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Andrea Bixio

Sociologia

Rivista Quadrimestrale di Scienze Sociali, Storiche e Giuridiche
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Genere e Violenza: i corpi delle donne tra modelli di rappresentazione e processi di medicalizzazione

Valentina Cremonesini, Irene Strazzeri Prefazione

Valentina Cremonesini “In questa imprevedibile tragedia ci sono solo vittime”. La violenza di genere estrema nella rappresentazione giornalistica / *Chiara Gius, Angela Toffanin, Arianna Dai Campi* Ri-connettersi: verso una concettualizzazione della violenza digitale di genere / *Giuseppe Gaballo* Violenza e genere nella società digitale. Manifestazioni di una tendenza sistemica / *Cosimo Marco Scarcelli, Rachele Reschiglian* Il consenso online nella vita quotidiana dei giovani adulti italiani: definizioni, violazioni e pratiche di protezione / *Camilla Gaiaschi* Disuguaglianze e stereotipi di genere nelle organizzazioni e nelle istituzioni / *Stefano Ciccone* Paradossi nel discorso pubblico sulla violenza di genere / *Sara Fariello* Il parto tra discorso, realtà e rappresentazione / *Irene Strazzeri, Maria Chiara Spagnolo* Fiducia e trasformazioni: dall’antico rituale del partorire alle radici della violenza ostetrica / *Stefano Magnolo* Donne, uomini e Niklas Luhmann. Appendice teorica

Achille Ardigò e la cultura internazionale

Costantino Cipolla Achille Ardigò, sempre oltre se stesso / *Antonio Scaglia* Achille Ardigò. Sacro e comunità. La fenomenologia tedesca e la sociologia / *Daniele Ungaro* Achille Ardigò, una lezione su Habermas e Luhmann / *Vera Kopsaj* Empathy: a bridge between Achille Ardigò and Edith Stein / *Guido Giarelli, Graham Crow* Ardigò and community studies in Italy in an international perspective / *Francesca Greco* La critique du structuralisme normatif de Achille Ardigò / *Verónica Roldán* La sociologia di Achille Ardigò in contesto ibero-americano

Note

Donatella Padua Determinanti della Medicina di Genere. Approcci sociologici e contributi interdisciplinari / *Daniela Bandelli, Barbara Sena* Capitale biologico e nuove forme di vulnerabilità del corpo: framework teorici emergenti / *Daniela Sideri* Il processo di socializzazione digitale e i suoi esiti: una proposta teorica / *Davide Bennato, Guido Anselmi* Più speranze che certezze. La percezione pubblica dell’intelligenza artificiale all’indomani del successo di ChatGPT

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Sezione prima

Genere e Violenza: i corpi delle donne tra modelli di rappresentazione e processi di medicalizzazione

VALENTINA CREMONESINI, IRENE STRAZZERI

Prefazione

3

VALENTINA CREMONESINI

“In questa imprevedibile tragedia ci sono solo vittime”.

La violenza di genere estrema nella rappresentazione giornalistica

4

CHIARA GIUS, ANGELA TOFFANIN, ARIANNA DAI CAMPI

Ri-connettersi: verso una concettualizzazione della violenza digitale di genere

10

GIUSEPPE GABALLO

Violenza e genere nella società digitale. Manifestazioni di una tendenza sistemica

15

COSIMO MARCO SCARCELLI, RACHELE RESCHIGLIAN

Il consenso online nella vita quotidiana dei giovani adulti italiani: definizioni, violazioni e pratiche di protezione

19

CAMILLA GAIASCHI

Disuguaglianze e stereotipi di genere nelle organizzazioni e nelle istituzioni

24

STEFANO CICCONE

Paradossi nel discorso pubblico sulla violenza di genere

29

SARA FARIELLO

Il parto tra discorso, realtà e rappresentazione

38

IRENE STRAZZERI, MARIA CHIARA SPAGNOLO

Fiducia e trasformazioni: dall'antico rituale del partorire alle radici della violenza ostetrica

42

STEFANO MAGNOLO

Donne, uomini e Niklas Luhmann. Appendice teorica

48

Sezione seconda

Achille Ardigò e la cultura internazionale

COSTANTINO CIPOLLA

Achille Ardigò, sempre oltre se stesso

53

ANTONIO SCAGLIA <i>Achille Ardigò. Sacro e comunità. La fenomenologia tedesca e la sociologia</i>	55
DANIELE UNGARO <i>Achille Ardigò, una lezione su Habermas e Luhmann</i>	67
VERA KOPSAJ <i>Empathy: a bridge between Achille Ardigò and Edith Stein</i>	72
GUIDO GIARELLI, GRAHAM CROW <i>Ardigò and community studies in Italy in an international perspective</i>	80
FRANCESCA GRECO <i>La critique du structuralisme normatif de Achille Ardigò</i>	92
VERÓNICA ROLDÁN <i>La sociologia di Achille Ardigò in contesto ibero-americano</i>	103

Note

DONATELLA PADUA <i>Determinanti della Medicina di Genere. Approcci sociologici e contributi interdisciplinari</i>	108
DANIELA BANDELLI, BARBARA SENA <i>Capitale biologico e nuove forme di vulnerabilità del corpo: framework teorici emergenti</i>	119
DANIELA SIDERI <i>Il processo di socializzazione digitale e i suoi esiti: una proposta teorica</i>	127
DAVIDE BENNATO, GUIDO ANSELMI <i>Più speranze che certezze. La percezione pubblica dell'intelligenza artificiale all'indomani del successo di ChatGPT</i>	131

