Eidos volume 9 no. 2 (2025)

A JOURNAL FOR PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE

DOI:10.14394/eidos.jpc.2025.0021

Estelle Clements
Independent Scholar, UK
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4261-584X
digitalcivics@gmail.com

Modern Mithraism: Ancient Concepts for an Information Age

Abstract:

Parallel observations in the works of Luciano Floridi, exploring philosophy in the digital age, and David Ulansey, studying philosophical concepts in Hellenistic cults, reveal a similarity of human experience in the face of philosophical transition. The similarities discussed by both scholars who describe the impact of ontological changes yields useful insights into individual and communal beliefs and western conceptual and cultural identity, helping to reasonably anticipate some future social and civic developments. These include anticipation of even further significant upheavals in belief systems, before settling on a digital age ecosystem that can sufficiently inform our cultural narrative. The development of new technological responses that feature interconnected story-telling and new community structures to facilitate these cultural transitions are also likely outcomes.

Keywords:

transmedia, philosophy of information, digital civics, Mithraism, Christian philosophy, digital citizenship

1. Introduction

The digital age has seen an ontological transition,[1] a changing of the very ideas humans hold about the nature of reality, as well as fundamental questioning about our place in the universe. At the forefront of this exploration, Luciano Floridi has described and theorized about the impact of this shifting ontology through his work on the "fourth revolution"[2]: a label that describes our latest digital age period of philosophical re-assessment instigated by new knowledge and technologies. Discussing how this development of new scientific discoveries and technologies has precipitated these philosophical transitions, he has remarked on the subsequent social and ethical transmutations occurring in our world, and the potential impact of these on the fabric of our society.[3] He has also remarked on the longevity of information societies, and the need to carefully consider how we approach the development of our current society to ensure positive outcomes for all entities existing within the complex digital age environment, which includes both online and offline realms, that he terms, the "infosphere."[4] Interestingly, the Classical scholar, David Ulansey, describes a process with startling similarities to the fourth revolution that Floridi describes, which unfolds during the Hellenistic period, at the traditional break between the ancient and new worlds.[5] Exploration of Ulansey's historical observations, with reference to Floridi's conception of the philosophy of information can yield insights for life in the digital age, helping us appreciate the significance of our current philosophical turn and anticipate the types of challenges we are likely to face.[6] Observing how successful or unsuccessful our previous approaches to these challenges proved to be, we can better prepare ourselves for life in the digital age that is developing, and calm our fears for the future, by contextualizing our current historical position.[7]

---

1) Floridi, "What is the Philosophy of Information", 140.

2) See, for instance, Floridi, "Turing's Three Philosophical Lessons," 10.

3) Floridi, "Future Impact of ICT."

4) An umbrella term encompassing information and biosphere. For a discussion see: Floridi, "Philosophy and Computing."

5) See Clements, "A Conceptual Framework," 11; and "Theuth, Thamus and Digital Civics," 769.

6) The relevance of such a potential link is theorized for its utility in digital age policy-making in Clements, "Exploring Digital Civics," 10–13.

7) Ibid., 13–14.

Seeking to stimulate further academic discussion and debate in this area, this paper begins by providing a brief explanation of Floridi's conception of the philosophy of information, and the "fourth revolution" before turning to Ulansey's ideas about the Hellenistic world. The propensity of both scholars to observe ontological change, ethical crisis, and a change in the cultural, civic, and social order is discussed. In closing, this paper remarks on the potential future development of new systems of belief and perceptions of reality in the digital age, given their classical antecedents, and invites scholars to further discuss these ontological transitions to impact the formative understanding of digital civics and digital age culture.

2. Floridi's Conception of the Philosophy of Information in Brief

It is useful to begin with a brief synopsis of Floridi's highly complex and nuanced philosophy. Certainly, it is impossible to relate this here in full,[8] however, this work will seek to draw attention to several key concepts that are notable in their sympathy with other scholarship in this area outside the current traditional scope of digital philosophy, and specifically the work of Mithraic scholar David Ulansey, to be discussed. Thus, I seek to sketch a broad outline with focus on the ideas necessary to facilitate later analysis.

Floridi defines the philosophy of information (hereafter PI) as:

> The philosophical field concerned with:
> a) the critical investigation of the conceptual nature and basic principles of information, including its dynamics, utilisation and sciences; and
> b) the elaboration and application of information-theoretic and computational methodologies to philosophical problems.[9]

It is a field that explores computational and information-theoretic research in philosophy. This includes the use of computers and the philosophical issues that arise from them. And Floridi prompts his readers to consider the context and cultural inheri-

8) See instead Floridi, *Information: A Very Short Introduction*.

9) Floridi, "What is the Philosophy of Information," 137.

tance that have contributed to our current circumstances, observing that information society has developed over approximately 6000 years, with humanity living in various kinds of information societies since at least the Bronze Age (with the advent of written recording systems).[10] For Floridi, communication technologies have evolved from simple recording systems (such as writing in Mesopotamia), to communications systems (especially since Gutenberg), to processing systems (particularly after Turing).[11] In this regard, Floridi differs from other scholars such as Manuel Castells,[12] who suggest the current information age is a recent development. Viewing it as a continuous advancement is an important, and extremely useful perspective, however, it reminds us that far from being cut adrift from the rest of history and left to foray helplessly in the new environment of digital *aether*, we have a rich and useful history from which to draw in facing contemporary challenges. It is, therefore, incumbent upon us to consider our historical antecedents, and reflect on their lived experience as a means of charting a better future for ourselves and our descendants.

