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A Responsible Knowledge Society Within a Colourful World: A Response to Luciano Floridi's New Political Ontology

I.

There are two situations that significantly influenced the line of argumentation in this response to Luciano Floridi's ideas on a »new political ontology for a mature information society«.[1] One is the, at the time of finishing this article still ongoing, global and integral COVID-crisis, the other is the political crisis in the United States of America marked by two events and their preliminaries and aftermaths: the presidential elections in November 2020 and the violent storming of the Capitol in Washington D.C. on January 6, 2021. Both are part of the huge crisis of modern society and the big challenges it faces, including foremost but not only climate change and biodiversity loss.[2] The recent events amplified my own thoughts and also led to a rewriting of some aspects of this response. In general, however, my considerations are deeply impressed by concerns that a parent has about the future of humankind and humanity. In this respect, both, the political situation in the USA and the COVID pandemic, should be regarded not as reasons for current, short-termed problems, but as symptoms of enduring and existential environmental, social, and

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[1] I would like to thank Luciano Floridi for his thoughtful and thought provoking essay, Jörg Noller for giving me the opportunity to publish this response, and my wonderful family for granting me some quiet moments for thinking and writing during strange and trying times.

[2] »The world is facing three existential crises: a climate crisis, an inequality crisis and a crisis in democracy.« (Stiglitz [2019]).

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political threats which the Anthropocene has been causing. I agree with Floridi in powerfully addressing these fundamental crises of the modern society, and I second the necessity to rethink the way we see the world after and still amid fundamental changes that have been underway since the beginning of the industrial revolution and reinforced through digitization.[3] Yet, I disagree with some of his assessments and some of the background of the solutions he offers. Although the latter seems to be based on integral approaches that I, too, would promote – such as those of an integral ecology expressed by, among others, Bruno Latour, Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker, and Pope Francis – the *relata* offered by Floridi should be discussed, partly in agreement, partly in replenishment, in various aspects of his essay. [157] I would like to argue that the world is not secular. It is not binary, neither ontologically nor in terms of an information divide. Technology is not the only solution, but part of the problem and it should be treated as such.[4] Capitalism is not a compelling prerequisite (markets are). The human condition, together with a new contractual definition of global equality and justice, well-being and welfare beyond materiality and consumption should indeed be the starting-point of any human project.[5] However, information is a necessity, but not a sufficiency to serve as a core concept for a new ethical and political framework. What is required might not be a new ontology, but a new inter-generational social and environmental contract.[6]

I also would like to add other perspectives on this matter that have already been expressed elsewhere. The response that I give here is probably less coherent than it should be, certainly superficial in many aspects, maybe trivial in others. Overall, it is a collation of more or less loosely coupled ideas, thoughts, and reactions to Luciano Floridi's essay.

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3 Göpel (2020), 15.

4 Connectivity (and globalization) is supporting the quick spread of the Corona virus, while it is also helping fighting it.

5 I strongly support Floridi's plea for establishing a circular economy.

6 Cf., for instance, Das Generationen-Manifest: https://www.generationenmanifest.de/manifest/.

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II.

In the light of the presidency of Donald Trump in the USA that continuously evoked a questioning of both: democratic procedures and standards of political communication, democracy itself appears to be under a threat to be slowly undermined by a populist induced autocratic system of rule. It is the way how Trump and his supporters acted – vastly through digital media and tools of the »information society«, such as broadcasting and communicating in »social« networks – that questions the notion of »information society« in both parts of its verbal expression: information and (democratic) society.

In an understanding of a relational sociology that seems to guide also Floridi's thoughts (I am referring to this later), one might or even needs to ask what (not only who) the actors in this situation are. To understand both crises, it may be helpful to consider ICT not as passive tools to be used by humans respectively the virus or the Corona-disease itself as given facts that we have to react to, but both as collaborators or actors within a complex system. It is not only Trump and his human base responsible for what happened on January 6, it is also the technology, in this particular case (social) media. The most prominent and maybe also prolific of these appears to be Twitter, at least with regard to Trump. Trump has reached out to the »masses« by his abundant broadcasting of messages through Twitter – a service without which he would, he once stated, never had become president.