Recensioni

RAFFAELE RAUTY (a cura di) <i>Mortalità in fabbrica. Donne, ricerca e denuncia sociale nell'America del primo Novecento</i> (Cecilia Cornaggia)	140
ALESSANDRA SANNELLA <i>Strumenti Sociologici e Transdisciplinari per il contrasto del femminicidio</i> (Simone D'Alessandro)	141
GIUSEPPE TOSCANO <i>I tesori dell'area grecanica calabrese. Rime perdute</i> (Domenico Minuto)	142

VERA KOPSAJ

Empathy: a bridge between Achille Ardigò and Edith Stein

ABSTRACT – The article revolves around four key concepts highlighted by Achille Ardigò in *The empathy of Edith Stein*¹, such as the ‘centrality of the empirical person’, ‘the unity of the empirical person’, ‘the medium of corporeality’ and ‘intersubjectivity’. Empathy, as the main element of inter-subjective communication, capable of bringing people out of self-referentiality, will be re-proposed, through the scientific gaze of Ardigò, in the digital society. As Ardigò was an artificial intelligence enthusiast and proposed the concept of empathy in a post-postmodern society, his scheme of empathic experience gains more importance today, in the digital age, where the psycho-physical relationship has totally changed, in its structure and essence as a priority of values. The intention is, therefore, to analyse empathy in digital society through the perspective of Ardigò, in terms of open systems theory.

1. Why Stein, why empathy?

«[...] I sensed, without knowing who Edith Stein was, I vaguely knew that she had died as a Jewess in the death camps, but as soon as I heard that there was a reprinted anastatic copy of this book on empathy I did somersaults to advise my publisher to get it and have a good friend of mine – who is a young philosopher from Trentino and president of Fuci – do the translation. I had almost a kind of cipher message, even though I had not read the text I decided to translate it, [...]. I was, so to speak, convinced that I had received some kind of special communication, so much so that in my room I have [...] a reproduction of Stein’s photograph»².

Achille Ardigò: 2021: 71³

Empathy, as the ultimate form of communication encompassing all senses and experiences, offers a gateway to transcendence. While it operates internally, its impact extends externally, akin to an intuition that eludes initial rational comprehension. However, reason can serve as a conduit for empathy’s power, as both are complementary, a notion embraced by both Stein and Ardigò within Thomism. This essay seeks to explore how this dynamic unfolds within their respective works.

This essay does not aim to provide an exhaustive study on empathy, a topic that has been explored by brilliant minds. Instead, its goal is to rediscover Ardigò and trace the paths he journeyed alongside Stein. Therefore, it will briefly touch upon the evolution of the concept of empathy from aesthetics, through psychology,

philosophy, and, with Ardigò, into sociology, and finally into artificial intelligence. Empathy, omnipresent yet not always overt, is intrinsic to human nature. Its absence would leave external reality impoverished and fraught with conflict.

The core argument of this study posits that Ardigò embodied the essence of a man and a sociologist with a ‘democratically cultured nature’. Despite his faith⁴, he navigated the realms of scientific progress, including the most advanced disciplines like artificial intelligence, without obstruction. Ardigò demonstrated a remarkable ability to reconcile the dichotomies of ambivalence in both his personal and intellectual endeavors, showcasing his scholarly acumen.

Writing about Ardigò and the connection between him and Stein has enabled me to embark on a dual journey: firstly, exploring the generational and intercultural dimension (I could have been Ardigò’s younger relative; not sharing the same cultural background by birth, I had to reconstruct Ardigò’s past, which provided fertile ground for empathy and intercultural understanding). The second dimension involves understanding Ardigò’s identity in relation to Stein, a task I undertake through the lens of empathy.

In this ‘reflective journey’, I essentially ‘visited’ various authors referenced by Ardigò, as well as those who were acquainted with or collaborated with him, akin to how a granddaughter might explore her grandfather’s world through the eyes of his friends. After all, isn’t empathy about stepping into another’s shoes?

The encounter between Ardigò and Stein unfolds through the amalgamation of four elements highlighted

¹ Original title, *Zur Problem der Einfühlung*, Buchdruckerei des Waisenhauses, Halle 1917, translated into Italian as *L’empatia di Edith Stein*, NICOLETTI M., ARDIGÒ A. (eds.), Il Prisma, Franco Angeli, Milano 1986.

² The translation of all Italian quotations is mine.

³ This quote is extracted from an interview with Achille Ardigò, conducted by an unidentified interviewer. The interview appears in the publication *Achille Ardigò a cento anni dalla nascita*, edited by E. Minardi, C. Corposanto, and C. Cipolla, published by FrancoAngeli, Milan 2021.

⁴ Ardigò was deeply committed to the Catholic faith.

in the aforementioned Ardigò's quotation, which can be summarized as follows: 1. *Intuition* – 'I sensed, without knowing who Edith Stein was'; 2. *Desire* – 'I did somersaults'; 3. *Confidence* – 'Although I had not read the text, I decided to translate it'; 4. *Belief* – 'I was, so to speak, convinced that I had received some kind of special communication.'

In 1986, at the age of 65, Ardigò had the volume on empathy translated by Michele Nicoletti. He was at the peak of his human and intellectual maturity, discerning enough to avoid whims or work proposals that would bring no benefit to the scientific community or humanity at large. This translation was driven by deep motivation rather than a momentary caprice. He embarked on this project propelled by intuition, with his only tangible link to Stein being a reproduction of her photograph. Everything was guided by a powerful current of intuition, an image, a strong desire, and a curiosity to understand her better, hoping that his feelings would resonate with hers. Thus, an invisible bridge materialized between Ardigò and Stein, fostering a tangible communication, an interaction between two minds, even in Stein's absence, through the corporeality of her writings. In essence, empathy was palpable. Consequently, the introduction of Edith Stein's *Empathy* in Italy owes its existence to an act of empathy: Two entities—Ardigò and Stein—in close communion, driven by a mutual openness and profound self-awareness, understanding not only their bond but also their place within the broader cosmos, spanning both the tangible and intangible realms.

