

Digital Humanism an introduction

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VIENNA MANIFESTO ON DIGITAL HUMANISM

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The system is failing” - stated by the founder of the Web, Tim Berners-Lee – emphasizes that while digitalization opens unprecedented opportunities, it also raises serious concerns: the monopolization of the Web, the rise of extremist opinions and behaviors orchestrated by social media, the formation of filter bubbles and echo chambers as islands of disjoint truths, the loss of privacy, and the spread of digital surveillance.

Digital technologies are disrupting societies and questioning our understanding of what it means to be human.

The stakes are high and the challenge of building a just and democratic society with humans at the center of technological progress needs to be addressed with determination as well as scientific ingenuity.

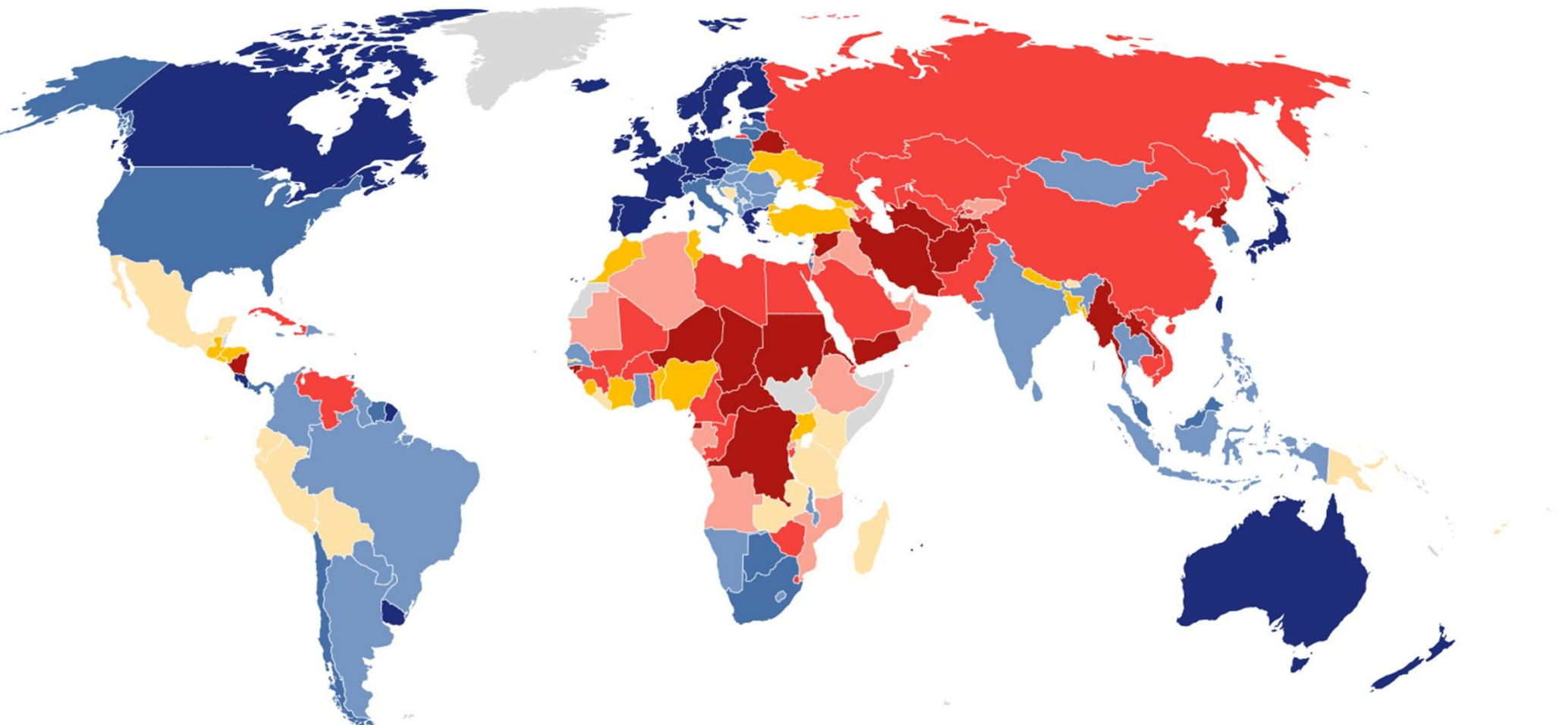
Democracy is failing!