The phenomenon that massive support is found for the narrative of fraudulent elections (rebuked by more than 60 legal trials and widely characterized as lies), connected with conspiracy theories, and paired with targeting democracy itself [158] (characterized by some as an attempted coup d'état) – be it ideally through agreement, by turning away, by electoral vote, through financial support, or even physically as seen on January 6 – resembles Hannah Arendt's considerations on »The Origins of Totalitarianism« from 1951:

> In an ever-changing, incomprehensible world the masses had reached the point where they would, at the same time, believe everything and nothing, think that everything was possible and nothing was true […]. The totalitarian mass leaders based their propaganda on the correct psychological assumption that, under such conditions, one could make people believe the most fantastic statements one day, and trust that if the next day they were given irrefutable proof of their falsehood, they would take refuge in cynicism; instead of deserting the leaders who had

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> lied to them, they would protest that they had known all along that the statement was a lie and would admire the leaders for their superior tactical cleverness.[7]

It is striking and frightening that this, widely known and often used, quote from Arendt's seminal work only needs a minor change to be aptly adopted to the situation 70 years after her writing. It appears that, at least in the situation of the USA, if we replace »the masses« by »some (or partisan) masses«, we maintain a valid assessment. Luckily though, as opposed to the totalitarian regimes Arendt referred to, we can state that in the current situation there are other masses and parties who strongly oppose, and at the time of writing and for the time being, the system as a whole seems to be narrowly resilient enough.

Floridi is right in emphasizing on the following: »Politics takes care of the relations that make up and connect things« (332). But this can easily lead to unwanted results: Connecting media that mobilizes a mob with executive power and access to physical forces that a US-president has is most dangerous. If a political framework only emphasises on relations but does not take care of the content, quality, and (ethical) value of these relations, the framework remains technocratic and allows support for totalitarian moves.

We are witnessing what Arendt characterizes as typical means of totalitarian leaders, we are witnessing information as »propaganda« (widely communicated and accepted lies), we are witnessing »fantastic statements«, and we are witnessing »admiration« of particular political leaders. And we are witnessing this in the 21st century – amid the ubiquitous possibilities of being informed, within networked societies, and in an emerging period of what Floridi calls »hyperhistorical« with an »infosphere« as its backbone.[8] What happened around January 6 is a stark example of political discussion and action in which opinion too often is hardly based on factual information, but in which opinion and wishful thinking replaces facts. Under this light, questions with respect to Floridi's considerations arise: How can we, if we can at all, speak of an »information society« in which »information« should have a certain quality especially a factual basis? And if we can, can this society be »mature«, in the meaning of being ripe or being ready? And if so: ready for what ex[159]actly?

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[7] Arendt (1951), part 3, chapter 11.
[8] Floridi (2014).

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My understanding of a mature society is that of a society that takes responsibility not only for the present, but foremost for the future, for far beyond the scope and life-time of its current members. I would like to add three observations and possible extensions to numbers 6, 7, 8, and 12 of Floridi's ideas: »*Democracy* is the best way to create and maintain the governance of a polity. […] The best form of democracy is *representative*. […] Good democracy allows voters to choose between *real alternatives*. […] Politics is good when it seeks to take care of the *prosperity* of the *whole society* […].« (328). First of all, these statements seem to be bound in the present. Floridi does refer to the future in some places (e.g. as a member of the »silent world«; 322), but much stronger emphasis should be put onto it. I would like to argue, following Hans Jonas, that good ethics (and politics) is not only about leaving alternatives for present decisions, but more importantly to make decisions now that leave alternatives and options for the future. Secondly, I wonder why emphasis is put on *representation* as the preferred form of democracy, contrasting it with dictatorship but not with other forms of democracy,[9] for instance grass-root, in which representation is replenished or replaced by participation. Both are types of relations between the individuals and the polity, but representation is based on delegation (leaving the individual be an individual) while participation is based on the individual's responsibility for the common good. Thirdly, I wonder how e-democracy or other forms of democratic participation empowered (but not replaced) by ICT would come into play here. Because one crucial question of a modernized democracy is how more and better participation will be reached, how all members of the society can be activated to take up their individual responsibility for the common good.