It can be said that through transcendental consciousness, as described by Husserl in *Ideas*⁵, Ardigò experienced an eidetic intuition that allowed him to grasp the essence and importance of the theme and volume. This profound insight motivated him to pursue the translation of the book with great determination. According to Searle (1980: 15), 'beliefs, desires, and intentions are intentional states', a fundamental and unique characteristic of the human being.

What Ardigò and Stein had in common was their faith, which guided them toward the highest value, God. However, this upward gaze never distracted them from focusing on others. Instead, transcendence served as a foundation for intersubjective relationships. When asked which three books he would take for meditation after retirement, Ardigò replied, 'the Gospel and the *Opera omnia* of St John of the Cross. The third could be a book of poetry...' (Ardigò: 2021: 75). There is no need to dwell on Stein's faith; it would suffice to simply say that Edith Stein is the patron saint of Europe.

Stein and Ardigò focused on those 'signals and symbols' not 'recognized by the common culture', but which reside 'in each of us [...] through which we try to understand — from external bodily perception — the

interactions of others, their sensations, feelings, and motivations' (Ardigò, 1986: 11). For Stein and Ardigò, these acts form the foundation of society.

What kind of society do we live in now? How does today's society differ from the society of Stein and Ardigò?

The following paragraphs will explore essential concepts of empathy, such as the unity and centrality of the person, the medium of corporeality, and intersubjectivity, and how these ideas translate into today's web society.

1.1. Ardigò: 'a sincere man, a free intellectual'⁶

Before delving into the analysis of key concepts, it is pertinent to introduce the figure of Ardigò with the respect he deserves.

Introducing Ardigò to newer generations would entail portraying him as he was perceived by many, as well as acknowledging what he wasn't to some. In essence, we would offer the new generations a necklace adorned with two-colored pearls, crafted from testimonials of those who knew him intimately and collaborated closely with him:

Ardigò's profound intent, both moral and practical, was to implement in the field a sociology aimed at reducing as much as possible the inequality between men (Cipolla, 2023: 197) and in this, the concept of ambivalence – which among other things links Ardigò to Stein – is fundamental because for him 'it means a diversity that is not necessarily contrasting; a co-existence that also contemplates antithetical impulses; a co-existence that incorporates two dissimilar aspects' (Ibid.: 17). 'Ardigò was [...] an authoritative, valuable cultural and political reference. [...] thanks to a solid philosophical-humanistic culture, in his work as a sociologist he did not settle for a reductive empirical approach [...] that renounced an overall vision and a value horizon'. 'Ardigò was a rigorous scholar and extraordinarily creative, [...]' (Monaco, 2023: 33). But not only: 'Ardigò was the one who drew attention to the world of agriculture and rural culture. [...] I do not know how many remember Ardigò's almost total openness to the subject of artificial intelligence. [...] Ardigò had seen further than me, he had understood that technological innovation has a slow but increasing, if not overwhelming, pace. Honour to him.' (De Rita, 2023: 56-57). Ardigò went further, in fact 'Of the many lessons he left us, I would like to capture precisely this way of being close to young people, beyond the very lucid analyses of the sociological scholar, there was the constant call to search for signs of hope, for paths [...]' (Giuntella, 2023: 62-63).

⁵ HUSSERL E., *Collected works*, Volume I, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1971.

⁶ TONELLI in *Achille Ardigò e la presenza politica e sociale dei cattolici in Italia*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2023, p. 119.

⁷ References in this section pertain to the volume *Achille Ardigò e la presenza politica e sociale dei cattolici in Italia*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2023.

On the political level ‘Ardigò insisted on the pluralism that in those years expressed a transversal demand that was penetrating the thinking of the parties, even those most anchored in ideological thinking’ (Claudio Cipolla, 2023: 68). ‘The thought that accompanies me in this time of explosion of issues, including ethical ones, relating to health technology and the debate around artificial intelligence, is precisely his absence’ (Garavaglia, 2023: 82). Ardigò was ‘a believer with a passion for the world [...] who never excluded the constructive criticism of an adult Catholic intellectual’ (Giordano, 2023: 86, 87). Ardigò had ‘analytical as well as overview skills’ and the ability to manage complicated transitions. He did not shy away from challenging tasks and ‘with no guarantee of success’.

To fully describe the work that Ardigò did, for example, as president of the then Istituto Trentino di Cultura, the word ‘reconciliation’ would be enough to encapsulate a rapprochement between different worlds and cultures that he succeeded in bringing together (Salvatori, 2023: 107, 110, 111). Ardigò ‘never abandoned hope in young people and in their ability to change the meaning of things’ (Tonelli, 2023: 123). Ardigò is also remembered for ‘his autonomy of thought, claimed with courage. [...] He was also a formidable man of synthesis’ (Valentini, 2023: 126, 128): ‘In discoveries it was difficult to anticipate him. [...] He wanted to build, to make, to create, in him the interpretation of social fact could not but be accompanied by action to transform society’ (Nicoletti, 2023: 136, 137). ‘Ardigò’s influence on local welfare policies was fundamental’ (Alberani, 2023: 141).

