

From Digital Capital to Webfare:

Toward a Theory of Social Justice in the Digital Age*

Jimmy Hernández Marcelo

§1. Introduction

RECENTLY, THE ITALIAN PHILOSOPHER MAURIZIO FERRARIS has introduced a new philosophical theory known as *Webfare*¹. This deliberately provocative proposal is situated within the conceptual coordinates of his *New Realism*². Within this theoretical horizon, the conceptual transformations underpinning *Webfare* have developed from an understanding of reality as intrinsically plural —that is, encompassing natural, ideal, technical, and social dimensions. Moreover, this realist approach conceives such plurality not as a mere juxtaposition of domains, but as a coherent process unfolding from being —the world, understood as the ontological domain— towards knowing —knowledge, understood as the epistemological domain. The link that connects these two spheres and renders their interrelation possible is doing, here understood in technological terms.

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¹ Maurizio Ferraris, *Webfare. A Manifesto for Digital Well-Being* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2024).

² Maurizio Ferraris, *Manifesto of New Realism* (Albany: SUNY, 2014); *Positive Realism* (London: Zero Books, 2015). Two European philosophers are likewise actively committed to New Realism: Markus Gabriel and Jocelyn Benoist. The former advances a pluralistic ontology in defence of realism, while the latter develops a form of contextual realism. See Markus Gabriel, ed., *Der Neue Realismus* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015); *Fields of Sense: A New Realist Ontology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015); Jocelyn Benoist, *Toward a Contextual Realism* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2021); *Von Der Phänomenologie Zum Realismus: Die Grenzen Des Sinns* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022).

J.H. Marcelo (✉)
Universidad de Salamanca, España
e-mail: jimhermar@usal.es

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Historically, philosophy has approached technology in a relatively limited and predominantly critical manner³. From the twentieth century onwards, philosophical reflection increasingly came to regard technology as a decisive phenomenon shaping human existence⁴. Thinkers such as Heidegger, Ellul, Marcuse, and Jonas interpreted technology as a transformative force whose effects on morality, politics, and the human condition were largely negative. This critical orientation has persisted into the twenty-first century in the work of authors such as Nick Bostrom, Peter-Paul Verbeek, and Byung-Chul Han. By contrast, Bruno Latour and Bernard Stiegler have articulated more nuanced positions, emphasising the ambivalent and potentially positive dimensions of technology. Departing from both predominantly critical and ambivalent approaches, Maurizio Ferraris' *Technosophy*⁵ advances a distinctive and innovative perspective by conceiving technology as an essential and constitutive dimension of the human condition. Rather than seeking to neutralise or condemn it, *Technosophy* contends that the positive transformation of humanity is possible only through the conscious appropriation of technology.

The proposals advanced within the theory of *Webfare* are presented as a novel form of social justice in the age of the digital revolution, grounded in this positive conception of technology. Within this framework, Ferraris had previously developed two theoretical approaches that underpin the idea of welfare based on digital capital: on the one hand, social ontology understood as a general theory of the document⁶; on the other, a philosophy of technology conceived as a new anthropology⁷. The aim of this essay, accordingly, is to render this new theory of digital social justice (*Webfare*) intelligible through a systematic exposition of the principal theses of *New Realism* in its most recent formulation, namely, in terms of *Technosophy*.

§ 2. From New Realism to Technosophy

New Realism is currently a well-established philosophical movement that is progressively expanding into other domains, both theoretical and practical⁸. To a large extent, this success is attributable to the rise of new technologies, which have made it

³ Val Dusek, *Philosophy of Technology. An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley, 2008).

⁴ Carl Mitcham, *Thinking Through Technology: The Path Between Engineering and Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁵ Maurizio Ferraris, *Tecnosofia. Tecnologia e Umanesimo per Una Scienza Nuova* (Bologna: Laterza, 2023).

⁶ Maurizio Ferraris, *Documentality: Why It Is Necessary to Leave Traces* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

⁷ Maurizio Ferraris, *Doc-Humanity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022).

⁸ Maurizio Ferraris, 'On New Realism', *Kairos. Revista de Filosofia & Ciência* 8 (2013): 45–65.

possible, on the one hand, for *New Realist* theorists to extend themselves across space and time in order to connect with other scholars, and, on the other, to the rapid translation of their works, which has rendered their proposals accessible to other linguistic communities. Consequently, the fact that *New Realism* has become, within a relatively short period, one of the defining philosophical currents of the twenty-first century⁹ is fundamentally due to a cultural and technical condition, namely digital technology.

In this respect, it is hardly surprising that Maurizio Ferraris has taken a sustained interest in the technological revolution, particularly that associated with the emergence of the Web¹⁰. This development has undoubtedly enabled him to revitalise his core notions of *Documentality* by updating them through his proposal of *Technosophy*. The outcome of this trajectory is articulated in his techno-anthropology, within which humanity is defined in essentially technological terms, a condition Ferraris designates as *Doc-humanity*.

