure system. It is significant both as a cost (imagine the employment of personnel in state administrations) and as a factor that generates income, and therefore direct and indirect taxes. The tax system is built on work, and on what it is connected to when it produces or determines other economic events. Without income from work, the legal rules of the tax systems would be meaningless. And, meaningless, i.e. useless, tax systems

would prevent the finance intended for the exercise of State functions from being collected. Now, the ending of work, the ending of entire categories of employed and self-employed work, is an almost certain fact that is already well beyond the point where it can be seen. If what has been said is reasonable and if the tax systems remain what they are today, within a few years the public functions that require financial resources will also disappear, or will manifest themselves in a way that differs from the expectations to which we are accustomed. The provision of healthcare, education, security, to name but a few services, will eventually be insufficient, if not disappear altogether, absorbed by private supplies (for the benefit of those with means only). In short, a causal process of enormous social significance has already been triggered: artificial intelligence will soon also disappear into the blood of the state, namely into the financial channels. It will become flesh and tissue, an era-defining metamorphosis in the organisation of the tax function and collection mechanisms. This metamorphosis does not simply call for a "change of pace", for modernisation. No. We are pushed into a narrowing space, a place where it is crucial to recognise the vital need for an unprecedented cultural model where inland revenue becomes something else (from the assumptions of taxation to the determination of the tax base); the health system becomes something else (dragged along in turn by a general private insurance system that becomes something else); education becomes something else.

Failing to recognize the signs that emerge, like red fruit, will leave decisions to chance. And so, yes, it will be difficult to oppose something just, something fair and a serious alternative to the demands of multitudes of people who, having lost their jobs, been humiliated and deprived of prospects, will ask for undifferentiated financial support: a compensatory allowance for not having been defended against the loss of work, a constitutional guarantee of our Republic.