

The meaning of being human and the future of humanity in the world of artificial intelligence

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Dates:

Received: 19 Nov. 2025

Accepted: 26 Jan. 2026

Published: 16 Apr. 2026

How to cite this article:

Mujinga, M., 2026, 'The meaning of being human and the future of humanity in the world of artificial intelligence', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 47(1), a3721. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v47i1.3721>

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Science has contested the traditional theology of *imago Dei* over time. The theology of God as the creator of humanity has been challenged, and, starting with evolution, artificial intelligence (AI), the critique has advanced by producing humanoid robots. Moreover, the African philosophy of *ubuntu* did not escape the challenge, as humanoids that are not divinely elected, rational, or relational compete with humanity. This article aims to juxtapose the meaning of being human and the future of humanity in the world of AI. Employing a desk research methodology, the article seeks to answer questions such as how do we define being human in the context of AI? What are the converging or diverging points between evolution, *ubuntu*, AI, and theology? To what extent would theology remain relevant in the context of different scientific evolutions? The article maintains that scientific scrutiny cannot render God obsolete. The article contributes to scholarship by bringing together theology, AI, and *ubuntu* in dialogue. Artificial intelligence contributes to existing dialogues by providing a fresh perspective on its role in theology, offering solutions for diverse cultural and theological contexts, and offering practical insights for churches, theologians, and tech developers seeking to integrate AI into theological practices.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The interplay among theology, science, and *ubuntu* is grounded in humanity. Whereas theology and science define communities, they are always in conflict with each other. This fact is true of how science has redefined theology over time, and yet theology remains undiluted.

Keywords: being human; humanity; artificial intelligence; *imago Dei*; creatio ex nihilo; *ubuntu*.

Introduction

The meaning of being human and the future of humanity are complicated debates that have become even more complex in the context of artificial intelligence (AI). As Bentley (2025) rightly puts it:

The emergence of AI technologies radically affected our relationships and our contexts, compelling us to inquire about who we are and the roles we play in the daily life experiences. (p. 1)

This intricacy stems from the multilayered relationship among theology and science and the African philosophy of *ubuntu*. In the relationships among theology, science, and *ubuntu*, humanity stands at the centre: presenting themselves as creatures created in the image and likeness of God, as one who invented science to create an imitation of humanity, and as one whose life is defined by African society. Given how science shapes human life, the future of humanity as a social and theological being is difficult to imagine without science.

This article employs a desk research methodology to explore the relationships between theology and science, as well as between theology and the African philosophy of *ubuntu*. The article used desk research to analyse literature on theology, *ubuntu*, and AI. The article will focus on the redefinition of human identity and the way AI challenges traditional notions of humanity, consciousness, and agency. Human-AI collaboration will also be discussed to analyse the future of work and the relationship between humans and AI. The extent to which AI raises questions about the role of humans in an AI-driven world will be explored. Moreover, the article will engage in the discourse of ethics and responsibility to ensure that AI systems are designed and deployed responsibly, with consideration for human values and well-being, and not to replace humanity. Lastly, the article will discuss the potential risks and consequences of advanced AI systems, including the possibility that superintelligent AI could surpass human control. The article will challenge theology to move beyond the comfort of its traditional position as the queen of science

Note: The manuscript is a contribution to the themed collection titled 'Echoes of eco-discourses' under the expert guidance of guest editor Prof. Wessel Bentley.

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and use science to redefine the meaning of being human and the future of humanity during and after the AI phase. The article will also highlight the importance of theology, science, and African philosophy in maintaining a dialogue, as they complement one another. It will conclude by challenging theologians to engage with AI to remain relevant in its various applications.

The relationship between theology and science

The relationship between theology and science dates to the Patristic period. During this era, 'Science existed as a social and cultural reality and was an essential part of the Hellenistic tradition' (Nesteruk 2003):

In its expansion, Christianity had to confront both existing religious traditions and contemporary secular culture, including philosophy and its specialised fields such as mathematics, physics, music, and everything we call science today. (p. 287)

The relationship continued either as 'science and faith or science and religion' (Tanzella-Nitti 2024:1). 'In the twentieth century, science began to refer to various disciplines concerned with the formal study of nature' (Ross 1962:65). This official study of science is characterised by a particular method conducted by specialists (Harrison 2022:11).