New Realism was introduced by Ferraris in 2012 with the publication of the *Manifesto of New Realism*. Its central claim consists in a critique of the relativism derived from postmodern theses concerning the external world (ontology) and objectivity (epistemology). However, *New Realism* is far from representing a return to a premodern state of philosophy; on the contrary, it seeks to acknowledge the plurality of the world while preserving a criterion of objectivity and avoiding both relativism and reductionism in all their forms. In this sense, the *Manifesto* warns against the dangers of the two principal theses of postmodernity: (1) that all reality is socially constructed and infinitely manipulable, and (2) that truth is a useless notion because solidarity is more important than objectivity¹¹. According to Ferraris, the origin of these postmodern claims lies in what he terms the transcendental fallacy, whose primary consequence is that reality becomes a “tale”, within which multiple micro-narratives coexist without being conditioned or determined by any causal relations among them.

If the twentieth century came to an end by endorsing a reduction of realism to its fictional representation, Ferraris, by contrast, contends that in a world understood in such terms there would be room neither for reasons nor for explanations, and, moreover, no space for justice or ethics. *New Realism* therefore maintains that the weakening of realism would inexorably lead to the disappearance of the distinction

⁹ Mario Teodoro Ramírez, ed., *El Nuevo Realismo. La Filosofía Del Siglo XXI* (México: Siglo XXI, 2016); Gregor Kroupa and Jure Simoneti, eds, *New Realism and Contemporary Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020).

¹⁰ Maurizio Ferraris, *Metafísica de La Web* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2020).

¹¹ Ferraris, *Manifesto of New Realism*, XV.

between the true and the false and, as a consequence, to the dissolution of the distinction between justice and the injustice.

Nevertheless, Ferraris is fully aware of the performative force of human presence in the world and of humanity's capacity to bring new objects into existence. Accordingly, his critique of postmodernity and his realist proposal proceed through a reformulation of the structure of reality and through the establishment of a clear differentiation among distinct types of objects. This classificatory framework can be traced back to Ferraris' period of renewed engagement with Derridean philosophy¹². Within this context, the philosophy of writing is reinterpreted through the recovery of the external world, resulting in the publication of innovative proposals for an ontology of the social world, initially articulated in *Where are you?*¹³ and subsequently expanded in *Documentality*¹⁴.

The central claim of *Documentality* is the development of a general theory of the trace as the condition of possibility of the social world. There are a clear legacy and continuity between *Grammatology* and *Documentality*; however, there is also an essential difference. Whereas Derrida operates within the framework of a strong textualism, according to which both natural reality and social reality are the product of the same performative act, Ferraris, by contrast, situates his position within the coordinates of a weak textualism, in which natural reality and social reality are differentiated precisely in terms of their relations of dependence on subjects.

In this respect, *Documentality* is a work written from a realist perspective. Its pages depict the social world as forming part of a network of reality-structures that render it objective. This means that, although social reality is genetically dependent on subjects for its emergence, once it comes into being the new objects behave as part of the "external world" and exhibit a degree of independence from subjects. To clarify this, Ferraris provides a catalogue of objects, distinguishing three categories: natural, ideal, and social¹⁵. Natural objects occupy a position in space and time and are independent of subjects; ideal objects do not occupy space or time yet are likewise independent of subjects; finally, social objects occupy a position in space and time —

¹² Maurizio Ferraris, *Ricostruire la decostruzione: cinque saggi a partire da Jacques Derrida* (Milano: Bompiani, 2010).

¹³ Maurizio Ferraris, *Where Are You? An Ontology of the Cell Phone* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Ferraris, *Documentality: Why It Is Necessary to Leave Traces*.

¹⁵ Later, this catalogue will be enriched with fictional and technological objects. See Maurizio Ferraris, *Intorno Agli Unicorni. Supercazzole, Ornitorinchi e Ircocervi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018); *La Pelle: Che Cosa Significa Pensare Nell'epoca Dell'intelligenza Artificiale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2025).

like natural objects— but depend on subjects, though they are not themselves subjective¹⁶.

Through a synthesis of Kant and Derrida, Ferraris proposes a social ontology understood as a critique of social reason¹⁷, in which transcendental philosophy is applied to social objects. The underlying idea is that a thesis such as “intuitions without concepts are blind” (Kant), which proved difficult to apply to the natural world, provides a perfect explanation of our relation to the social world. This world exists only because we believe it exists, mediated through a process of recording that allows for the temporal and spatial deferral of the originating subject in relation to the social act (Derrida), the outcome of which is the emergence of the social object.

In this way, documental realism presents three main elements: (1) the constitutive law¹⁸, (2) ichtology¹⁹, and (3) documentality²⁰. The constitutive law is formulated as “Social object = Inscribed act.” It establishes that social objects emerge from the recording of acts involving at least two individuals (or their representatives, which need not be human agents), characterised by the fact that they are inscribed on some physical support. Recording —or inscription— constitutes a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the existence of social objects. Not all social acts, however, generate social objects, as sterile acts may occur when the social act fails to materialise in a recording. This explains the centrality of recording, since Ferraris maintains that the letter precedes the spirit, and technique precedes meaning.

Ichnology —the doctrine of the trace— aims to establish an ontology of inscribed things by classifying them into three types: traces, recordings, and inscriptions in the technical sense. A trace is any form of surface modification that refers to something not present; a recording is a trace deposited in our mind as a device of inscription; and a technical inscription is any form of fixation accessible to at least two people. It is this latter type of inscription that enables the construction of common objects, whose defining feature is accessibility. It is, therefore, this category that gives rise to the world of social objects.

