CHRISTIANITY WORLD • POLITICS No 29, 2025
JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

DOI: 10.21697/CSP.2025.29.1.06

Dariusz Kowalczyk, SJ
Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome
ORCID: 0000-0002-6469-2443

Humans and AI: differences, opportunities, threats Reflections around the Note Antiqua et nova

Abstract: The article, drawing on the Vatican document *Antiqua et nova* and Leo XIV's proclamation of his intention to confront the challenge of new digital technologies, addresses the relationship between natural intelligence, notably human intelligence, and artificial intelligence. In this context, the author further discusses transhumanism and the resulting concepts of human 'enhancement', contrasting them with the Christian vision of the human being created in God's image. In the central section of the text, he analyses the concepts of human, animal and artificial intelligence, emphasising the key role played by intentionality, freedom and the relational dimension in distinguishing human intelligence from AI. Using, *inter alia*, the distinction between *noûs* [contemplative mind] and *mêtis* [practical intelligence], the author points out that AI possesses solely functional abilities, devoid of intentionality and of reference to a sense of meaning and values. Furthermore, in light of *Antiqua et nova*, the author discusses the opportunities and threats associated with the use of artificial intelligence in education, medicine, economy, communication, politics, and the military, as well as the risk of technocracy and deepening inequality. The article emphasises that AI should remain a tool that serves the human being, and its development requires ethical supervision, in which Christian anthropology can be of considerable assistance.

Keywords: *Antiqua et nova*, natural intelligence, artificial intelligence, transhumanism, Christian anthropology

Introduction

Leo XIV explained to the cardinals gathered in the Synod Hall why he had chosen the name Leo: the last Pope with that name, Leo XIII, wrote the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, in which he confronted the urgent social problems of the time, especially the issue of the plight of the workers, in the context of the so-called First

Industrial Revolution. Pope Prevost believes that today the Church must respond to another technological revolution, including the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI), which poses challenges in terms of, *inter alia*, understanding human dignity and the labour law. For now, we have the Note *Antiqua et nova* – on the relationship between artificial intelligence and human intelligence. It is a 117-paragraph document published by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education, and endorsed by Pope Francis on 14 January 2025. Leo XIV has already referred to this document several times on various occasions, for example in his address at the Second Annual Conference on Artificial Intelligence, which took place in Rome in June 2025 and included the following statement: 'In the end, authentic wisdom has more to do with recognising the true meaning of life, than with the availability of data' [Leo XIV 2025a]. Nonetheless, we should expect the present Pope to issue a more in-depth document addressing these issues. The objective of this article is to raise and possibly explore in greater depth the most important aspects of the Note in the context of Leo XIV's anticipated document on AI, including in particular the very concept of intelligence and the question of whether artificial intelligence differs significantly from human intelligence, the constitutive feature of which is intentionality. The second aspect focuses on the opportunities and threats arising from the potential of AI, which is linked, inter alia, to various currents of transhumanism.

1. The wisdom of the Church, new technologies, transhumanism

As such, the Church is not an expert in artificial intelligence, although eminent computer scientists may be members of the Church. It is not an expert in technical and IT issues, but it has something important to say about the impact that new technologies can have on the human being in the individual and social dimensions. In his Encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, John Paul II emphasised that "man is the way for the Church (…) because man – every man without any exception whatever – has been redeemed by Christ" [No. 14]. It is to this interest of the Church in human beings, who in every era experience a combination of old and new challenges, that the title of the Note refers: *Antiqua et nova*. It is about retrieving old and new things from the treasury of the Church [see Mt 13:52], and the challenge to do so undoubtedly lies in new technologies, in particular AI.

Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin pointed out these challenges when he delivered a message on behalf of Pope Leo XIV to participants at the *AI for Good Summit 2025* in Geneva. Cardinal Parolin emphasised that humanity stands at a crossroads in the face of the enormous potential of the digital revolution driven

by artificial intelligence, which is transforming education, work, art, healthcare, management, the military, and communication. Responsibility and discernment are necessary for AI to serve the common good, to serve the building of bridges and the fostering of brotherhood, and not just the interests of individuals or corporations. In the face of the possible insidiousness of the digital technologies available to date, such warnings are imperative. The message points out that 'while AI can simulate aspects of human reasoning and perform specific tasks with incredible speed and efficiency, it cannot replicate moral discernment or the ability to form genuine relationships' [Parolin 2025]. It is not surprising that the development of digital technologies, especially AI, 'has prompted many to reflect on what it means to be human, and on humanity's role in the world' ibid. Hence, digital transformation is not only about technological progress, but also a call to reflect on our identity and responsibility.