Floridi's particular conception of the philosophy of information is used widely, already informing policy initiatives, such as the European Commission's Onlife Project, and forms a useful underpinning for digital media ethics and its education, and digital civics. [13] It is able to form such a valuable underpinning because it directly addresses the changing digital age world in which we live, by acknowledging: the changes in the environment in which we live (that is, the infosphere, and the interconnected relationship between the online and offline portions of this environment), the informational nature of interaction in this infosphere, and the ways in which this impacts and informs our daily lives.[14] This is accomplished by exploring the changes in self-perception that humans undergo as our ontological ideas about the world around us develop beyond those to which we have previously subscribed. As

10) Floridi, "The Information Society and its Philosophy," 3.

11) Ibid.

12) See for instance: Castells, *The Information Age*, vols. 1, 2, and 3.

13) For more on the EU's Onlife Initiative see: Floridi, *The Onlife Manifesto*. For more on the value of PI to digital media ethics see: Ess, *Digital Media Ethics*. For its value to digital civics see: Clements, "Exploring Digital Civics." For a discussion of PI's strengths and uses across disciplines, see: Clements, "A Conceptual Framework," 572–73.

14) Clements, "A Conceptual Framework," 572.

our ontological views change, they fundamentally alter how we perceive everything else in our world, in radical ways.

Floridi suggests that what has spurred this ontological change are new scientific developments, such as in technologies (ICTs), and their implementation (digital convergence). This new scientific development has led to a re-ontolization.[15] In short, Floridi suggests that "philosophers have begun to address the new intellectual challenges arising from the world of information and the information society."[16] PI can help us see that the "information turn" has catalyzed a transition in the way that humanity views itself and its environment.[17] As a consequence, "PI is the sort of approach we need to develop if we wish to tackle the challenges posed by such profound transformations."[18]

To understand the changes that are occurring, Floridi has described "the fourth revolution," which frames the impact of technological development, reflecting on the ontological change that it precipitates, the subsequent ethical crises that it spurs, and the significant changes to the civic and social fabric of society that ensue; changes for which we must account, if we are to direct our societal development in healthy and productive ways, and it is useful to briefly explore that now.

2.2 Floridi and the Fourth Revolution

As Floridi puts it, "we are experiencing what may be described as a fourth revolution, in the process of dislocation and reassessment of humanity's fundamental nature and role in the universe."[19] The term describes the philosophical transition in self-understanding that is currently being experienced by humanity as a result of ICTs: the natural process of philosophical exploration and re-identification that occurs when we experience a dissonance between what we believed, and what, with new information, we now realize to be more correct. Such experiences prompt a new perception of reality, which inevitably leads to changes in the way we view ourselves.

---

15) Floridi and Sanders, "Artificial Evil," 5.

16) Floridi, "What is the Philosophy of Information," 139.

17) Ibid., 140.

18) Floridi, "The Information Society and its Philosophy," 11.

19) Floridi, "Turing's Three Philosophical Lessons," 10.

In observing humanity's circumstances approaching the fourth revolution, Floridi discusses the three previous revolutions in self-understanding to have occurred in the past 500 years. These are identified as resulting from the works of Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud; each of whom de-centralizes the human's views of self through new knowledge, decentralizing the human from: the center of the cosmos, the animal kingdom, and even their own conscious mind, respectively.[20] It is clear from the impact of Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud, that such decentralizations have significant consequences for religious belief.

In this latest, fourth revolution, our digital age technologies and scientific advancements have, quite literally, thrown us off center again, this time as they change the way we interact with reality.[21] This has given rise to an ontological and subsequently ethical crisis, the impact of which we are currently experiencing. In the face of our new developments, we have discovered that we cannot view ourselves in the ways that we previously did: our advancements make us realize how old self-perceptions no longer serve us by confronting us with new circumstances and scenarios that render them inoperative. For instance, when we enact a communication in the online world, such as a comment or incitement to action, its ability to travel is unbounded by the same limitations as our offline physical body traditionally experienced. The communication is nearly instantaneous, and does not require the same amount of time, or effort, to arrive at its destination. Such communications can also directly impact our life in the offline world, as the consequences of our online communication can be experienced offline also. This ontological continuity between the environments that can be used to access reality leads us to reconceptualize the views that we had previously held of ourselves. We are no longer entities in simply the offline, physical world, but can take action in new and different ways – unbounded by certain physical restrictions, such as distance – in the online world, also. These new-found abilities quite literally force us to reconsider who we are. Eventually, we come to see ourselves as informational.[22] This spurs numerous questions regarding the nature of humanity's responsibilities in the world, our potential for agency, and

20) Floridi, "The Information Society and its Philosophy," 9–10.

21) Floridi, "Future impact of ICT."

22) Ibid.

naturally, the ethical consequences of this newfound agency and responsibility. After all, ontology and ethics are strongly inter-related.[23]

As the fourth revolution takes place, ethics and the nature of responsibility take on new dimensions. As I will discuss, this philosophical process in which the human experiences a philosophical dissonance in the face of new information – to which the response is to reassess our place in the universe and re-ontologize ourselves, developing new ideas about who we are and how we perceive our world – is not isolated to the digital age. Correlations between the late Hellenistic period and the fourth revolution can be assistive in formulating an understanding of how such changes in society may be managed,[24] and it is to these, that we now turn our attention.

3. David Ulansey and a Hellenistic "Fourth Revolution"

As Floridi argues that human experience of living in information societies extends 6000 years into the past, it seems likely that we can draw from these experiences to gain some insight into our future, and the challenges we are likely to face. In this regard, the work of classical scholar David Ulansey contributes a useful perspective when contextualizing the digital age, particularly when considering the ethical implications of cosmological crisis. Ulansey's work, particularly his paper "Cultural Transition and Spiritual Transformation: From Alexander the Great to Cyberspace,"[25] raises many of the same questions as Floridi, addressing the digital world and its philosophical and cultural underpinnings. An expert in Mithraism and cults contemporary to the early Christian period, Ulansey observes that there are parallels between the Hellenistic period and our own present day period that make the Hellenistic period worthy of particular study and valuable in understanding current trends and

23) Long, *Ethics of Ontology*, 8.

