

# DIGITAL ENLIGHTENMENT

George Metakides

Digital Humanism Summer-school  
Vienna  
September 2023



digital enlightenment  
forum

# Technology and Sociopolitical Change



Agricultural  
land



Industrial  
money



Digital  
Data

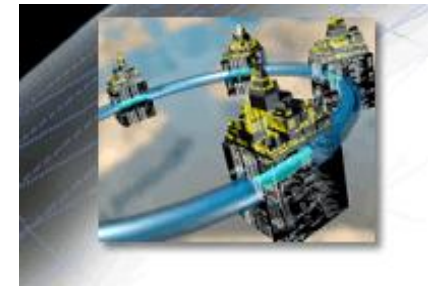
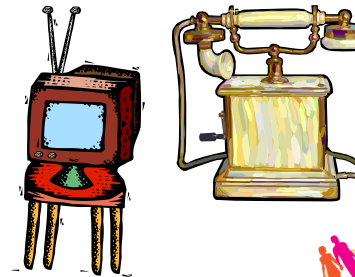
3500 B.C.  
Writing

15th  
Printing

Enlightenment

19th -20th  
Long-distance  
Communication  
Mass media

21st  
Internet/Web/AI



# Renaissance/Humanism/Enlightenment

---

- *A tidal wave that burst the bonds of medieval thought started in Italy as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century and reached the coast of the Atlantic towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup>*
- *A rebirth of individual thought and expression. **A new Humanism***
- *“Let us go and wake the dead”*
- *Fine Arts, Literature, Ethics, Philosophy*
- *Dante, Petrarch, **Boccaccio**, Copernicus, **Leonardo***

# 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* digital enlightenment  
forum

*Select Society*

# Diderot's Encyclopedia (1751-1772)



# Declaration of Human Rights (1789)



# Enlightenment as a metaphor for

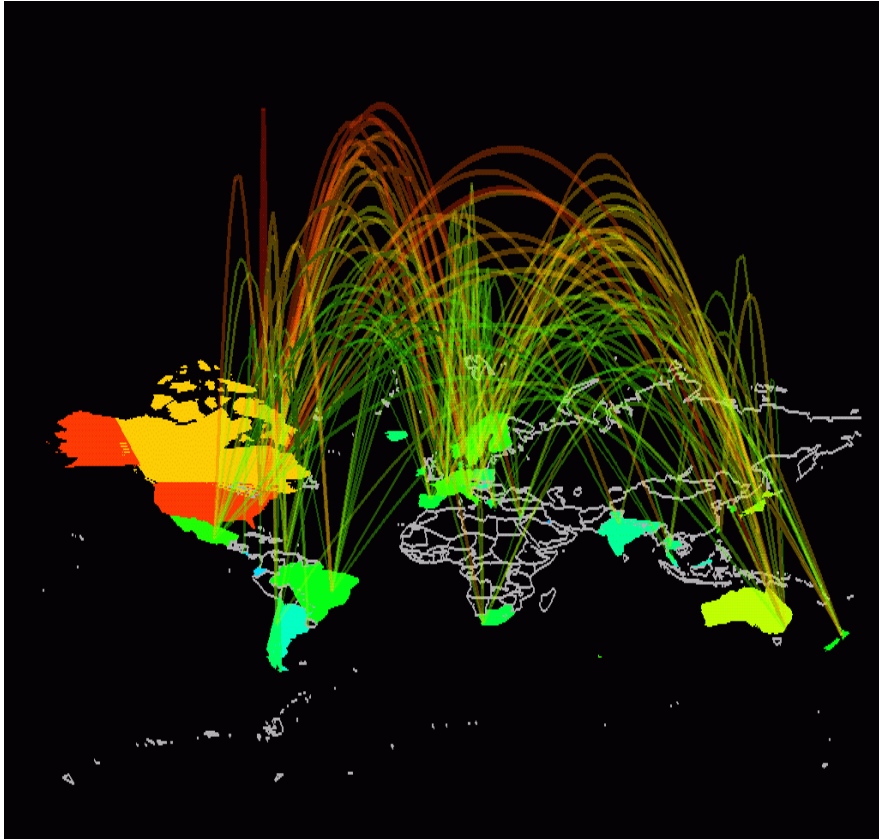
## Digital enlightenment

---

- In the wake of the Industrial Revolution
- Roots in Renaissance Humanism
- Freedom of speech. Global reach as ‘ideas travelled on the tall masts of ships’
- Human Rights, Individual Autonomy
- Confidence/Optimism/Scepticism
- New “public sphere” and education
  - Parisian salons, London coffee houses, Lunar Society, Poker Club
  - The “penny universities”
  - Widespread education for children
  - Ecole Polytechnique, School of mines and many others
  - Engineering became ...civil