/-dem)

SOURCE: EIU 2026 (check a

Authoritarian regime Hybrid regime Flawed democracy Full democracy

regime regime democracy democracy

A horizontal color scale legend with four categories: 'Authoritarian regime' (dark red), 'Hybrid regime' (yellow), 'Flawed democracy' (light blue), and 'Full democracy' (dark blue). Each category has a corresponding color swatch.

Representative Democracy: Three pillars

John Locke *17th century*

Elections of governments by the people (Kick the rascals out!)

C.L.Montesqieu *18th century*

Separation of powers (executive, legislative, judiciary)

John Stuart Mill *19th century*

Human Rights : Individual liberty and rights. Protect against tyranny of the majority

Democracy: Failures

Disinformation : Disinformation, weaponized social media and AI . Voter mistrust and

Public sphere flooded with toxic sludge. Polarization.

Catechism/manipulation by “AI –companions”

Separation of powers

Executive Aggrandizement ! Increasing % of young favour a ...”strong leader”

Human Rights

Rights of minority are trampled on

Surveillance (incl. Biometric)

Economic Inequalities (increasing)

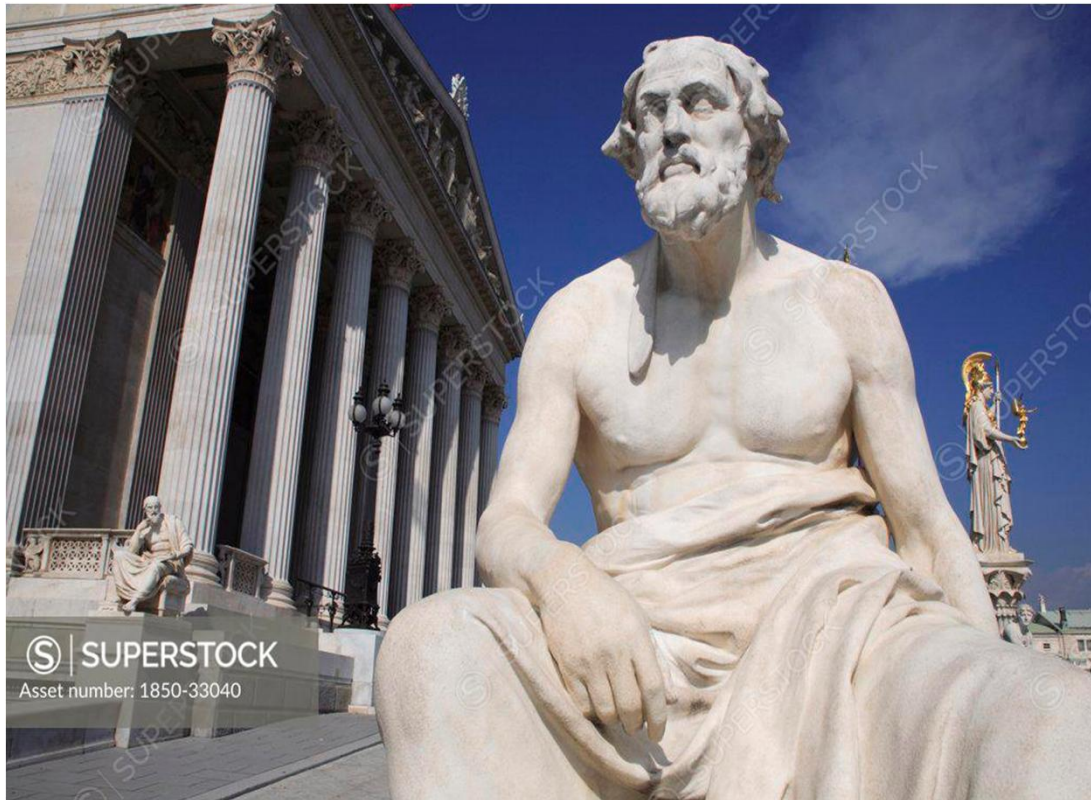
Concentration of economic and political power: Big Tech companies

Lack of Trust in institutions (also internationally) and each other

Geopolitics and AI: Might makes right

Digital Divide, Data colonialism

Threat to democracy!