Floridi, without explicitly mentioning it, seems to outline a different line of idea. While the »infosphere« and ICT play an important role in the first part of his essay they do not so in its finale. The vast absence of technology in the concluding 69 ideas is conspicuous. Floridi refers back to his idea of a »human project«. He is right so that this project needs to respect human (as well as environmental) interests, but the ontology he uses is abstract in a way that it would work without humans being in control. The ontology is about politics, but it is not about politicians, about law but not about law makers. This

[9] A further discussion on »dictatorship« is timely in the context of this controversy as formulations like »eco dictatorship« or »Corona dictatorship« rapidly appear.

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might open up the stage for a rational-choice regime of cybernetics (cf. 334) that can (or maybe – due to its complexity – has to) be steered by a machine of Artificial Intelligence with generative models for human behaviour as a replacement for a top-down »legibility« of the society (cf. James C. Scott). This is frightening not only because there cannot be a democracy without democrats, but as there is no reservation about or differentiation between what technology might be capable of and what shall be reserved for the human (cf. Joseph Weizenbaum). This negotiation between man and machine is arising in many aspects of modern society, in particular in economic questions leading to outlines of a »digital capitalism«. [160]

Also a cybernetic democracy would require mass amounts of data. And this again raises the question of potential totalitarian threats. Maybe we are already on our way towards a new regime with new actors and new forms of power. Gramsci's remark that a crisis occurs when the old one is dying and the new one has not fully come to life yet has indeed its validity nowadays (cf. 320). We might be amid an interregnum, a vacuum that the quickest or strongest are about to fill with technological, economical, and executive determination, quicker than a new ethical framework and integral contract for the future can be negotiated let alone implemented. Here, one needs to carefully look into the role of especially the big internet companies (GAFAM being a symbol for them):[10] the way how they put democratic societies under pressure while at the same time their services are being utilized by non-democratic societies (such as China). Particularly one needs to assess how individuals and groups interact with data, and data itself as a powerful actor. To rule assisted by technology and being ruled by technology seem too easily be indistinguishable. Under the light of significant technological developments already in place and also more to be expected, it is important if not existential to consider new ethical frameworks. Floridi is right doing so. Cultural, societal and ethical changes often seem to follow, with delay, those of technology (Wiliam Ogburn's theory

[10] As a consequence of the riots on January 6 in Washington D.C. which Trump is accused to have incited, Twitter closed Trump's account and banned him from further usage. In the public discussions that followed this act, it has soon become clear not only how thin the borderline is between the right to free speech and a censorship required to protect free speech (and human lives), but also about the role of a private company like Twitter as either a political actor or even a judge. Cf. e.g. Garton Ash, (2016).

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of cultural lag).[11] As a consequence, transformations determined by technology potentially threaten values, be it for the good or the bad. But unless new ethical frameworks have not been negotiated in society-at-large, the risk is high that unwanted directions are taken due to the sheer power, not only economically but also politically, and speed of this transformation as seen in digitization (as a »power« in the understanding of an actor as well as in »empowering« relations). Floridi's call for a new framework and new »human projects« is still timely and in good company as such threats against humanity, democracy, or plurality are being addressed widely.[12]

Many would agree with Floridi that there is need to rethink the way we see us as humans and the world. Floridi's critique of the »Aristotelian-Newtonian Ur-philosophy« is a thoughtful starting point for this (that might comply with ideas of relational sociologists, see below). Another exemplary one is that of Maja Göpel's *Unsere Welt neu denken* in which she questions axiomatic, yet often misinterpreted, foundations of our economic systems such as those of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Charles Darwin. It is certainly worth bringing those approaches together, espe[161]cially as criteria such as prosperity or well-being should be discussed beyond a GDP-based point of view (cf. 330).[13]

III.

