

# Digital Humanism for an Enlightened Society

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The goal of technology should be to serve humanity







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

# HOMO FABER

- 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)
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Inspiration from  
past  
Enlightenments



Digital 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"***

# YOUR Enlightened Eutopia ?

- Democratize our Digital Future
- A free and open Public Sphere
- Web Oligarchs broken up! Plurality of R&D
- 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!

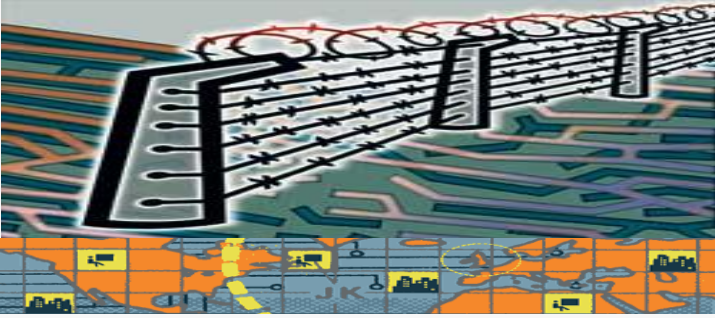




# Backcasting from ...Dystopia

(To identify ways to prevent it)

- Total Big Tech domination: The new Empires.
- Politics, Health, Education, Energy dominated
- Public sphere flooded with toxic sludge
- Extreme digital divide
- Rise of strongmen/autocrats/dictators everywhere
- From “President for Life” to “President ...forever”
- Catechism/manipulation by “AI –companions”
- Biometric Surveillance, data colonialism
- Autonomous deadly weapons. Wars (and “departments of war” !) everywhere
- Extreme economic inequality and polarization (Matthew Principle)
- Societal breakdown



Listen to the ...Cassandras  
Critical thinking!  
Early Warnings: Tim Berners Lee  
*Scientific American, 2010*  
*We didn't listen then....*

- **Privacy** (snooping , profiling ,tracking)
- **Closed «silos»** (Social Media)
- **«Walled Gardens»** ( smart phone apps)
- **Monopolies** (private clouds ,”trapped in a store”)

**From Utopia to Dystopia** (TBL, 2019, Turing Award acceptance speech)

# The “AI Messiah”: False Prophets?

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The Prophets: Altman, Amodei, et al

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Jobs disappearing. A new social contract. GO FAST !

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Pushing for AI Adoption by Governments (DOGE, Defense)

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The sceptics: D. Acemoglou, Gary Marcus et al

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Acemoglou at MIT Tech Review February 2025

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AI will increase US GDP by 1.1-1.6% in next 10 years. Impact 5% of jobs

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An AI Bubble correction and re-set? AN OPPORTUNITY

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A “neuro-symbolic” future combining Kahneman’s FAST and SLOW?

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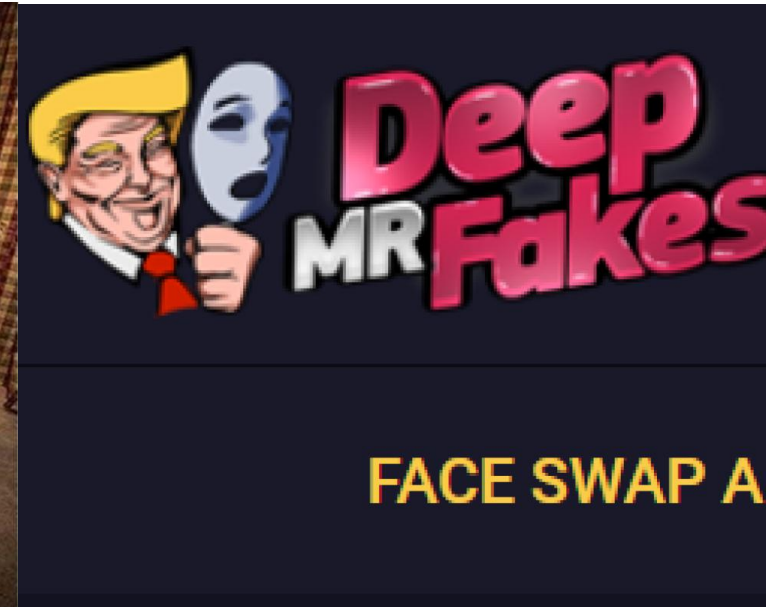
Don’t be manipulated into believing that there is no choice!



The Good



The Bad



The Ugly

# Limit the Bad: What YOU can do



- Balance: Online/Offline experience (restaurants, bars)
- “No phone challenges” ( by young people!)
- Family/friends gatherings: Put humans back into the center
- Vinyl, Audio cassette (+Walkman!) revival . Nostalgia or actual pushback?
- Schools? (bans in several EU countries and 21 US States)
- Prohibitions never worked in the past
- Parent/Teachers group co-operation
- Citizen Assemblies?
- Get engaged !