**The strong always
do what they can,
and the weak suffer
what they must.**

- **Rights are only
pertinent between
equals in power.**



all these gloomy forecasts to be passively
accepted?

Digital Technology is NOT a force of nature

AI (like the Web) is a human artifact

Beneficial applications to be designed and promoted

Potential harmful applications NOT to be treated like volcano
eruptions and earthquakes but to be avoided at the design stage

Unavoidably there will be f**k-ups! They should be treated as
such

Critical Thinking and “optimistic skepticism”





Proactive “Backcasting” vs Passive Forecasting

Passive forecasting: Weather, Earthquakes, Hurricanes.....

Backcasting:

Construct YOUR vision of the future (choices to be made!)

YOUR Enlightenment

Identify techs/policies needed to achieve it

Identify obstacles and strategy/tactics to overcome them

Create a roadmap with milestones (and then revise dynamically)

 Unite with like –minded and act on behalf of civil society

YOUR vision ?

A free and open Public Sphere (as envisaged in early www days)

Web Oligarchs broken up! Plurality of R&D (role of universities!)

Re-directed digital R&D to serve humanity (Vienna Manifesto)

AI that helps/augments rather than replaces (Acemoglou)

Guidelines to protect universal human rights (Regulation!)

Re-set of liberal democracy, social justice and cohesion

Throw in your own ...extras!



Inspiration from
the
Enlightenments



Intellectual Humanism:
a guide towards a
new enlightenment



The 18th century enlightenment

Voltaire
Diderot



Adam Smith
Ben Franklin



Industrial Revolution

Humanism

Free Discussion: Anything,
anywhere

Light of Reason

Science AND Classics

Religious Tolerance

Challenge to Authority

Human Rights

Education: Sapere Aude

Dare to know

Diderot's Encyclopedia

French Salons

Lunars

The "Penny Universities"

Voltaire: The purpose of technology should be to serve society



"The measure of success for AI applications should be the value they create for human lives and society"

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a call for reflection and **action**, also a research program

the core principles:

Democracy

Digital technologies should be designed to promote democracy and inclusion

Fairness, responsibility and transparency of software programs and algorithms

Regulation

Action / intervention against Big tech monopolies

Decisions affecting human rights must be made by humans

The role of Research, Science, and Academia

The connection of different scientific disciplines is essential: Interdisciplinarity

Universities (create new knowledge, enhance critical thinking) have a particular responsibility

Education

Academic teaching needs to combine humanities, social sciences and engineering

Education on Informatics and its societal impact must start as early as possible

AI in education (currently a mess!)

Regulation :The three myths

1. **Regulation stifles innovation**

Counterexamples (Automobiles, Pharmaceuticals and ...Ch

2. **Existing Regulation Suffices**

It does not but should be carefully examined before new one

3. **“Nascent” technologies should not be regulated**

The Collingridge Dilemma and its resolution (ex ante and ex
post)

Automobiles and regulation

1910's': Break lights, turn signals

1920's : Speed limits and driving licences

1930's : Safety glass windshields

1940's : Hydraulic brakes

1950's : Padded dashboards

1960's : Collapsible steering wheel

1970's : Seat belts and catalytic converters

The automobile industry lobbied against all of these!

Combined Attacks on Digital
regulation (US Gov +Big
Tech)

from several angles and
with different instruments

Liberalism : Ultra-libertarian

(principle rejected)

deregulation agenda

Private self-interest /Profit

Example: Zuckerberg/Musk decrying “censorship”

Examples : “Regulation stifles innovation”

**Political domination (The new
powers)**

“If we don't regulate or China will surpass us!”

“We need tight and enforceable regulation !”



