

*Ad lectores*

In March of this year, Steven Spielberg's *Ready Player One* (produced and distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures; Burbank, California, 29 March 2018) reached cinemas in the United States – and in Italy, too. It is a film adaptation of the earlier novel by the same name (Crown Archetype, New York 2011), the first by the scriptwriter Ernest Cline, winner of the 2012 “Alex Awards”. The authors imagine a world where, by the year 2045, heedless use of natural resources, pollution, indigence and overpopulation will have ruined life on Earth, with many cities having become merely mega-slums. In a world where life is certainly not pleasant yet has to be lived regardless – the film is indeed classified as belonging to the genre of “dystopic science fiction” – a good part of the population find refuge and consolation in the virtual reality of a widely available videogame, named “OASIS”. To be sure, the metaphore of an *oasis* was already quite effectively employed by Fink, the philosopher, to illustrate the fundamental human phenomenon of the game, in his essay *Oase des Glücks. Gedanken zu einer Ontologie des Spiels* (Alber, Freiburg-München 1957).

Let us now take one more, final, look at the plot of Spielberg's film – or of Cline's novel, for those who consider the “seventh art”, filmmaking, a minor one when compared with the other six: The multinational corporations – so the plot – that had so badly damaged life on the planet, are now in search of a “code”, hidden within the videogame itself. They intend to find this “code” and to use it to extend their power even further, by gaining control also over the virtual reality of the videogame, which they intend to privatize, commercialize, and turn into yet another source of financial gain. This would come at the cost of the complete freedom, which characterizes that virtual reality and has made of it precisely an “oasis” for the players, for human beings.

The film's kind of science fiction – like that of Isaac Asimov or of the genre's classics by Jules Verne – borders simultaneously on the scientific novel, on “political fiction”, and on “social science fiction”. This means that it speaks of something that is underway, though not yet actually present. Game playing, in itself an exercise of the imagination, of free choice, indeed of freedom, and of joy, is at risk of becoming, at this time more than ever, a manifestation of being held in thrall, repet-

itiveness, neediness, indeed dependence and even enslavement. Indeed it risks being made into yet one more thing for the powerful to exploit for their own gain. From a delightful place of rest and refreshment, the *oasis* of game playing is thereby downgraded to a closed space with all the exits blocked, a place of detention, a penal colony. From an activity, in which utopia is in some way made present already in the *hic et nunc* (thus Guardini, for whom, in *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, game playing is an activity that may make Utopia somehow present and operative even now), game playing is reduced to throwing the doors ever more wide open to dystopia, to borrow a term from John Stuart Mill. The world of the game and, in parallel, real life, with which it is bound up at root, thus become ever less worthy of being inhabited and lived. Never more so than when the game being played is a game of chance, and is engaged in obsessively, compulsively. Indeed, compulsive gambling, the obsessively played game of chance negates the true and profound meaning of game playing. It pushes rather those who engage in it to tear up that network of relationships – in the family, with friends, in society, and at the workplace – which make up those persons' real lives. In such cases, one may speak of the “shredding of the hopes” that let a human being build himself up as an individual and as a member of the community. A process of “shredding” – or else, “crumbling” – with a tragic outcome for the person concerned.

Still those, in the *polis*, who should have some kind of duty in the matter – legislative, educational, informational – do always seem to pay greater attention rather to the “pathology of not-gaming.” For his part, though, receiving in Audience the members of Italy's National Council of Anti-Usury Foundations, on 3 February this year, in the Vatican's Clementine Hall, Pope Francis launched a heartfelt appeal to the authorities of the state: «Of whom it is expected that, by means of adequate measures, they disincentivize those instruments that, directly or indirectly, are a cause of usury, such as gambling, another scourge. I saw and heard of old women in Buenos Aires who went to the bank to receive their pension and from there straight to the gambling establishments. It is a pathology that takes hold of you and kills you!» (*L'Osservatore Romano*, Sunday 4 February 2018, n. 8, in the Italian original). As is his pastoral style, Pope Francis brings forward an example taken from daily life, and prefers everyday language to technical terminology,

and yet his chosen words are powerfully clear, warning of an excess that «takes hold of you and kills you! »

The Pontifical University Antonianum (specifically, its three Faculties in the Rome campus: Theology, Canon Law, Philosophy) dedicated a “Study Day”, on 13 May this year, to looking more deeply into games and, particularly, to taking a closer look at the dystopic mutations of game playing. Given that, in Italian, any game of chance is called “a game of hazard” (in English, this is the designation of a specific dice game, already known in mediaeval times), this Inter-Faculty “Study Day” was aptly titled: *Gioco o azzardo? Verso una risposta interdisciplinare* (meaning: Game or Hazard ? Towards an Interdisciplinary Response). This title is in itself unambiguous criticism of the oxymoronic “game of hazard”. Indeed, not unlike calling gambling in English simply “gaming”, the very term “game of hazard” is used in the attempt to justify that which by no means – especially not legally or socially – could be considered a game, while it is indeed, in every way, a hazard.

The interdisciplinary approach, announced in the title, has been particularly fruitful, and the contributions made in this perspective render this issue of our journal, the closing one of this year 2018, even more clearly interdisciplinary than it normally is. These contributions come from the fields proper to the speakers, and, respectively, to the other colleagues who participated by means of written submissions. Specializations are thus also represented that are beyond the ambit of those of our three Roman Faculties.

The game, and conversely, the “non-game,” as it were, is reviewed from several perspectives, namely those of: psychotherapy and social assistance (Simone Feder, Anna Polgatti); the history of Franciscan spirituality (Lorenzo Turchi); the law, and specifically, too, the canon law (Michele Sardella, Francisco J. Regordán Barbero); literature and art history (Brigitte Poitrenaud-Lamesi, Arnaldo Casali); Franciscan-theological (Bernard Forthomme); philosophical and theological (Lluís Oviado, Stéphane Oppes).

Finally, under *Relationes Bibliographicae*, we bring to you here reports on three publications of particular interest: the Italian translation of Richard of St. Victor’s *De gratia contemplationis*, also known as *Benjamin major*; a study on the modal theory of John Duns Scotus; the latest volume, the sixty fifth, of *Doctor Seraphicus*, in the new form now given

this series by “Edizioni Biblioteca Franciscana”. These reports are authored, respectively, by Professors Andrea Bizzozero, Orlando Todisco and Maurizio Malaguti.

Stéphane OPPES