Food for the body vs food for the ...soul 😊  
Make your choices heard!



# Ban the ugly : Regulation (and your support) needed

- “Unregulated AI will be bad AI” (Acemoglu)
- Disruption of social cohesion, Disinformation, Manipulation , Surveillance
- The EU AI Act : Human rights are universal, not optional
- Emulated by several other countries and US states.
- Now under attack ( to postpone, water down....)

# Attacks on Digital Regulation

From several angles and with different instruments

- **Ideological** : Ultra-liberal
- (Harm principle rejected)
- General deregulation agenda

## Corporate self-interest /Profit

**Hypocrisy:** Zuckerberg/Musk decrying “censorship”

**False dilemmas** : “Regulation stifles innovation”

- **Geopolitical domination**

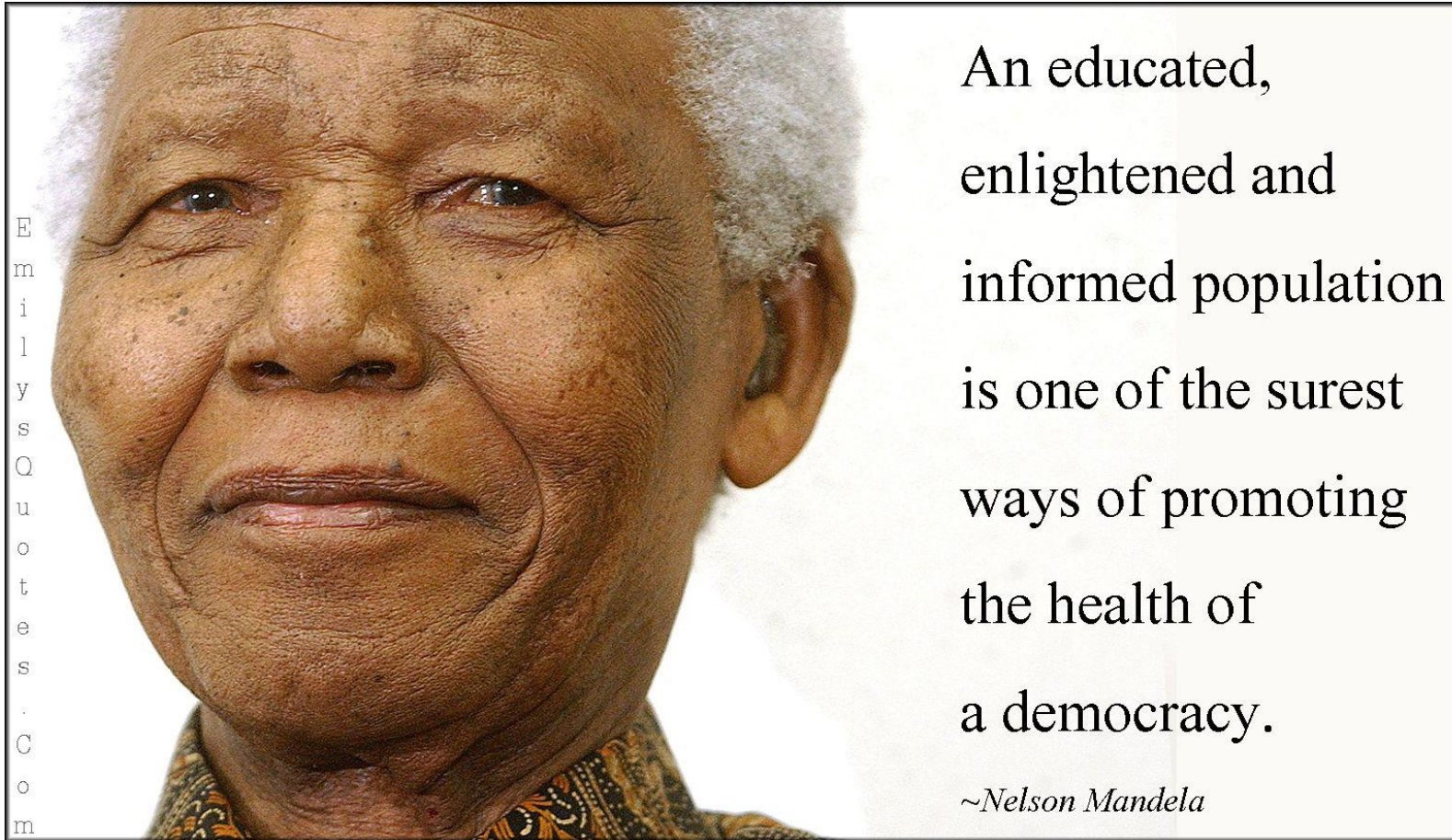


# The Dighum open letter/petition and beyond; A civil society engagement case-study

- Open letter : A civil society pushback against the deregulation lobbying.
- Submitted to the European Parliament's Petitions Committee.
- Hearing took place on July 16 under the urgency procedure.
- EP committee decided unanimously in favour
- **LESSONS:**
- **Fight 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.