Finally, documentality conceives the document as a technical inscription. A document is an inscription endowed with institutional value, which allows the establishment of the link between society and power. This doctrine of the document enables Ferraris to formulate a theory of value understood in terms of social objects

¹⁶ Ferraris, *Documentality: Why It Is Necessary to Leave Traces*, 33.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.

—that is, as the result of interactions between subjects governed by certain poietic rules of action inscribed on some medium. This notion of value underpins the development of both *Doc-humanity* and *Webfare*.

In 2020, at a time when *Documentality* had already become a reference text in social ontology and *New Realism* was beginning to consolidate its position among scholars on both sides of the Atlantic, Ferraris published his *Metaphysics of the Web*²¹. This book aims to outline the general contours of the philosophy of technology within *New Realism (Technosophy)*. While it presents innovative reflections on technology, it retains a central idea inherited from *Documentality*: the primacy of recordings.

In *Documentality* (2009), the registration is presented as the condition of possibility of the social world, and from 2016 onwards, with the publication of *Emergence*²², Ferraris began to radicalise the thesis of inscription, extending it to the universe as a whole. In this context, he now proposes to include the world of technology within this universal process of hysteresis²³ —that is, the process by which an event preserves the effects of preceding events, so that consequences outlast their causes²⁴. The first part of *Metaphysics of the Web* is therefore devoted to understanding the nature and scope of this hysteresis at a metaphysical level. This foundation allows us to grasp the specificity of the current technological revolution through a reversal of the theory of the Web. In this respect, Ferraris seeks to carry out a “Copernican revolution of the Web,” establishing the primacy of inscription over communication. This revolution can be summarised as follows:

1. The Web is primarily registration, not merely a medium of communication; it functions not as a television, but as an archive; 2. It is action and performativity rather than information; it does not merely accumulate knowledge but defines a space in which social acts —such as promises, commitments, and orders— take place; 3. It is real rather than virtual; that is, it is not a mere immaterial extension of social reality, but constitutes the elective space for the construction of social reality; 4. It is mobilisation rather than emancipation; it does not provide immediate liberation (as was believed during the Web’s early stages), nor does it simply operate as a tool of domination; rather, it is a device that mobilises —that is, one that enacts actions; 5. It is emergence rather than construction, in the sense that it is not the deliberate project of any single agent, but the outcome of many components that have coalesced in a non-programmatic fashion; 6. Finally, it is opacity rather than transparency; it does not clarify

²¹ Ferraris, *Metafísica de La Web*, 2020.

²² Maurizio Ferraris, *Emergenza* (Torino: Einaudi, 2016); Maurizio Ferraris, Jimmy Hernández Marcelo, and Erica Onnis, *Realismo y emergencia: contribuciones para una Filosofía (nuevo) realista en clave emergentista* (Dykinson, 2024).

²³ Maurizio Ferraris, *Hysteresis: The External World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024).

²⁴ Maurizio Ferraris, *Metafísica de La Web* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2020), 48.

itself, but instead demands to be elucidated, revealing a close isomorphism with social reality and, in particular, with its emergent apex, which is capital²⁵.

These six elements of the Web —registration, performativity, reality, mobilisation, emergence, and opacity— are presented as key to understanding not only our most contemporary social practices, but also as capable of offering a more adequate account of what it means to be human in general. This constitutes precisely the challenge of *Doc-humanity*, in which Ferraris develops the theses of *Metaphysics of the Web* with the aim of understanding the nature of humanity in light of technology.

Doc-humanity unfolds along a philosophical itinerary that seeks to answer the question: what is to be done in the contemporary world? Having previously addressed, in a systematic fashion, the questions of knowledge (*History of Hermeneutics*, 1988), the natural world (*Rational Aesthetics*, 1997), and the social world (*Documentality*, 2009), the task now is to interrogate the meaning of contemporaneity, which is profoundly determined by the technological revolution. In this respect, Ferraris seeks to design a philosophy of the present grounded in a reflection on technology, the result of which is the revelation of the human being as an essentially technological animal²⁶.

In order to arrive at this conclusion, it was necessary to deconstruct the Pentecostal image of human nature, which consisted primarily in the idea of a definitive and closed nature existing above the concrete manifestations of human life. Ferraris refers to this representation of humanity as “the Rousseau syndrome,”²⁷ according to which humans are born free and embody a condensation of virtues, progressively transforming and alienating themselves upon contact with the world and society. This can be understood as an anthropological version of religious traditions in which humanity is made in the image and likeness of God and exists in the world as the consequence of a transgression that results in the loss of original purity.

In Ferraris’ emergentist proposal, by contrast, humans are not bundles of virtues, but maladapted and imperfect animals who construct themselves through elements of the external world. In this way, what seemingly alienates us is in fact what reveals who we are and what we become. Human nature is thus conceived as a continuous historical process, since the true anthropological difference is an insufficiency of adaptation that compels us to improve indefinitely through the optimisation of forces and the accumulation of resources. Consequently, humans are the true “animals poor in world (*weltarm*)” —contrary to Heidegger’s view— and are

²⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁶ Ferraris, *Doc-Humanity*, 106.