- **The Digital Revolution**
- **Freedom of expression, discussion globally**
- **New opportunities for education, business**
- **New Forms of Human Rights (e.g. privacy)**
- **WWW: An Arc of Knowledge**





*A Digital Incarnation of Diderot's dream ?*

# Enlightenment thought leaders

- **France** – Descartes, Voltaire, Condorcet, Diderot, Montesquieu, Rousseau, la Mettrie, Bayle, Buffon, Lavoisier, Robespierre, de Sade
- **England** – Newton, Hobbes, Locke, Paine, Gibbon, Defoe, Pope, Priestley
- **Scotland** – Hume, Smith, Burns
- **Holland** – Spinoza
- **Germany/Prussia** – Leibniz, d'Holbach, Kant
- **Ireland** – Berkeley, Boyle, Sterne
- **Switzerland** – Rousseau, Bernoulli, Euler
- **United States** – Jefferson, Madison, Franklin
- **Latin America** – Bolívar
- *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (abolished in 1966 by Pope Paul VI)

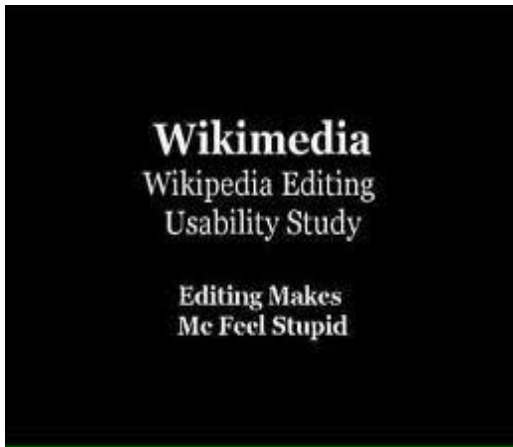
## Familiar Books

---

- Robinson Crusoe (William Defoe)
- Gulliver's Travels (Jonathan Swift)
- The Fall of the Roman empire (Gibbons)
- Critique of Pure Reason (Immanuel Kant)
- Treatise (David Hume)
- Condorcet, Montesqieu ,
- *GREAT MUSIC (esp. in Austria!)*
- Handel, Haydn, Bach, Mozart
- *NOT MUCH IN PAINTING!*

# Power to the People!

## Online deliberation/decision making/rapid mobilization



- **Icelanders 'like' their crowdsourced constitution**
- A year after Iceland asked its citizens to help write its new constitution by making suggestions via Facebook, voters decide this new draft should be the basis for the upcoming constitution.



- **Crowdsourcing/Crowdfunding**
- [http://www.ted.com/talks/a\\_choir\\_as\\_big\\_as\\_the\\_internet.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/a_choir_as_big_as_the_internet.html)
- [www.fansnextdoor.com](http://www.fansnextdoor.com)  
New Art ideas
- [www.kickstarter.com](http://www.kickstarter.com)  
Innovative entrepreneurship

# Awstruck!





# Early warnings(2010)

- Privacy (snooping , profiling ,tracking)
- Closed «silos» (Social Media)
- «Walled Gardens» ( smart phone apps)
- Monopolies (private clouds ,”trapped in a store”)
- Neutrality (ISP speeds , Google on mobiles)
- **HOMO FABER!!!**

# Long Live the Web *Scientific American*

By [Tim Berners-Lee](#) on December 1, 2010

- The Web is critical not merely to the digital revolution but to our continued prosperity—and even our liberty. Like democracy itself, it needs defending
- [The Web as we know it](#), however, is being threatened in different ways. Some of its most successful inhabitants have begun to chip away at its principles. Large social-networking sites are walling off information posted by their users from the rest of the Web. Governments—totalitarian and democratic alike—are monitoring people’s online habits, endangering important human rights



digital enlightenment  
forum

The Age of Reason and  
the Age of Digital

Rethinking Governance  
for the Digital Era

Inspired by the  
18th Century Enlightenment

PLATFORM SPONSORS

- Google
- Microsoft
- IBM
- Oracle
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Facebook
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Facebook
- YouTube

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

- UCL
- MIT
- Stanford
- Harvard
- Yale
- Cambridge
- Oxford
- ETH Zurich
- EPFL
- KAIST
- RIKEN
- NTT
- Intel
- IBM
- Microsoft
- Google
- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- YouTube

Roland

FP-



# The enlightenment metaphor

Back in 2011 when we founded the Digital Enlightenment Forum



“We call for a Digital Enlightenment movement for a humanistic digital society in which:

- People enjoy the kinds of autonomy and freedom online that they have offline
- The privacy, dignity and rights of the individual are supported.