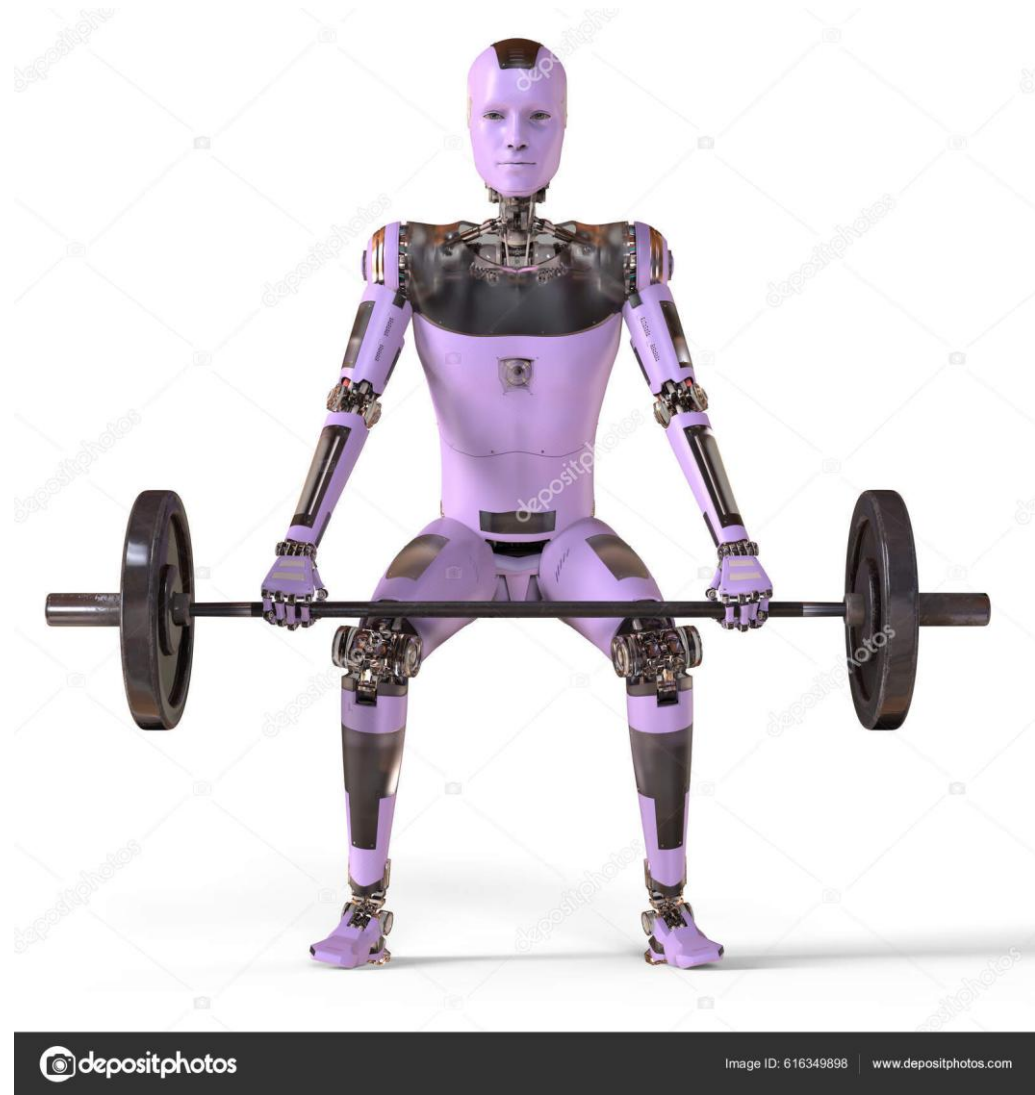
*~Nelson Mandela*



# 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 readings, 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.
- Ditto for “AI companions”

Weak body  
Weak mind?



# Enlightenment :Voltaire and ...Ubuntu

- Voltaire argued that 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 values of a few tech executives and the politicians they influence or by the will of the people?
- **Make your choices and defend them!**
- **Digital Humanism can help show the way towards enlightenment**

# The “Matthew Principle”

- "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away".
- Matthew, 25:29

- So how can Digital Humanism guide us forward?
- What can **you** do?