24) Identifying these symbolic potentials, the Hellenistic transition of ideas into biblical scripture has been referred to as an ancient infosphere, a suggestion with potential to help understand the locality and jurisdictional issues in digital-age civic interactions. See Clements, "Exploring Digital Civics," 12.

25) Thomas Singer's book, *The Vision Thing*, in which Ulansey's paper is featured, aims to inquire about the underpinning concepts of our modern politics and political psyche. Ulansey's contribution aims at appreciating this through Hellenistic cults – including those of Mithras and Christ – and thus naturally lends itself to a discussion of the cultural and political foundations in the Western tradition.

attitudes around self-perception, society, and cyberspace in the Western world.[26] Ulansey quotes a number of key classicists[27] to support his observation that the Hellenistic period and its subsequent changes in philosophy are vastly relevant to our modern age, to great effect. He postulates, for example, theories regarding communication technologies resulting in a "planetary cultural unification" in a manner reminiscent of McLuhan's global village.[28] He further cites this cultural unification as a parallel resembling the one set in motion by Alexander's conquests, noting that the effect of this in Hellenistic times was:

> A decisive shift in the locus of human identity from the collective to the individual, with the subsequent emergence of new symbolic systems that offered responses of various kinds to this shift. Likewise, in our own time a change in the structure of human identity seems to be accompanying the process of planetary cultural unification (at least in the industrial cultures of the West that are at the forefront of this process). (CT, 225)

Not unlike Floridi's fourth revolution, Ulansey notes the shift in self-understanding and human identity, and its global impact, but paralleled in the Classical world. He identifies how, like those who lived in the Hellenistic period, we are currently experiencing the emergence of a new "cosmological vision" because our discovery of the universe is also being challenged and expanded much in the same way scientific discoveries altered the understanding of the universe for ancient peoples.[29]

Just like Floridi, Ulansey also proposes that the reason for many of the philosophical changes that take place (but in Ulansey's work, during the Hellenistic

---

26) Ulansey, "Cultural Transition and Spiritual Transformation." Hereafter cited parenthetically as CT.

27) Primarily, Ulansey draws on arguments from W.W. Tarn and Peter Green in his discussion of Alexander's role in shaping individuality, though also convincingly invokes a number of ideas from Martin Nilsson, Kenneth Gergen, and Robert Jay Lifton, among others.

28) McLuhan's now famed global village, as discussed in Gutenberg Galaxy, has maintained influence given its pertinence to the shrinking timescales of digital age communications, and their impact, and complements ideas put forward by Floridi ("Future Impact of ICT," 5) regarding what Floridi terms the "frictionless infosphere."

29) For further discussion see Ulansey, "'Visions in the Night.'"

period), have to do with the development of new scientific knowledge beginning in the Pre-Socratic period, which had previously been unavailable (CT). At the center of this, he places the discovery that the world was round instead of flat and the publicizing of this worldview in the work of Plato (CT, 221).

Plato's vision of a round globe presented a literally earth-shattering view of the world quite apart from the disc-like cosmology of ancient belief (CT, 221). By comparison, Ulansey cites the discoveries of Edwin Hubble in the 1920s – "about 80 years ago the universe as we know it expanded overnight by a factor of 100 billion" (CT, 226) – to explain how current views of the universe have become a "reality without a center or boundaries … leading to a doubly reinforced sense of a loss of contact with the grounding forces of reality" and consequently resulting in "apocalyptic ideation" (CT, 226). This argument prompts one to consider afresh the reasons for the apocalyptic Y2K scares of 1999, the Mayan 2012 prophecy, and perhaps even warnings precipitated by technological determinist arguments that seem to offer ominous predictions of the world to come. Such warnings of moral deterioration and the threat of destruction could, like our ancient forebears, be viewed as a philosophical response to cosmological change. They are a natural result of the sensation of losing one's entire identity of being, and of recognizing an ideological change or transition in which previously held ideas about the world are destroyed, or die away.

4.1 The Ethics of Universe Building

Floridi notes this impact of a vastly expanding universe in his own work. For example, he observes that the digital world has also grown massively, noting that "this exponential escalation has been relentless: between 2006 and 2010 […] the digital universe will increase more than six-fold from 161 exabytes to 988 exabytes."[30] Our exploration online makes our world ever larger, further impacting our cosmology. Indeed, the ontological continuity of the infosphere means that this space is constantly being explored and further developed. As this new space becomes more familiar, we have an even greater sense of the increasing expanse, to which we ourselves contribute through the creation of more and more data and content online: a growth in concep-

30) Floridi, "Against Digital Ontology," 4.

tual space reminiscent of the work of John B. Calhoun,[31] who advocated that humans must undergo a conceptual and compassionate revolution in their use of space. We are ourselves literally universe building, and as we become aware of this, and of the responsibility that comes with this, we seek to understand our new power and how to wield it.[32] The impact of realizing such new power in the world is not entirely unlike the recognition and subsequent reasoning that must have occurred in the Hellenistic period when, embodied by Alexander the Great, the concept of individualism – and the power, or personal agency, this involved – became more broadly understood. The sheer scale of the universe, our creative potential within it, and the immense responsibility this places upon us, forces us to develop ethical responses and new ways of seeing the world and how to live in it; we are, ever so slowly, learning to recognize and wield our own power, not unlike our ancient forebearers.[33]

As discussed, in Floridi's "fourth revolution" new scientific knowledge has created a dissonance in human understanding and displaced previously held ideas about how humans understand themselves;[34] the subsequent re-ontologization necessitates new ethical responses, given the close relationship between ethics and ontology. Through Ulansey's work it is possible to observe that such issues are not isolated to the digital world: breakthroughs in scientific knowledge in the pre-Socratic period that generated a new cosmological vision, and an ontological shift, created the same dissonance to which Platonic discourse and later Hellenistic philosophy attempt to respond. But Ulansey goes on to discuss how, in the midst of this Hellenistic philosophical disruption, new ideas are generated about community (such as civic responsibilities to one another), and ethical behavior (as to our responsibilities with this new found individual power). Through further exploring Ulansey's work, the Hellenistic past can provide potential insight into the communal and civic challenges now faced in the digital age, and the types of responses that one might expect given human history. Though to appreciate this, it is useful to first consider how we move around in this universe that we are helping to develop.