Different scholars presented different relationships between theology and science. This point is buttressed by Miller (2017:255), who forwards that 'Since the Patristic Period, science and theology were at loggerheads'. Coyne (2018:1) 'further stresses that science and religion were not only at war, but have been in conflict since their beginning.' For Zon (2024:88), 'Theology and science were not in conflict, but they represent incompatible ways of viewing the world'. This unresolved relationship between theology and science was emphasised by Brooke (2014:6), who noted that 'There was no conflict between theology and science, but the relationship was complex'.

The conflictive relationship persisted in the history of Christianity until one of the critical thinkers of the 12th century, Thomas Aquinas, gave theology a status superior to that of science through his *Summa Theologica*, written between 1265 and 1274. In his works, Aquinas argues that theology is the queen of the sciences (Aquinas 1274). Aquinas grounded his reflections on his own observations and worldview, and his epistemology differs from the paradigms of the same concept in contemporary theological discourse. For Aquinas, creation holds answers to the most challenging questions people have about the world and evil. With that, theology is the queen of science, and within this doctrine, it helps restore the actual value and beauty of science (Joseph 1880). Aquinas's work synthesised the ideologies of Aristotle, who argued that 'Science and theology are interdependent theoretical sciences' (Johnson 2021:12). Aquinas's work was also forwarding the ideas of Augustine, who argued that the relationship between theology and science is difficult to

distinguish because actual knowledge comes from faith and revelation (Nordlund 2015:221). Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* contribution became the basis of making theology the queen of science, a critical statement that influenced the way theology saw its place in higher education in the centuries to come (Oliver 2016:4). However, although Aquinas hailed theology as a superior discipline in academia, leading to its inclusion in secular institutions, over the centuries, science continued to challenge the traditional underpinnings of theology (Oliver 2016:1). This contestation led to the weakening of theology in many facets of life. For example, Van den Brink (2019) argues that:

Theology has had a remarkable career: once hailed as the 'queen of the sciences', its status has been questioned ever since and after the secularisation of the European universities, it has been written off and discontinued in many places. Even where theology departments have survived to this day, essential universities, both in the United Kingdom and on the continent, still contain theological faculties or departments in some form; however, they are under pressure and are being considered as quixotic vestiges of a bygone era. (p. 442)

Volf and Croasmun (2019:35) bemoan that, 'although theology has been the queen of science', 'Theology is becoming like a shrinking job market, with a shrinking audience and a shrinking intellectual reputation'. Taylor (2007:3) cautions that, 'The queen of science could lose her crown because of the influence of secularisation'. Taylor (2007) further warns that:

The shift of theology as a queen of science is being necessitated by the move towards a technology-based network society, with its tendency of privatisation of religion and its blurred presence from life because together with faith, they have become an option that could either be chosen or rejected. (p. 22)

Taylor's point agrees with the assertions raised by Dorobantu (2022:175), who highlighted the complexity brought by the interplay of science and theology. Dorobantu argues that 'If computers ever attain human-level AI, such *imago Dei* interpretations could be seriously contested'. The contributions of Volf and Croasmun, Taylor, and Dorobantu answer the question of why humanity succumbed to science by creating humanoid robots in the likeness of fallen humanity. An attempt to discuss how humanity has fallen to science addresses the challenges posed by the conflict between theology and science. According to Evers (2023:32), 'The discourse on theology and science regularly suffers from distortions when they compete for public attention and belief formation, and mix facts with values'. These competitive discourses have kept alive the debate on the meaning of human beings and the future of being human in the context of AI.

Theology of *Imago Dei*

The traditional theory of the origins of humanity locates their creation in theology, in which God is the creator of the world and of human beings, out of nothing [*creatio ex nihilo*]. *Creatio ex nihilo* emphasises that humanity was not formed

but was created out of nothing. 'The universe was brought into existence out of nothing or without the use of pre-existing materials' (Erasmus 2018:4). '*Creatio ex nihilo* is thus an interpersonal transcendence statement that genuinely connects God with the world' (Bauman 2009:9):

It creates the no space that separates God and the world, spirit and matter, history and nature, mind and body, culture and nature in a way that puts these two poles over and against one another in a logic of domination. (Bauman 2009:9)

From God's act of creating out of nothing, we also find God's decision to create humanity in the image of God. According to Genesis 1:26–27, God created humankind in the image and likeness of God [*imago Dei*]. *Imago Dei* is thus a biblical concept that humans are created in the image of God, possessing qualities that reflect God's nature (Crouch 2010:1).