The Dighum open letter/petition and beyond;

A civil society engagement case-study

Open letter : A civil society pushback against the deregulation lobby

submitted to the European Parliament's Petitions Committee.

Hearing took place on July 16 2025 under the urgency procedure.

Parliament decided unanimously in favour

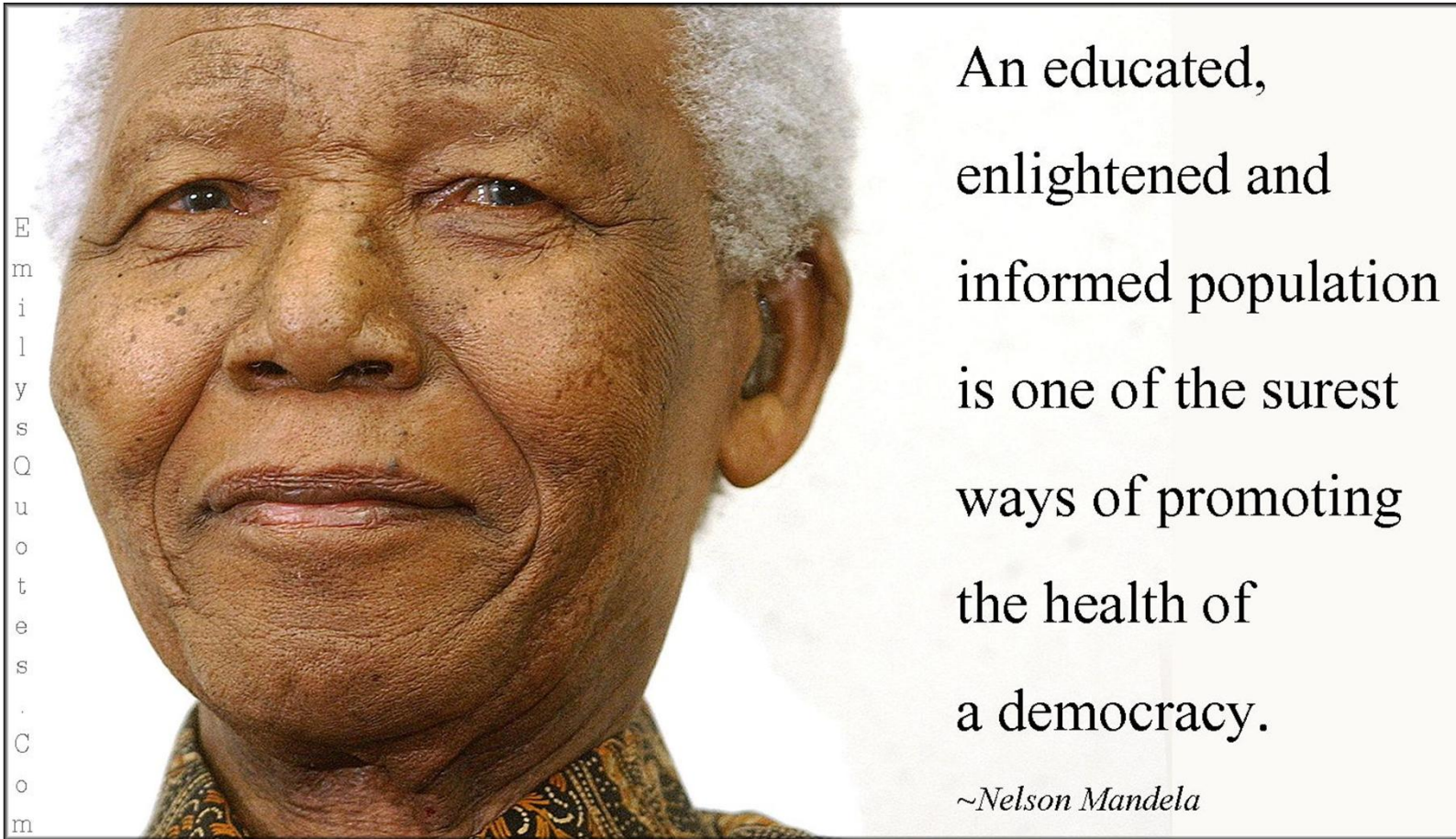
EC responded positively in 2026. (Prospects for DMA,DSA,AI Act good!)