Ardigò was ‘at the same time a man of theoretical innovation and a man of management’, ‘because he was able to reconcile theoretical ideas with the concrete realisation of projects, such as the one on artificial intelligence’ and ‘the focus on telemedicine’ (Trabucchi, 2023: 148). ‘Many of the choices that had to be made as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic had been anticipated over 30 years ago by Ardigò, starting with *smart working*’ (Rosati, 2023: 152). Ardigò, through his sociology of ambivalence, seeks to understand sociology as a whole, considering not only interdependencies but above all tensions between systems and life-worlds that ‘reproduce recompositions and new balances’ (Abbruzzese, 2023: 154). His being a believer was in no way an obstacle to the development of even the most advanced sciences and, Ardigò, the founder of the Italian Sociology Association, was able to overcome the conflict between faith and reason (Vecchi, 2023: 169).

‘All Ardigò’s thoughts and analyzes are inspired by the profound values of the Constitution but Achille above all supported the idea that it was necessary to spread its knowledge and values among young people, defining it ‘a heritage to be rediscovered’, also updating it at school desks’ (Alberani, 2023: 140).

Moreover, Ardigò deserves credit for firmly establishing phenomenological thought in Italy following Luigi Sturzo’s historical method. However, he did so by redirecting its course, imbuing it with a historical perspective (Fornari, 2021: 337).

Ardigò ‘continuously emphasized his project of uniting intellectuals from diverse backgrounds, particularly those from both religious and secular spheres. He achieved this by transcending ideological boundaries, engaging with supposed adversaries, seeking avenues for dialogue, and tirelessly striving to establish common ground for meaningful discourse’ (Cipriani, 2023: 200).

‘Ardigò was much more’ (Cipolla, 2023: 19), he above all ‘was far-sighted, as happens to those who are not satisfied with the way things appear but want to grasp the deeper meaning’ (Salvatori, 2023: 118).

In spite of all this, Ardigò is seen ‘on the cultural level as not really democratic’ (Trabucchi, 2023: 147). The author does not elaborate on this thesis - which could be interesting - on the contrary, through his meticulous analysis of the erudite figure of Ardigò, he lets it fall on deaf ears without even voicing it.

‘Culturally undemocratic’, in fact, means practices that deviate from basic democratic principles, behaviour that lacks accountability and transparency, behaviour that does not respect human rights, that lacks political pluralism and discriminates, behaviour that favours authoritarianism. Can we say that Ardigò was at least one of these?

Despite this, Ardigò is depicted as ‘not truly democratic on the cultural front’ (Trabucchi, 2023: 147). While the author does not delve into this thesis - which could be intriguing - their meticulous analysis of Ardigò’s erudite persona allows it to remain unexplored and unarticulated.

‘Culturally undemocratic’ denotes actions or behaviors that depart from fundamental democratic principles, lacking in accountability, transparency, and respect for human rights. Such conduct may also exhibit a lack of political pluralism, discrimination, and a propensity towards authoritarianism. Can it be asserted that Ardigò exhibited any of these traits?

2. *The centrality and unity of the empirical person*

The principles of unity and centrality of the person are essential for comprehending the thought of Stein, Ardigò, and their interconnectedness. Additionally, the notion of the ‘Person’ forms the foundation of sociological thought,

«where the constituent values of the person (freedom, responsibility, dignity, relationality, spirituality, justice) are taken as coordinates for the definition of a scientific paradigm capable of orienting both the practice of research and the concrete “human development” of society» (*Dizionario di Sociologia per la Persona*, 2021: 13).

Ardigò, often regarded as the ‘father’ of ‘Sociology for the Person’ (*Sociologia per la Persona – SPE*) in Italy, played a pivotal role in its development and expansion, evident in the growing community of sociologists dedicated to this approach. However, Sociology

for the Person has faced criticism from those who perceive it as a ‘reformulated form of methodological individualism’, where only individuals are seen as actors and the conceptualization of collective entities is deemed mythical’ (ibid.: 24).

Returning to Stein and Ardigò: What was Stein’s intended meaning behind the term ‘empirical person’, and how did Ardigò interpret it?

For Stein, a living subject (*das erlebende Subjekt*) is something that can neither be denied nor erased, therefore it cannot be bracketed (*ausschaltet*) as something irrelevant and which, only after verification, can be brought back into play. On the contrary, the living subject is, for the Author, always and everywhere a concrete and indubitable presence and existence, even in cases this subject may have invented his past, may have illusions of memories which, this time yes, those can be bracketed. His psychophysical condition is not in doubt. The living subject lives not only in ‘a world of physical bodies’, but in a world of other living subjects (Stein, 1986: 53-55). In order to bring these experiences of ‘sensitive living bodies’, of these ‘perceiving selves’, into communication, the act of empathy is essential as a bridge between two living subjects (ibid.: 56), ‘as I try to clarify to myself the state of mind in which the other is in, the other is no longer an object in the proper sense but has involved me in him/herself.’ (p. 62). There is a path of quasi-transformation that leads a psychophysical person to an empirical person, that is the psychophysical person should realise himself as a spiritual person to reach the unity of the person. Since for Stein the spiritual person is subject to the laws of meaning, only after this part of the personality has been developed and formed can one speak of a psychophysical empirical person (Ibid.: 194-195). Stein considers the person as a whole and empathy for her is able to grasp the profound meaning of an action not as an isolated experience, but as an action ‘coming meaningfully from the overall structure of the person’ (ibid.: 195).

Stein attaches great importance to knowledge, not only that which has already been acquired but also the hidden knowledge that is about to be born. For the Author, ‘The knowing is itself a value and certainly a value always graduated according to its object. [...] Not only obtained knowledge, but (and perhaps in an even broader sense) knowledge that has not yet been realised is felt as a value and this feeling as a value is the source of all striving for knowledge’ (ibid.: 190).

Ardigò fully agrees with Stein that the empirical person stands above any unitary synthesis, ‘through which even the most sublime empathy passes’ (Ardigò, *ivi*: 13).

