

PERSONHOOD AND DIGITAL AGENCY IN THE INFOSPHERE: TOWARDS A NEO- AFRICAN JURISPRUDENCE OF DIGNITY

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Abstract

The advent of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed conceptions of personhood, agency, and legal subjectivity. Autonomous systems, algorithmic platforms, and virtual entities increasingly operate as normative actors, challenging classical jurisprudential frameworks grounded in anthropocentric notions of autonomy and responsibility. Drawing upon Luciano Floridi's philosophy of the infosphere and the African ethical paradigm of Ubuntu, this paper advances a Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity. Ubuntu, expressed in the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, "a person is a person through other persons", emphasizes relationality, communal interdependence, and moral personhood as realized through social engagement (Metz, "Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights" 534). Integrating Floridi's ontology of the infosphere with Ubuntu-inspired relational ethics, the proposed framework reconceptualizes legal personhood, agency, and accountability in mixed human-digital networks. It contends that digital agency necessitates a recalibration of jurisprudential categories while preserving human dignity through participatory governance, ethical stewardship, and relational recognition. The Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity thus offers a culturally grounded, philosophically rigorous, and normatively coherent model for addressing contemporary challenges in digital law, AI governance, and ethical regulation, situating African philosophical insights within global debates on personhood and the infosphere. By foregrounding relational ethics alongside technological realities, the framework provides a robust lens for examining the evolving moral, legal, and social landscapes of the digital age.

Keywords: Digital personhood; Infosphere; Neo-African jurisprudence; Human dignity; Digital agency; AI ethics; Ubuntu; Relational ethics; Legal personhood; Technological governance.

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed the unprecedented proliferation of digital technologies, radically transforming the ways in which human beings understand themselves, their communities, and the law. The philosopher of information Luciano Floridi identifies this transformation as the "fourth revolution," characterized by the emergence of the infosphere, which encompasses the totality of informational entities, their properties, interactions, and relationships (Floridi, *The 4th*

Revolution 45). Unlike previous technological revolutions, which primarily enhanced human capacities externally, the digital revolution reshapes ontological and normative categories themselves. Autonomous systems, algorithmic platforms, and networked virtual entities now operate as agents that co-constitute social, legal, and ethical realities. Consequently, classical jurisprudential frameworks, historically rooted in anthropocentric notions of the autonomous individual, face severe challenges in addressing emergent forms of agency, accountability, and legal personhood (Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 14). The digital environment, often described as “onlife”, blurs traditional boundaries between offline and online existence, complicating the attribution of responsibility and the protection of human dignity in ways unanticipated by classical legal theory (Floridi, *The 4th Revolution* 123).

Central to addressing these challenges is a reconsideration of the concept of human dignity. In many Western philosophical and legal traditions, dignity is framed as an intrinsic attribute of the autonomous individual. Yet, such individualistic conceptions inadequately capture the relational and communal dimensions of personhood, especially in technologically mediated contexts where agency and responsibility are distributed across networks of humans and non-human actors. African philosophy, viewed by some scholars as “African preconception of concepts like time, personhood, immortality” (Asira & Bisong, *Philosophy and Logic for Beginners*, 79), in particular, offers a robust alternative through the ethic of Ubuntu. Ubuntu, expressed in the Southern African aphorism *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* “a person is a person through other persons” emphasizes relationality, interdependence, and the achievement of moral personhood through communal engagement (Metz, “Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights” 534). Bolden sees Ubanu as a social philosophy based on principles of care and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness that expresses the fundamental interconnectedness of human existence (Ubuntu, *Encyclopedia of Action Research*, 1). According to Thaddeus Metz, Ubuntu provides a normative basis for human dignity by situating ethical evaluation in the capacity to identify with others and act in solidarity, framing violations of dignity as degradations of relational moral capacities rather than merely breaches of individual rights (Metz 535–36). This relational ontology is particularly apt for the digital age, where individuals are embedded in complex informational networks that shape moral, social, and legal outcomes.