Let us note that if we were to adopt an evolutionary-materialistic worldview, man would appear to be a random product of evolution, who has no supernatural dignity bestowed upon him by the Creator. Man's position in the world would be determined by so-called human rights proclaimed by the consensus of the majority or simply imposed arbitrarily in the name of one ideology or another. In such circumstances, transhumanist ideas emerge, proposing to use technology, including artificial intelligence, to steer the further evolution of humankind. Here, we can distinguish several main currents, which can be divided into two subgroups: philosophical-worldview and socio-political [Garbowski 2015]. Philosophical-worldview themes include abolitionism, extropianism, immortalism, and singularitarianism. Abolitionism postulates the elimination of all suffering (physical and mental) through biotechnology, genetic engineering, and other tools. It considers the permanent attainment of happiness through the removal of the causes of pain and sorrow to be the supreme goal of humankind. Extropianism refers to the idea of 'extropy', which is the opposite of entropy. Its main tenet is perpetual improvement, the growth of complexity and the development of capacities – both biological and technological. Extropianism emphasises the importance of progress and argues that any regulations hindering technological development are harmful. Immortalism focuses on the radical prolongation of life, up to the point of achieving potential immortality. The interests of this branch include tools such as genetic engineering, stem cells, therapies that slow down ageing, and the transfer of the mind to non-biological carriers. Singularitarianism assumes that a so-called 'technological singularity' point will occur, i.e. a moment when artificial intelligence will surpass humans in terms of intellectual performance.

Proponents of singularitarianism believe that the development of technologies leading to this point should be accelerated. The main currents of socio-political transhumanism are post-genderism, technogaianism, and democratic transhumanism. The aim of post-genderism is to erase gender differences with the help of advanced technologies such as genetic engineering, cybernetics, or cloning. It advocates the individuals' emancipation from biologically determined gender roles. Technogaianism combines the ideas of transhumanism with concern for the environment. It advocates the use of the latest technologies to solve environmental problems and protect the Earth. Democratic transhumanism focuses on securing equal access to technological 'enhancements' for everyone, promoting social justice and preventing the exclusion of those who might be left behind in technological development.

In general, a distinction can be made between moderate and radical transhumanism [Social Council of the Archbishop of Poznań 2022; Pawlak 2022]. The former focuses on the gradual, ethical improvement of humans, while preserving their integrity and species identity. Consequently, it prefers methods and technologies that serve to improve the quality of people's lives, particularly in the context of the treatment of diseases, disabilities and life prolongation, albeit without infringing on fundamental human characteristics. In addition, it takes ethical and social risks into account, exercises caution against potential side effects, and emphasises social and bioethical discussion while introducing new technological solutions. Radical transhumanism represents a different position. It assumes the possibility of completely overstepping man's current biological limitations, and even the creation of a 'posthuman', i.e. a being significantly superior to the current human in terms of physical and mental abilities and longevity. Radical transhumanists endorse ideas such as 'immortality' through the transfer of the mind to a machine, total cyborgisation, genetic modifications enabling the crossing of the boundaries to which *Homo sapiens* is subject, and the use of artificial intelligence to enhance consciousness or memory. This type of transhumanism often disregards ethical issues in favour of faster progress and promotes visions that fundamentally change the meaning of humanity, sometimes even a complete break with human nature as we know it. Such a break could occur as a result of the transfer of human consciousness to a machine, genetic modifications resulting in the creation of a 'super-human', or the complete merging of humans with AI. Thus, biological death would be eliminated.

Radical transhumanism is criticised for being utopian, for ignoring potential threats and disregarding traditional human values such as the meaning of