In the wider context of the discussion, Floridi states that »we do not have a human project for the digital age« (320). Maybe we have not implemented such a project or put it into concerted action yet. But there are bookshelves full of ideas.[14] Maybe the strongest global voice in this direction has recently been Pope Francis with his two

[11] That generally leaves out that technological development is culture and that it is interwoven in cultural development. With regard to digitization and especially Artificial Intelligence, speed of development seems to play a dominant role and makes a case for reconsidering Ogburn's theory.

[12] Such as Nemitz/Pfeffer (2020), Hofstetter (2016), Zuboff (2019), or Runciman (2019).

[13] Cf. e.g. Stiglitz/Fitoussi/Durand (2019).

[14] Such as von Weizsäcker/Lovins/Lovins (1997), von Weizsäcker/Wijkman (2018), both reports to the Club of Rome, Göpel (2016), or the Flagship Reports of the WBGU – German Advisory Council on Global Change (2011, 2019).

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encyclicals *Laudato Si'. On Care for Our Common Home*[15] (2015) and *Fratelli Tutti. On Fraternity and Social Friendship*[16] (2020). Especially the latter serves as a point of reference for parts of this essay. The title of its third chapter *Envisaging and Engendering an Open World* may indicate its closeness to the questions dealt with here.

Mankind itself certainly is the source of our problems. But mankind and its interweaving with its natural environment is far too complex that just one single cause exists. And as the reasons for our problems are not mono-causal, nor will the solutions be mono-disciplinary. This is even more so if the world is constantly asking for easy explanations and causation (that especially populists deliver) instead of critically questioning larger contexts. The handling of the COVID-crisis shows this clearly. The crisis of our modern society will hardly be solved by information technology for the same reason as the climate crisis will not be solved by geo-engineering. We need to go into the roots and foundations of humanity, the human condition, and start from there. Any political or ethical framework that does not do that is doomed to fail.

Information is a necessary but not sufficient condition. There are plenty of theories on information, and Luciano Floridi himself made a significant contribution to it. However, while he characterizes information as being a »member of the same conceptual family« as knowledge,[17] many other theories make a stronger distinction in between the triad of data, information, and knowledge (sometimes extended even to the fourth category of »wisdom«). All three relate to each other, sometimes characterized as being 0-, 1-, and 2-dimensional respectively, or as a pyramid in which one builds upon the other (e.g. information as semantic data, knowledge as contextualized and applied information). It is clear that it strongly depends on a subjective viewpoint whether something is regarded as data, as information, or as knowledge. But this categorization is important because, while it may be that information alone leads to action, one cannot assure that it leads to *good* action. It is [162] only the wider context of knowledge that does so. Take the following example: »It is raining« (information); »When it rains, I get wet. When I am wet, I get cold. When I am cold, I am less resilient for getting

[15] Francis (2015).
[16] Francis (2020).
[17] Floridi (2010), 51.

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sick« (knowledge); »I don't want to be sick« (attitude); »Hence, I take an umbrella, or I stay inside« (consequential action). Hence, for the right action, the right context such as experience (personal or societal) as well as the right attitude is required.[18] The base of attitude is a knowledge itself, a know-why, an orientating knowledge (besides the know-whats and know-hows). As orientating knowledge is based on (societal) experience which underlines the particular role of history and historical consciousness in the context of this discussion. (Good) policy requires knowledge, too. From the viewpoint of an acting politician, a writing of a political scientist might be information only, and only when combined with other information, attitudes and agendas and with the aim of a political action (e.g. to follow the human project, not necessarily retention of power), it potentially leads to good decisions.[19]