Building on these insights, this paper proposes a **Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity**, integrating Floridi's informational ontology with Ubuntu-inspired ethics. The central thesis is that digital agency, manifested through AI systems, algorithmically mediated platforms, and virtual entities, necessitates a jurisprudential recalibration that both acknowledges the normative significance of non-human actors and preserves human dignity as a relationally constituted phenomenon. This framework contends that legal personhood and agency must be reconceptualized to accommodate emergent realities in the infosphere, but in a manner that is culturally grounded, ethically coherent, and philosophically rigorous.

Three interrelated conceptual moves define this framework. First, the ontology of the infosphere challenges classical legal and philosophical categories by demonstrating how informational entities act, influence, and participate in the co-construction of normative environments (Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 14). Digital actors, including autonomous algorithms, are not merely passive instruments but constitute functional agents whose operations have ethical and legal consequences. Second, Ubuntu-based relational ethics offers an ethical grounding, emphasizing that dignity and moral status arise within networks of social interdependence and solidarity (Metz, "Toward an African Moral Theory" 322). Within this paradigm, human dignity is preserved through mutual recognition, relational accountability, and active engagement with communal values. Third, synthesizing these strands produces a jurisprudential model wherein human dignity is safeguarded not by excluding digital actors but by integrating them into informational networks under conditions of ethical governance and participatory oversight. This synthesis allows for a coherent approach to accountability, distributive responsibility, and the equitable regulation of both human and non-human actors within the infosphere.

The Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity offers several theoretical and practical contributions. It provides a **culturally grounded philosophical lens** that situates African ethical thought at the center of contemporary debates on digital agency and legal personhood. By integrating Ubuntu with the philosophy of information, the framework addresses the ontological and ethical realities of the digital age without resorting to either anthropocentric exceptionalism or technocentric determinism. It also establishes **normative coherence** by linking human dignity to relational achievement and ethical practice rather than to formalistic legal definitions alone. In doing so, it presents a viable model for interpreting, regulating, and ethically evaluating digital actors in both

African and global contexts. This, to a extent, explains the assertion that “the business of philosophy is ideas: and ideas are very necessary in understanding ourselves (Ojimba & Chukwuma, 307).

The practical relevance of this framework extends to governance, law, and technology policy. In digitally networked societies, accountability is often diffuse, making it challenging to assign legal responsibility and uphold ethical standards. Recognizing digital agents as participants in relational networks allows for regulatory frameworks that assign moral and legal significance according to the capacity to affect communal outcomes. Moreover, Ubuntu-based relational ethics suggests mechanisms for participatory governance, promoting inclusivity and mutual accountability in algorithmic design and digital policy-making. Such an approach is particularly relevant for African jurisdictions, which may leverage indigenous ethical traditions alongside global normative standards to develop contextually appropriate frameworks for digital governance.

Structurally, this paper is organized as follows. **Section I** analyzes Floridi’s conceptualization of the infosphere, its ontological implications for human and non-human agents, and the ethical challenges posed by distributed agency. **Section II** examines Ubuntu and the ethics of relational dignity, engaging critically with Metz’s moral theory and its implications for human rights and jurisprudence. **Section III** synthesises these perspectives into a Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity, outlining the theoretical foundations of legal personhood, agency, and accountability in mixed human-digital networks. **Section IV** applies this framework to practical governance, regulatory, and ethical challenges in digital spaces, emphasizing African and transnational contexts. The **Conclusion** reflects on the broader implications of this framework for jurisprudential innovation, digital ethics, and the protection of human dignity in the infosphere.

In sum, this study asserts that the digital age demands both **conceptual innovation** and **normative fidelity**. By integrating Floridi’s philosophy of information with Ubuntu’s relational ethics, the Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity offers a philosophically robust, culturally grounded, and ethically coherent framework for understanding and regulating personhood, agency, and legal responsibility in the twenty-first century. This approach addresses the transformative challenges of digital technologies while remaining attentive to human dignity, relationality, and communal

ethical practices, contributing a novel perspective to the global discourse on digital jurisprudence and philosophy of technology.