The Psalmist emphasises the theology of *imago Dei* by saying:

What is man that you are mindful of [*them*]? The [*son and/or daughter*] of man that you care for [*them*]? You made [*them*] a little lower than heavenly being and crowned [*them*] with the glory of honour. (Ps. 8:4–5)

The Psalmist suggests that God takes care of humanity's everyday life because human beings possess the image and likeness of God. The traditional discourse of *imago Dei* has survived many theories, including the myths of the Old Babylonian Empire, such as the Enuma Elish (Balogh 2023:1) and the Gilgamesh Epic (Abusch 2001:614), which present different theories that explain the origin of humanity. These theories are contrary to the theological view of the creation of humankind, which presents them as having the likeness, image, and resemblance of God.

According to Simango (2016:172) 'The concept of the image of God can be traced back to Israel's history through her contacts with Egypt, where the idea was transformed and adapted into Israelite theology'. For Simango 'The Israelites believed that all persons were created in the image of God, not only the king or the pharaoh, and that this image involved the function of dominion' (Simango 2016:172). The two creation biblical narratives are attributed to the Priestly source (Gn 1:1–2:4a) and the Yahwist (J) (Gn 2:4b–3:24), respectively (Ramantswana 2013):

Both creation narratives are viewed here as fitting within the bounds of the author of Genesis, who sets them in a dialogic relationship in which they mutually enrich each other. (p. 426)

Simango (2012) avers that:

The image of God is both moral and relational in perspective. It involves a moral likeness to God and a relationship between God and humans like that between parent and child. (p. 638)

According to Erickson (1983:498), 'There are differing sentiments about the image of God in Gen. 1:26–27'. The conflictive relationships among biblical scholars and

theologians give rise to these perceptions. To resolve these controversies, Erickson proposed three perspectives for understanding the theology of *imago Dei*. Firstly, 'There is the substantive view of the image of God, which consists of specific characteristics inherent in the very nature of humanity, which may be psychological, physical, or spiritual' (Erickson 1983:499). This view argues that humans possess specific characteristics or attributes that reflect the image of God, such as rationality or morality. Secondly, there is the:

Relational view, which presents the image of God not as something inherently or intrinsically present in human beings, but as the experience of a relationship between human beings and God or between two or more humans. (Erickson 1983:499)

In the relational model, humanity's image of God is revealed through its relationships with others and with God. Lastly, 'The functional view presents the image of God as a function that humans perform' (Erickson 1983:499). In this model, humans have a specific role or function in the world that reflects God's purposes. All three views present the relationship of God and humanity at the centre of the theology of *imago Dei*.

Imago Dei theology presents humans as more special than all other creatures. Bentley (2017:1), however, cautions the speciality and superiority of humanity over all creation, considering the doctrine of *imago Dei* and contemporary scientific knowledge (Bentley 2017:1). For Bentley, the notion that human distinctiveness is embedded in an understanding of *imago Dei*, which elevates humanity above the rest of creation, is problematic. He raises critical questions that theology might grapple with answering: Who told humanity that they were created in the image of God? Did God say that? If so, who was there to hear what God said before humankind was created? Wasn't the Bible written by human beings (obviously biased in their reflection), locked in contexts with the aim of conveying messages which were relevant to their worldview, situation, and theology? Is *imago Dei* nothing more than an inflated, self-appropriated notion, addressing the question of human identity, using theological and cosmological understandings of a particular time, culture, and context? Is it responsible for shaping not only modern theology but also worldview, ethics, economic sciences, politics, conservation efforts, and the list goes on? (Bentley 2017:1–2).

Bentley's numerous questions cast the theology of *imago Dei* into the realm of science. His views were supported by Oritsegbemi (2023:76), who argues that 'The affective computing approach of AI has made it possible for machines not only to think, behave, and communicate like humans, but also to emote like humans'. To this, Thompson (2020:11) argues that 'Characteristics once considered unique to humans, such as learning, logic, reasoning, perception, and creativity, are now being replicated by technology and used across every industry'.

Oritsegbemi's point raises our discussion to the next level, where we will need to analyse the human being as a social being.

