

# Ethics and the Techno-Economic Future\*

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The general theme—"ethics in the future"—intends to question a form of human knowledge, ethics, in relation to a dimension of time, the future. In broader terms, the title refers to a question about the relationship between knowledge and time, which in turn includes questions such as: "To what do different forms of knowledge—ethics, economics, physics—refer when they discuss the future?"; "What do they mean by a possible, probable, preferable future?"; "What future emerges through their key concepts?"; "What kind of future challenges present knowledge within an epochal context that is established in the form of an incessant reproduction of relative means and ends, one that is constantly outdated?"; "What form of knowledge is required first and foremost so that the establishment of this epoch can take place?"

**Keywords:** Phenomenological Ethics; Ethical Space; Future; Moral Imperatives; Philosophy of Economics; Techno-Economics

## Preliminary Note

Before we introduce the question to which this essay will be devoted, we should note that the future dimension is included within the fundamental question of modern ethics. In a passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, this dimension is introduced in the second of the three guiding questions of Kantian thought: "Alles Interesse meiner Vernunft (das spekulative sowohl, als auch das praktische) vereinigt sich in folgenden drei Fragen. 1. Was kann ich wissen? 2. Was soll ich tun? 3. Was kann ich hoffen?"<sup>1</sup>

In the English translation by J. M. D. Meiklejohn, the passage sounds like this: "The whole interest of reason, speculative as well as practical, is centred in the three following questions: 1. What can I know? 2. What ought I to do? 3. What may I hope?" (Kant, 2009, pp. 841-842).

These three questions then merge into a single question: "What is man?"<sup>2</sup> Without entering into the substance of the matter, and without delving into ethical implications, we may note that the second of the three questions, the so-called practical question, refers to the future: that which needs to be (done), but is not yet (done); that is, that which has not yet (in fact) materialised. If it were already, it would not emerge as that which is yet to be (done). The question is therefore articulated with regard to a future that claims its own realization—a

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<sup>1</sup> I. Kant, *KrV*, A 804-A 805.

<sup>2</sup> I. Kant, *Log*, AA IX 25: 6.

realization which seems, Kant says, *möglich*, or, as I translate: likely, and which therefore lies in the future (De Gennaro, 2019, p. 97; 2013, pp. 15-26).<sup>3</sup> The future, in turn, refers to man as an acting being, so that what is likely can be realized in the sense of a “to be done”, which is, in itself, possible, probable, preferable. Through this active realization, man affirms his own freedom, while at the same time confirming the objectivity of what he encounters as something before him, placed outside his own being-subject. Ethics is a science (“Wissenschaft”), writes Immanuel Kant in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, devoted not to the laws of nature (“Gesetze der Natur”) but to the laws of freedom (“Gesetze der Freiheit”), i.e., not to the laws according to which everything comes to be (“nach denen alles geschieht”), but to those according to which everything ought to come to be (“nach denen alles geschehen soll”), even if, most of the time, it does not come to be (“es öfters nicht geschieht”).<sup>4</sup> We understand that which we “ought to do” as the demand to commit ourselves to something that is not yet, namely something likely, which needs to be realized in the future. It is therefore an “ought-to-be-done” based on the freedom of those who assume it as a likely future. Here we can see the trait that characterizes the above-mentioned interrogative (“What ought I to do?”) as a fundamental question of modern ethics: indeed, that question does not arise, as we might think, within an already constituted field of human knowledge, called “ethics”, which in turn refers to a predefined period, called “modern”, of an already established historical context. On the contrary, it is precisely because this question is asked that ethics is, in the first place, a well-founded knowledge; in other words, ethical knowledge itself is *based* on the aforementioned question, and is informed by the way in which that question is asked. Finally, we note that this question assumes the existence of a subject—one who performs the “to be done” to the extent that the latter must be done according to the laws of freedom—while the character of doing is, in turn, predefined as the realization of a likely effect, so that the one who performs the “to be done” is considered the author responsible for the effect itself (“Urheber der Wirkung”<sup>5</sup>) (Höffe, 2012; Heidegger, 1994; Sciacca, 2000; Guyer, 2008; Engstrom, 2009; Bauer & Meyerhuber, 2019; Pirni, 2019).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> I prefer to translate *möglich* (in the Kantian sense) with “likely”, rather than with “possible”. The possible is only the “not yet actual”; however, when Kant speaks of *Bedingung der Möglichkeit*, he does not refer to a condition that establishes something as “not yet actual”. If that were the case, that something would lose its *Möglichkeit* in the very moment in which it becomes actual. Now, something actual certainly ceases to be possible, but it does not cease to be *möglich*. In order to capture the sense of *möglich* and *Möglichkeit* which is not superseded by actuality, Ivo De Gennaro suggested the use of the words “likely” and “likelihood”. In introducing this notion, he writes: “Today the most common meaning of likelihood is probability (*Wahrscheinlichkeit*; *probabilità*); in this meaning, the word is also used in the science of statistics. However, this is only *one* meaning, and more specifically one that applies to contingency. On the other hand, in our use of the term, likelihood is a word of being: it indicates what is likely, where ‘likely’ means: apt, fair, (and therefore) expectable, acceptable, credible, promising, thinkable, true.” (I. De Gennaro, *Principles of Philosophy. A Phenomenological Approach*, Karl Alber Verlag, München/Freiburg, 2019, p. 97. Regarding the translation of *Möglichkeit*, see also I. De Gennaro, *The Weirdness of Being. Heidegger’s Unheard Answer to the Seinsfrage*, Acumen, Durham 2013, pp. 15-26).