Information is carried by data. Data is amassed, but data itself is hardly objective. Data is not dogmatically *given* as the Latin origin of the word suggests, it is *taken* within specific contexts and under the assumption of specific theories, but also too often carelessly.[20] Information alone as a conceptual point of reference for a human project is insufficient also because it is disconnected not only from will and attitude, but from the human condition. Although technology might be a universal constant of the latter, its very core is the expectation of death. However, I am not *informed* that I am going to die someday, I *know* it. This is a huge difference. A mature society needs to be a knowledge society. Maybe Floridi is right, focusing on the middle term of the triad data – information – knowledge, for the time being. Maybe we are an information society. But if we want to be mature and face and solve the problems that are ahead, we have to become more. It might be that Floridi's »translational ideas« (307) refer to a similar conceptualization.[21] There is a particularly important institution of and for the (responsible) human society, existential for

[18] Maybe someone takes an umbrella, just because he does not like to get wet.

[19] »See – judge – act« is a core principle also of Laudato Si'.

[20] Cf. Johanna Drucker's concept of capta: Drucker (2011).

[21] In the general context of digitality (or Floridi's »infosphere«), I have characterized my own area of research, that of the so-called Digital Humanities as a scholarly discipline (or practice) that not only *transfers* ideas from ICT into the humanities, but also *transforms* the traditional disciplines in a way that it enables them to »maturely« deal with digitality of their own benefits, to master ICT and not to be mastered by it. Digital Humanities is an example for translation between different areas; yet, whether it is bidirectional remains to be seen. Cf. Rehbein (2018).

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its survival: education. Its task is to bring knowledge to the people, not information. Knowledge that encompasses the competence to critically assess information, methodologically as a know-how and ethically as a know-why, based on a framework of responsibility for the future. The aforementioned historical dimension is an important part of it. We have to become a broadly and deeply educated knowledge society. [163]

IV.

Floridi describes the political space of the information society as a network and characterizes this network as »a logical space, not a physical one, in which distances are measured with metrics that are not Euclidean« (317). The emphasis on this is surprising as I think that political geography has never been thought of being Euclidean. Two people might be situated on different shores of a river, a Euclidean distance of maybe 100 metres, but as the river is impassable, a long detour has to be taken in order to cross the river at the next ford. The same applies for many other geographical features as well as for man-made efforts to reduce (e.g. build bridges or construct ferry boats) or increase (e.g. build fortresses or other obstacles) time and effort it takes to get from A to B.

Distances are historical, too. Geographically, the Strait of Gibraltar is only a few miles wide which can be regarded more or less as a constant in the context of history. But the time and effort it takes to cross it, by whom and what purpose it is allowed to do so, varies, and is again a question of politics and has been so since man was capable and willing to actively control geography. In the 20th century, while political distances have been cemented on the one hand (e.g. for migrants), they have dramatically been shortened on the other in a way that the Global North can easily externalize its problems to the rest of the world.[22] Indeed there are good reasons to come to the conclusion that putting values and not geographic space into focus of the EU, that a country like Canada might be a better fit than, say, Turkey (cf. the Cyprus case). This viewpoint however forgets about the long-term history of Canada, and the Americas at all, which is not

[22] Lessenich (2016).

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European, but aboriginal First-Nations, or with other words: it does not take into account that these (geographical) lands had once been conquered violently by Europeans. Infraethics need to avoid becoming a new form of colonialism as well as its universal claim needs to be analysed under the light of a very diverse world. One crucial question is whether global governance is possible without a global government. As the latter in form of a *Weltstaat* seems to be both unattainable and unwanted, one might look into the conceptualization of *Weltinnenpolitik* as first proposed by Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker. As a strengthening of multilateral relations[23] is crucial for such an approach, it should correspond with Floridi's ideas.[24] [164]

Secondly, in historical perspective, rule has not always and not exclusively been thought as a geographical space in which power was executed. Especially in the Middle Ages of Central Europe a territorial state did not exist a for long time. Rule and political power were defined basically by influence over people (or sub-ordinate rulers) not over geographical space or territory. The mediaeval itinerant king was a networker in that sense; in order to maintain his power, he needed to be present personally or indirectly through some sort of medium. Research in mediaeval studies emphasizes the importance of personal bindings for politics above all others.[25] The »zone of influence« of mediaeval rule was not geographical, and »the spatiality of social relations, including those of strengths« (317) has long existed and is

[23] Cf. Weizsäcker (2021).