Ardigò, in the wake of Stein (and no doubt Husserl)⁸, recognises the unitary force of empathy as capable of uniting the opposite poles of the subject and the social system. As the ‘opposite pole of self-

referentiality’, empathy for Ardigò is that openness to the other that promotes human well-being, social harmony and personal growth through the ability to judge the other better than he does himself. Self-referentiality and empathy, therefore, ‘can be taken as the two poles of the cognitive spectroscopy, both personal and collective’ (Ardigò, 1986: 13, 15, 16). Empathy, according to Ardigò, can also include some ‘possibility of illusions, of corrections’, but these are all acts that push a person to come as close as possible to understanding the other (Ivi: 11). It is about getting involved in a social relationship.

3. *The medium of corporeality*

As a phenomenologist who emphasises the study of conscious experience as it is given to us directly, rather than speculating on external realities, Stein sees the human body as a ‘medium’, that is, that the body is the medium through which we experience the world and through which our consciousness is interconnected with our surroundings. This approach of the medium of corporeality suggests that the body is not simply a separate physical entity, but an integral part of our experience and self-awareness. Our perceptions, emotions and interactions with the world are all mediated by our bodies. This perspective challenges a dualistic view that separates the mind or soul from the body. Soul and body are, for Stein, an entity that can be called an *empirical psychophysical person*. For Stein, the spirit is founded on the physical body, and without the mediation of the latter, no encounter between spirits can ever take place. Even in the case of non-living people, a bodily mediation (e.g., through other people or works of art) is always needed for spirits to come into contact (Stein, 1986: 201-202). This is the case with Ardigò and how he came into contact with Stein through the mediation of a photograph and the book on *Empathy*.

Ardigò emphasizes the importance of corporeality in facilitating the connection between two subjects, even those of a highly spiritual nature (Ardigò, 1986: 13). Much like Stein, Ardigò acknowledges the tension inherent in the two poles of ambivalence. However, he remains committed to bridging these poles to preserve the unity of the person, aligning with Stein’s intentions. Ardigò’s entire life, his writings, his choices bore witness to how this was possible (with some disappointments, of course): He was, therefore, a mystic but also a man intrigued by artificial intelligence; he was a Catholic who loved politics; he made the world of everyday life (*Lebenswelt*) and social systems communicate with each other; he tried to overcome his own ‘narcissism’ (Ardigò, 2020: 70) in order to move towards altruism; theory and expendability (Cipolla; Esposito, 2010: 165). His own small-statured physique was the polar opposite of his brilliant mind, but through that tiny body, he put his

⁸ It should be noted that Ardigò considered Stein’s work not only original, but also capable of breaking down Husserl’s often complex thought, on which subject see the *Presentazione* on the book *Empatia di Edith Stein*.

ideas to good use. Ardigò tested Stein’s ambivalence on his own skin.

Corporeality in Ardigò is seen in its fullness: as a biological body (*Körper*), as an ‘object of study of the natural sciences’, but above all as a living body (*Leib*), thus placing the relationship between subject and corporeality at the centre (Maturo, 2010: 200).

4. Intersubjectivity and empathy

Husserl’s new transcendental idealism went beyond Kant’s transcendental idealism that considered two elements: the subject and the object. For Kant, it is the subject that knows, which sets the conditions of knowing, and not the object known. Husserl’s idealism is shaped by the ‘constitution of external reality’. Stein goes even further, introducing the concept of intersubjectivity as the only horizon capable of fully grasping external reality. Stein’s empathy is therefore a natural continuation of previous reflections, starting with Lipps, Volkelt, Stern with their aesthetics of empathy and the relationship of the subject to the object; Husserl and the phenomenological school with the subject-nature and subject-subject relationship. Stein’s empathy is the red thread between these extremes that finds its strength in the unity of the person and communication (Nicoletti, 1986: 23, 32-33). For Stein, the empathic act is simultaneously a movement of the subject towards the object and of the subject towards himself (Scaglia, 2021: 269).

It is the distance from idealism and the approach to realism and the originality of empathy that separates Stein from his master Husserl. Stein therefore asks: ‘Does empathy possess the originality of its own experience?’. Even if experience itself is originary, for Stein, not all experiences are endowed with originality, such as memory, fantasy, expectation. To distinguish originality from non-originality, Stein uses the example of remembering a past joy. The memory has an originality, but not the joy in its content (*Gehalt*), because it was originary at the time. Joy in this case is for Stein the intentional object (*intentionales Objekt*). The subject (remembering) and the intentional object (joy) are in close contact without merging with each other (Stein, 1986: 58-60). Empathy is thus for Stein an original act as a present lived experience, although it is not original in its content (*Gehalt*).

As “Empathy is not an external perception” (Stein, 1986: 58), it “[...] is above all the experience of a consciousness other than ourselves (*fremd*) irrespective of the type of subject who performs this experience and the type of subject whose consciousness is experienced. [...] Thus man grasps the psychic life of his fellow man” (Ivi: 64). Therefore, not through unipathy (*Einsföhlung*) in the strict sense, as Lipps understood it – i.e. the experience of others and one’s own dissolve by abandoning oneself in each object – , but through empathy (*Einföhlung*) we experience others (Stein, 1986: 71).

The following diagram summarises the fundamental steps from Kant to Ardigò, focusing on the objects/ subjects of their study.