<sup>4</sup> I. Kant, *Gms*, AA IV: 387-388.

<sup>5</sup> I. Kant, *Ms*, AA IV 26.

<sup>6</sup> Regarding the fundamental question of modern ethics in the context of metaphysical thought, see: O. Höffe, *Kants Kritik der praktischen Vernunft. Eine philosophische Freiheit*, C.H. Beck, München 2012; M. Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit. Einleitung in die Philosophie*, GA 31, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 1994; F. Sciacca, *Il concetto di persona in Kant. Normatività e politica*, Giuffrè Milano 2000; P. Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008; S. Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009; A.M. Bauer and M.I. Meyerhuber, *Zwei Welten am Rande der Kollision. Zum Verhältnis von empirischer Forschung und normativer Theorie, insbesondere vor dem Hintergrund der Ethik*, in: A.M. Bauer and M.I. Meyerhuber (eds.), *Philosophie zwischen Sein und Sollen. Normative Theorie und empirische Forschung im Spannungsfeld*, de Gruyter, Berlin / Boston 2019, pp. 13-38; A. Pirni, *Il reale, il possibile, il comune. Sul concetto kantiano di libertà*, in F. Camera, R. Celada Ballanti, and G. Cuncio (eds.), *Etica, Tempo, Verità a Studi in onore di Domenico Venturelli*, Le Lettere, Brescia 2019, pp. 158-173.

### The Question

Following on from the general theme mentioned at the beginning—“ethics in the future”—which is the context of the present text, the focus is on the future as a dimension within which a future ethics becomes likely, and therefore decides on its own advent—an advent which in turn emerges as the future of ethics, and which, therefore, is necessarily constituted through a form of human knowledge, which, in its turn, is at all times likely. There arises, at this point, the question to which this study will be devoted, and which sounds as follows: “Do we, today, have a notion of the future which is sufficient to interrogate its relationship with ethics? Or must we still commit ourselves to the project of a new ethical space (as the general theme states) in the future?”<sup>7</sup>

In the metaphysical tradition, the future of ethics is decided by the “kingdom of ends”. This sphere offers a path to action, providing human existence with a measure, so that it can be an existence worthy of man. These ends—necessary in themselves and therefore free from any contingency—outline a future that in turn requires a knowledge devoted to the attempt to establish ultimate goals.

