

Reply to Floridi's Reply

First and foremost, I thank Luciano Floridi for pointing out that there is already a longer version of the paper under discussion, published as a book in Italian. I am looking forward to reading it (no need to wait for the English translation, I read Italian). For my reply to his reply, I will, however, exclusively focus on what is explicit in the reply.

First of all, he explicitly describes his project as a »postmodern meta-project« (Floridi 2020, 321). The hyphen I sometimes used in my own formulations has no specific meaning. Thus, if he wants to reconsider my reply to his original paper, he can just ignore the hyphen.

In his reply, he informs us that he »moved to a department of social science« (Floridi 2021, 381). Thus, asking for a contextualization of a relational account within the most prominent social theories of our own time (whether one likes them or not is an entirely different question) is not a surprising maneuver. I myself have many objections against actor-network theory, and my intention was not to recommend it, but that would be a different discussion.

I am glad to hear that Floridi does not believe that his recourse to the relationship between classical and quantum mechanics is anything more than a »pullback metaphor,« as the physicist Harald Atmanspacher calls this.¹ I will leave it at that.

Floridi maintains that »almost all« of my objections are »correct but irrelevant.« (381) He claims that there is »one that is relevant, but luckily, it is incorrect« (381). As a reason why it is incorrect, he mentions that it is »based on lack of knowledge of the methodology it discusses« (381) and then he quotes the objection. However, what he quotes is indeed an objection and not evidence of a »lack of knowledge

¹ He refers to the Pauli-Jung conjecture connecting Jungian psychoanalysis and quantum theory: »structural relations in a new domain to be explored are pulled back to structural relations in a familiar domain.« (Atmanspacher 2020, 533).

of the methodology it discusses« (382). Hence, this claim is merely polemical and can be discarded as irrational. He mischaracterizes my objection and does not prove any lack of knowledge of anything on my part. It is perfectly possible to know a philosophical position (and I have read Floridi's technical work) and object to it. Let's focus on the issue. He confesses to wanting to »maintain some Kantian, sensible approach« (382) which he contrasts with »an ontological interpretation of the method of abstraction.« (382) The alternative to this he considers is the attempt to provide »the ultimate answers about the intrinsic ontology of *noumena*« (382) which he believes »to be a nonsensical waste of time« (382). As far as the rationality of his reply to my objection is concerned, I can only see one element in his defense, namely his pragmatist idea that the correctness of a LoA depends on a given purpose and that this is built into his notion of a LoA. Now, some such form of pragmatism might very well be built into his notion of a LoA and, thus, be an essential part of his reply that there are pragmatic rightness conditions for choosing a LoA. But in addition to a purpose, like it or not, there are objective ontological features of reality that significantly contribute to which purpose is better than some other purpose, a distinction that can be judged quite independently of model construction. And this moves the conceptual action to another level that has nothing to do at all with a choice between some »Kantian« epistemology and a commitment to an »intrinsic ontology of *noumena*« (382). There is a disagreement between us here, which leads deeper into various realism debates. Let it be noted in passing that I could not understand from his short comments what it would take for a view to be »ontologically committed«, in Quine's sense, »only in terms of epistemological choices« (382), but thereon hangs a tale.

I thank Floridi for his comments on his take on the religion/ethics distinction and how he takes it to relate to the issue of tolerance. I disagree with him that »the best kind of ethics« (383) is more tolerant than »the best kind of religion« (383) and he certainly provides no evidence for his claim apart from his unsupported claim that »ethics texts and practices provide the evidence« (there is no reference to an actual ethics text or practice in his reply). Many ethics texts (by no lesser figures than Kant, Locke, or Hobbes) contain explicit misogynist and racist statements and justifications of intolerant practices of subjugation of whole peoples. Further, I do not know what an »ethics practice« is meant to be.

Instead of replying to any of my specific questions concerning his random list of 69 political ideas (again: with many of which I happen to sympathize), he prefers to just brush my objections aside by calling them »misunderstandings« which he sees as a result of my not being a sufficiently »careful and charitable reader« (383). At the same time, he offers a *sua culpa* for his »shortcomings« in clarity. But either he can blame me for not being »careful« enough or he did not express his ideas carefully enough. Maybe he wants to have it both ways, but that would be a contradictory desire. Again, I'll leave it at that, as the reply to my replies in the last paragraph of his reply is merely polemical, when it could have addressed my specific objections.

For clarity's sake and in order to fend off his polemical remarks concerning alleged »misunderstandings,« let me just repeat one of my questions without expecting an answer: why is democracy »the best way to create and maintain the governance of a polity« and how exactly is this claim (with which I wholeheartedly agree) justified by Floridi? And he has still not told us what »the values of the EU« are, such that one could actually exclude some of its member countries on their basis. While it often strikes me personally as politically sensible to worry about populist political developments in Italy, France, Hungary or Poland, or within Germany, I have no doubt that similar worries about »shared values« are present in those other member states of which I do not happen to be a citizen. Should the EU have excluded Berlusconi's Italy and could Italy have returned now? A philosophical claim concerning the relational nature of governance alone can certainly not justify any specific political decision concerning EU-membership and the completely vague reference to »the values of the EU« does nothing to support the political theses of Floridi's article either.

Bibliography

- Atmanspacher, H. (2020), »The Pauli-Jung Conjecture and Its Relatives: A Formally Agumented Outline,« in: *Open Philosophy* 3, 527–549.
- Floridi, L. (2021), »Replies to Broy, Gabriel, Grunwald, Hagengruber, Kriebitz, Lütge, Max, Misselhorn, and Rehbein,« in: *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 128(2), 378–393.