---

31) See Calhoun, "Space and the Strategy of Life."

32) For some of the consequences of this, see Floridi, "Digital's Cleaving Power and Its Consequences."

33) For a discussion of this relationship, see: Clements, "Digital Civics in Pedagogy," 158–61. For an exploration of how this power is applied in relation to digital technologies, see: Floridi, "Digital's Cleaving Power and Its Consequences."

34) Floridi, "Turing's Three Philosophical Lessons."

4.2 Ontological Continuity and Identity

Ulansey's concept of a "reality without a centre" or "border" (CT, 226) evokes notions of a de-physicalized environment akin to the online world, but more importantly it also supports Floridi's fourth revolution views, that the current change in human self-perception, and previous revolutions in self-perception, result from scientific realizations which de-centralize human beliefs (such as with Darwin, or Freud), and there is certainly something Heideggerian about it.[35]

It is perhaps also worth noting that Plato's theory of forms could also be viewed as an expression of ontological inter-relationship, in that a non-physical idea could be made physically concrete (in inferior mold) from a conceptual form. (An experiment in what Floridi might describe as levels of abstraction[36] but only in as much as levels of abstraction "allow informational agents to access the physical or conceptual state of a system"[37] providing differing mechanisms through which one is able to access reality.) In Plato's case, the physical world allowed a glimpse of reality, but true reality was accessed in the world of the forms. In the digital age, both realms offer insight into the nature of reality, but the digital world and its technologies are helping us to appreciate a different perspective of this reality and understand its informational nature. And perhaps we also see this ontological continuity in Ulansey's observations about the concept of a human's physical body and psyche, given that "for Plato the soul and the heavens were intricately bound together, for he argues that human souls were created from the same substance as the soul of the entire cosmos itself" (CT, 221). Thus, a human (in Plato's understanding) could literally enact this ontological continuity, in their connection to the heavens through their soul, and their physical existence in flesh: distinctly separate aspects of distinctly separate worlds, yet part of the same entity, linking both with the ability to traverse (however briefly) worlds. From Plato's discussion of the erotic ladder,[38] to his allegory of the chariot,[39]

35) That is, in the separation of being from beings. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*; and Nicholson, "The Ontological Difference."

36) Floridi is clear to articulate and make a distinction from this theory in his discussions of levels of abstraction in "A Defence of Informational Structural Realism," and in "Against Digital Ontology."

37) Ganascia, "Abstraction of Levels of Abstraction," 3

38) Plato, *Symposium*, 210a–212b.

39) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246a–254e.

to his cave metaphor,[40] the ability of humans to move back and forth between perceptual experiences is a feature.[41]

Perhaps this digital-age ability to traverse realms with such ease then, is a legacy of our Platonic philosophy and explains why the occurrences of today bear so much similarity to the processes occurring in the Hellenistic period (in the responding wake of Plato's ideas), as Ulansey might describe them. That is, that the movement between levels of abstraction, the idea that one could somehow move a portion of oneself into a realm of de-physical ideas and back as Plato describes, gives rise to the same philosophical impact and shaping of the self as the movement between levels of abstraction we experience now as we move between the online and offline worlds. It gives rise to the phenomenon the religion scholar J. Sage Elwell identifies and describes as the "transmediated self":

> The identity experience emerging from the feedback loop between the digital and the analog whereby one domain informs the other in an ongoing dialectic of existential equivalence. Thus, the transmedia model serves as a helpful paradigm for understanding the nature of self-identity and self formation in this new liminal space by offering the conceptual architecture necessary for exploring and articulating its integrated, dispersed, episodic, and interactive narrative character.[42]

This is of further interest to modern ideas if one considers that the boundaries of the current world are also changing and the relationship between physical and non-physical are being yet again re-considered through their ontological relationship, as humanity moves into the digital landscape. The lessons of Plato in the digital age should be appreciated and indeed, a number of scholars consider, as Ulansey does,

---

40) Plato, *Republic*, 514a–520a.

41) While focus on the Ladder and Chariot metaphors is usually concerned with ascending, movement occurs in both directions, and in the cave metaphor there is encouragement to return underground to support others in their ascension, so the movement is clearly both ways. It should also be stated that Ulansey himself observes the oft-noted thematic similarities between the Chariot and Cave metaphors. See Ulansey, "Mithras and the Hypercosmic Sun," 259.

42) Elwell, "The Transmediated Self," 243.

that Platonic ideas deeply impact the development of cosmological, ontological, and ethical digital-age responses[43] suggesting how the Platonic legacy is very much active in our present day-to-day lives.[44] Thus, it seems useful to next explore the ways in which our Hellenistic ancestors dealt with the philosophical changes occurring in their world, for insight into our similar digital-age concerns.