The goals are considered likely ends, since their implementation is entrusted to principles of action constituted in the form of what “ought-to-be-done” (and thus is itself likely), i.e. to principles of action that are themselves future-related (and thus are themselves a promise of likelihood). These principles are considered measure-giving ends that provide a horizon for the likelihood of man’s action.

In fact, these principles are principles of perfection; in other words, principles of action that imply and promise a truth. In turn, the implementation of this truth also seems reasonable; in other words: sufficiently well-founded to indicate a preferable future. In this context, economics, for example, is seen as a knowledge dedicated to the optimization of production, distribution, and allocation processes of the means useful for the realization of the purposes mentioned above. Thus, economics contributes to the implementation of the ends set by ethics, while it itself refrains from questioning these ends.

We can restate the thus characterized relation between ethics and economics, as conceived in the context of metaphysics, in the following manner: the future of ethics is decided by the “kingdom of ends”, from which so-called first-order, that is, unconditional, imperatives can be derived. On the other hand, the future of economics is defined by the “realm of means”, whose likelihood is based on the decisions that occur at the level of the “kingdom of ends”; hence, from that realm so-called second-order, that is, conditional, imperatives can be derived. In short, the relation between ethics and economics, hence between ethical and economic future, is defined by the dependence of the latter (second-order, conditional) from the former (first-order, unconditional).

How do things stand today with regard to this metaphysical perspective? In fact, what we see is that the relationship between ethics and economics appears to be *upended*. Economics, whose form is now that of a techno-economy,<sup>8</sup> has become a branch of knowledge that determines *for itself* (so to speak, unconditionally) the ends to be realized, implementing principles of action that inform the process lending its name to our time: globalization (Giovanola & Totaro, 2008; Giovanola, 2012; Amendola & Cantillo, 2017; Savater, 2017; Mearman,

<sup>7</sup> In this regard a recently published book by Ivo De Gennaro is particularly illuminating. Ivo De Gennaro, *Vincoli etici. Tra metafisica, scienza e arte*, Ibis, Milano 2022.

<sup>8</sup> The term “techno-economy” is defined below, p. XX.

Berger, & Guizzo, 2019; Schäfer & Schuster, 2022).<sup>9</sup> It follows that ethics finds itself forced to assume—in the second place, so to speak—the role of a corrective and functional knowledge in a predetermined context of action,<sup>10</sup> which, according to the interpretation proposed here, corresponds to a future which we can characterise as techno-economic. We also note how this future speaks the language of metaphysics to the extent that it uses its terminology—without, however, questioning the sense of the employed metaphysical terms, and without a critique of their common meaning. It is, as it were, a manner of speaking completely lacking in self-awareness. Despite the apparent reversal of the classic relationship between ethics and economics, the techno-economic future nevertheless remains characterized by the need to establish an end in the form of a principle of action, although we can see that the end now envisaged no longer has the character of perfection, but, on the contrary, is *in principle* imperfect and unfinished; not because it doesn't attain a likely perfection, but because it is *ab ovo* unrelated to something like a perfection. As a result, the path that, in a metaphysical context, preserved human existence from being deprived of a measure is now abolished; just as the future is abolished as that dimension within which is decided the future of a knowledge such as classical ethics, the likelihood of which, as previously stated, depends on the question of the final goals of human existence.