Tab. 1 - From transcendental idealism to intersubjective objectivity

Thinker	Subject	Object
<i>Kant</i>	Subject	Object
<i>Husserl</i>	Subject	Consciousness, External reality
<i>Stein</i>	Intersubject	Object, External reality, Transcendence with a return to the person
<i>Ardigò</i>	Subject	Internal reality, External reality, Intersubjective objectivity

For Ardigò, intersubjectivity had a broad spectrum of connection due to empathy, not only between subjects of the same life-world (*Lebenswelt*), but also between different life-worlds (Abbruzzese, 2023: 156).

Although for some (Castagnetti, 2023: 175), the empathy of Edith Stein and St John of the Cross are not ‘properly “professional” readings, which I would rather associate with the interests and search for spiritual gratifications, typical of the more mature age of man or, if you like, of certain people’. And yet, in 2010, a quarter of a century after the presentation of *Empathy in the Italy*, Maturo (2010: 208) states that ‘empathy is used as a key to interpreting the social, as an ethical orientation, as a methodological tool’.

5. Ardigò, artificial intelligence and empathy

The reasons why Ardigò was so keen to propose Stein’s volume on empathy to sociologists and artificial intelligence scientists, in particular, are both simple and imperative. Sociologists are the experts called upon to unite the two poles of ambivalence, those who to understand the macro must first understand the micro, while artificial intelligence scientists are those who seek to transfer this capacity to non-living bodies, to facilitate human life as an extension of our bodies and our physical and mental capacities. Failure to achieve one or the other could cause damage not only on an individual level, but also on a societal level. Ardigò’s proposal to this category of experts is therefore not to underestimate empathy, which is also capable of perceiving our own and others’ limits.

Ardigò adheres with deep conviction to Stein’s ambivalent model (Ardigò, 1986: 12), he has even coined the *Sociology of Ambivalence*, in which soul and body or mind and brain are an integral part of the empirical person, in which the extreme poles can meet, so that dignity is fully restored to the person.

Empathy, for Ardigò, constitutes ‘the first elementary grammar of human knowing’ (ibid.: 12) that links the personal with the social. In the wake of this observation,

we can discuss developments in Artificial Intelligence and ask ourselves some questions that Ardigò, I suppose, Ardigò would also have asked himself. Could Artificial Intelligence (AI) replace humans?

On the logic of Ardigò, we can give the following answer:

It is impossible for Artificial Intelligence to replace the person in every respect, this because AI lacks the primary and ultimate element, ‘the first elementary grammar of human knowing’, empathy. It would be like building a skyscraper without foundations, because ‘since each mind is governed by its own categories of thought that theorise on its own life experience’ (Ardigò, 2020: 144), Artificial Intelligence cannot satisfy the individualised needs of humans, nor the ambivalence of the worlds of everyday life and the social system, but can only exist through our intentionality. It is our intentionality that gives and takes life to Artificial Intelligence.

The connection that Ardigò establishes between empathy and hermeneutics is intriguing, as it anchors his perspective on comprehending others from one’s own standpoint (Ardigò, 2020: 42), a concept that holds relevance beyond its original context, including in the realm of Artificial Intelligence. Can artificial intelligence truly grasp, and if so, is it capable of comprehending entities that are fundamentally different from itself?

The importance of empathy for Ardigò in technocratic societies, and beyond, is of great significance as a recovery of the subjective and intersubjective variables that make a difference in the knowledge process:

«[...] empathy constitutes, in my opinion, a watershed and, I believe, a useful heuristic tool precisely in the current period characterized by the end of positivisms and structuralisms and the search for a recovery of subjective and intersubjective variables in the process of knowledge and humanizing practices of otherwise technocratic societies⁹».

In Searle’s article *Minds, Brains and Programs*, written in 1980 and quoted by Ardigò in 1986, the author questions whether “a digital computer think” (p. 11). Forty-three years later, Searle’s question may be formulated as ‘could a digital computer have feelings?’. The difference between ‘strong AI’ and ‘weak AI’ offered by Searle (p. 2) changes the perspective. In the case of strong AI, the computer is regarded as the mind, whereas in the case of weak AI, it is regarded merely as a powerful tool for studying the mind. ‘in artefacts we extend our own intentionality; our tools are extensions of our purposes’, but “The computer understanding is not just (like my understanding German) partial or incomplete; it is zero.” (ibid: 5), ‘Because the formal symbol manipulations by themselves don’t have any intentionality; they are quite meaningless; [...] In

the linguistic jargon, they have only a syntax but no semantics’. The intentionality of computers is limited to a few people, among programmers, users and data analysts, it is not remotely comparable to human intentionality. Since intentionality is human and must be entered into the computer through human intentionality, the intentionality of the computer can never exceed the original intentionality of man. (Ivi, p. 11-12).

Highlighting the potential of Artificial Intelligence to enhance people’s lives across multiple domains is essential. This includes advancements in healthcare, security and crime prevention, assistance for the elderly and people with disabilities, automation of time-consuming repetitive tasks, information processing, translation and global communication by making interaction between cultures easier, and so on. Ardigò stands as a testament to the pioneering use of technology for the betterment of healthcare. As evidenced by Maria Caterina Federici, his impact in the health sector was profound. This is exemplified by initiatives like the ‘establishment of a teleconsultancy service at the Rizzoli Institute in Bologna, where Ardigò served as the Extraordinary Commissioner, and the implementation of electronic health records, first introduced in Emilia Romagna’ (Federici, 2021: 124).

Nello Cristianini, a leading authority on Artificial Intelligence, delves into the shortcuts or decisions made over the past two decades, which have contributed, in part, to the ‘ethical debts’ we face today. What Cristianini underscores is that the new AI models have been crafted by individuals entrenched within a cultural and social milieu that extends beyond mere technology. Consequently, the challenges of AI must be approached in conjunction with cultural issues (Cristianini, 2019: 3). ‘The current paradigm of Artificial Intelligence emerged as the result of a series of cultural innovations, some technical and some social’ (Cristianini, 2019: 1).