5. Changing Communities

The changing conception of self-understanding brought about by new scientific exploration (i.e., Plato's round globe, and later, perhaps Hipparchus' equinoctial discoveries[45]), spurs the numerous religious cults (including Mithraism and the Christian tradition), which spring up in the later Hellenistic period seeking means to understand new concepts of the self and universe, and how to navigate human interactions and community within it.[46] In responding to intense changes, new social identities are required to take the place of the previous systems of collective identity, causing new forms of citizenship, and new forms of community building to occur. Ulansey identifies the "Christ cult" as a highly successful response to changes in cosmological vision and self-understanding for a number of reasons,[47] but arguably the most relevant to this discussion is:

> Along with giving its members citizenship in a symbolic homeland [substitute for the lost sense of collective identity that had died with the dissolution of the old local groups], the Christ cult offered to its adherents an almost infinitely intricate symbolic personal genealogy: upon joining this group, one immediately became an heir to the extraordinarily complex and elaborate universe of history, myth, and symbol embodied in the texts of the cult – what we now call the Bible. Here was provided – now

43) See, for instance, Clynes, "Sacred Sky and Cyberspace"; O'Hara, *Plato and the Internet*; Heim, "The Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace"; and Stenger, "Mind is a Leaking Rainbow."

44) Clements, "Theuth, Thamus and Digital Civics," 768.

45) For more on this see Ulansey's earlier work on Mithraism, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*.

46) Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*.

47) For a discussion, see Clements, "Exploring Digital Civics," 12–13.

> on a symbolic level – the same rich sense of embeddedness that used to be furnished by one's growing up within the traditions of a local society. In other words, the Christ cult offered a convincing sense of identity to people for whom the old structure of local group identity was no longer available. (CT, 229)

Another parallel may be drawn here between the work of Ulansey, and the insights of media scholar Henry Jenkins,[48] who identifies the same phenomena occurring in society today, through transmediated experience, as he suggests that the educational establishment sits in direct opposition to students' views of developing cultural identity:

> That sense of old categories or racial and national identities breaking down in a multi-cultural society over generations leaves one hungry for that sense of affiliation or cultural connection, of rootedness, but the search becomes for a self-selecting cultural community … they become very very powerful parts of who they [students] are and how they see themselves and school's attempts to suppress those views … become direct threats to their views of developing cultural identity[49]

So, while Ulansey identifies the success experienced by the early Christian church, in their capacity to understand and work with the cosmological and cultural changes occurring in their world, perhaps it is this failure to understand and take account of these same changes described by Jenkins, which leads to difficulty in contemporary digital-age culture: the ability to, as Ulansey puts it "provide a convincing sense of identity to people for whom the old structure of local group identity was no longer available" (CT, 229). Thus, when responding to digital-age social and civic challenges we should take account of the need to formulate a sense of cultural identity, and particularly self-selecting cultural community, if we are to be successful in meeting the needs of citizens in the infosphere.

---

48) Jenkins is similarly interested in impacts of digital convergence that Floridi identifies as sitting at the heart of these philosophical transitions, and foundational to conversations on the transmediated experience.

49) Jenkins, "Media, Education and the Marketplace," 08:09.

5.2 The Role of Narrative

One way that cultural identity is shared and understood that is accessible through Elwell's articulation of the transmediated self, and present in Ulansey's description of the Christ cult's success, is through the use of narrative. This functions through story-telling, and the creation of shared mythos: the formulation of a communal mythical and mystical framework within which questions about existence and the world can be posed and explored through lived experience, with heroic (but relatable) models serving as guiding characters through the challenging circumstances of daily life. As readers, we hear of Jesus' exploits through the interactions he has with others: we understand the disciples surprise at the miracles they witness, Peter's fear as he denies knowing Jesus, or Thomas' disbelief as he examines Jesus' hands. These personal narratives share the goal of helping to re-orient humanity as we recognize, develop, and integrate new found powers of agency. Thus, such stories are critical to make sense of the new landscape and philosophical premises that unfold. They also ensure that we can appreciate in practical lived terms, through vicarious experience, how to integrate this knowledge into our daily lives in ways that can be properly understood by members of the public, who may not possess a thorough grounding in complex philosophy, but who can, with time, formulate understanding through shared experience with narrative characters. This suggests that storytelling is an integral part of successful civic and social development, not simply as a conduit for creative human outreach, but as a primary resource for understanding and developing survival skills for our world: that is, narrative is imperative. (This may yet demonstrate even greater pertinence, as new research extends the understanding of story-telling within our lives, particularly in regards to our physiological well-being.[50])

In the Hellenistic period, the formulation of new community interactions occurred by outlining how Christians might behave in their new community through texts which would become the Bible: providing instruction, often through story-telling, for this developing society to those more accustomed to living in tribal units or genetic groups (such as the 12[51] tribes of Israel), as opposed to peoples united by

50) See Brockington, et al., "Storytelling Increases Oxytocin."

51) The number 12 is one which Ulansey discusses at length for its spiritual utility in the alignment of

common ideas. The approaches of the Hellenistic period in regards to community building and the dissemination of knowledge in the formulation of community interaction then, may also be useful to generate coping strategies for the changes in our own twenty-first century cosmological and philosophical vision, for instance, through narratives based on the reported lived experiences of individuals whose lives represent these new experiences and how to cope with them. Considered in this way, the internet is a story-telling mechanism, through its digitally mediated and recorded memory: the story of the twenty-first century human.

And both (the internet and the Bible) share a narrative thread. They are about ordinary humans being extraordinary – the simple fisherman learning the gospel, or the humble housewife posting online about her daily chores and future hopes – both delve into the humdrum existence and fierce potential of our human experience: from Peter to Twitter, the exploits of the ordinary human, and their potential agency are placed at the forefront of our exploration, complete with their capacity for humbling mistakes. These story-telling experiences are a narrative made flesh, and a flesh, now digitally, made narrative: a continuous story-telling loop.

But what is fascinating about the Bible is not only its narrative structure, but how that narrative is structured. What makes the Bible integrally different to other mythical and mystical resources of its time, is its capacity to record its experiences in writing, and its use of interconnection.