Humanity as a social being: The African philosophy of *ubuntu*

Although human beings were created in the image and likeness of God, being human is defined by society. Being human locates humanity within a complex web of society, in which culture, norms, values, politics, the economy, and relationships shape individuals. For Jiménez (2015:289), 'Being human means the existence of humanity is rooted in respect for nature, acknowledging that human life is intertwined with the broader ecosystem'. Moreover, being human is emphasised by cultural values, and human dignity is derived from work and from collaboration with other people, animals, and the natural world. From the arguments presented above, human beings are societal beings whose lives, characters, and behaviour are defined by socio-natural entities that are interconnected with all living beings in creation, embodying a relationship of equality with plants and animals.

As societal beings, humanity is defined by the Bantu concept of *ubuntu*, championed by John Mbiti. In advocating the *ubuntu* philosophy, Mbiti (1970:141) was separating humanity from its location within society. For Mbiti, being human means, 'You are because we are and because we are, therefore you are'. 'Mbiti's adage describes his idea of Afro-communitarianism, accounts for the importance of individual and community in thinking about social existence in African thought' (Adeate 2023:1). 'Ubuntu presents the attributes of humanity that are defined by society, such as honesty, generosity, empathy, compassion, forgiveness, understanding and the ability to share' (Onyebuchi 2018:1). The term *ubuntu* is known in various African cultures. In IsiXhosa, it is called *botho*; in the Zimbabwean language Shona, it is called *hunhu*; while in IsiNdebele, it is called *umuntu* (Onyebuchi 2018):

The word *ubuntu* in its various forms defines personhood that is linked to religion, thereby making religion and *ubuntu* the two sides of the same coin because they both form the communitarian ethics, discourses on identity, and the uniqueness of pan-African ideology. (p.1)

However, when it comes to community-based ethics, AI lacks the *ubuntu* that defines human beings as community beings.

As a public discourse, *ubuntu* has gained recognition as a peculiar form of African humanism, encapsulated in the following Bantu aphorisms, such as *Motho ke motho ka batho ba bang*, (Xhosa) *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (IsiNdebele and IsiZulu), and *Munhu munhu panevanhu* (Shona, Zimbabwe), loosely translated to mean 'a person is a person through other people'. In other words, a human being achieves humanity through their relationships with other human beings. The sociological meaning of *ubuntu* positions

humanity as a divine, scientific, and sociological being. This relationship explains why understanding humanity attracts the attention of theologians, sociologists, and scientists. On the contrary, Ramose argued that, in the early 1990s, 'Ubuntu has been employed by the elite parties involved in the negotiations for transition to justify the new society. This perverse employment of *ubuntu* has been primarily supported with the aid of sophisticated academic posturing by the predominantly white academic establishment in South Africa and its network of international allies, (Dladla 2019:145).

In contrast to the philosophy of *ubuntu*, the 21st century saw a surge in which humanity used science to challenge both theology and the African philosophy of *ubuntu*. Artificial intelligence crafted images that can function as human beings who are not defined either by theology or religion, or by society, but by science, technology, and industry. These human beings' imitations are not rational, relational, or divinely elected. It is this scenario that has posed challenges to the debate over the meaning of being human and the future of humanity in the world of AI.

The development of AI

The concept of artificial intelligence is not as modern as we think. It traces back as far as 1950 when an English computer scientist, cryptanalyst, mathematician, and theoretical biologist, Alan Turing invented the Turing test. (Saha 2021:4)

'The Turing Test was designed to determine whether a computer can think like human beings' (Britannica 2025:1). In his experiment (Britannica 2025):

Turing predicted that, by the year 2000, a computer would be able to play the imitation game so well that an average interrogator will not have more than a 70% chance of making the right identification. (p.1)

In 1960, Joseph Weizenbaum created ELIZA, the first chatbot computer program, at the MIT Artificial Intelligence Laboratory. ELIZA was designed to demonstrate the superficial nature of human-to-computer communication at the time. However, when it was implemented on personal computers, humans found it quite engaging (Wallace & Dunlop 2016:1). The development of science continued with the chess computer, IBM Deep Blue, developed in 1997. IBM beat a world chess champion in two out of six games, with one win by the champion and the other three games ending in draws (Saha 2021:4). In 2011, Apple Inc. introduced Siri as a digital assistant, while Elon Musk and others founded OpenAI in 2015 (Saha 2021:4).