To grasp Artificial Intelligence thoroughly, it’s essential to comprehend the term ‘algorithm’, defined as ‘a set of instructions provided to a computer to solve a specific problem or execute a particular task’. It’s through these algorithms that Artificial Intelligence ‘achieves tasks typically necessitating human intellect’ (Di Bello, 2023: 2). However, algorithms presently lack the capacity to navigate emotions. Indeed, the ability to pose pertinent questions, a hallmark of elevated human intelligence and empathy, stands as the barrier delineating Artificial Intelligence from human cognition.

ChatGPT, for instance, is a chatbot based on a large language model developed by OpenAI and launched on 30 November 2022. It is characterised by the ability to refine and target a conversation to the desired length, format, style, level of detail and language. ChatGPT is certainly one of the most advanced chatbots in terms of natural language generation and understanding.

⁹ A. ARDIGÒ, *Per una sociologia oltre il post-moderno*, II edizione, C. CIPOLLA, A. PITASI (a cura di), Milano, FrancoAngeli 2020., p. 42.

«In essence, ChatGPT has no knowledge (or experience) of what it reads or writes, but handles each textual datum with interpretative and generative formulas based on mathematical algorithms, having decomposed the information into elementary particles and created relationships between them, in order to develop purely linguistic comprehension and generation capabilities» (Di Bello, 2023: 13).

What still sets Artificial Intelligence apart from human intelligence is that while the former excels at organizing elements, the latter is the source of elements imbued with a certain intentionality and comprehension.

The ensuing dialogue unfolds between myself and ChatGPT to explore the latest advancements in empathy within Artificial Intelligence.

«V.K.:
Hello!

ChatGPT
Hello! How can I assist you today?

V.K.:
How are you?

ChatGPT
I don't have feelings or emotions, but I'm here and ready to help you with any questions or tasks you have. How can I assist you today?

V.K.:
So, you cannot know how I feel.

ChatGPT
That's correct. I don't have the ability to experience emotions or understand how individuals feel. My responses are based on patterns in the text data I've been trained on, and I aim to provide helpful and informative answers to the best of my knowledge and abilities. If you have any questions or topics you'd like to discuss, feel free to let me know!

V.K.:
I am interested in empathy.

ChatGPT
Empathy refers to the ability to understand and share the feelings and perspectives of others. It's a fundamental aspect of human interaction and can contribute to building strong relationships, effective communication, and a sense of connection with others. There are different forms of empathy:
Is there something specific you would like to know more about regarding empathy?

V.K.:
You are clever.

ChatGPT
Thank you for your kind words! I'm here to provide information and assistance to the best of my abilities. If you have any

questions or topics you'd like to explore further, feel free to let me know. How can I assist you today?

V.K.:
Do you think Artificial Intelligence will become empathic in the future?

ChatGPT
Artificial Intelligence (AI) becoming truly empathic, in the same way that humans experience empathy, is a complex and debated topic within the field of AI and ethics. As of my last knowledge update in September 2021, AI systems like myself don't possess emotions, consciousness, or the ability to truly understand and experience human emotions in the way humans do.

However, researchers are working on developing AI systems that can simulate empathy in certain ways. For example:

Emotion Recognition: AI systems can be trained to recognize and interpret human emotions based on facial expressions, tone of voice, and other cues. This can help AI systems respond appropriately to human emotional states.

Chatbots with Empathy: Some chatbots are designed to simulate empathy by using predefined responses based on recognized emotional cues. These responses aim to create a more human-like interaction. [...]

One of the potential risks accompanying this rapid development is the fragmentation of the individual's unity, a regression into dualism, wherein the person itself is marginalized (*ausschalten*). The Internet and Artificial Intelligence offer a myriad of possibilities, and the allure of acquiring everything may lead to an attempt to surpass inherent limitations such as beauty, intelligence, and wealth. In doing so, there is a danger of undermining the principles espoused by Stein and Ardigò. Consequently, individuals, especially those marginalized, may be tempted to virtually possess what they lack in reality, blurring the lines between actuality and virtuality, normalcy and fantasy, attainable and unattainable. The urge to project oneself differently externally than internally strikes at the core of human essence, widening the chasm between the lived body (*Leib*) and the physical body (*Körper*). Our behavior online differs from our actions in real life, leading to emotional discrepancies between the digital and offline realms, resulting in a sense of disorientation. Discussions around new values emerge, defining digital citizens: the culture of sharing, the value placed on transparency, and the evolving concept of privacy, which the younger generation does not prioritize (de Kerkhove, 2018).

Conclusions

Ardigò remains an enduring influence for social scientists, his insights and explorations into future-oriented themes continue to guide us, emphasizing the paramount importance of the individual. Through his engagement with Stein and the profound empathy they shared, Ardigò brought theory to life, seamlessly

integrating his beliefs into his daily existence. His transparency and intellectual integrity underscore his commitment to human dignity, bridging the gap between theory and practice. As a multifaceted figure, Ardigò has enriched our understanding of social reality, and his legacy endures, evolving to meet contemporary challenges. He recognized the potential of artificial intelligence as a boon for humanity while remaining vigilant to its potential pitfalls, particularly its impact on the vulnerable. In today's digital society, empathy takes on renewed significance, transcending virtual interactions to encompass genuine human connection. The pursuit of AI capable of understanding and empathizing with human experience presents a compelling challenge, one that Ardigò would likely approach with caution, emphasizing the indivisibility of human nature. To contemplate society without acknowledging the individual is akin to celebrating a wedding without a groom. Intuition, desire, trust, conviction, and intentionality drive our connections with others, inspiring creativity, altruism, and hope. As noted by Cipolla¹⁰, one of Ardigò's devoted disciples, "Ardigò lives on in his thought and work", a testament to his enduring impact on the field of sociology.