6. Hyperlinked Virtual Reality: An Ancient Idea

In closing his article, Ulansey comments on the Bible itself, identifying it as a hypertext (CT, 228). That is, that the New Testament was constructed with reference to the Old Testament in mind; so, as passages are read in the New Testament, one can refer back to the original prophesy in the Old Testament to which they pertain. Thus, the term "hypertext," coined by Nelson in the 1960s to describe a collection of documents used for non-sequential cross-referencing,[52] is applicable. Ulansey further discusses how

systems, for instance, the 12 disciples or the 12 signs of the zodiac. See Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*.

52) See Nelson, *Literary Machines*, for a broad discussion.

the practice of biblical typology also shows the process through which this hypertext could reach out and connect itself to the rest of the world formulating connections between its own Christian content and anything to which it could relate or associate itself (CT, 229), not entirely unlike the anything to anything, or "a2a," phenomenon Floridi describes, in which our technology connects us not only to one another, but to other things in our world.[53] To resituate Ulansey's insight through the lens of PI, we might suggest then, that the Christ cult presented the Bible as "an infinitely dense, complex, hyperlinked virtual reality" (CT, 229) reaching out in a networked "anything 2 anything." And throughout the history of Christianity, Western civilization's search for meaning has been lived out within this hyperlinked virtual reality.

What seems startlingly familiar about the innovation of the Christ cult is their recognition, adoption, and use of technology (writing) to formulate this virtual reality. A step apart from Mithriasm and the Cult of Isis, about whom very little writing has survived to inform our perspective, and nothing written of their rites by practitioners themselves.[54] The biblical text states outright that "In the beginning there was the word": a technology of communication equated to that same "logos"[55] that underpins the cosmos. Formulated with the most universal communications technology of the time,[56] the Bible reaches out, transmuting the world into an experimental facility to help us appreciate the nature of reality, identity, and power, like a living laboratory, through experiential learning. This is the very embodiment of the digital transmediated experience as described by Elwell.[57] Using communications technology developed through the deployment of computer languages that are similarly able to transcend national boundaries, we are supported to reconsider our human identity as we move between levels of abstraction connecting our daily experiences and altering our conception of reality. Indeed, Elwell's description of this experience was already familiar to digital age educators, enacting learning environments like the Rieberian Microworld,[58] and learning laboratories like

53) This discussion is outlined in Floridi's paper, "Things."

54) Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*, 3.

55) The Greek word that gives us both "word" and the modern "logic."

56) It is developed using the shared written language of its day Koine Greek, literally "common."

57) Elwell, "The Transmediated Self."

58) Rieber, "Seriously Considering Play."

the Digital Civics Pedagogy Project enacted for Dublin City Libraries in 2010[59]: projects that sought to explore civic agency and identity in digital environments.

Like the Bible then, cyberspace is a technologically-based, hyperlinked virtual reality, subsuming our physical world to prompt ontological change for the purposes of exploring the fundamental nature of reality, our own being, and the exercise of power. And, like the history of Christianity acting through biblical typology, our recorded data trail through Floridi's Infosphere, is a record, seeking out meaning through the sharing of the lived experiences of its ordinary citizens, whose lives yield key insights, and shared cultural responses, to help drive our development and understanding of newfound agency.

The Christ cult even offers a sort of insight into experimenting with Plato's aforementioned ontological continuity between physical and non-physical planes within the matrix of this "hyperlinked virtual reality," embodied by the eponymous hero of the Christian tale whose ability to move between planes of physical existence, and the heavenly world of ideas makes him the god-like figure upon which citizens of this new age of individualism can attempt to model themselves. He begins in the spirit, incarnates in the physical world, lives a life connected to the heavenly world conducting miracles, departs the physical world, then returns from the spiritual realm to re-animate his physical being. This proto-digital study in seamlessly crossing between realms is now perfected in the average lives of digital age citizens, who can move back and forth between levels of abstraction simply by carrying a small technological device, like a mobile phone.

Meanwhile, as we theorize the most useful forms of ethics to guide us through our re-ontolization and into new forms of identity and power, we can perhaps take further council from our Hellenistic counterparts. The Bible's narrative suggest the importance of skills like love, cooperation, compassion, empathy, humility, and forgiveness. Skills that modern virtue ethicists have already voiced as vital for successful life in the infosphere.[60]

---

59) For explanation of how the project was enacted, see: Clements, "Asking Dorian Gray," 128–29. For the original brief outlining its exploration of civic agency see Clements, "Digital Media Convergence," 49–53.

60) See, for example, Vallor, *Technology and the Virtues*; or Ess, "Trust and New Communications Technologies."

7. A Platform to the Divine: Looking Ahead

From his distant vantage, during Floridi's fourth revolution, through a lens of 2500 years of history, Ulansey observes the dissolution of ideas already underway in our current lives as our guiding principles cease to function effectively, and we begin to seek new structures of reality, like our ancient counterparts. He asks of cyberspace "are we seeing here merely the first of many competing reality-structures that will arise to contend for the new allegiance of the human soul?" (CT, 229).