²⁷ Ibid., 87.

therefore endowed with technical supplements that allow them to overcome their natural deficiencies²⁸.

Firstly, humans are biologically defined as organisms, sharing the need to consume resources to sustain life through metabolism. In this sense, nature exerts control over them. Secondly, their mortality inclines them toward ends and intentions expressed in the world that aspire to survive the empirical subject. This is why an organism such as the human finds in mechanism the means to sustain itself and survive through two processes: (1) compensating for its deficiencies and extending its life, and (2) preserving its traces beyond natural life. It could therefore be said that “this encounter between the metabolic needs of organisms and the supplements inherent to mechanisms is what defines the specificity of human nature.”²⁹

Ferraris employs a specific term to describe this technological difference between human and non-human animals: *responsiveness*³⁰. This refers to the capacity to respond to needs through prostheses that compensate for both biological and cultural deficiencies. As explained in *Doc-humanity*, this emergentist view of humanity conceives technology as the very condition of possibility of the human. Consequently, the Aristotelian definition of humans as *zoon logon echon* must be replaced by one that highlights our technological nature: *zoon bakterion echon*, meaning “an animal equipped with a stick.” This depiction of humans as essentially animals possessing a prosthesis that enables their being is vividly illustrated in the passage from Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, where Oedipus resolves the Sphinx’s riddle³¹.

Within Ferraris’ theory, humans are primarily builders of devices rather than creators of syllogisms and theories. The *homo sapiens* is thus the result of the hysteresis produced by the *homo habilis*, which explains why philosophy and science emerge in specific contexts: understanding arises from actions that do not presuppose it —the phenomenon of competence without comprehension being recurrent in everyday life.

The next step in this new anthropology consists in inverting the relationship between the hands and reason. Ferraris explains that, between Aristotle’s view, according to which humans have hands because they possess reason, and Anaxagoras’ view, in which hands make humans intelligent, *Doc-humanity* aligns with the primacy of the hands. This is entirely consonant with the technological character of human nature, since the hands release and manifest the forces and desires of the body while

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

²⁹ Ibid., 101.

³⁰ Ibid., 86.

³¹ Ibid., 104.

enabling their implementation in the world through grasping, transforming, and writing. Yet Ferraris returns to Aristotle in conceiving the mind as a *tabula*³², since this representation captures the essence of reason: it enables recordings that are enacted through the activity of the hands.

From the configuration of a techno-anthropology —linked to overcoming precariousness, satisfying metabolic needs, and creating artefacts— Ferraris advances to a theory of consumption and value, ultimately presenting a new theory of capital: one that emerges from mobilisation in the digital age.

§ 3. The emergence of digital capital

The term digital capital has a genealogy that traces back to debates on digital capitalism in the 1990s. Its earliest known mention appears in *Forbes Magazine*, which described the growing computerization of global finance³³. This critical perspective was later consolidated by Dan Schiller³⁴, who examined how the Internet amplified the expansionist logic of capitalism by integrating telecommunications into the global economy. At the beginning of the 21st century, the concept shifted into the business sphere with Don Tapscott and David Ticoll's³⁵, redefining it as the sum of human capital, customer capital, and structural capital circulating in digital business networks. This shift marked a transition from an economic critique toward a strategic and optimistic view of the digital sphere as a generator of corporate value. In the 2010s, researchers such as Massimo Ragnedda conceptualized digital capital as a set of digital resources and skills that can be accumulated, transformed into other forms of capital, and generate social benefits³⁶. This perspective integrates the concept into analyses of social stratification and digital citizenship. In the 2020s, the idea has expanded into broader critiques of the data economy, with related notions such as cybernetic capital³⁷, which interprets social life as raw material for algorithms and capitalist accumulation processes mediated by digital platforms. The trajectory of the term thus

³² Maurizio Ferraris, *Anima e iPad* (Parma: U. Guanda, 2011).

³³ Lenzner, R. and Heuslein, W., 'The Age of Digital Capitalism', *Forbes Magazine*, 1993, 62–72.

³⁴ Schiller, D., *Digital Capitalism: Networking the Global Market System* (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 1999).

³⁵ Tapscott, D. and Ticoll, D., *Digital Capital: Harnessing the Power of Business Webs* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 2000).

³⁶ Ragnedda, M., *The Third Digital Divide: A Weberian Approach to Digital Inequalities* (London: Routledge, 2018).

³⁷ Fuchs, C., *Communication and Capitalism: A Critical Theory* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2020).

reflects a shift from its early economic critique, through corporate strategy and sociological analysis, to its incorporation into debates on digital surveillance and algorithmic control. Within this genealogical framework, Ferraris' *Technosophy* attributes a positive role to digital capital, conceiving it as an instrument for the transformation of human sociality toward greater justice and equity.