<sup>9</sup> The relationship between ethics and economics has recently been thematized in a series of publications which offer an overview of the wide spectrum of issues encompassed by that relationship in our time. In light of the recent global economic crisis, particular attention is being devoted to the need to re-establish this relationship by founding it on a new basis. The global economic crisis has manifested itself not only at the financial and banking level, but also at the political, social, environmental, climate, migration level, etc. At all these levels, the economy interferes decisively, so that, as a result of the global economic crisis, the predominant economic approach is called into question both in theory and in practice. It seems, in fact, that the “orthodox” economy is characterized by a somewhat reductive approach to the phenomena which it thematizes—an approach incapable of grasping the latter in all their richness. In the face of this inadequacy, therefore, a series of “heterodox” approaches have emerged, which are committed to a redefinition of the economy itself, which, in turn, requires a rethinking of economic ethics. On the other hand, the mere *ex post* application of ethics as a corrective tool could prove just as inadequate as the mere prospective application of ethics as a guiding tool. With regard to the need to re-found the relationship between ethics and economics, see: B. Giovanola and F. Totaro (eds.), *Etica ed economia. Il rapporto possibile*, Edizioni Messaggero, Padova 2008; B. Giovanola, *Oltre l'omo oeconomicus. Lineamenti di etica economica*, Orthotes, Salerno 2012; A. Amendola and C. Cantillo (eds.), *Etica ed economia. Una tormentata relazione*, Mimesis, Sesto San Giovanni 2017; F. Savater, *Un'etica per il futuro. Conversazioni con Filippo La Porta*, Castelvecchi, Roma 2017; A. Mearman, S. Berger, and D. Guizzo, *What is Heterodox Economics? Conversations with Leading Economists*, Routledge, London 2019. G. N. Schäfer, S. E. Schuster, *Mapping Mainstream Economics. Genealogical Foundations of Alternativity*, Routledge, London/New York 2022.

<sup>10</sup> From the perspective of classical metaphysics, we see how, at a time when a context for action is configured exclusively in relation to relative ends, which are therefore no longer necessary in and of themselves, the commitment derived from ethical criteria dwindles through the act of relativizing itself. In other words, what dwindles is the reason why the commitment appears to be “true” and not merely “contingent”. On the other hand, contingent commitments serve only to maintain the context for action within which they reign, by means of operational criteria of a functional or corrective nature. The problem discussed here concerns, not least, applied ethics, which, as K. Bayertz notes in a recent text, has “established itself as a sub-discipline of moral philosophy in both academic teaching and research”, while it has already “expanded beyond the realms of academic moral philosophy into a *public role*. Applied ethics has an impact not only in the form of books and essays but also in the form of practical decisions and thus action. This impact is not occasional and coincidental, but rather regular and systematical”. K. Bayertz, *Self-enlightenment of Applied Ethics*, in: A. Cortina, D. García-Marzá J. Conill (eds.), *Public Reason and Applied Ethics: The Ways of Practical Reason in a Pluralist Society*, Routledge, London/New York 2008, pp. 33-48, p. 33). Thus, we see how “ethics” is “applied” to a predetermined context of action, in light of which it arguably has a more or less “public” role, with more or less “practical” consequences, with more or less “regular and systematical” outcomes. Applied ethics is characterized from the outset by its claim to find solutions to “true problems”, writes K. Bayertz. The consequences of this claim are far-reaching: “The project of applied ethics does not only reveal the changing function of ethical reflection within modern societies, but also a change of function and status of morality itself. [...] As applied ethics becomes the instrument of direct problem solving, morality is being made positive, that is it results from human settings [...]” (K. Bayertz, *Self-enlightenment of Applied Ethics*, cit., p. 40). Hence the proposal to develop, in the future, an ethics emancipated from the metaphysical tradition, which, instead, surrenders to the “reality” of “true problems”. The latter, in fact, emerge in the light of relative ends within predefined contexts for action. In order to guarantee that the context itself is maintained, we need criteria that can solve the problems that threaten it. It is precisely these criteria that are subsequently assigned an “ethical value”, whereas, in themselves, they have no authority, since, outside the aforementioned (“already established”) context, they appear unfounded.

### Segue

How is the future represented following the upending just noted? In order to attempt an answer, three preliminary comments must be made.