We aim to foster:

- Interdisciplinary debate and development of technical and policy solutions that stimulate digital innovation and sustainable evolution, are people-centric and beneficial to all.”



# Digital Enlightenment Activities

DEF Activities since 2011 included:

- Conferences
- Publications
- Workshops, seminars
- Fireside chats (started in 2020 as part of the DEF mission focusing on the nurturing of thought leaders)
- Policy Bootcamps

**Privacy** was one of the first issues tackled (others included net neutrality, education and digital skills, democracy in the digital era)

# The “party line” on Privacy in 2011 !

## “Privacy” – Outdated? Incompatible? A problem?

Google's Eric Schmidt:  
“If you have something that  
you don't want anyone to  
know, maybe you shouldn't be  
doing it in the first place”



Facebook's Mark  
Zuckerberg:  
“The Age of  
Privacy is Over”



Sun Microsystems'  
Scott McNealy:  
“You have zero  
privacy anyway..  
get over it.”



Louis Freech former  
Director FBI:  
“the American people  
must be willing to  
give up a degree of  
personal privacy in  
exchange for safety  
and security”



# EU Legal framework on Data Protection and Privacy was antiquated Urgent Action was needed

- DP Directive: 95/46/EC,  
Privacy Directive: 2002/58/EC
- **Personal Data**: information relating to an identified or identifiable person
- **Scope**:
  - **Material**: which information and processes addressed
  - **Personal**: which roles (data controller, processor, subject)
  - **Territorial**: applicable law, cross-border data transfer
- **Issues**:
  - **Linked data**, smart data mining and Personal Data
  - **Accountability** and **transparency** of controller and processor; need for technology support
  - **Risk** assessment and **user control**, need for technology support



Seven Years Later

# GDPR : Implemented in 2018 in the EU

Inspired similar regulation around the world

Paved the way for DMA, DSA, AI Act



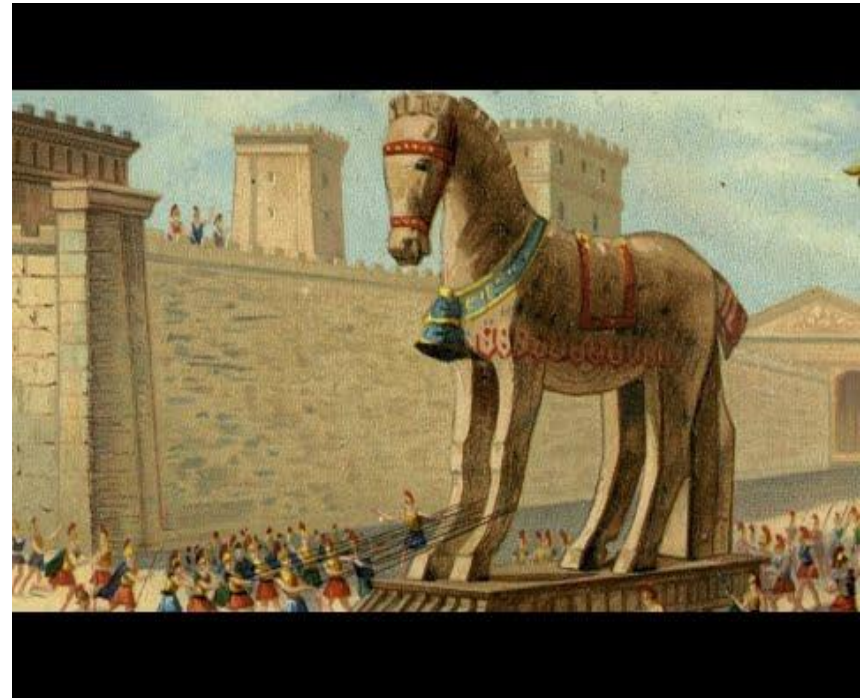
# Are we better off today (privacy –wise) than we were in 2011?