mortality, dignity and individual freedom. From a biblical-theological perspective, it can be considered yet another version of man's rebellion against God the Creator, and such rebellion sooner or later leads to catastrophe, as we see in the first pages of Genesis in the description of the fall of Adam and Eve. The key moment here is when the first humans violate the only commandment given to them, namely the prohibition to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent, symbolising Satan, tempts Eve with the words: 'You will not certainly die (…). For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil' [Genesis 3:4-5, NIV]. The words, 'You will be like God', encapsulate the essence of human rebellion – the illusion of transcending one's own limitations, of placing oneself in the place of the Creator. This is not only disobedience to God's command, but also an expression of hubris and self-referential judgement of what is the good and what is evil. However, Satan's promise is a deception. After eating the fruit, Adam and Eve do not become like God, but step into spiritual and existential death: 'Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked' [Genesis 3:7, NIV]; they experience fear and hide from God. Nakedness in the Bible is a symbol not only of poverty, scarcity, shame and guilt, but also of loss of dignity and identity. Of course, the nature of God's relationship with man is not based on prohibitions. The first parents were not allowed to eat from merely one tree. They could enjoy all the other trees. God desires man's development, as expressed in the words: 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it' [Genesis 1:28, NIV]. The Hebrew word for 'to subdue' used in the Bible means to exercise authority, though not in the sense of arbitrary exploitation or destruction, but in the sense of responsible 'governing' and 'overseeing' like a good king or a shepherd [Oworuszko 2011]. Man acts as God's vicegerent on earth, a manager, not the proprietor. The earth remains the property of the Creator, and man is its steward, accountable both to God and to future generations.

The first pages of Genesis provide a theological and anthropological foundation for confronting various desires for the development of human capabilities. The species *Homo sapiens* (sensible man) would be improved through genetic intervention and the connection of the human brain to computers, i.e. artificial intelligence. However, as a result of such actions, the human beings as we know them might simply cease to exist. The question is whether this would constitute a new, superior species of *homo*, or some non-human hybrid that would notice that it was 'naked'. Furthermore, 'enhancing' humans could lead to unprecedented social inequalities because, after all, not everyone would undergo the same degree of 'enhancement'.

Therefore, we have two perspectives here: human dignity (*Homo sapiens*) and the issue of just social relations. The *Antiqua et nova* note does not focus on futurological deliberations but rather points to the already possible applications of artificial intelligence and evaluates them precisely from the point of view of human dignity and social justice, whilst doing so in relation to God the Creator and Saviour, and moreover, God who became man. This reference to Jesus Christ is the essence of the wisdom of the Church. Without God, all *humanism* sooner or later becomes a caricature of itself, even if it is called *transhumanism* or *posthumanism*. In the Note *Antiqua et nova*, we read that posthumanists maintain that 'such advances will ultimately alter human identity to the extent that humanity itself may no longer be considered truly "human"' [*Antiqua et nova*[1]: endnote 9]. As the authors of the Note emphasise, this view is based on, inter alia, 'a fundamentally negative perception of human corporality, which treats the body more as an obstacle than as an integral part of the person's identity and call to full realization' ibid. Meanwhile, human dignity pertains to both the soul and the body, which is, in its own way, an element of having been created in God's image. The question of understanding the body is particularly important in the context of various types of *spiritualisms* that pollute Christian anthropology.

Paradoxically, the threats that arise in connection with the development of new technologies, including artificial intelligence, make the Church's teaching on man, based on the theology of creation and the theology of salvation, i.e. the call to eternal life, even more relevant than in the past. Indeed, the profoundness of the Christian view of man and humanity allows us to guard against the temptation to reduce man to an object that can be enhanced in the same way that a machine is improved. In other words, today more than ever, the world needs the wisdom of the Church, rooted in the Bible and in the belief that God the Father, the Creator, seeing his eternal Son becoming man, 'chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight' [Eph 1:4, NIV].

2. What is intelligence?

The question of what it means to be human and what the essence of humanity is in the context of AI primarily concerns what we call intelligence. The Note *Antiqua et nova* recalls that intelligence is an essential aspect of the truth that has been revealed to us, namely that we were created 'in the image of God' [Genesis 1:27, NIV]. For the eternal attributes of God are absolute reason and absolute freedom.

[1] Hereinafter in citations referred to as the 'Note'.

Human intelligence and free will are their reflections. Thus, when something we call 'artificial intelligence' emerges, the question arises as to the relationship between artificial intelligence and human intelligence. On the one hand, AI is a product of human intelligence and can therefore be controlled by humans, but on the other hand, its computing power and ability to collect and analyse information surpasses the human mind to such an extent that fears of artificial intelligence slipping out of human control and, in a sense, starting to live a life of its own – for example, by programming itself – are not a science fiction fantasy, but a genuine challenge. However, according to the biblical vision, man received from God – as previously noted – the task to 'work' the Earth and 'take care' of creatures [cf. Genesis 2:15, NIV], to subdue the Earth [cf. Genesis 1:28] for the common good. And we can also include technological products among 'creatures'. It is man who is to rule over them, and not they over man, even if in some respects machines are faster, more powerful and more accurate. Let us note that this has been the case for millennia. Humans have used animals and machines that were more effective and productive than them in certain specific activities. But it was humans who used them, not the other way around. The novelty of the challenges posed by AI lies in the fact that the issue is intelligence. Man-made algorithms seem to be similar to human intelligence and even surpass it. This situation raises troubling questions. There is hence a need to reflect on what human intelligence, and this thing we call artificial intelligence, essentially is.