Humans, as organisms, are living beings—a condition shared with countless other entities—subject to irreversible processes that dictate the urgency of consumption³⁸. This constitutes, in essence, the condition upon which the technological nature of human beings is grounded. Ferraris' careful demonstration that comprehension, science, and epistemology emerge from ontological conditions that precede them—and, specifically, from forms of action that respond to structures independent of subjects—aims precisely to trace the origin of what drives organisms to act.

It is here that “consumption” assumes a fundamental role in shaping human nature. On the one hand, humans are producers of technology—a differential trait distinguishing them from other animals—but on the other, they are consumers—a trait shared with other organisms. Consumption, as an organic part of human existence, is thus something that cannot be automated, not for ethical reasons, but ontological ones. In this context, consumption not only precedes production, but constitutes the very *raison d'être* of any form of production. Thus, “consumption and production will be considered as the two faces of the same reality.”³⁹

Although this consideration may seem self-evident, at a historical moment in which machines have begun to replace humans in production processes through automation, the human function as consumer emerges as more important than the human function as producer. A proper analysis of automation reveals that while any form of production can be fully guaranteed by machines, consumption requires human agents, who provide the ultimate purpose of the entire system of production, since consumption is the only un-automatable element⁴⁰.

One could therefore posit a trajectory that runs from the natural to the social and cultural—that is, from natural necessity to cultural necessity—intertwined from beginning to end by consumption:

energy consumption → supplement production → satisfaction of needs

³⁸ Ferraris, *Doc-Humanity*, 300.

³⁹ Ferraris, *Webfare. A Manifesto for Digital Well-Being*, 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

At the outset, we have an organism that consumes energy to live. This organism finds itself in a condition of maladaptation to its environment, requiring external supplements to overcome its deficiencies. This leads to the satisfaction of specific needs, but simultaneously gives rise to new deficiencies, such as language, customs, laws, titles, driving licences, and so forth. For this reason, Ferraris speaks of both material consumption (energy) and spiritual consumption (culture)⁴¹, both of which are made possible through technology (supplements).

Reflecting on the consumption/production dialectic leads Ferraris to consider digital technology as a revealing element of the primacy of consumption, which in turn allows a reconfiguration of the traditional definition of labour. These elements — consumption, production, and labour— have been indispensable in critical theories of capital, especially Marxist theory. Ferraris' aim, however, in this process of deconstructing traditional notions of capital, is to deconstruct the very meaning of capital itself, through a de-anthropologisation of the capitalisation process, tracing it back to the very origin of humanity⁴². In this respect, prior to alienating forms of capital, *New Realism* recognises a revolutionary and humanising capital.

The fundamental question to be addressed is: what does it mean to capitalise?⁴³ Setting aside prejudices about capital, abandoning its reduction to industrial capital — the kind Marx described— and without denying the harm it may produce, one must engage in a deep analysis of the structure of capitalisation, the different forms it takes, and its relationship to valorisation. This allows us to understand the novelty of new digital capital and new forms of exploitation through a redefinition of labour. In Ferraris' terminology, to capitalise is simply “activating a process of hysteresis.”⁴⁴ This means that traces, when recorded on a support, produce both descriptive and prescriptive value: they inform us about something and indicate how it can be repeated. In other words, a trace is, in the strict sense, a repository of value directed toward future actions⁴⁵.

This occurs within a general system in which the supplement operates and finds meaning, as it allows efforts to be capitalised and multiplied. Reinterpreting an expression of Bergson, the thesis can be summarised as follows: “memory remains in matter” through hysteresis, which is in fact the origin of capitalisation as a process of conservation, iteration, and transformation. The result is therefore a universalisation

⁴¹ Ferraris, *Doc-Humanity*, XI.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 117–22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

of capital, which could be understood in terms of a general theory of capital. It must be emphasised, however, that capitalisation is inseparable from production in its most elemental form, from notches in stones to the creation of platforms on the Web. Production of value is thus the result of the production of supplements. In this sense, just as for Ferraris there would be nothing human prior to technical supplements, so too there would be nothing human prior to capitalisation.

This conclusion may seem striking if one is accustomed to accepting Marx's theses on capital as definitive. Yet if we consider industrial capital merely as one moment in the long history of capitalisation, it becomes clear that the world's ills do not reside in capital itself, but in the way humans make use of it. Scholars may recognise in this gesture a trace of Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism. We might transfer the restoration of writing as the condition of possibility for the *logos* to the restoration of capital as the condition of possibility of humanity. In this respect, "there is nothing outside the text" could perfectly well be translated as "there is nothing (human) outside capital."

This process of capitalisation unfolds across different spheres of reality. Ferraris explains it as follows:

The first is the **ichnosphere**, representing the realm of accumulated traces that humanity has capitalized on since its origins and that sets it apart from non-human animals. Then we have the **infosphere**, which predates the Web and emerged with the development of culture thousands of years ago. This sphere allows for the capitalization of knowledge beyond the experience of individuals. Next there is the **docusphere**, as old as writing itself, but that has been significantly enhanced, indeed transformed, through the digital revolution which transformed recording from a rare and costly activity to a ubiquitous and systematic process. However, the docusphere does not record everything indiscriminately; it is selective and captures those aspects of the human life form that hold relevance for the next sphere: the **anthroposphere**. It is this realm, the realm of human life, that is master over the docusphere and technology in general, even if humans, for various and often unfounded reasons, perceive themselves as its slaves⁴⁶.