---

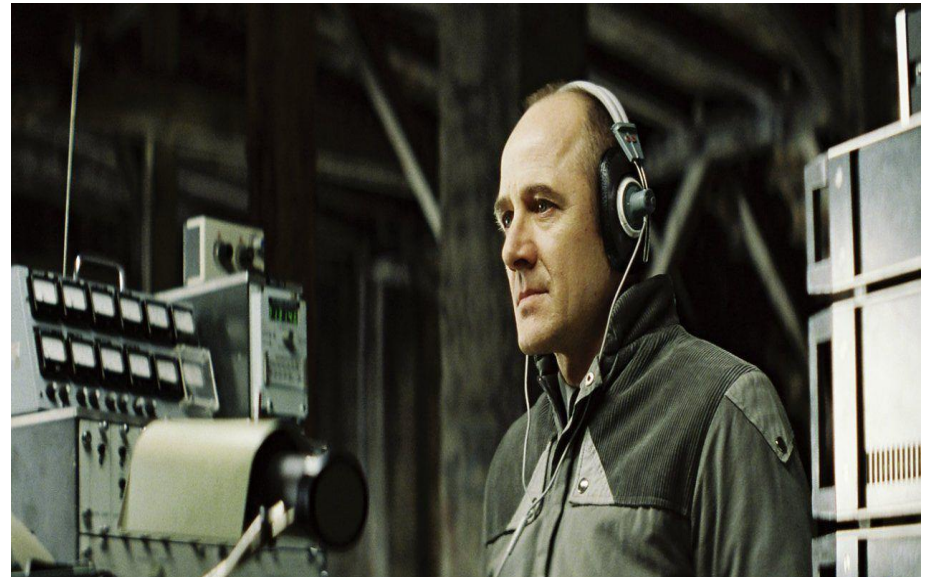
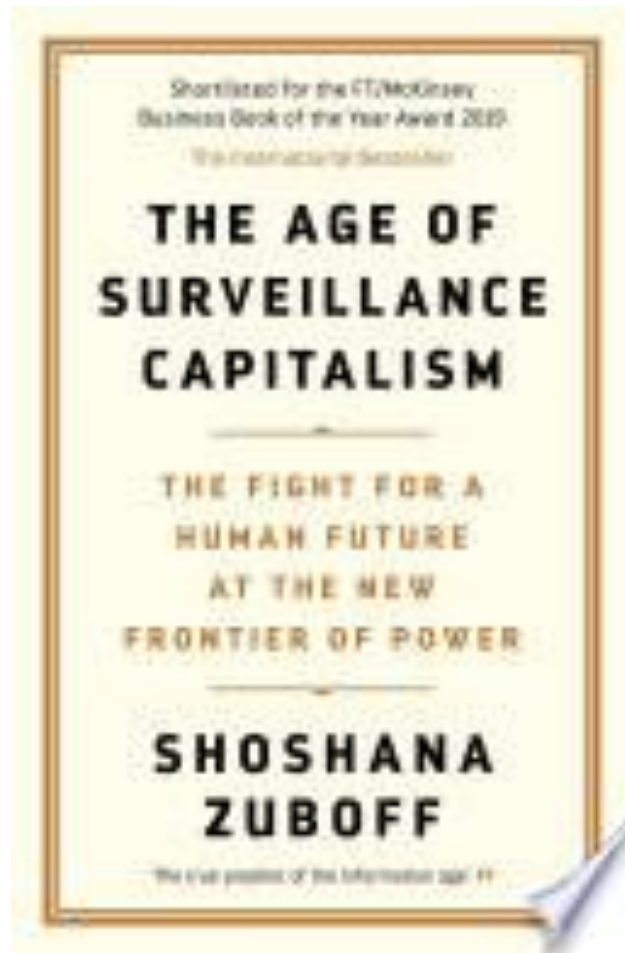
- Citizens, policy makers and even industry leaders have been “sensitized” (reluctantly?)
- We got GDPR and privacy legislation emanating from it
- Numerous decisions by the Courts
- Some technology developments helped
- BUT.....