[24] There is another aspect here that asks for further discussion: the juxtaposition of the European Union as a geographic space versus a union of values. Firstly, the EU already has this set of values (codified in the Treaty of the European Union, especially article 2: »The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights […]«). Secondly, Europe is not a geographic, geologic, natural unit, but part of the continent of Eurasia. Regarding Cyprus (as political unit(s) or as an island?) as part of Asia (because it is located East of the Bosporus) already is political because the geographical argument itself is a political one. Here, too, temporality has to be taken into account. If we look at the Roman Empire, e.g. 4th century A.D., we can see that it completely surrounds the Mediterranean Sea, covering territory in three nowadays continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa, with the Mediterranean Sea, the Roman *mare nostrum* in its centre. The sea as a geographical fact is immutable (at least during the span of history). But the question whether the sea is unifying or separating is a political question and that is temporal. However, neither (written) shared values nor geographic neighbourhood have made possible joint politics to overcome the COVID-crisis, let alone the migrant crisis, and the outlook for the climate crisis makes one thinking.

[25] Cf. e.g. the works by Gerd Althoff or Hagen Keller.

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hardly a phenomenon of the information age only.[26] One might think the way how the Global North has control over the South also along these lines.

V.

Floridi is pleading for scholarly disciplines, »economics, jurisprudence, sociology, and […] politics, [to] become relational sciences of the links that make up and connect the *relata*« and to include in these links »not just people, but all things, natural and constructed, and therefore their environments and ecosystems« (316). I agree, but I also wonder whether there have not yet been already significant examples of research towards this direction. Especially sociology has developed and established the relational concept for a couple of decades by Harrison White, Charles Tilly, and Mustafa Emirbayer, to name a few, based on earlier ideas. It »is not the concept of ›thing‹, but that of ›relation‹ – which refers to what constitutes all things and connects them among themselves – that can play a foundational role in the political thought of the twenty-first century« (315). Floridi's conclusion seems particularly to resemble Bruno Latour's (and others') actor-network theory (ANT) developed in the area of Science and Technology Studies. ANT's approach integrates human and non-human, physical things and ideas, discourses etc. within the same conceptual or ontological framework and seem to anticipate Floridi's »semantic equipotency« (315) or »multiagent system« (326), as well as the form of democracy he proposes (»all related ›things‹, that is, the human, natural and artificial *relata*«, 328).

Floridi's »Green and Blue« seems to have its predecessor in Latour's construction of systems that joins politics, science, technology, and nature, that combines Rousseau's social contract and Serres's natural contract, that reworks our thinking by [165] abandoning the dichotomy between culture and nature,[27] and that can be read as a

[26] A further consideration as a side-note, one might think of big internet companies (GAFAM) as (new) (political) actors on the scene that have the capability of ruling over people and economies in a potentially unprecedented quality and are gaining more power than governments. Here, the »logical space« of the ubiquitous ICT might indeed lead to a full coverage of geographical space.

[27] Latour (1993).

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political ecology. Puzzling, however, and contradictory to the rest of his argumentation appears Floridi's classification of the world: »We know that things are discrete and can easily be grouped in separate sets« (316). In an example, he distinguishes French from Italian citizens, but leaves out those with unclear status and does not handle the not untypical situation that information is missing or insufficient for a classification. It is not only in quantum mechanics and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle to illustrate cases in which classification is not simple, not binary, or even not possible.[28] The symbiosis between fungus and tree or the platypus as a mammal that shares properties with reptiles (egg-laying) might serve as examples as well as ongoing discussions on human gender. Most of the world is considered to be »analogue«, perceived as a continuous variable rather than discrete objects. It is only through digitization (and its predecessors) that we have to perceive the world as objects in distinguishable sets of discrete objects. Like technical analog-digital conversion, philosophical ontologies, too, can be considered as acts of modelling that are subject to reduction and disputable attribution and that raise thought puzzles and dilemmas such as those of potential multiple identities, illustrated for example in the ship of Theseus paradox.