Christianity, like so many of its contemporary movements, is a path for reaching the divine reality. It is a way of accessing another realm, a platform for interaction with the divine, or the higher truth, or nature of reality. Today's cyberspace attempts to serve this function. It helps us to access the digital realm through which we might more readily understand the nature of reality: it serves as our guide to understanding the divine realm of information. But we must also ask ourselves if there is a better way of seeing information and helping us to understand our reality? The graphical interface to access our current internet is, in many ways, a clumsy expression of communication. Artificial reality, the use of implants, or neurological stimulation are emerging technologies that will find new ways of reaching out and communicating in our world; re-shaping our experience and resulting in new visions of our world, and our selves. Even now, the technologies and mechanisms behind our experience are shifting. Silicon chips were only one methodology, but now we are coming to the end of what is possible with traditionally made silicon chips, what happens next? There is promising research on new semiconductors like graphene and carbon nanotubes, compound semiconductors like gallium nitrate, and electro-magnetics.[61] And already our traditional use of logic gates is changing with developments in quantum computing.[62] All of these technologies have the potential to extend our universe as we appreciate the fundamental potential for increasingly tiny- even atomic- processing ability, and our capacity to develop a further and greater breadth of information processes. Consequently, all of these developments have the potential to fundamen-

61) For instance, on nanotube transistors see Hills, et al., "Modern Microprocessor." On Gallium Nitride, see Xie, "Gallium Nitride Electronics." On electro-magnetics, see Vahapoglu, et al., "Single-electron Spin Resonance."

62) For a discussion, see Schäfer, et al., "Fast Quantum Logic Gates."

tally alter not simply the computing landscape, but the ways in which technology is developed and implemented, bringing about fundamental changes to our cosmological and ontological understanding, and thus to our views of self, agency, and ethics.

And who will mediate our access to these experiences? Linux, Microsoft's Windows, Google's Android, Apple's iOS, even Meta's burgeoning deployment of platform tools; these operational ecosystems are a lens through which we are able to mediate our digital experience: the sect with which we identify our familiar experience as we traverse through the online world. But at what cost will that come? Ulansey reminds of the choice that was made 2000 years ago, to take a path in which "Christianity became the dominant symbolic system of western culture, but other possibilities were present at that time."[63] He suggests that by exploring our untaken path, we can consider unconscious notions still at play in our world.[64] We must look carefully at these paths offered by our digital operational ecosystems and reflect upon how we may formulate a better world for those who come after us. Particularly as we recognize the critical historical junction at which we now sit. As Floridi observes of the decision-making currently underway in our digital age, "we will be in serious trouble if we do not take seriously the fact that we are constructing a new environment that will be inhabited by future generations."[65] Given the power and fiscal interests at play, we must be concerned with the potential of who will own the future way we see the world. Who may control our portal to this divine realm? And, how will it be managed? Will it be a company's corporate view, or a philosophically grounded legal system that shapes our connection to one another, the world around us, and even our ideas of what is sacred? We must insist on a gatekeeper with ethics and integrity, bound by laws that recognize the sanctity of the digital environment, and that grant us power and autonomy, else face a terrifying and unknown future. These are but some of the vital questions with which we must contend if we are to act responsibly in our universe building efforts.

It took several hundred years of philosophical development and competition before one structure, the Christ cult, won out over its competing ideologies. Indeed,

63) Ulansey, "The Cosmic Mysteries of Mithras," 04:09.

64) Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*, 4.

65) Floridi, "Future impact of ICT," 8.

Ulansey's entire body of work reminds us that once, nothing was so popular as Mithras, and even this god disappeared into the mists of time, overtaken by a new system of belief and community function. Perhaps, then, as we sit at the crux of this historic epoch, we should reflect that we too, may merely be modern Mithraists, followers subscribing to an ideology we believe to be the path forward, but lacking insight into what structure is yet to come and in what new directions our technology may take us.

It is argued here that a successful system will be the one that responds to our new needs, addresses fundamental questions of existence and being, and can be easily and readily understood through new forms of interconnected narrative. It seems likely at this early stage of development, we will yet see many competing ideas and philosophies take shape and undergo the same competition for dominance: we should not yet get too attached to what we think we know. Given our circumstances, perhaps all we can rely on is our drive to reach out and build a functional shared community with others, seeking to shape our digital-age life with the best our human experience has to offer. At such a critical juncture the value of debating these ontological transitions and their impact on the formative understanding of digital civics and digital-age culture is deeply necessary.

Bibliography:

Brockington, Guilherme, Ana Paula Gomes Moreira, Maria Stephani Buso, et al. "Storytelling Increases Oxytocin and Positive Emotions and Decreases Cortisol and Pain in Hospitalized Children." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 22 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2018409118.

Castells, Manuel. *End of Millennium*. Vol. 3 of *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Blackwell Publishers Inc. eBooks, 1997. https://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=522528.

—. *Power of Identity*. Vol. 2 of *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*. Blackwell Publishers Inc. eBooks, 1997. https://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=523283.

—. *Rise of the Network Society*. Vol. 1 of *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Blackwell Publishers Inc. eBooks, 1996. http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=524598.

Calhoun, John B. "Space and the Strategy of Life." In *Behavior and Environment: The Use of Space by Animals and Men*. Edited by Aristide Henri Esser. Springer, 1971. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4684-1893-4_25.

Clements, Estelle. "Asking Dorian Gray for a Digital Civics Education." *Journal of Literacy and Technology* 23, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2022): 124–56.

—. "A Conceptual Framework for Digital Civics Pedagogy Informed by the Philosophy of Information." *Journal of Documentation* 76, no. 2 (2020): 571–85.

—. "Digital Civics in Pedagogy: A Response to the Challenges of Digital Convergence in the Educational Environment." PhD diss., Technological University Dublin, 2017. https://doi.org/10.21427/d7j45f.

—. "Digital Media Convergence and the Challenge for Media Educators: Applying Floridi's Theoretical Framework to Digital Civics in Pedagogy." Confirmation paper, Technological University Dublin, 2009. https://www.digitalcivics.org/archived-materials/.

—. "Exploring Digital Civics: A Framework of Key Concepts to Guide Digital Civics Initiatives." *Philosophy & Technology* 36, no. 2 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-023-00614-x.