'In November 2022, ChatGPT 3.0 was released on the Internet' (Beard 2024:31). Since then, scholars and individuals have begun to discuss the impact of AI in various fields. In academia, seminars, blogs, conferences, essays, and webinars were conducted to examine the contribution of AI. Whereas disciplines such as education find the coming of AI as a step in the right direction, Beard cautions that, 'The future role of generative AI in theological education and theological

librarianship remains open and complex' (Beard 2024:31). For Beard (2024:31), 'theologians tendance of either to over or underestimate the realities and impact of such technology in the domain of religious life'. Science has always been at the forefront of raising questions that theology responds to. These questions pertain to the nature and future of humanity, history, and ethical engagement with others and the natural world. Beard calls the discourse on theology and AI 'the myth of AI' because humanoid robots remain imitations of humanity, not rational, because they are created in humanity's image and weaknesses (Beard 2024:31). Although AI has developed to advance the life of humanity at work, research, school, etc. the role of superhumans is worth interrogating and whether they are worth replacing humankind must be questioned. For example, Sharan, Peter, & Van Straven (2025:1467) argue that 'As social robots become increasingly advanced, the rules of human-robot interaction may diverge from those of interpersonal communication'. In view of this, the researcher has suggested that the computers-are-social-actors paradigm, which treats machines as we do humans, may need to be revised.

The impact of AI on the future of humanity

It cannot be overemphasised that AI has a substantial impact in the 21st century. To understand this impact, we must venture into a comparative analysis of the machine and the person who produced it. As Boden (2018:1) rightly put it, 'AI has led to some controversial philosophical discourses with regard to the nature of intelligence, the nature of the mind, and the uniqueness of humanity'. In his analysis of Nick Bostrom's *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*, Brundage (2015:2) argues that 'The book explores the future of artificial intelligence and related technologies, as well as the risks they may pose to human civilisation'. Bostrom (2014:55) 'advocated for a long-term future for AI because the development of superintelligent machines will, if not adequately managed, impact humanity's future'. This point was buttressed by Loureiro, Guerreiro, and Tussyadiah (2021:911), who predicted that, 'Soon, the use of AI robots may become dysfunctional and may cause mental disorders and other psychiatric issues in humans'. Researchers and thinkers on AI argue that:

The use of AI robots can have a significant impact in society, not only because they will be more embedded in-service encounters, but they can also put themselves and human beings at risk, become capable of performing creative tasks (thus leave nothing for human beings), and achieve the same level of intelligence of human beings. (Ashrafiyan 2017:406; Wright & Schultz 2018:682)

According to Kurzweil (2005:35) 'One of the most immediate concerns of humans is the fear of losing jobs because of Artificial Intelligence'. Artificial intelligence-enhanced automation is also leading to massive job losses worldwide. 'Research conducted by the World Economic Forum predicts that by 2025, automation will result in the loss of 85 million jobs' (Urgan 2019:328). For Saha (2021):

Bigger fears regarding AI also include the scenario in which machines become more innovative and intelligent and end up being as opinionated and biased as some of the people training them. (p. 6)

In their writing on software engineering, Sangeeta and Seok-Won (2021:1) argue that the unprecedented advances in AI over the past few years have altered humanity's perspectives on software engineering and systems engineering. Moreover, intelligent autonomous agents are proliferating and rapidly evolving as a result of the exponential growth in computational power and recent advances. Ranging from chatbots, over personal virtual assistants and medical decision-aiding systems, to self-driving or self-piloting systems, whether recognised to the users or not, Intelligent Autonomous Agents (IAA) are increasingly integrated into many aspects of daily life (Ningyuan & Botev 2021:1). A frequently discussed worst-case scenario is that AI could eventually gain superiority, with catastrophic consequences for humankind (Brundage 2015:2). Many leading AI researchers and industry experts have signed an open letter to warn of this scenario and appeal for a research agenda that prioritises robust and beneficial AI (Ningyuan & Botev 2021:1).

Critique of AI as science without rationality

Although there seems to be a challenge about how AI is likely to replace humanity, the development of AI raises questions about whether machines can possess the *imago Dei* or exhibit similar qualities. There are many diverse factors to consider when dealing with the question of humanity and humanoids. One school of thought argue that AI's ability to reason, create, and make decisions challenges traditional understandings of human uniqueness and the *imago Dei*. This thinking presupposes that humanoids have the capacity to replace humanity not only as humanoid robots but also as theological beings. However, being human is an event in life that starts and ends, whereas superhumans are often viewed as machines or properties. Being human is actualised. By this, we mean that the life of humanity can be traced, unlike that of machines, which are a product of humanity. This argument can be further strengthened by emphasising that an image is not a reality but the imagination of the one who created it. Whereas humanity represents the image of God, humanoids are expressions of humanity's creativity, with an impact on those who created them. That being as it may, humanity, as the creation, cannot replace God because God is the creator. The same goes for AI; it cannot replace humanity because it owes all its development to humanity. Artificial intelligence is a product of humanity's scientific origins. This point was buttressed by Herzfeld (2024), who cautioned that:

Although numerous language models are on the rise, the actual challenge for humanity is not superintelligence, but the lack of criticality and the intensive use of biased software being presented as neutral tools. (p. 148)

As machines, AI demands water and fossil fuels. At the same time, it is disembodied, thereby making it an illusion that chatbots are viable substitutes for therapists, pastors, or friends (Johnson n.d). These limitations, including a lack of emotional intelligence and relational capacity, render AI incapable of being considered an image of God.

The other school of thought argues that, in a world driven by rapid technological advancement, AI is reshaping the way humanity interacts, communicates, and works. Artificial intelligence is being integrated across industries to streamline operations and enhance decision-making, including education. Azoulay (2025:1) confirms that. Artificial intelligence can address challenges in innovation, education, and learning practices and accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4. This improvement is possible through virtual learning environments, which serve as tools to supplement human teachers and improve access to quality education. On the one hand, AI-driven tools assist teachers in reaching many students at the same time, planning, student tracking, and providing personalised instruction. On the other hand, the tools can help students with disabilities, such as text-to-speech systems or AI-powered sign language interpretation. Nevertheless, the constant technological development invariably multiplies risks and challenges that have so far outpaced policy deviations and regulatory frameworks.

Although AI seems to be pacing the future, it lacks the ethics and responsibilities that humanity possesses. This inadequacy also speaks to AI's lack of *ubuntu* as a quality of communal life.

On the basis of the value of embodiment, human uniqueness, and community, Herzfeld (2024:149) sees modern AI and transhumanist dreams as a return to ancient Gnostic heresies – disembodied, elitist, and ultimately dehumanising'. As machines, humanoids are designed and displayed responsibly, with considerations for human values and well-being. This aspect has the potential to see AI fade, just as many other scientific and evolutionary theories, such as Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. In this theory, Darwin argued that all organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited, or newly arising species (Gregory 2009:156). As a theory aimed at explaining the origin of humanity, it faced religious criticism because it was not compatible with the traditional Christian teaching of the theology of creation. According to Robert Shedinger, 'the theory of evolution did not materialise because Charles Darwin was far from being the scientific and cultural icon he is considered today'. Darwin doggedly sought status within the scientific community of his day, desperate to achieve something of lasting significance, which helps explain the stubborn defence of his theory of natural selection, even in the face of substantial counterarguments (Ruse 1975:219). It becomes evident from the above assertion that AI, as a scientific conspiracy, will also face the same challenges as populism, trying to impose reality where reality is not a fact, and this will be its end.

Ashrafian (2017) stresses that:

The potential of AI and robotics to achieve the capacities of consciousness, sentience, and rationality suggests that these agents have minds. If so, then there may be a potential for these minds to become dysfunctional, or for artificial intelligences and robots to suffer from mental illness. (p. 403)

The existence of artificially intelligent psychopathology can be interpreted through the philosophical perspectives of mental illness. This offers new insights into what it means to have either robot or human cognitive disorders, but may also provide a platform on which to examine the mechanisms of biological or artificially intelligent psychiatric disease (Ashrafian 2017:403). The possibility of mental illnesses occurring in artificially intelligent individuals necessitates the consideration that, at some level, they may have achieved a mental capability of consciousness, sentience, and rationality such that they can subsequently become dysfunctional. A deeper philosophical understanding of these conditions in humans and AI might therefore offer reciprocal insights into mental health and mechanisms that may lead to the prevention of mental dysfunction. Kurzweil warns of the dangers when AI surpasses human intelligence and its implications for human evolution. For him, 'AI is a shortcut to the reality of the individual they represent' (Kurzweil 2005:35). For example, a movie remains an action, and often, it is not reality. However, it presents a real-life situation, which is why it is always cautioned, 'Do not practice this at home'. AI humanoids remain objects that lack a sense of passion, empathy, or love, which distinguishes them from humanity. Whereas humanity has self-consciousness, humanoids are programmed to think and act consistently.

