



Being Human in the Age of artificial intelligence

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The impact of artificial intelligence (AI) in our lives is a social issue that concerns us all. Our social interactions are increasingly driven by algorithms to the point where serendipity is fading. These technologies end up setting the tone. In the same way that connected speakers grant our every wish, they can have major consequences when it comes to answering sensitive questions: "*Which is the capital of Israel? Tel Aviv or Jerusalem?*" This opens up a window of opportunity to influence our perception of the world. All citizens must be aware of the positive and negative effects of these technologies to preserve a humane society in a world where AI is increasingly present.

In this context, OPTIC has mobilised its team and network to analyse the positive and negative impacts of AI through a theological anthropology approach. This document is the result of several seminars. It is intended to be used to develop training modules.

A balanced perspective over AI from a theological point of view

The religious sphere is usually known in the AI community for its conservative views on AI. However, we believe that a theological assessment of AI can go beyond the common religious criticisms levied upon AI: idolatry, techno-salvation etc. Such a balanced evaluation would include a measured appreciation of the benefits of AI, but also a more subtle analysis of the potential latent in AI technologies to impact humanity in the long term. Our target audience does not consist of theologians, but of people who can resonate with universal human values, such as compassion, love and human flourishing.

AI has the potential to radically change our world and even who we are as a species in the long term. How is the process of creating AI reflected upon ourselves, in other words, re-creating us?

We know that being human, or better, *humane*, is not necessarily a yes/no feature, and there is likely a *continuum*: individually and collectively we can be less or more humane, depending on how we act, and which values we choose as the guiding principles of our lives and societies. A crucial question about current and future AI is whether it engenders a more humane world and



whether it helps us or not in **becoming better humans**.

Theological anthropology can be of great help in approaching this question, due to its millenary expertise in dealing with issues like what it is to be human or what is a good life. A core notion that could inform our reflection is that of the **image of God** (*imago Dei*). We believe there is something special about us, and this intuition is remarkably shared across cultures and time. The concept of human distinctiveness has thus strong resonances even in non-Christian environments. In particular, the so-called functional and relational definitions of the image of God can prove useful.

The functional interpretation regards the *imago Dei* as our appointment to represent God in creation by exercising stewardship and dominion. The **stewardship** dimension is especially important, because it stresses our responsibility. We have a duty to care for the world, and we cannot resign from it. Some key decisions with global impact will always need to be made by humans, and not simply delegated to powerful AI algorithms.

The relational interpretation affirms that the image of God is best understood as God's I-Thou relationship with humanity as a whole and with each human being. God, the Holy Trinity, is relationship ("God is love"), and we are called to grow in the likeness of God by cultivating our loving relationships with God and with each other. Relationships are, to a certain extent, the most fundamental level of human ontology. Will AI help us have **more authentic relationships**, or will it promote a more individualistic and self-sufficient world? This is an open question.

A common misconception is that such visions of the future are neutral, because they claim to be scientific and manifestly anti-religious. However, when deconstructed, they too are revealed to be built on top of some non-neutral values and principles, and, more importantly, some **implicit anthropologies**. When future utopias of AI-driven abundance and invulnerability are presented, we should always ask the question: what anthropology is really at work in this scenario? Is this a world where our humanness is promoted or inhibited?

The theological evaluation of AI can be overall positive, especially in light of creativity being an important part of the *imago Dei*. But a realistic engagement needs to take into account that there is a plurality of AI approaches and thus a plurality of possible futures. It is our duty to help the tech community discern between those futures.

Relationship to others:

AI modifies the very nature of our social interactions, in their many forms (familial, friendships, sexual and romantic, professional and other global social relations). AI presents a new creation



that can be used for both human interactions - helping us meet, communicate, understand each other - and new types of interactions - with the AI directly, replacing an increasing amount of personal and daily interactions. This creates new opportunities and risks, modifying how we perceive each other, and ourselves through that. AI may be changing the very nature of our relationships, playing as a constant intermediary, which presents advantages such as their optimization and the increase in connections we have with each other, but also risks such as the decrease in tolerance, the loss of social competencies, the reification of the other... The question of fundamental human rights, which has a more socio-political approach, might help us define a framework, guidelines, in exploring AI's impact in our relationship to others. As we exist, first and foremost, through our relationship to others, this reflects back on our sense of identity and how we perceive the world. The importance of this axis lies in the very nature of human beings, which is social. It raises the question of our capacity to evolve within this nature, is this social dimension singular, or can it be entirely redefined? Does our social nature define us or do we define the way it is expressed?

AI changes the way we exist in the world, through the way we understand it, react to it, analyze and live through it. This is analyzed through our cognitive and physical abilities. AI taking our place in daily tasks, interactions and specific tasks modifies the way our brains and bodies learn and grow. As we become less autonomous as individuals, our collective capacities rise. However, it raises important issues, such as the importance of personal growth in collective improvement, as well as the replacement of human activity and actions by AI. AI has the potential to optimize our relationship to the world, but also of making us live completely passive existences. This raises the fundamental question of the existence of humanity as builders, are we individuals capable of positive growth or does human nature favor the easy way? Does AI improve us, weaken us, or simply make us evolve into a different species, concentrated on different tasks and with different capacities? Is AI built to encourage our shortcomings or our resilience? If it favors our flaws (laziness, greed, selfishness...), could it lead to the destruction of our species and its environment?

Relationship to God/our transcendence:

AI's impact on our spirituality may be analyzed through its use in developing spirituality in general ("spirituality 2.0", more individual and rationalized) but also through the very existence of AI and its possible deification (which is a natural phenomenon given AI's very advanced nature and the way it impacts and transforms our daily lives). Beyond these effects, the general tendency of human playing God becomes a reality, as AI-powered technology allows us to modify ourselves in new ways (genetic engineering, robotic prosthesis...) and the world around us, making way for longer lives, perhaps even overcoming death. Moreover, through AI we create a new self-thinking entity, which takes us even further in our creation (and destruction) power and what that might involve for how human beings perceive themselves, deify themselves. Does AI mean a renewal in our spirituality or are the shifts it implies going against



the very nature of transcendence?

Relationship to oneself:

The use of AI tends to affect our self-perception and psychological identity of the self. This dimension of how we exist as human beings is modified in the AI era, through the advancement of research and, thus, a better understanding of ourselves. The technology we now have access to modifies our daily lives and, progressively, ourselves: AI pandering to our every need and desire impacts our patience, loneliness, global activity and, overall, individual autonomy. It changes the way we experience the human condition, trying to address issues human beings have always internally struggled with. However studies underline the gap between human development needs and AI's current uses, which may lead to an increase in global anxiety instead of individual improvement. A lot of unanswered questions have been raised in exploring how AI modifies our relationship to ourselves. Does AI help us perceive and understand ourselves better? Are the questions it addresses fixable issues, especially through technology? Are the changes it implies individual transformation or a collective mutation (outside the sum of individual changes)?

[A propos d'OPTIC](#)

OPTIC is a research and action network that prioritises human values in the development of new technologies. While such development sometimes raises a range of concerns, and justifiably so, our belief is that technologies can also help build a society that is more respectful of each individual, provided we consider the ethical aspects and assess their real-world impact. While most technologies are not intrinsically forces for good or for evil, they cannot be considered entirely neutral either, in that they are the products of intentions and a vision of human values that are open to question. From this perspective, OPTIC seeks to encourage a renewed social discussion of the role that technologies should play.

The OPTIC network was founded in 2012 under the aegis of the Dominican Order, and today has several thousand members and operates in Paris, San Francisco, Rome, Montreal, Brussels and Geneva.