The task now is to explain the development of this process of capitalisation, which is contemporaneous with humanity as a producer of supplements. Ferraris establishes a classification of different types of capital:

a) Ichnological or stigmergic capital⁴⁷: This form of capitalisation corresponds to the initial stage of trace production as a modification of the environment, incorporating the inscription of information that allows accumulation, deferral, and

⁴⁶ Ferraris, *Webfare. A Manifesto for Digital Well-Being*, 41.

⁴⁷ Ferraris, *Doc-Humanity*, 128–29.

transformation. This process concerns not only the external world but also the production of meaning within the intimate world of consciousness, through the capitalisation of inscriptions and signs that give rise to intelligence. This first recording of traces constitutes the condition of possibility for the voluntary transformation of the environment through tools.

b) Technological capital⁴⁸: This is the capital that emerges from the creation of tools, which reduce living labour through the recording of acts that grant access to the world. The production of new technologies occurs via the externalisation of internal purposes. This capital allows for the reduction of effort in the production process, whereby the force required by the organism to produce something is replaced by the mechanism. The ultimate aim of technical capital is to record production processes in order to optimise them, independent of human labour. A close analysis of technological development reveals that its objective is to make human life less onerous; otherwise, why would we strive to gain greater knowledge and create new technical objects?

c) Document capital⁴⁹: The encounter between the world (ontology = external world) and the human being produces knowledge (epistemology = internal world). This internal world can, in turn, be externalised and create new real structures that may be termed social (documentality = social world). Documental capital is therefore the process by which the experience of subjects is externalised and fixed in social objects, which function as modes of accumulation or capitalisation of past individual or collective experience, enabling the iteration of accumulated intentions and values (economic or moral). From this perspective, accumulation presupposes a collective system of reference corresponding to a social world that precedes the individual subject. Within this sphere, both economic and moral value acquire real significance, since value can only be understood within a system of value oppositions, and morality consists in a process of capitalising our values.

d) Documedia capital⁵⁰: This refers to the new capital that emerges from the convergence of documentality as the production of documents and the mobilisation generated by new digital technologies. This form of capital has four fundamental characteristics that could serve as the basis for a new form of social justice: it is new, abundant, renewable, and equitable⁵¹. Moreover, it constitutes the synthesis of the preceding forms of capital, in which humanity manifests its true nature in

⁴⁸ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 132.

⁵⁰ Ferraris, *Documentality: Why It Is Necessary to Leave Traces*, 136.

⁵¹ Ferraris, *Webfare. A Manifesto for Digital Well-Being*, 67–68.

consumption, technology as a producer of supplements, and documentality as a creator of documents. The principal feature of this capital is that it arises from the accumulation of life-world acts that were previously not considered sources of value but which, thanks to the power of Big Data, can now be used as new sources of value and wealth creation. While its essence is revealed through the emergence of digital technology, its structure responds to the original human nature founded upon hysteresis. For this reason, it is preferable to refer to this digital capital as a human heritage⁵².

This classification demonstrates that Ferraris begins from a broader and more positive conception of capital, aiming to create a new social justice appropriate to the era of the digital revolution. In this regard, prior to being an instrument of alienation, the Web is conceived as an instrument of emancipation. The realisation of this project of social transformation is described in his *Webfare*⁵³.

§ 4. Webfare as an ethical-political proposal

Let us turn our attention to the claim that digital technology reveals the nature of the social world in which value is produced. Ferraris refers to his attempt to explain the essence of twenty-first-century technological transformations as a “Copernican revolution of the Web.”⁵⁴ This approach allows us to correctly understand the emergence of digital capital, resulting from the transition from analog to digital⁵⁵.

In Ferraris’ framework, the traditional way of explaining the Web is flawed, as it conceives it merely as a sphere of information and communication. Within this conception, only certain aspects of our social life —and only residually parts of our everyday life— would be represented. In this sense, the Web would be, at most, an *infosphere*.

For Ferraris, this model is insufficient, as it would demand from users the mastery of specific competencies enabling them to distinguish truth from falsehood. In reality, however, the Web has become the terrain of post-truth, an inevitable consequence of the quantitative increase in user interactions. Considering this logocentrism of the Web, Ferraris proposes a return to a hysteresis of the Web that places the *biosphere* at the centre —that is, the domain of user actions without requiring any epistemic competence— the lifeworld. Subsequently, thanks to digital

⁵² Ibid., 67.

⁵³ Ibid., 93–104.

⁵⁴ Ferraris, *Doc-Humanity*, 16.

⁵⁵ Ferraris, *Webfare. A Manifesto for Digital Well-Being*, 35–56.

technology, for which recording is necessary for communication, actions are inscribed in documents that, within their documedia environment, become ubiquitous and automatic. The result of this inversion demonstrates that the infosphere constitutes only a limited part of the interactions taking place within the Web, restricted to those with the appropriate epistemic tools to interpret them.

This Copernican revolution allows Ferraris to reintroduce his proposals regarding humans as producers and consumers within the framework of theorising new forms of value creation and new ways of conceiving labour —and, consequently, labour injustice in the digital context. Let us now turn to his classification of the data produced by humans within the Copernican Web.