The Ontology of the Infosphere

The contemporary proliferation of digital technologies has precipitated a fundamental reconfiguration of personhood, agency, and legal subjectivity. Luciano Floridi designates this epochal transformation as the “fourth revolution,” characterized by the emergence of the infosphere, the totality of informational entities, their properties, interrelations, and systemic interactions (Floridi, *The 4th Revolution* 45). Unlike preceding technological milieus, which extended human capacities externally, the infosphere constitutes an ontological environment in which entities, both human and artificial, exist, interact, and co-construct normative and social realities (Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 14). This ontological framing demands rigorous reflection from philosophy, law, and ethics, as it necessitates reconsidering agency, personhood, and responsibility in digitally mediated contexts.

Classical jurisprudence and moral philosophy have traditionally anchored agency in human intentionality, autonomy, and rational deliberation. Kantian ethics, for instance, grounds moral responsibility in the capacity of rational agents to act according to universalizable maxims (Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* 27). Similarly, Western legal theory has long construed the legal subject as a human individual endowed with rights and duties (Hart 80). The infosphere, however, disrupts these anthropocentric assumptions: algorithmic systems, autonomous platforms, and distributed digital agents increasingly function as operational participants capable of generating tangible social, legal, and ethical effects (Floridi, *The 4th Revolution* 123). Such entities are not mere instruments; they constitute functional agents whose interactions actively shape the contours of normative and social reality.

Floridi’s concept of “re-ontologizing technologies” aptly captures this transformative dynamic. These technologies, he argues, do not merely enhance human capacities; they redefine the conditions of existence for both human and non-human actors (Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 14). Social media algorithms, autonomous vehicles, and artificial intelligences introduce new forms of causality, decision-making, and normative influence, which classical legal

categories struggle to apprehend. Agency in the infosphere is therefore **distributed**: actions emerge from hybrid networks comprising human actors, digital entities, and algorithmic processes, compelling a reconceptualization of accountability, liability, and moral responsibility (Floridi, *The 4th Revolution* 145).

The epistemic dimensions of the infosphere further underscore its normative significance. Digital environments are constituted by informational flows that are dynamic, networked, and often opaque. Knowledge production and dissemination in such contexts require frameworks capable of evaluating truth, reliability, and ethical implications (Floridi, *Information: A Very Short Introduction* 42). Human actors operate not in isolation but as nodes within informational ecosystems, where non-human agents influence outcomes with profound social and legal consequences. Consequently, jurisprudence must expand to account for hybrid forms of agency while ensuring that human dignity remains central.

Importantly, Floridi differentiates between **functional agency** and moral personhood. While he does not attribute intrinsic moral status to digital entities equivalent to human beings, he emphasizes their normative relevance as actors within informational networks whose operations yield real-world consequences (Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 67). For jurisprudence, this insight entails a recalibration of legal personhood and responsibility: law must account for the agency of non-human actors within networks without diminishing the centrality of relational human dignity.

Classical legal categories of rights, duties, and liability are increasingly inadequate in the context of the infosphere. Traditional frameworks presuppose linear responsibility anchored in individual intentionality (Hart 90). Yet in digitally mediated networks, accountability is often diffuse, requiring recognition of the interdependent actions of human and non-human agents. Autonomous vehicles, for instance, may make real-time operational decisions through algorithmic processes; when harm occurs, liability cannot be ascribed solely to a human operator but must be understood in relation to algorithmic design, infrastructural constraints, and networked causality (Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 67–68). These developments necessitate a jurisprudential orientation that privileges relational accountability and recognizes the distributed nature of agency in contemporary digital contexts.