*First observation.* In the metaphysical tradition, the future is indicated as a temporal dimension that needs to be sustained, borne by human knowledge; in other words, the future is configured in an essential bond with man's existence. The importance of this circumstance emerges in a recent book of Gino Zaccaria (2022). While in the metaphysical tradition the concept of time, and therefore also the future, exist thanks to the existence of man, and are not considered independently of the latter, this understanding is not shared by the modern sciences, first and foremost by mathematical physics. In fact, the latter conceives of time as a phenomenon, which, in order to exist, does not need man at all, to the extent that it is understood as a property of a reality that was given and configured well before the appearance of man. With regard to this distinction Zaccaria writes the following:

Su tale punto, la fisica matematica e il meditare scismatico sono infatti destinalmente separati, irrimediabilmente scissi: —il meditare scismatico sente il tempo come un'indole che richiede, fruendone, l'esistenza dell'uomo;

—la fisica matematica teorizza invece il tempo come ciò che, per sussistere, non ha affatto bisogno dell'uomo, giacché esso sarebbe invece una proprietà intrinseca alla realtà naturale, già data e configurata “ben prima” della comparsa, in essa, della forma di vita del genere “uomo”.

La situazione sembra essere la seguente: noi intendiamo costantemente e compiutamente un “che” del genere “tempo”, nel senso che non un solo istante della nostra esistenza potrebbe essere ci è che è—*istante*, appunto—se tale intesa temporale non sussistesse in noi, con noi e per noi (in, con e per ciascuno). Eppure, non appena poniamo (o ci sia posto) il suddetto duplice interrogativo [Che è esattamente (concretamente) ci è che chiamiamo “tempo” e intendiamo come tempo? È il tempo “qualcosa” che possa sussistere indipendentemente dell'uomo?], ci ritroviamo privi di una parola comune [...]: non abbiamo né troviamo una risposta univoca. Entriamo pertanto in uno stato che definiamo, alla greca, “aporetico”. E ci è una buona cosa per un pensare che abbia a cuore l'essenziale [...]. (Zaccaria, 2022, pp. 99-100)

On this point, mathematical physics and schismatic meditation [i.e., the thought of being itself] are, in fact, destined to be separated, irretrievably “scissured”:

—schismatic meditation senses time as “something” that as such requires for itself to avail itself of the existence of man;

—mathematical physics, on the other hand, theorises time as something that, in order to subsist, does not need man at all, since it would instead be an intrinsic property of natural reality, already given and configured “well before” the appearance, in the latter, of the life-form we call “man”.

The fact of the matter seems to be the following: we constantly and completely understand “something” of the genre “time”, in the sense that not a single instant of our existence could be what it is—i.e. precisely *an instant*—if this temporal understanding did not exist within us, with us and to us (within, with and to each one of us). And yet, as soon as we ask (or are asked) the aforementioned two-part question [a. What, in concrete terms, is that what we call “time” and understand as time? b. Is time “something” that can subsist independently of the existence of man?], we find ourselves without a common word [...]: we do not have, and we cannot find, a univocal answer. Therefore, we enter into a state that we can call, according to the Greek manner, “aporetic”. And this is a good thing for a thought that has only the essential at heart [...].<sup>11</sup>

*Second observation.* In the context of the techno-economy, the future is represented through the adoption of a distinction between a “future present”—that is, the future in the sense of the (given) reality of a future moment, a reality about which we still know nothing in the present—and a “present future”—or the future in the sense of a representation that, in the present, anticipates future time (Esposito, 2009). However, which conditions allow us to assume this distinction? Can we, with certainty, take for granted the notion of a present future without in

<sup>11</sup> The translation is by the author, G. Zaccaria, himself.

any way anticipating it in its presence and therefore imagining it, as is the case for the future present? And furthermore: how can we refer to a given reality (namely, the future present), about which we still cannot know anything? Should we not at least admit that we are in a situation which requires a further effort of clarification?