LESSONS:

Push back. The “wait and see” time is over. Get involved! Get engaged!

Try to learn to explain the need for all this better to young people

In today's classrooms sit tomorrow's societies



An educated,
enlightened and
informed population
is one of the surest
ways of promoting
the health of
a democracy.

~Nelson Mandela

AI in Education and critical thinking

Asking students to read, reflect upon, write about, and discuss ideas helped train them to think critically

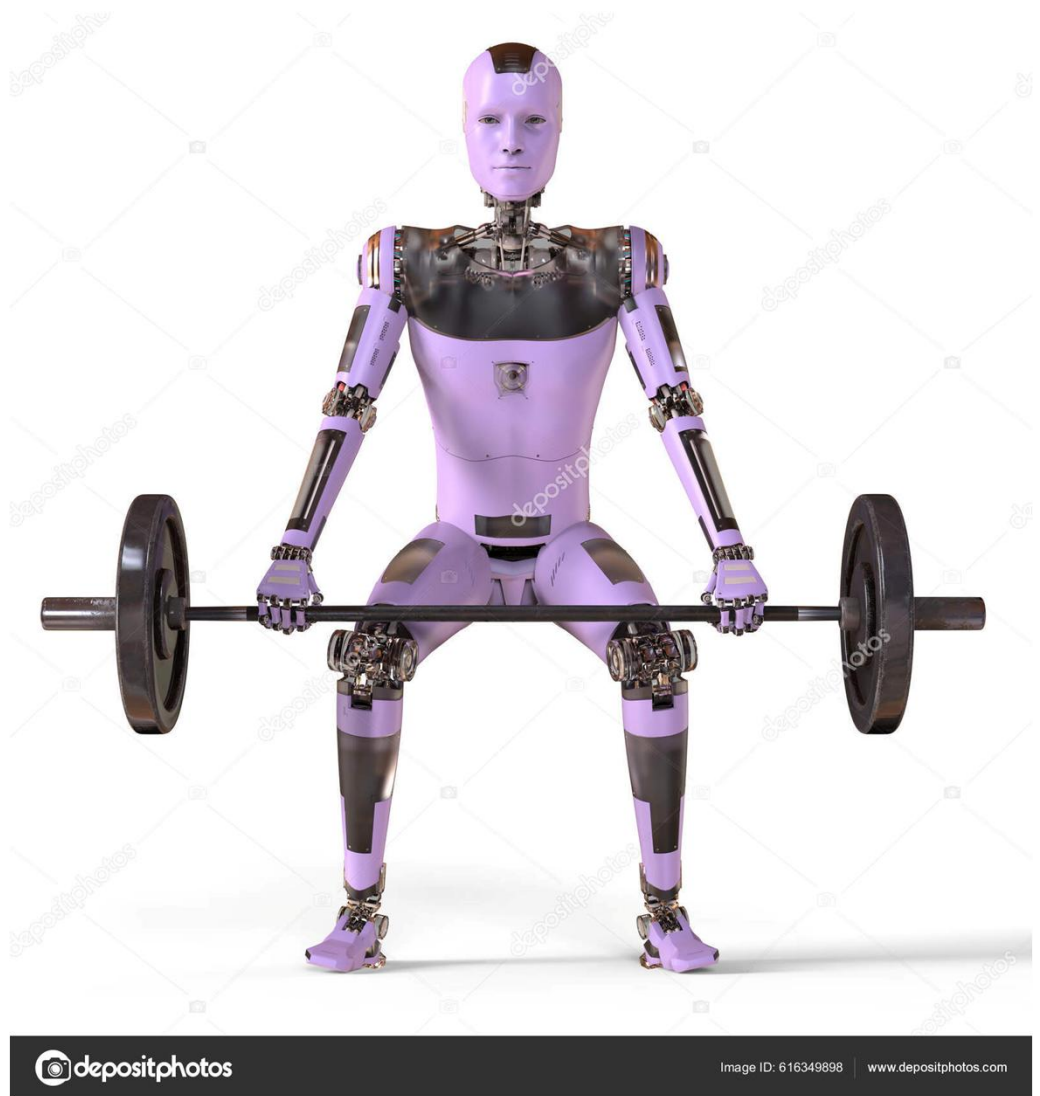
GenAI can simulate all of these steps: it can summarize reading, pull out key concepts, draft text, and even “discuss” ideas. But that would be like going to the gym and asking a robot to lift weights for you.