Value in general had previously been defined in terms of social contextuality — that is, objects (in this case, data) acquire value within a system of references, namely, the social world. Following these premises, the *docusphere*, as a vast space in which an enormous quantity of recordings is produced, becomes the setting for a dual production of recordings. On the one hand, there is a set of recordings that deliberately produce documents, recognisable both by their senders and receivers. For instance, suppose someone shares a photograph with another person via WhatsApp; the data transmitted across the Web is recognisable to both parties. If, for example, one had promised to send a photo from a birthday party and the recipient receives a landscape photo instead, they could inform the sender of the error. Ferraris refers to this type of data as *semantic data*. On the other hand, Ferraris explains, the moment this interaction begins, a much larger quantity of documents —expressing the automatic recording of human mobilisation— circulate around the process of information transmission. Examples include location, time, status, and so forth. These recordings are referred to as *syntactic data*⁵⁶.

The former are related to our productive nature and are visible to users; the latter, however, are linked to the hysteresis generated by our life as living beings within a given context. Within the framework of the primacy of production as a conscious act and of labour as effort, syntactic data were initially relegated to the background at the creation of the Web, as evidenced by the fact that the first source of value production was sought in advertising. As time went on, however, platform owners realised that data recorded during interactions —which may not have appeared significant individually— could, when combined with other similar data, generate valuable information that, in the appropriate context, could produce economic value. For this

⁵⁶ Ibid., 36.

reason, Ferraris also refers to *semantic capital* and *syntactic capital*, corresponding respectively to semantic and syntactic data.

To summarise the discussion thus far: technology precedes knowledge, but consumption is the engine of production and technology. Consumption is primarily linked to the lifeworld. Subsequently, technical and documental capital focused on production because it enabled the accumulation of goods and culture. However, in the digital age, production is automated, and mechanisms begin to take the place of humans as producers. In this context, the Web emerges as an instrument of social interaction, enabling new forms of capitalisation. Initially, these focus on documents as intentional products of users. Yet platform owners discovered that true digital capital arises more from the traces recorded during interaction than from the documents produced. In this scenario, a new form of injustice emerges between users and platforms, as the latter begin to generate monetary value that is not returned to the agents whose data form the basis of the new capital.

The final stage of Ferraris' theoretical framework therefore returns to consumption in terms of value production, and thus, in the strict sense, as labour. In *Metaphysics of the Web*, he had already introduced reflections on the concepts of labour, alienation, and leisure. In *Doc-humanity*, he develops these ideas further, asserting that labour must be understood as the production of value, whether through the creation of goods or the consumption of products, culture, or trivialities. The Marxist thesis of alienation erroneously attributes to humans a virtue they do not naturally possess, which must instead be acquired through technology and culture. In the digital age, work time (*negotium*) and life time (*otium*) appear to converge, as mere living already produces value, and is therefore a form of labour.

This new conception of labour encompasses ordinary life, biorhythms, and leisure, which do not necessarily involve work in the traditional sense, that is, effort and fatigue —consider, for instance, the vast number of content generators engaged in activities such as travelling, dining in restaurants, or staying in hotels. While some of these activities —particularly those of influencers— may be remunerated by platforms, Ferraris focuses on the exchange between those who generate data (the *mobilised*, the users) and those who collect and monetise it (the *mobilisers*, the platforms), thereby producing value⁵⁷. In most cases, the former receives no economic benefit for their activity, which is fundamentally consumption. The fact that content creators —such as influencers— share digital capital with platforms demonstrates the centrality of production and the undervaluation of consumption.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 51.

Doc-humanity concludes with a reflection on this new form of surplus value, produced by the asymmetry between users —the producers of recordings— and platforms —the conservators of recordings. The reconceptualization of production and consumption connects directly to the opening of *Webfare*, which asserts that focusing on consumption allows us to overcome the culture of merit, which renders humans unequal, and instead turns attention to what makes them equal: necessity.

Webfare, a form of digital welfare, seeks to initiate a Copernican revolution that places need instead of merit at the center of society. Need acts as an equalizer among humans, while merit serves as a differentiating factor⁵⁸.

Having traversed a theoretical trajectory that takes us from ontology to the philosophy of technology, Ferraris now seeks to apply his theses within the realm of practical philosophy. In this regard, his proposal to socialise digital surplus value aims to establish a new form of social welfare that addresses the challenges of twenty-first-century societies. These initiatives, according to Ferraris, must be grounded in the fundamental intuition that consumption is the only element that cannot be automated.

The future of humanity, in a historical moment where the force of production has shifted to machines and where the Web contains an immense amount of information, should consist of concentrating efforts on education and social justice. Regarding the former, Ferraris argues that in a world of rapidly advancing automation, concern should be directed towards the formation of individuals equipped with the conceptual tools necessary to live in a digitalised world. In this way, the new resources generated by digital capital should be primarily invested in education, since “it provides humanity not only with the spiritual resources needed to unlock its full potential but also replace idleness with the joys and responsibilities of human coexistence.”⁵⁹

Regarding the latter, Ferraris asserts that by transforming need into a productive element, *Webfare* will be capable of generating new wealth, thereby enabling “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” (Marx). This, without doubt, constitutes the principal objective of social justice. Through the conceptualisation of the heritage of humanity, it becomes possible to recognise needs on an equal footing with merit.