—. "Theuth, Thamus, and Digital Civics: Plato's Formulation of Memory and its Lessons for Civic Life in the Digital Age." *Memory Studies* 15, no. 4 (2022): 767–83. https://doi.org/10.1177/175069802210945.

Clynes, Frances. "Sacred Sky and Cyberspace." In *The Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena 6*. Edited by Enrico Maria Corsini. *ASP Conference Series* 441, (2011): 343–49. http://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2011ASPC..441..343C/abstract.

Elwell, J. Sage. "The Transmediated Self: Life between the Digital and the Analog." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 20, no. 2 (September 2013): 233–49. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856513501423.

Ess, Charles. "Trust and New Communications Technologies: Vicious Circles, Virtuous Circles, Possible Futures." *Knowledge, Technology & Policy* 23, no. 3–4 (2010): 287–305.

—. *Digital Media Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2009.

Floridi, Luciano. "Against Digital Ontology." *Synthese* 168, no. 1 (2009): 151–78.

—. "A Defence of Informational Structural Realism." *Synthese* 161, no. 2 (2008): 219–53.

—. "Digital's Cleaving Power and Its Consequences." *Philosophy & Technology* 30, (2017): 123–29. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-017-0259-1.

—. *Information: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

—. "The Information Society and its Philosophy." *The Information Society* 25, no. 3 (2009): 153–58.

—. "A Look into the Future Impact of ICT on Our Lives." *The Information Society* 23, no. 1 (2007): 59–64.

—. *The Onlife Manifesto: Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era*. Springer, 2014. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-04093-6.

—. *Philosophy and Computing: An Introduction*. Routledge. 1999.

—. "Things." *Philosophy & Technology* 26, (2013): 349–52.

—. "Turing's Three Philosophical Lessons and the Philosophy of Information." *Royal Society's Philosophical Transactions A* 370, no. 1971 (2012): 3536–542.

—. "What is the Philosophy of Information." *Metaphilosophy* 33, nos. 1–2 (2002).

Floridi, Luciano, and Jeff W. Sanders. "Artificial Evil and the Foundation of Computer Ethics." *Ethics and Information Technology* 3, (2001): 55–66.

Ganascia, Jean-Gabriel. "Abstraction of Levels of Abstraction." *Journal of Experimental & Theoretical Artificial Intelligence* 27, no. 1 (2015): 1–13.

Hills, Gage, Christian Lau, Andrew Wright, et al. "Modern Microprocessor Built from Complementary Carbon Nanotube Transistors." *Nature* 572, no. 7771 (August 2019): 595–602. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1493-8.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

Heim, Michael. "The Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace." In *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Jenkins, Henry. "Lec 6 MIT CMS.930 Media, Education and the Marketplace." Posted February 14, 2008, by MIT OpenCourseWare. Accessed May 26, 2025. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDKIsplqGmY.

Long, Christopher. *The Ethics of Ontology: Rethinking an Aristotelian Legacy*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2004.

McLuhan, Marshall. *Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962.

Nelson, Ted. *Literary Machines: The Report on, and of, Project Xanadu Concerning Word Processing, Electronic Publishing, Hypertext, Thinkertoys, Tomorrow's Intellectual Revolution, and Certain other Topics Including Knowledge, Education and Freedom*. Sausalito: Mindful Press, 1981.

Nicholson, Graeme. "The Ontological Difference." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1996): 357–74.

O'Hara, Kieron. *Postmodern Encounters: Plato and the Internet*. Edited by Richard Appignanesi. USA: Totem Books, UK: Icon Books, 2002.

Plato. *Phaedrus*, in vol. 9 of *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, translated by Harold N. Fowler. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1925. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext%3DPhaedrus.

—. *Symposium*, in vol. 9 of *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, translated by Harold N. Fowler. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1925. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg011.perseus-eng1.

—. *The Republic*, vols. 5 and 6 of *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, translated by Paul Shorey. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1969. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0168.

Rieber, Lloyd P. "Seriously Considering Play: Designing Interactive Learning Environments Based on the Blending of Microworlds, Simulations, and Games." *Educational Technology Research and Development* 44, no. 2 (June 1996): 43–58. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02300540.

Schäfer, Vera M., Christopher J. Ballance, Keshav Thirumalai, et al. "Fast Quantum Logic Gates with Trapped-ion Qubits." *Nature* 555, no. 7694 (February 2018): 75–78. https://doi.org/10.1038/nature25737.

Stenger, Nicole. "Mind Is a Leaking Rainbow." In Cyberspace: First Steps. Edited by Michael Benedikt. MIT Press, 1991, http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=114782.

Ulansey, David. "Cultural Transition and Spiritual Transformation: From Alexander the Great to Cyberspace." In *The Vision Thing: Myth, Politics, and Psyche in the World*. Edited by Thomas Singer. London & New York: Routledge, 2000.

—. "David Ulansey – The Cosmic Mysteries of Mithras." Posted June 24, 2021, by dreamlion [David Ulansey]. Accessed May 26, 2025. https://youtu.be/ezr71f2z7po.

—. "Mithras and the Hypercosmic Sun." In *Studies in Mithraism*. Edited by John R. Hinnells. Rome: "L'Erma" di Brettschneider, 1994.

—. *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World*. Oxford University Press. 1991.

—. "'Visions in the Night' — Prof. David Ulansey [HD 720p]." Posted February 26, 2016, by dreamlion [David Ulansey]. Accessed May 26, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mV9ONKKmhI.

Vahapoglu, Ensar, James P. Slack-Smith, Ross C. C. Leon, et al. "Single-electron Spin Resonance in a Nanoelectronic Device Using a Global Field." *Science Advances* 7, no. 33 (August 2021). https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abg9158.

Vallor, Shannon. *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

Xie, Qingyun. "Gallium Nitride Electronics for Cryogenic and High Frequency Applications." PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2020.