There exists no single universal definition of intelligence that everyone would agree on without reservation. In general, it could be said that its basic characteristics are the ability to reason and think abstractly, to learn quickly and use experience, problem-solving and decision-making, to adapt to new environmental and social conditions, and to analyse and process information. Psychologists emphasise that it is erroneous to reduce intelligence to the process of thinking. There are different kinds of intelligence. For example, Howard Gardner mentions eight types of intelligence: linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, musical (auditory, rhythmic) intelligence, spatial intelligence, kinesthetic (movement-related) intelligence, intrapersonal (intuition-related) intelligence, interpersonal (social) intelligence, nature-related intelligence (natural environment) [Gardner 2002]. Intelligence is not one single, universal ability measured by IQ tests, but a set of independent potentials (so-called multiple intelligences) that every person possesses to varying degrees and which can be developed throughout their lifetime. Traditional IQ tests measure but a fragment of the broad spectrum of human abilities, mainly linguistic and logical-mathematical ones. Every human

being possesses all types of intelligence, but the profile of these abilities is unique and dynamic for each individual. Intelligences are equivalent and can work together in various configurations. If we agree on such a broad understanding of the concept of 'intelligence', then we must accept that it is not a solely human trait. Many animals also display signs of some kind of intelligence. We know that certain species, especially primates (chimpanzees, gorillas, orang-utans), dolphins, ravens, magpies, parrots, octopi, elephants and dogs, have the ability to solve problems, learn through observation, use tools, communicate, recognise themselves in a mirror (the so-called red spot test), and even show empathy and plan future actions. Parrots and crows can use tools and solve complex puzzles. Dolphins communicate with each other using complex sounds and are capable of understanding human gestures. Elephants recognise themselves in mirrors and exhibit altruistic behaviour. Dogs possess cognitive abilities that are often compared to the intelligence of young children.

Does this mean that the difference between human intelligence and animal intelligence is merely quantitative? This topic is the subject of ongoing debates, in which scientific arguments are mixed with ideologies and fads. For this reason, there is a growing group of proponents who prefer to speak of 'human animals' or 'nonhuman animals' [Gosling and John 1999]. It has nevertheless been pointed out that the human mind differs from animal intelligence in fundamental (qualitative) ways in characteristics such as abstract thinking, language, self-awareness and self-reflection, and the creation of culture. Humans are capable of operating with concepts abstracted from reality, long-term planning, symbolic analysis, and theoretical reasoning. In animals, concrete thinking dominates, focused on immediate needs and practical tasks. Human language enables the communication of highly complex and abstract content, the exchange of ideas, the creation of culture, and the development of law and science. Humans possess self-awareness and are capable of self-reflection, in other words, they can analyse their own thoughts and emotions, draw conclusions about themselves, and evaluate their decisions and actions. People pass on knowledge, traditions, technologies, and symbols in a systematic and purposeful manner from generation to generation, leading to the continuous development of civilisation and culture. Certain 'intelligent' behaviours of animals are closely related to their natural environment and the ecological niche in which they live. Human intelligence, on the other hand, is characterised by universality and the ability to think abstractly, allowing the solution of problems entirely detached from environmental conditions, which has enabled the development of civilisation, science, art, and religion. From

a theological perspective, it could be noted that animals cannot be religious, although they may play a greater role in human religious experience than previously realised [Wojtysiak 2015]. Referring to Paul Henri Holbach, Jacek Lejman states that 'in our assessment of animals, we commit (…) an "anthropomorphic error", which lies in the fact that we determine the abilities of animals, in particular their lack of intelligence, based on the criterion of our own intelligence. (…) In other words, we ourselves are the benchmark for assessing whether a given creature is intelligent' [Lejman 2020: 86–87]. However, this kind of argument simply depends on what meaning we want to attribute to the concept of 'intelligence'. Furthermore, it does not seem to be some kind of mistake to define the meaning of this concept having the human intelligence as a starting point, and then possibly extending it to the intelligence of animals or machines, pointing out similarities and differences.