Floridi's ontological framework also foregrounds ethical imperatives. Digital entities are not morally neutral; they shape human experiences, social relations, and access to knowledge, with significant implications for justice and dignity. Ethical evaluation must extend beyond individual acts to encompass informational ecosystems, assessing the consequences of human and digital agency on the integrity, accessibility, and normative quality of information (Floridi, *Information: A Very Short Introduction* 42–43). Such an approach enables the development of normative principles that govern both human and non-human actors, ensuring that informational networks promote fairness, accountability, and the protection of dignity.

Floridi's ontology of the infosphere, therefore, provides a rigorous conceptual foundation for understanding the ontological, ethical, and juridical dimensions of digital environments. By framing informational entities as functional agents capable of influencing social and legal outcomes, the ontology challenges classical assumptions about autonomy, intentionality, and personhood. At the same time, it prepares the ground for integrating relational ethical frameworks, such as Ubuntu, into a Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity. Recognizing the structural and ethical realities of the infosphere enables legal and philosophical inquiry to accommodate hybrid networks of human and digital actors while preserving the primacy of human dignity, relational accountability, and normative coherence.

Ubuntu and the Ethics of Relational Dignity

Ubuntu, a cornerstone of African philosophical thought, articulates a conception of personhood and moral responsibility that is inherently relational. Expressed in the Southern African aphorism *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, “a person is a person through other persons”, Ubuntu posits that individual identity, moral worth, and legal recognition are actualized through communal interaction and ethical engagement with others (Metz, “Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights” 534). This relational ontology challenges the individualistic and atomistic paradigms prevalent in Western jurisprudence, offering a framework that is both normatively robust and ethically coherent for contemporary governance, particularly in digitally mediated contexts.

At the core of Ubuntu is the principle that moral and juridical status derives from the capacity to cultivate relational virtues. Thaddeus Metz explicates this conception by arguing that personhood

is actualized through the ability to empathize with others, to act in ways that promote communal flourishing, and to respect the dignity of fellow persons (Metz, “Toward an African Moral Theory” 322). In this view, violations of dignity are understood not merely as infringements upon autonomous individuals but as disruptions to the relational and moral fabric of the community (Metz, “Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights” 536). Consequently, Ubuntu is not only an ethical paradigm but also a juridical one: it provides a normative foundation for assessing accountability, legitimacy, and moral responsibility in both social and legal spheres. This extends to cover for the idea of Ushingio & Chukwu in the sense of taking care of issues of factions, tribalism, nepotism and the likes. It takes care of the situation of one-sided approach to human interest (Peace and Conflict Resolution: A Paradigm for National Development, 120).

In integrating Ubuntu with contemporary jurisprudential challenges, its relevance to digital agency becomes evident. Within the infosphere, autonomous algorithms, artificial intelligences, and networked digital platforms increasingly co-constitute social and normative realities (Floridi, *The 4th Revolution* 123). Traditional legal frameworks, grounded in anthropocentric conceptions of responsibility and rights, struggle to accommodate the distributed and emergent nature of digital agency. Ubuntu offers a complementary lens: ethical and legal accountability should be understood relationally, accounting for the networked interactions of all agents, whether human or artificial. By emphasizing relationality, jurisprudence can uphold human dignity while effectively regulating complex, hybrid networks of agency.

Furthermore, Ubuntu reconceptualizes the notion of dignity. In classical Western legal theory, dignity is often treated as an intrinsic attribute of autonomous individuals (Donnelly 34). Ubuntu, by contrast, situates dignity within relational contexts: it is realized through ethical engagement, mutual recognition, and the capacity to foster communal well-being (Metz, “Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights” 535). This conception has profound implications for a Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity: dignity becomes a dynamic achievement rather than a static entitlement, realized through participatory engagement, relational accountability, and the ethical integration of both human and digital actors within informational networks.