It has traditionally seemed just that individuals receive according to their abilities, yet less so that they receive according to their needs. This, precisely, is the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 105.

revolutionary aspect of Ferraris' proposal, for whom human life itself constitutes the genetic moment and ultimate foundation of value. This means that all those connected to the Web would generate value merely by living. This new wealth, produced through the capitalisation of data, should be distributed among those lacking other sources of income —that is, the most disadvantaged members of society, who always possess needs. If this capitalisation of need, of which the Web is presently the most conspicuous manifestation, could be intercepted and redistributed to humanity as a whole, it would constitute a decisive step towards achieving the highest good, Ferraris asserts⁶⁰.

In general terms, this is the path traced by Maurizio Ferraris from his realist turn to the formulation of a demand for social justice within a reality expanded through the incorporation of digital technologies. This, consequently, constitutes the theoretical challenge addressed in *Webfare*: on the one hand, it develops a rigorous theoretical foundation for his new philosophical positions, and on the other, it sets out the process through which these theses are realised in an articulated set of proposals concerning the mechanisms for collecting and redistributing wealth —the new digital capital— generated by the mobilisation of users on digital platforms.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 80.

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From Digital Capital to Webfare: Toward a Theory of Social Justice in the Digital Age

This paper examines Maurizio Ferraris' theory of Webfare as a novel proposal for social justice in the context of the digital revolution. Situating Webfare within the broader framework of New Realism and its recent development into Technosophy, the text reconstructs the conceptual trajectory that leads from social ontology (documentality) to a theory of digital capital grounded in inscription, hysteresis, and technological mediation. Against both postmodern relativism and predominantly critical philosophies of technology, Ferraris advances a positive realist account in which technology is understood as a constitutive dimension of human nature (doc-humanity). On this basis, the paper analyses the emergence of digital capital as the capitalization of recorded human actions and consumption, rather than solely of productive labour. The distinction between semantic and syntactic data is shown to be central to understanding new forms of value production and digital exploitation. Finally, the paper argues that Webfare represents an ethical-political attempt to socialise digital surplus value by shifting the focus of justice from merit to need, thereby outlining a model of digital welfare suited to highly automated societies.

Keywords: Digital Capital · New Realism · Social Justice · Social Ontology · Webfare.

Del capital digital al Webfare: hacia una teoría de la justicia social en la era digital

Este artículo examina la teoría del «webfare» de Maurizio Ferraris como una propuesta novedosa para la justicia social en el contexto de la revolución digital. Situando el «webfare» en el marco más amplio del nuevo realismo y su reciente desarrollo hacia la tecnosofía, el texto reconstruye la trayectoria conceptual que conduce desde la ontología social (documentalidad) a una teoría del capital digital basada en la inscripción, la histéresis y la mediación tecnológica. En contraposición tanto al relativismo posmoderno como a las filosofías predominantemente críticas de la tecnología, Ferraris propone una visión realista positiva en la que la tecnología se entiende como una dimensión constitutiva de la naturaleza humana (doc-humanidad). Sobre esta base, el artículo analiza la aparición del capital digital como la capitalización de las acciones y el consumo humanos registrados, y no solo del trabajo productivo. Se muestra que la distinción entre datos semánticos y sintácticos es fundamental para comprender las nuevas formas de producción de

valor y explotación digital. Por último, el artículo sostiene que el Webfare representa un intento ético-político de socializar la plusvalía digital desplazando el foco de la justicia del mérito a la necesidad, esbozando así un modelo de bienestar digital adecuado para sociedades altamente automatizadas.

Palabras Clave: Capital Digital · Nuevo Realismo · Justicia Social · Ontología Social · Webfare.

J.H. MARCELO realizó sus estudios de Filosofía en la Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca. Es doctor en Filosofía por la Universidad de Salamanca (España) y la Universidad de Turín (Italia). Ha sido investigador visitante en la Universidad de París 1, en la Universidad Católica de Lovaina, en la Universidad de Coímbra, en los Archivos Husserl de la Universidad de Friburgo, en los Archivos Husserl de la Universidad de Colonia, en la Universidad de Bonn y en la Universidad de Montreal. Es Profesor Ayudante Doctor en la Universidad de Salamanca, e Investigador en el Labont –*Center for Ontology*– de la Universidad de Turín. Sus principales campos de investigación se centran en la filosofía francesa contemporánea, la ontología social, la filosofía de la tecnología y el Nuevo realismo. Ha publicado *Fenomenologia dei Margini. Derrida allievo di Husserl* (Mimesis, 2024). También ha traducido al español escritos de Jean Héring, Maurizio Ferraris, Markus Gabriel, Jocelyn Benoist, Jacques Derrida, entre otros.

Contact: Universidad de Salamanca, Facultad de Filosofía, P.º Francisco Tomás y Valiente, 37007 Salamanca, España. e-mail (✉): jimhermar@usal.es · iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6522-5516>

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