*Third observation.* The term “techno-economy”, which I propose here, does not refer to an economical reality based on the use of particular technologies, but to a human mode of knowledge, namely *that* mode of knowledge which captures the meaning of economic phenomena in a purely operative manner. More specifically, the techno-economic future is constituted by means of a knowledge that anticipates the sense of economic phenomena by virtue of the scientific method, recognizing only that sense and determination of reality which the method itself requires for its own implementation (that is, for itself to operate). This sense is what determines economic phenomena as something that can be controlled, and finally reproduced, thus pre-establishing them within their own future. Once again: the scientific method recognizes (and in its turn actively articulates) as a phenomenon only that which can be represented securely, such that its commandability and reproducibility is in advance ensured. Hence, techno-economy indicates a knowledge that is constituted as a representation of phenomena based on the anticipation of their sense through this method. Paraphrasing an elucidation by Heidegger (2016)<sup>12</sup>, it could be said that the method is understood here not as an instrument, with whose help research is able to manage the complex of given phenomena, but as that “pre-conceiving project” of the sense that “establishes the horizon” in which phenomena “can be adopted and illuminated” in their objectivity, with the aim of making them, as mentioned before, everywhere and always controllable and reproducible.

### Ethical Space in the Techno-Economic Future

Let us return, then, to the question asked previously: how does the future appear in light of the techno-economic context? That is: how does that dimension appear, within which the coming ethics (according to the aforementioned general theme, which defines the scope of the present text) would become likely, and hence be decided with respect to its future? Answer: in the techno-economic context the future appears as a sphere that involves uncertainty and risk. Both uncertainty and risk are constitutive elements of the modern economy. Both—in their essential reference to the future—operate as motives for investments, transactions, and credits (Esposito, 2009). In the techno-economy, the future itself is conceived by means of probability calculations related to levels of preference, thanks to which one would anticipate future events. However, we must be clear about the following circumstance: the methods of computation which translate the uncertainty of a “present future” into the certainty of a “future present” not only mask the future risks associated with economic decisions (which may have undesirable effects on the expected results of investment strategies), but also prevent man from experiencing the future in such a way that the future has man’s existence as its foundation. In other words: the future as such (i.e., as a dimension intimately related to man’s being) is abolished, and replaced by a surrogate which, unlike the future itself, proves to be calculable. In this way, those methods create a narrative that is stated in terms of purely

<sup>12</sup> See M. Heidegger, *Die Herkunft der Kunst und die Bestimmung des Denkens*, in *Vorträge*, GA 80.1, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 2016. An Italian translation of this text, which is particularly helpful for its understanding, is provided by I. De Gennaro and G. Zaccaria: M. Heidegger, *La provenienza dell’arte e l’intonatura del pensiero*, in: *eudia. Annuario di pensiero, poesia e arte*, 5/2011, pp. 1-22. Heidegger’s elucidation refers to the following observation by Nietzsche, which underscores a fundamental trait of the present era: “Nicht der Sieg der Wissenschaft ist das, was unser 19. Jahrhundert auszeichnet, sondern der Sieg der wissenschaftlichen Methode über die Wissenschaft.” (F. Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, n. 466). An English version of this passage, based on the Italian translation by I. De Gennaro and G. Zaccaria, reads as follows: “It is not the cogency of science that is the distinctive mark of our nineteenth century, but the cogency of the scientific method exercised upon science” (M. Heidegger, *La provenienza dell’arte e l’intonatura del pensiero*, cit., p. 9).

fictitious certainties; finally, they create a fictitious future in the form of a set of computable scenarios. In sum, the replacement of the uncertainty of the present future with the certainty of a calculable future present amounts to the very abolition of the future itself (Morgan, 2012, pp. 55-64; Geipel, 2015, pp. 9-116; Priddat, 2015, pp. 57-76; Esposito, 2016, pp. 37-42).