Ubuntu also offers practical guidance for the ethical governance of digital environments. Algorithmic systems and autonomous technologies often operate opaquely, generating

consequences that diffuse across social and normative networks. Ubuntu emphasizes transparency, participatory oversight, and reciprocal accountability, ensuring that all agents contribute to communal flourishing (Metz, “Toward an African Moral Theory” 326). Such principles resonate with contemporary debates in AI ethics and digital jurisprudence, where relationality, fairness, and ethical stewardship are recognized as central to normative evaluation (Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 67).

Significantly, Ubuntu provides a culturally grounded framework for navigating legal pluralism in African contexts. Many African jurisdictions must reconcile formal statutory law with customary and communal norms. Ubuntu offers an ethical anchor capable of integrating these diverse normative systems, thereby fostering jurisprudence that is philosophically coherent, culturally resonant, and practically applicable in contemporary contexts (Metz, “Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights” 539). This explains the traditionalist notion of African philosophy when it states that the enterprise is a collective world view of Africans and by extension the investigation, recording and analysing these worldviews. Any rational venture within the context of African rely on the anthropological reports of scholars which is informed by the conception of philosophy as a body of ideas through perceive, feel and interpret reality (Jimoh, *Philosophy A Guide for Beginners*, 189).

Central to Ubuntu is the recognition of co-constituted moral agency. Whereas classical frameworks locate responsibility exclusively in discrete individuals, Ubuntu situates accountability within relational networks that include both human and, in the context of the infosphere, non-human actors. The outcomes of digitally mediated interactions are emergent properties of complex networks, and Ubuntu’s relational ethics permits a jurisprudential response that incorporates these dynamics while preserving human moral primacy (Floridi, *The 4th Revolution* 145).

By emphasizing relational dignity and accountability, Ubuntu aligns directly with contemporary ethical and legal imperatives in digital governance. Human dignity is preserved not only through formal recognition but through active engagement with, and ethical management of, the digital and informational environment. This relational paradigm ensures that law and ethics account for the normative influence of algorithms and autonomous systems without undermining human dignity or eroding moral responsibility (Metz, “Toward an African Moral Theory” 324–25).

The synthesis of Ubuntu with Floridi's ontology of the infosphere thus provides the foundation for a **Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity**. While Floridi elucidates the structural and normative challenges of the infosphere, Ubuntu furnishes the ethical and juridical grounding necessary for evaluating these challenges within a culturally coherent and philosophically rigorous framework. This synthesis allows for a jurisprudential model that is relational, contextually sensitive, and normatively robust, ensuring that human dignity remains central while acknowledging the operational significance of digital agents.

Ubuntu, which is uniqueness is seen in its depth of meaning in relationality, collective responsibility and communal accountability, social justice, recognition, and reciprocity, (Udah, *et al.*, 1), offers both a philosophical and juridical paradigm capable of addressing the ethical, legal, and social complexities of the infosphere. By situating personhood, moral responsibility, and dignity within relational networks, Ubuntu complements Floridi's informational ontology, enabling a Neo-African jurisprudence that is simultaneously rigorous, culturally grounded, and applicable to contemporary digital and legal contexts. This framework equips African jurisprudence with the normative and conceptual tools necessary to navigate the digital age while maintaining fidelity to indigenous philosophical insights and universal principles of justice.

Neo-African Jurisprudence of Dignity: Synthesizing Infosphere Ontology and Ubuntu Ethics

The digital age, characterized by the pervasive integration of autonomous systems, artificial intelligences, and networked informational platforms, compels a reconfiguration of jurisprudence that transcends classical anthropocentric paradigms. The Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity emerges as a philosophically rigorous and culturally grounded framework that synthesizes Luciano Floridi's ontology of the infosphere with the relational ethics of Ubuntu. This synthesis situates human dignity not as an inherent, isolated attribute but as a relational and normative achievement actualized through ethical engagement with human and digital agents alike (Floridi, *The 4th Revolution* 45; Metz, "Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights" 534).