VI.

I argued earlier that the future should play a primary role in any ethical framework. In addition, guidance by history should be sought as well, to avoid an impression of a dangerous »presentism« (Douglas Rushkoff). In historical research, Wolfgang Reinhard explained in *Freunde und Kreaturen. »Verflechtung« als Konzept zur Erforschung historischer Führungsgruppen*[29] that European politics (around 1600) cannot be understood without knowledge of an ever-changing tangle (German: *Verflechtung*) of relations. Niall Ferguson's *The Square and The Tower*[30] discusses rule and power based on network analyses in which the tower is a metaphor for a hierarchical, vertical rule

[28] A recent anthology tries to unite quantum theory with »Geist und Materie« in order to outline a new way to think our world with similar questions as in this discussion: Mann/Mann (2021).
[29] Reinhard (1979).
[30] Ferguson (2017).

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while the square symbolizes a horizontal way of interaction. While both, Reinhard and Ferguson focus on human beings as political actors, there are historical works that go beyond. I would like to mention Arnold Toynbee's integral and universal approaches in *A Study of History*[31] (1934–1961) and *Mankind and Mother Earth*[32] (posthumous, 1976). Recently, Kyle Harper's *The Fate of Rome*[33] let the decline of the Roman Empire be understood as a complex interplay of humans, viruses, and climate (changes). While the latter two use rela[166]tional approaches to understand political actions of the past, Reinhard and Ferguson show that relational approaches have long been used to do politics also.[34] There might be a significant difference, though, to which Floridi refers. While politicians historically have often thought politics relationally, they have not done so comprehensively. Relations as such build by mediaeval rulers (see above) focussed on chosen key people, but not among people in general let alone between political power and other aspects of society and beyond. Here, a shift in our thinking is indeed a necessity.

I would also add in this context, that science (in the German understanding of *Wissenschaft*, including arts, humanities and social science) as a system itself should become more relational. Relational is here meant in a sense that understanding and improving the world (307) is a relational matter not only within the different disciplines, but inclusively among them – as integral *Wissenschaft* – and, even more so and equally importantly, together with all societal areas and environment – as integral ecology. This seems to correspond to Latour's thoughts, but it is also expressed convincingly and more recently by von Weizsäcker and Pope Francis (see above).

It is striking that Francis' *Fratelli Tutti* also puts a strong emphasis on relations: »I cannot know myself apart from a broader network

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31 Toynbee (1934–1961).

32 Toynbee (1976).

33 Harper (2017).

34 Further research might be required to historicize the concept of relation itself. While it is undisputed that pre-modern societies were constructed upon different concepts and understandings than modern societies – such as that of a family or of history and time, conceptual changes that happened in Europe roughly between 1750 and 1850, a period characterized by Reinhart Koselleck as *Sattelzeit* and that discriminate the pre-modern from the modern – it may well be that the concept of *relations* in politics remains important throughout history but changes its meaning.

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of relationships«[35]. He takes up a viewpoint that not only highlights one's care for the other, not only considers a society in which the »We« is stronger than the sum of its individuals[36], nor exclusively that of a »global society« which »is not the sum total of different countries, but rather the communion that exists among them«[37], or one in which there is an »increasing number of interconnections and communications«[38] and »growing interdependence and globalization«[39]. In addition and matching his integral thinking, relations, including actions, are seen as constitutive for societal networks:

> What is needed is a model of social, political and economic participation ›that can include popular movements and invigorate local, national and international governing structures with that torrent of moral energy that springs from including the excluded in the building of a common destiny‹, while also ensuring that ›these experiences of solidarity which grow up from below, from the subsoil of the planet – can come together, be more coordinated, keep on meeting one another‹[40] [167]

VII.

