



In memoriam - Stefano Rodotà.

On Saturday June 23rd 2017, Stefano Rodotà died at the age of 84. A great jurist, academic and political figure, his cultural production was immense. Alongside his participation in the democratic life of Italy - always on the part of social justice - Rodotà had written fundamental contributions on the issues as diverse as the respect for human rights, human dignity, so that people are never reduced to commodities even in cyberspace or the 'infosphere'.

Perhaps one of the lesser known dimensions of Rodotà's multiple activities was that dedicated to the complex interaction between technology and law. His book, which was in those years completely visionary, *Electronic Compilers and Social Control* (Mulino, 1973), laid out the first crucial questions to understanding the reality of what would become the information era. *The world in the net* got to the core of the issues; also, *What rights, what constraints* (Laterza, 2014). Rodotà was among the first to question the transnationality of law in the Internet age and. In November 2007, he presented the first draft of an "Internet Constitution" in Rio De Janeiro to the UN Internet Governance Forum. It was then that the whole of society began to reflect on the need for an Internet Bill of Rights, a domain which had until that period been limited to academic research.

The first time Stefano Rodotà and I met in person was in Naples, in October 2006, at a conference organized by the Italian Institute for Philosophical Studies on the Ethical Aspects of Interaction between Humans, Robots and Artificial Intelligence Systems. Opening the sessions with his master lesson, he described a complete scenario of issues which would become the subject of public debate only many years later: digital identity, sensitive data processing, and the shift from *habeas corpus* to *habeas data* - data on human beings becoming the "21st century oil". I remember my trepidation when I saw him sitting in the front row, listening attentively to my intervention on nanoscale robots.

My greatest pleasure was when Rodotà wrote the preface to the first Italian anthology on *Ethics and Social Responsibility in the Information Society* (Franco Angeli, 2010), published with colleagues Piercarlo Maggiolini and Sebastiano Di Guardo. The last time we met together was in Amsterdam, when the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) Working Group 9.2 awarded Rodotà the 2012 Namur Award:

"... for an outstanding contribution with international impact to the awareness of the social implications of information technology. The aim is to draw attention to the need for an holistic approach in the use of information technology in which the social implications have been taken into account."

(<http://ifipwg92.org/blog/category/namur-award/>)

On that occasion, it was with great emotion that I listened to his lecture about the future of the digital identity. I could see that - even at international level - Rodotà's thinking placed him among the "giants".

Rodotà's greatest lesson was to teach that, in the design of technological systems, one should always place human beings at the centre, starting from their rights and their dignity. Technological development must never become techno-determinism. We human beings are plunged into the very centre of technology.

At the same time as I feel the pain of the death of a teacher and a friend - who was a source of inspiration, encouragement and guidance for those who deal with the ethical dilemmas emerging from the complex interaction between technology and society - is associated the feeling of being lucky to sit "on the shoulders of giants" like Prof. Stefano Rodota when striving to design socially desirable and ethically acceptable innovations.

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