

PRESS RELEASE 07/2023

## Public conference: What is the “metaverse” capable of – and what standards do we need for it?

Berlin, 8 November 2023

From research and industry to education and arts – the “metaverse” opens up new possibilities in many areas. What might be the psychological and social consequences of linking our analogue and digital worlds – and how are they to be evaluated? At its conference “Lost in ‘Metaverse’? On the Intertwining of Real and Digital Worlds”, the German Ethics Council addresses the opportunities and challenges of these new technological developments. The audience is cordially invited to join the discussion at the conference as well as to try out first steps in the “metaverse”.

Wandering through ancient ruins, gaming with avatars or exploring material properties – the “metaverse” offers countless possibilities. Here, the real world is to be linked with the virtual one. This digital, interactive reality is intended to be permanent, synchronous and immersive. What do we need to prepare for and how do we best deal with these developments? These questions are at the core of the German Ethics Council’s public conference in Erfurt.

“Developments such as seen with social media have shown how important it is to address new technological trends as early as possible – in order to understand their impact on our world, and to be able to shape them wisely,” emphasises Alena Buyx, Chair of the German Ethics Council. “For example, we still know very little about what norms should and can govern this virtual world,” adds Mark Schweda, who is co-chairing with Petra Bahr the working group that prepares the conference. “Who needs to be particularly protected? What legal framework can or even must apply? And how can we organise access to the ‘metaverse’ in such a way that ideally no one is excluded?”

Technological advances are creating new opportunities for personal development, social inclusion and political participation, but at the same time raise far-reaching questions, such as on the fundamental understanding of reality, the status of the person and property, the reach and enforcement of norms, the handling of manipulation and abuse, or longer-term psychological and social consequences. As the technological developments and infrastructures are dominated by large companies, economic power is also an important issue.

### Programme

At its conference, the German Ethics Council approaches the topic in several steps. Christoph Meinel from the German University of Digital Science (currently being founded), Anna-Verena Nosthoff from the Humboldt University of Berlin and science journalist, philosopher and publicist Gert Scobel will open the event by discussing the opportunities offered by the “metaverse”.

#### Members

Prof. Dr. med. Alena Buyx (Chair)  
 Prof. Dr. iur. Dr. h. c. Volker Lipp (Vice-Chair)  
 Prof. Dr. phil. Dr. h. c. Julian Nida-Rümelin (Vice-Chair)  
 Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Susanne Schreiber (Vice-Chair)

Prof. Dr. iur. Steffen Augsberg  
 Regional bishop Dr. phil. Petra Bahr  
 Prof. Dr. theol. Franz-Josef Bormann  
 Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Hans-Ulrich Demuth  
 Prof. Dr. iur. Helmut Frister  
 Prof. Dr. theol. Elisabeth Gräß-Schmidt  
 Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Dr. phil. Sigrid Graumann  
 Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Armin Grunwald  
 Prof. Dr. med. Wolfram Henn  
 Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Ursula Klingmüller  
 Stephan Kruijff  
 Prof. Dr. theol. Andreas Lob-Hüdepohl  
 Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Annette Riedel  
 Prof. Dr. iur. Stephan Rixen  
 Prof. Dr. iur. Dr. phil. Frauke Rostalski  
 Prof. Dr. theol. Kerstin Schlögl-Flierl  
 Dr. med. Josef Schuster  
 Prof. Dr. phil. Mark Schweda  
 Prof. Dr. phil. Judith Simon  
 Prof. Dr. phil. Muna Tatari

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After this, Georg Hobmeier from Causa Creations, curator and author Peggy Schoenegge, Jessica Szczuka from the University of Duisburg-Essen, Hans-Peter Klös from the German Economic Institute and political consultant Martin Fuchs will analyse in which areas of life the “metaverse” plays a relevant role – from business through gaming to sexuality, arts and politics.

The discussion will then turn to the consequences that the intertwining of the real and the digital world can have for the human mind, social life and gender relations. Carolin Wienrich from the University of Würzburg, Matthias Quent from Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences and Sara Morais dos Santos Bruss, curator at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, will speak on this topic.

To conclude the conference, Dominik Erhard, senior editor at the journal Philosophie Magazin, Susanne Beck from the University of Hannover and Ethics Council member Judith Simon will provide philosophical, legal and ethical perspectives on the topic.

### **Showroom with practical examples**

In addition, participants can directly experience possible applications of the “metaverse”: For example, the memorial site “Topf & Söhne – Die Ofenbauer von Auschwitz” invites to an interactive tour of the Erfurt Great Synagogue. The building, which was destroyed by the National Socialists in 1938, has been virtually reconstructed and is digitally accessible in its original size.

Furthermore, participants can virtually meet refugees from Ukraine at a railway station, wander through the exhibition hall of the 1931 German Building Exhibition in Berlin, manipulate artefacts from ancient Ostia or talk to AI-controlled avatars.

### **The public conference**

The conference in Erfurt is open to the public. For on-site participation, registration is required ([www.ethikrat.org/weitere-veranstaltungen/anmeldung](http://www.ethikrat.org/weitere-veranstaltungen/anmeldung)). The event will be held in German. The event will also be broadcast online at [www.ethikrat.org/live](http://www.ethikrat.org/live). Some of the practical examples are also available online.

#### **Public conference**

**Lost in “Metaverse”? On the intertwining of real and digital worlds**

**15 November 2023, 10:00 am – 6:00 pm**

**Kaisersaal, Futterstraße 15/16, 99084 Erfurt**

Further information, including on the programme, is available (mostly in German) at [www.ethikrat.org/weitere-veranstaltungen/lost-in-metaverse](http://www.ethikrat.org/weitere-veranstaltungen/lost-in-metaverse).