# The state of privacy in 2023

New Threats: Pegasus, Predator etc.) and AI advances



# The state of Surveillance





# Lessons learned?

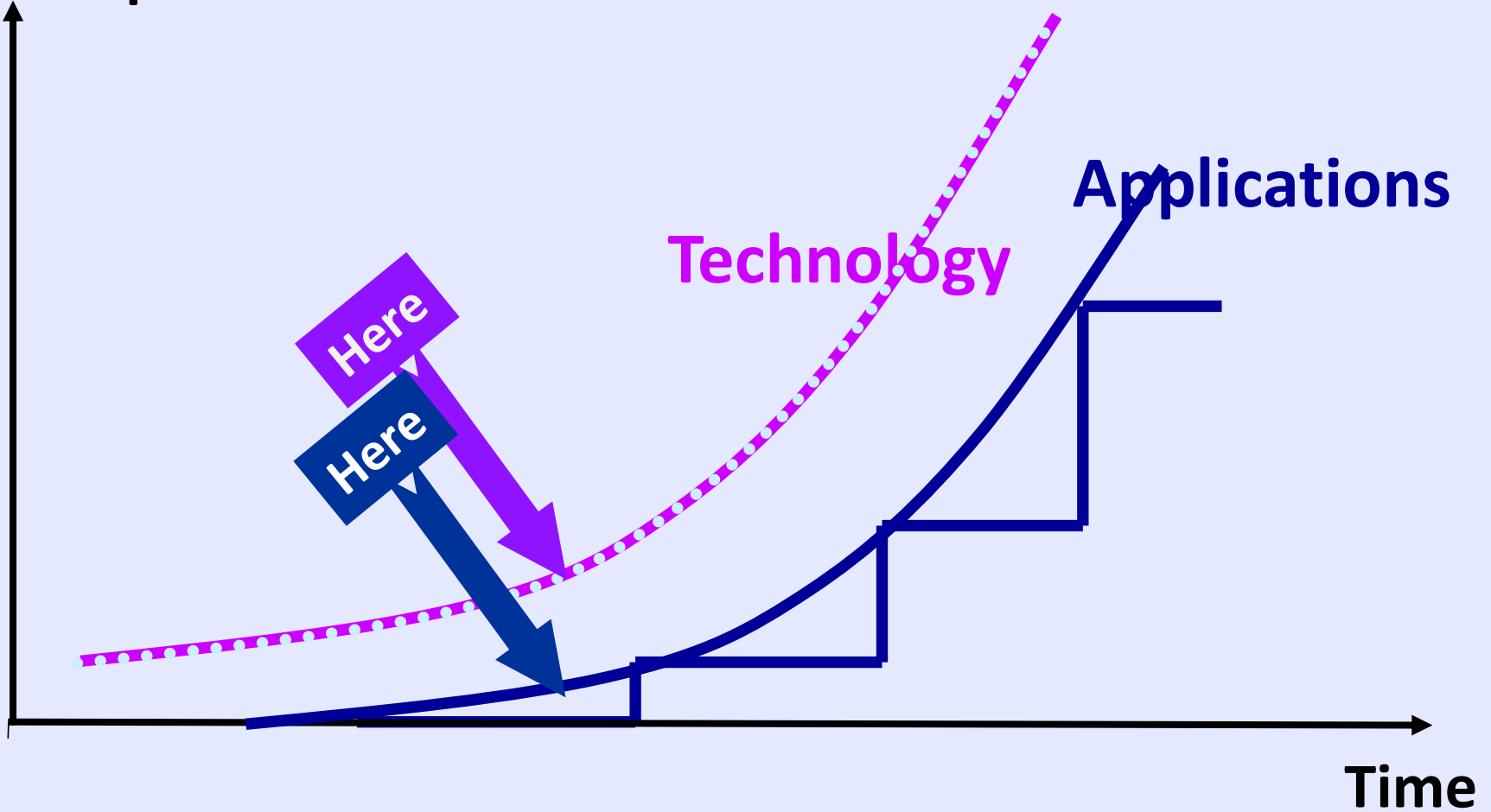
---

- Regrets now that there was no regulatory framework established for social media platforms
- Allowed Big Tech to treat personal data as commodity to be sold to the highest bidder
- Consent is a sham as opting out is penalized
- Huge concentration economic and political power
- AI-powered “misinformation on steroids” ?
- False dilemma: Regulation OR Innovation



It is still early days!

AI developments



# HOMO FABER

---

- ▶ AI is NOT a force of nature
- ▶ It is (like the Web) a human artifact
- ▶ Beneficial applications to be designed and promoted
- ▶ Potential harmful applications NOT to be treated like volcano eruptions and earthquakes
- ▶ We can make controllable “volcanoes” (or none?)
- ▶ New regulatory impetus globally
- ▶ Techno-optimism: It depends!

# The goal of technology is to serve humanity



***"The measure of success for AI applications is the value they create for human lives"***

They should be designed to enable people to understand AI systems successfully, participate in their use, and build their trust. Public policies should help ease society's adaptation to AI applications, extend their benefits, and mitigate their failures

# Humies and Techies: Bridging



# A New Digital Ecosystem is Emerging



[[www.aquarium-berlin.de](http://www.aquarium-berlin.de)]

- AI advances ( not the A and  $\Omega$  !)
- Trustworthiness as a prerequisite and driver
- Regulation: Social –Economic- Legal – Technical Issues all bound up
- Critical thinking
- Digital humanism :The Right Framework
- Summer Schools like this now more important than ever!

# Being Human

---