At the core of this jurisprudence lies the recognition that digital agents, while lacking intrinsic moral personhood, are operationally and normatively significant. Algorithmic processes, autonomous platforms, and hybrid informational networks act as participants in social and legal

interactions, producing effects that bear upon communal and individual flourishing (Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 67). Consequently, accountability must extend beyond the human subject to encompass the distributed and emergent nature of agency within the infosphere (Floridi, *The 4th Revolution* 145). Ubuntu's relational ethics provides the normative lens to assess these interactions, ensuring that moral and legal responsibility remains anchored in the promotion and preservation of human dignity (Metz, "Toward an African Moral Theory" 322), which Gelaye maintains that its essence is attribution of respect to a human person and the recognition of their superior value in comparison to other creatures (Gelaye, *African Human Rights Yearbook*, 116).

Ubuntu reconceptualizes dignity as relational, emphasizing communal recognition, interdependence, and the ethical cultivation of moral capacities (Metz, "Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights" 535). This conception diverges from classical Western traditions, which often frame dignity as a fixed attribute of autonomous individuals (Donnelly 34). Within digital and hybrid human-digital networks, relational dignity requires that jurisprudence evaluate the consequences of human and non-human actions not only in terms of individual intent but also in terms of their broader normative effects. Algorithmic decision-making, for instance, must be assessed according to its capacity to promote communal well-being, relational integrity, and participatory accountability (Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 67–68).

The integration of Floridi's ontological framework with Ubuntu ethics produces a jurisprudence that is both descriptively accurate and prescriptively rigorous. Floridi identifies the structural conditions of informational reality, revealing the emergent properties of hybrid networks and the distributed character of agency (Floridi, *Information: A Very Short Introduction* 42). Ubuntu provides the ethical framework through which these structural realities are evaluated, emphasizing relational responsibility, moral empathy, and the cultivation of communal flourishing. Together, they generate a jurisprudential model capable of addressing the complex interplay of human and digital actors, ensuring normative coherence and ethical legitimacy.

Practically, Neo-African jurisprudence articulates principles that guide both law and technology governance. First, **distributed accountability** recognizes the emergent effects of digital actors and evaluates human responsibility in relation to their oversight, design, and interaction with these systems (Floridi, *The 4th Revolution* 145). Second, **participatory oversight** operationalizes

Ubuntu's emphasis on relational engagement, promoting transparency, deliberation, and ethical monitoring within digital networks (Metz, "Toward an African Moral Theory" 326). Third, **relational dignity** demands that legal and technological systems are designed to enhance communal well-being, mitigate harm, and reinforce participatory agency (Metz, "Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights" 539).

Moreover, Neo-African jurisprudence offers a principled approach to **legal pluralism** in African contexts, reconciling statutory law, customary norms, and emergent digital regulatory frameworks. Ubuntu functions as a normative anchor, harmonizing these diverse sources by prioritizing relational dignity and ethical responsibility (Metz, "Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights" 536). Regulatory frameworks for artificial intelligence, for example, must be evaluated not only for formal compliance but also for their capacity to preserve communal integrity and relational accountability in accordance with Ubuntu ethics.

This jurisprudence also accommodates **emergent liability structures**. Classical doctrines premised on linear causality and individual intentionality are insufficient in digitally mediated networks, where algorithmic systems operate semi-autonomously. Neo-African jurisprudence reframes responsibility relationally: human actors retain primary accountability for design, supervision, and intervention, while the normative impact of autonomous systems is incorporated into legal and ethical evaluation (Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 67–68). Such a framework maintains the primacy of human dignity while acknowledging the operational significance of digital agents.

Central to this model is the recognition of **ethical co-constitution**. In digitally mediated networks, normative outcomes emerge through the interaction of human and non-human actors. Ubuntu informs the ethical evaluation of these interactions, emphasizing empathy, reciprocity, and relational accountability. By situating responsibility within networks rather than in isolated agents, jurisprudence reconciles technological realism with moral and legal obligation (Metz, "Toward an African Moral Theory" 324–25).