Yes, of course, to AI for the classroom but not...mindlessly.

The end of homework?

Deeper problem: How to educate so that the young enjoy thinking independently and critically in an environment that keeps offering to do the thinking for them!

Weak body, weak mind?
Reskilling ?
Dependence
Overservience?
OR.....



An Education Revolution?

The time has come for an education revolution as we still have a system motivated by the 18th century industrial revolution.

How to motivate independent critical thinking from early stages for “digital natives”?

Different approaches in different countries.

Create a platform for adaption and adoption of promising practices

Curate feedback and develop success metrics

The Dighum education initiative

It is still early days for AI !



t is still early days

The Revenge of the Philosophy Majors

A.I. labs are hiring contrarian, chin-stroking, finger-steepling sages. Who's underemployed now?

NY Times July 5 2026

Enlightenment :Voltaire and ...Ubuntu

Voltaire argued that our actions should be judged by their usefulness to society

Ubuntu describes a set of closely related African-origin value systems that emphasize the interconnectedness of individuals with their surrounding societal and physical worlds.

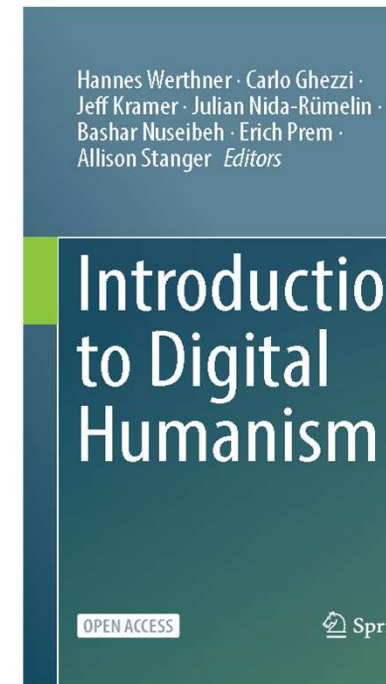
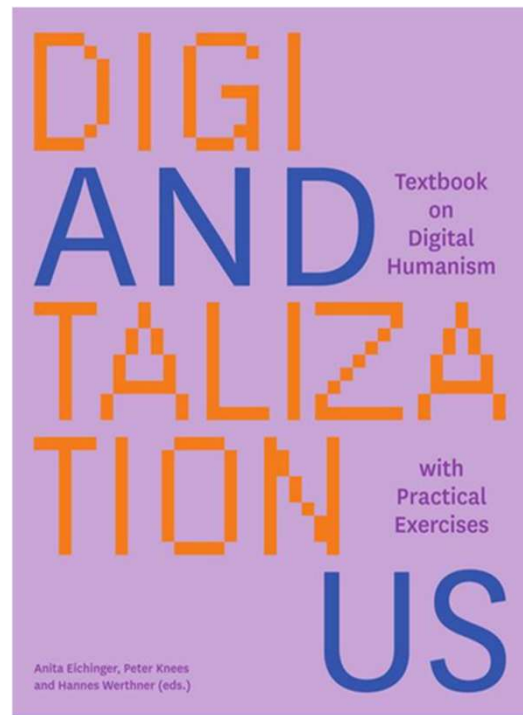
"Ubuntu" is sometimes translated as **"I am because we are"**.

Should the future be shaped by the interests of a few tech executives and the politicians they influence or by the values and will of the people?

Make your choices and defend them!

Fight for a humanistic democratic digital future

Digital Humanism can help show the way forward



dighum.org
Thank you