However, what do we mean, here, when we say: “the future”? We must admit that a concept of future not informed by the notions of “present future” and “future present” still seems vague.

Acknowledging this vagueness, rather than avoiding it, allows us to detach our question from a common concept of time, which is related to time as conceived in the domain of mathematical physics, and which proves to be problematic in our interpretive context. We call it “the chronological concept of time”. It refers to clock-time, namely time as a parameter that is objectively measured by a clock. As long as the notion of future is exclusively informed by the chronological concept of time, the future does not appear in its relation to the human being, and this means: in its need to be founded in a human knowledge such as ethics. The reason for this is that the chronological concept of time implies a future that persists independently from the existence of the human being. For as long as the understanding of ethics is related to the juxtaposition of “present future” and “future present”, it remains within the scope of the chronological concept of time; according to this concept, the present and the future (as well as the past) are calculable points on the time axis, which in principle only differ from each other by their position on this axis. Ethics itself is then ultimately an event (among other events) in the so-called “time continuum”. However, this contradicts the approach of the metaphysical tradition of ethics, in which the future is configured in an essential bond with man’s existence; in fact, based on the chronological concept of time it seems impossible to understand how this essential bond can be thought at all, i.e., how the future could become constitutive of ethics. It seems that the chronological concept of future denies, and, in a sense, objects to, the very openness of the future, so that man, in turn, is deprived of being concerned by it.

In conclusion, the constellation which urges us to reconsider our understanding of the future can be outlined as follows: We recognize, within the techno-economic future, the metaphysical structure of a future determined by the kingdom of ends, which in turn emerges through the perceived need to establish an end in the form of a principle of action; however, this principle no longer seems to have the character of perfection (as was the case in classical ethics), but, on the contrary, (in light of an end that constitutes itself as a constant overcoming of itself) the principle presents itself as the affirmation of the negation of every final goal (as is the case in today’s economy).

### Synopsis

We conclude by summarizing the steps taken thus far:

1. In the metaphysical context, ethics is linked to a future represented by the kingdom of ends.
2. The dimension within which ethics becomes likely is therefore defined by the relationship between means and ends that are necessary in themselves.
3. The kingdom of ends represents a “strong” future, so to speak, by virtue of a path that can offer a measure to human existence.
4. The representation of the future takes place through the formulation of first-order ethical imperatives.
5. In the techno-economic context, ethics remains in some ways linked to a future represented by the kingdom of ends.

6. However, to the extent that these purposes are perceived as relative (i.e., without a likely perfection or accomplishment), they appear in light of an imperative which commands their constant overcoming. The dimension within which ethics became likely is abolished, in the sense that it is defined by the relationship between means and ends that are no longer necessary in themselves; that is, by the relationship between means and ends destined to become means themselves.<sup>13</sup>

7. Consequently, every supposed “present future” is represented in the form of a “future present”. This representation takes place through probability calculations, by which we try to anticipate every eventuality, thus preventing the uncertainty of incalculable risks.

8. These calculations, however, mask essential traits of the future itself, and, consequently, its truth.

9. Ethics—now exempt from the kingdom of ends necessary in themselves—is left with the role of a purely corrective and functional knowledge, a role which it plays through the formulation of second-order imperatives (i.e., the imperatives which, in a metaphysical setting, belong to the economic sphere).

10. An ethics detached from the kingdom of ends necessary in themselves seems forced to accept the role of a corrective-functional knowledge; in order to avoid this “destiny”, it must in turn commit itself to the configuration of a new and different notion of the future. The need for such a notion becomes perceivable if we acknowledge the abolition of the future which characterizes the epoch of the techno-economy.

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<sup>13</sup> Any end, aim, goal, target, objective is a means in that it functions as that which must be attained only in order to be overcome by means of the fixation of a new end, etc. In other words, any end is just an occasional tool (a condition) for the tendency to overcome. In fact, the latter is the only “end” which is constantly realized.

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