Some models can help us understand the relationships among God, human beings, and scientific concepts. The first is the created co-creator model, which suggests that, as co-creators with God, humans can build AI that reflects the image of humanity. However, it is not clear whether AI would also bear the *imago Dei* or the image of fallen humanity. The second model is the election model: it holds that God's election of humans is based on their unique relationship with God. This point removes AI from being a threat to humanity's future because it remains humanity's handiwork. In further critiquing the potential of AI to replace the future of humanity, it is essential to know that the relationship between the *imago Dei* and AI has implications for our understanding of human identity, purpose, and responsibility in the world. The first point to consider is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand, manage, and respond to emotions – both your own and those of others. It plays a vital role in building relationships, resolving conflicts, and inspiring effective leadership. Artificial intelligence is limited in its understanding of emotional intelligence because it is built on algorithms trained to detect patterns in data.

While AI tools can simulate responses or perform sentiment analysis, they lack genuine understanding and emotional depth. According to Ripple Solutions (2025), 'The lack of

empathy in AI can mimic empathetic responses via chatbots or voice assistants, but it does not actually evoke genuine empathy'. Ripple Solutions (2025) also emphasises that, 'AI is rooted in shared human experience – something machines cannot possess', which means that AI cannot understand the context that emotions bring. Emotions are influenced by tone, body language, history, and environment. This activity is contrary to AI, which may detect words but often misses subtle cues that define how we genuinely feel. This weakness makes AI less of a threat to humanity's future. Moreover 'AI lacks the emotional judgment needed in everyday life. Emotional intelligence involves judgment, intuition, and emotional reasoning, skills essential for conflict resolution and leadership' (Ripple Solutions 2025). Artificial intelligence's logic-based processing falls short in emotionally charged scenarios. While humanoid robots can do the work that humanity can, it is humans who bring meaning, compassion, and connection to the conversation. Much as humanity depends on God, AI depends on humanity to function. Successful integration of AI into business requires us to recognise where human skills add irreplaceable value – especially in emotionally complex areas such as conflict resolution, counselling, negotiation, and leadership. This research agrees with Oritsegbemi that AI cannot adequately replicate the complexity and subjectivity of human intelligence and emotion, as it lacks innate emotions and the ability to understand abstract concepts (Oritsegbemi 2023:76).

Conclusion

Science and theology have always been in partnership and in conflict. The article demonstrated that the theology of *imago Dei* continues to survive scientific theories such as evolution and AI. The production of humanoids by humanity does not replace humanity as both a theological and a social being. In addition, the African philosophy of *ubuntu* defines what it means to be human, and for generations, it has shaped African culture. Whereas humans are social, scientific, and theological beings, AI is only scientific, which makes it fall short of replacing humanity or defining humanity's meaning. The major weakness of AI is that it is not divinely elected, rational, or relational, although humanoids do most of what humanity can do. Artificial intelligence produces programmed machines, while society and theology produce individuals with free will, love, and empathy, whose lives can be traced. This deficiency makes the humanoid short of either a social or a theological being. The article also found that being human in the context of AI is a phase that will still happen, and yet it has nothing to do with defining humanity. The paradox remains: humankind was created in the image of God, while AI is a product of experimentation.

There is a distinction between *imago Dei* and AI that should not be confused with humanity's ability to create a humanoid. Humanity does not owe its existence to AI but to God. The article maintains that, although the theology of *imago Dei* continues to face scientific scrutiny, science remains a force that pushes theology to redefine itself in response to different

challenges. Lastly, the article places AI in high regard because it has made life easier in schools, industry, universities, and other settings. That being as it may, theology must embrace AI as a tool to make work easy, but not as a competitor. Artificial intelligence enhances human capabilities, improves productivity, and improves the quality of life. This ability means that AI will remain a model of communication that will strengthen humanity's future. In addition, the relationship between humanity and AI is premised on the discourse of transformation, changing how humanity lives, works, and interacts.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on a conference paper originally presented at the South African Science and Religion Forum, held at the University of South Africa in Pretoria, South Africa, on 17–19 September 2025. The conference paper, titled 'The meaning of being human and the future of humanity in the world of Artificial Intelligence' was subsequently expanded and revised for this journal publication. This republication is performed with permission from the conference organisers.

Competing interests

The author declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

CRedit authorship contribution

Martin Mujinga: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting this study and its findings are available within the article and its listed references.

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The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any

affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

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