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¹⁰ It's noteworthy to mention that, thanks to Costantino Cipolla's initiative, ten books exploring Ardigò's ideas have been published, alongside numerous articles in various academic journals. Personally, my introduction to Ardigò came through Professor Cipolla, and interestingly, not within the confines of traditional Italian university lecture halls.

¹¹ I extend my sincere gratitude to Luca Corchia for his precious advice and for providing me with some of the literature. Any omissions are entirely my responsibility.

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La rivista *Sociologia* è una delle più antiche pubblicazioni di sociologia edite in Italia (1956). Essa fu ideata da Luigi Sturzo già negli anni del suo esilio americano, in un tempo nel quale la cultura italiana tendeva ad osteggiare lo sviluppo di una disciplina che alla fine dell'ottocento nel nostro Paese aveva stentato ad affermarsi anche per la debolezza teorica che aveva caratterizzato le sue prime espressioni. La rinascita di questa disciplina dopo il secondo conflitto mondiale si deve, dunque, in gran parte al fatto che negli Stati Uniti Sturzo era già considerato uno dei sociologi stranieri più rilevanti. La nascita della rivista ha segnato, perciò, una modernizzazione degli studi relativi alle scienze sociali italiane e una riapertura del dialogo con la cultura di oltre oceano. Scorrendo i numeri di *Sociologia* si può seguire, dunque, lo sviluppo della disciplina e la maturazione culturale di quelli che, a partire dagli anni cinquanta, si sono poi affermati come i più rilevanti sociologi italiani e stranieri. L'impostazione scientifica e culturale della rivista è stata sempre caratterizzata da alcune linee di sviluppo particolarmente rilevanti che, a partire dal duemila e otto, data di inizio dell'attuale direzione, sono state riprese, specificate e approfondite. Linee di sviluppo che vanno qui di seguito ricordate. A) Valorizzazione della sociologia come disciplina generale. Se non si vuole abbandonare l'insegnamento di Comte, va considerato che la sociologia costituisce un sapere che guarda al sociale come ad un tipo di esperienza che ci consente di comprendere le ragioni dello sviluppo della vicenda umana concepita nel suo insieme. Da questo punto di vista la sociologia è nata e si è sviluppata sulla base di un rapporto dialettico e spesso conflittuale con la filosofia. B) Promozione della sociologia come scienza particolare accanto alle altre scienze dell'uomo. Infatti, il sociale, se rappresenta la modalità fondamentale di ogni tipo di espressione dell'esperienza umana, costituisce anche qualcosa che è specifico rispetto ai fenomeni che sono oggetto di altre scienze sociali: il diritto, l'economia, l'antropologia, la storia... A causa e grazie a queste due dimensioni la sociologia si può presentare ad un tempo come teoria generale e come ricerca particolare diretta a ricostruire ed interpretare dati sociali relativi e singoli settori della società. C) Attenzione alla sociologia come paradigma. Soprattutto a partire dall'età della rivoluzione industriale, la sociologia ha dato luogo ad un nuovo paradigma, quello appunto sociologico, che è divenuto qualcosa che ha caratterizzato anche le discipline limitrofe. Si pensi alla teoria delle aspettative e all'impianto non astrattamente economicistico dell'economia, all'anti-formalismo che è alla base di tutte le scienze giuridiche contemporanee, alla prospettiva che oggi qualifica la scienza politica più avanzata, alla stessa teologia, la quale si sta presentando sempre più come teologia 'pubblica', caratterizzata da un punto di vista sociologico, alla storiografia, la quale si è rinnovata già a partire dalla prima parte del novecento mediante l'inserzione del paradigma sociologico in quello propriamente storico, all'epistemologia, che per definire i concetti di verificabilità e di falsificabilità deve affidarsi alla fine ad un elemento sociologico, al consenso della comunità scientifica. Dunque, una sociologia, che voglia essere consapevole pienamente delle sue potenzialità, deve essere in continuo dialogo con le altre discipline; deve accogliere le riflessioni 'altre', proprio perché è opportuno sia attenta alla funzione svolta dal proprio paradigma nell'ambito dei saperi limitrofi. È su tali presupposti, in linea con l'insegnamento di Luigi Sturzo, che la sociologia, pur rimanendo aperta ai diversi orientamenti culturali che ne caratterizzano il percorso scientifico, può tornare a quella storicità concreta, a quella dimensione di esperienza effettiva che definisce, più nel profondo, il suo terreno elettivo. È all'esperienza, infatti, colta nella pratica della ricerca e nella sua lettura teoretica, concettuale e riflessiva, che la cultura sociologica, per andare oltre l'astratta costruzione del dato, deve rivolgere il suo sguardo. La sociologia, se vuole cogliere il carattere concreto della vita, deve riuscire a penetrare nelle strutture concettuali in cui si risolve la costituzione storica del sociale. Per questi motivi, sulla scorta delle suggestioni ereditate dai più sensibili sociologi dell'età della rinascita della nostra disciplina, la rivista *Sociologia* accoglie le riflessioni a) della teoria sociologica e della storia della sociologia, b) della ricerca empirica e dell'analisi concettuale, c) delle discipline limitrofe fondate su un impianto eminentemente sociologico. Per questo motivo ritiene di svolgere, all'interno della nostra *koimè* culturale, un'includibile funzione, tanto più necessaria, in quanto non sempre sufficientemente promossa e valorizzata anche a livello internazionale.

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