In a concluding thought, Floridi's divide between those who participate in the infosphere and those who do not (yet?) do so, leaves open a couple of questions: Is this, if it exists, the decisive cleavage? And is it the only one? And if so: On which side of the divide is one happier? For Floridi's human project, the latter seems to be unequivocal as there is a moralized technological determination: »those on the wrong side of the digital divide« (335). But happiness might be gained elsewhere. There are those who live (naturally and more like humans) in the subaltern »Savage Reservation« in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*; those who deny using or are about to remove from their bodies the grain technology in the episode *The Entire History of You* of Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror;* or maybe those who escape

35 Francis (2020), 89.
36 Francis (2020), 77.
37 Francis (2020), 126, 149.
38 Francis (2020), 96.
39 Francis (2020), 262.
40 Francis (2020), 169.

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The Matrix. These fictional examples deliberately draw borderlines towards a dystopian transcendence of the human from its natural rootage through external (yet man-made technological invention) violence (*The Matrix*) or induced transformation (*Brave New World*, *Black Mirror*). I discuss these here symbolically, not as a Luddite (we are either way far beyond the possibility of cancelling digitization, but foremost: technology certainly is one tool for well-being), but to illustrate that mankind might be led onto a dangerous path when treating digitization as a moralized divide between good and bad (Floridi's marking of the »other side« as »wrong«). Inclusion should be sought first, but on basis of a diverse and pluralistic zone not along a clearly marked borderline that risks to turn into an ideology or religion which Floridi wants to avoid (322). Or taking into account the speed of technologically induced transformation, the solution should not only be – speaking with Maja Göpel – to leave none behind, but also not to allow anyone to move away.[41]

There is a joke in which a man wanders about through wasteland, left alone. Finally, he reaches a river, and on the opposite shore, there is a hut and another human being. Civilization, he thinks. »How«, he shouts, »can I get to the other side of the river?« After a while, the man on the other side replies: »But you *are* on the other side.« In the newspaper article which I got this joke from, Alard von Kittlitz explains that the man finally and desperately finds someone, but regrettably that someone is an idiot.[42] I read the story differently, though, in two versions of a »stay where you are«: One is the excluding othering: stay where you belong (here is mine). The second version: stay where you are happier (here is even worse).

Either of the different interpretations is capable of drawing a picture of the information society: not educated or knowing, othering and filter bubbles, or dystopia; the man on the »other« side as a (globalized) villager, but not a cosmopolitan. One of the biggest problems for any political agenda is that we are all in the same storm, but not in the same boat nor even in the same type of boats or level of resilience. A huge part of mankind does not even have a boat at all, but it is there where consequences of the anthropocenic world-view hit first and hardest. Although we do have sufficient information about the crises such as global warm[168]ing and global injustice, we do not

[41] Göpel (2020), 175.
[42] von Kittlitz (2020).

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yet have the right attitude to jointly face and address the challenges. Globalization (understood as a shrinking of space and time) and also a global infosphere can help or might even be a necessity, but there are phenomena such as the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous as well to be taken into account and to be addressed as it is important to accept differences, not as divides, but as pluralistic views of the same: »Without encountering and relating to differences, it is hard to achieve a clear and complete understanding even of ourselves and of our native land.«[43].

Humanity, in an integral ecology thought together with the environment and the planetary boundaries should be put into the centre of all considerations and form the basis for a new contract: »To see things in this way brings the joyful realization that no one people, culture or individual can achieve everything on its own: to attain fulfilment in life we need others. An awareness of our own limitations and incompleteness, far from being a threat, becomes the key to envisaging and pursuing a common project.«[44].

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[43] Francis (2020), 147.

[44] Francis (2020), 150.

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