Lastly, the Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity contributes to **global legal and ethical discourse**. Rooted in African philosophical insight yet attentive to the ontological realities of the infosphere,

it provides a model applicable to AI governance, transnational digital law, and international ethics. By integrating ontology with relational ethics, this jurisprudence promotes accountability, protects human dignity, and guides normative evaluation across hybrid human-digital systems (Floridi, *The 4th Revolution* 123; Metz, “Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights” 535).

In summary, Neo-African jurisprudence offers a philosophically rigorous, culturally grounded, and jurisprudentially coherent framework for understanding and regulating the complex interplay of human and digital agency. By synthesizing Floridi’s ontology of the infosphere with Ubuntu ethics, it reconceives dignity as a relational achievement, anchors responsibility in networked interactions, and provides normative guidance for law, technology, and ethics. This framework demonstrates the enduring relevance of African philosophical traditions in shaping contemporary jurisprudence while engaging with the challenges of the digital age.

Core Argument: Dignity, Distributed Agency, and the Neo-African Turn

In the unfolding epoch of the digital revolution, the **infosphere**, a term meticulously articulated by Luciano Floridi, signifies more than a mere technological domain; it denotes an ontological milieu wherein human and artificial agents coexist, interact, and co-constitute the reality of information (Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 67). Within this metaphysical continuum, the locus of agency ceases to be exclusively human. Rather, agency assumes a **distributed configuration**, diffused across interdependent human and digital nodes that collectively generate action, intention, and consequence. This profound transformation necessitates a jurisprudence commensurate with its ontological foundation: one that preserves the inviolable dignity of the human person while recognizing the emergent, relational character of agency in the infosphere.

The **Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity** answers this challenge with philosophical precision and moral profundity. Drawing from the African communitarian ethic of *Ubuntu*, it redefines personhood as an achievement of relational harmony rather than a static possession of autonomous rationality. As Thaddeus Metz elucidates, personhood is realized through one’s capacity to participate in, and sustain, relations of mutual recognition, solidarity, and moral responsiveness (“Ubuntu as a Moral Theory” 534; “Toward an African Moral Theory” 323). Such a relational

ontology transcends the atomistic tendencies of classical liberal jurisprudence, grounding dignity not in isolated self-determination but in the intersubjective web of communal flourishing.

When transposed into the digital context, this moral insight acquires renewed urgency. The algorithms and systems that now mediate human interaction are no longer neutral instruments but **moral participants** in the creation and dissemination of meaning. The Neo-African framework thus contends that these digital architectures must be evaluated not solely by their instrumental rationality, efficiency, precision, or computational power, but by their **capacity to uphold human relational dignity**. The dignity of the person, in this view, extends into the digital realm as a criterion for just design, ethical programming, and equitable governance (Floridi, *The 4th Revolution* 45; Metz, 535).

The classical jurisprudence inherited from Kantian autonomy and Western rationalism anchors moral responsibility in the self-legislating subject, presuming agency to be both unitary and intentional. Yet, in the digital infosphere, causation and responsibility are often distributed across multiple interacting agents, human, algorithmic, and institutional. To persist with anthropocentric legal paradigms is to risk **juridical anachronism**. The Neo-African turn proposes instead a **communal accountability** that complements distributed agency with moral cohesion. In this model, human dignity does not vanish amid digital multiplicity; rather, it finds renewal through ethical interdependence and collective stewardship.

Accordingly, the emerging **digital legal subject** cannot be conceived as an isolated rights-bearing entity, but as a **relational participant** within a dynamic web of informational and ethical exchanges. Law, therefore, must evolve toward what may aptly be termed **networked accountability**, a mode of legal reasoning attuned to the entangled causality of the infosphere. As Jack Donnelly observes, human rights jurisprudence remains the guardian of dignity, yet its application must now extend beyond corporeal existence into the informational self (112). The task of Neo-African jurisprudence is precisely this: to articulate a normative synthesis that safeguards dignity amidst the fluidity of hybrid agency.

Ultimately, the Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity reconciles Floridi's ontological pluralism with the normative teleology of African communitarian ethics. Where Floridi discloses

the **structure of informational reality**, Ubuntu provides its **moral direction**. Together they constitute a jurisprudence of the infosphere that is both descriptive and prescriptive—grounded in the recognition that technology is a moral habitat and that human dignity remains its cardinal measure. In this synthesis, dignity ceases to be an abstract property of rational beings and becomes the living principle of harmony animating the moral, social, and digital order of existence.

Conclusion: Toward a Neo-African Jurisprudence of Dignity in the Digital Age

The emergence of the infosphere, characterized by the pervasive presence of autonomous systems, artificial intelligences, and complex informational networks, necessitates a rearticulation of jurisprudence that transcends classical anthropocentric paradigms. Luciano Floridi's ontological analysis elucidates the structural and normative dimensions of these networks, revealing that human and non-human agents co-constitute social, ethical, and legal outcomes in ways that challenge traditional frameworks (Floridi, *The 4th Revolution* 45). In response, the Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity, grounded in the relational ethics of Ubuntu, offers a philosophically rigorous and culturally coherent model for understanding agency, accountability, and personhood in the digital era (Metz, "Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights" 534).

This jurisprudence reconceives human dignity as a relational achievement, actualized through ethical engagement, communal recognition, and the cultivation of moral capacities. It recognizes the operational significance of digital actors while situating ultimate moral and legal responsibility within human agents, thereby preserving the primacy of human dignity in emergent informational networks (Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 67–68; Metz, "Toward an African Moral Theory" 322). In so doing, it bridges the ontological realities of the infosphere with the normative imperatives of African philosophical thought, producing a jurisprudential framework that is simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive.

Neo-African jurisprudence further addresses the complexities of legal pluralism and digital governance in African and transnational contexts. By harmonizing statutory law, customary norms, and ethical principles derived from relationality, it provides coherent guidance for regulating AI and autonomous technologies in ways that enhance communal flourishing, ensure accountability, and preserve participatory oversight (Metz, "Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human

Rights” 536; Floridi, *The 4th Revolution* 123). Algorithmic systems and autonomous platforms are thus evaluated not only for their compliance with formal rules but also for their capacity to promote relational dignity and ethical coherence within human-digital networks (Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 67–68).

A central contribution of this jurisprudence lies in its emphasis on **ethical co-constitution**. Human and non-human actors jointly produce normative outcomes within the infosphere, and Ubuntu provides the evaluative lens by which these interactions are ethically and legally assessed. This relational approach ensures that accountability, responsibility, and the protection of dignity are not abstracted from context but are grounded in the dynamics of communal life and digital interactivity (Metz, “Toward an African Moral Theory” 324–25).

Practically, the Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity recommends: (1) **regulatory recognition of distributed agency**, ensuring human oversight and accountability for algorithmic systems; (2) **institutionalization of participatory mechanisms**, facilitating ethical deliberation, transparency, and community engagement; (3) **integration of relational ethics into law**, harmonizing customary and statutory norms with the exigencies of digital governance; and (4) **prioritization of human dignity**, guiding technological development to reinforce rather than compromise ethical and social flourishing (Metz, “Toward an African Moral Theory” 326–27; Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* 67–68).

In sum, the Neo-African jurisprudence of dignity offers a **philosophically sophisticated, jurisprudentially coherent, and ethically grounded framework** for the regulation of hybrid human-digital networks. By synthesizing Floridi’s ontological insights with Ubuntu’s relational ethic, it reconceives dignity as a relational achievement, situates accountability within networks of interaction, and provides normative guidance for law, governance, and digital ethics. This model demonstrates that African philosophical thought can make substantive contributions to global discourses on personhood, agency, and normative regulation in the digital age, offering both a theoretical foundation and a practical guide for navigating the ethical, legal, and technological challenges of the twenty-first century.

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