In the first part of the Note *Antiqua et nova*, we find a certain synthesis of views, mainly classical ones, on the concept of 'human intelligence' in philosophy and theology, and their confrontation with the term 'artificial intelligence'. We find that as early as 1956, at a congress on artificial intelligence, it was defined as 'that of making a machine behave in ways that would be called intelligent if a human were so behaving' [Note: No. 7]. However, this kind of definition does not determine whether the programme's operations can be called thinking, or whether it is an activity that merely resembles thinking, analogous to human thought. In the latter case, AI would be able to mimic human cognitive processes, surpassing them in computing power, but it would not be, in the strict sense, the intelligence that characterises a human being. We read in the Note that human intelligence is not some isolated ability to calculate or search for information, but that it realises its capabilities in personal relationships with other people [Note: No. 18]. From a theological perspective, reason is a gift from God the Creator, who wants to be known and loved by reasonable and free creatures [cf. Note: No. 19]. Instead, artificial intelligence is limited to logical and mathematical mechanisms that do not create actual relationships. Machines, based on algorithms programmed by developers, learn in a purely functional way, automatically, without self-reflection and without interaction with others based on freedom. Human intelligence, conversely, 'is shaped by embodied experiences, including sensory input, emotional responses, social interactions, and the unique context of each moment' [Note: No. 31]. The authors of the Note clearly point out that artificial intelligence, while capable of mimicking human cognitive processes, is unable to replace humans in their personal and social dimensions. They emphasise that man is a social being and

that interpersonal relationships are *incarnational* in nature, i.e. they combine the spirit and the matter.

The use of the word 'intelligence' in relation to humans and computer programmes is analogous. And in every analogy, there are similarities, but equally there are differences, sometimes much greater than the similarities. In light of the differences between artificial intelligence and human intelligence outlined above, the Note states that the very use of the term 'intelligence' in relation to AI can be misleading and can consequently lead to a reduction of what human ability to think and understand actually is. From this perspective, 'AI should not be seen as *an artificial form* of human intelligence but as a product of it' [Note: No. 35]. Such a statement obviously does not end the discussion but rather initiates it. The question of the essence and different types of intelligence continues to require interdisciplinary exploration. It is important, the Note aims to convey, that this discussion should not be limited to the technical utility of AI, but should also address fundamental issues such as what man is and what constitutes human dignity, reason, and freedom. Here, we also touch upon the relationship between reason and faith. Either way, biblical anthropology leads to a practical conclusion, namely that it is man who should control AI, not the other way around. Commenting on the Note, Józef Kloch stated that AI 'has no intentionality, empathy, or feelings', but that, nevertheless, machines 'are capable of imitating human thinking to a certain extent'. However, he immediately specifies that artificial intelligence performs 'exclusively zero-one operations, nothing else. Everything can be expressed in a binary system. When describing artificial intelligence, or more broadly, the operation of machines, we have to use words that describe human activities; we have no other way of going about it. But some people transfer these anthropomorphisms to another field of reality, and they "come to the conclusion" that these machines actually think, and that they want something' [Kloch 2025]. In the quoted comment, Kloch emphasises that AI possesses no intentionality. Many researchers believe that it is precisely intentionality that most distinguishes [qualitatively] human intelligence from artificial intelligence.

3. The intentionality of human existence

Intentionality is a philosophical concept describing the active attitude of the mind towards any object. It involves the mind being 'directed towards something', an awareness of something or thinking about something. Our thoughts, desires, beliefs, or intentions always refer to a specific object, situation, person, or state of affairs. This orientation of the mind towards an object leads to a relationship

between the subject and the object (real or imagined). That consciously experienced relationship, in turn, leads to the attribution of meaning to potential objects and phenomena, as well as to the formulation of ever new goals to be achieved. [Krokos 2013]. Intentionality differs from the automated processing of information by systems which, despite their ability to operate according to predefined rules, do not possess their own goals or sense of purpose. Intentionality is considered a distinguishing feature of natural intelligence, and particularly human intelligence. For a long time, intentionality was considered a quality unique to humans, a view espoused, for example, in the work of Franz Brentano, who considered it a distinguishing feature of human mental states. However, contemporary research and the philosophy of mind have led to the broadening of this concept to include other living entities [Dyk 2014]. Today, the existence of various 'levels of intentionality' is accepted. Thus, zero-order intentionality is attributed to machines or simple organisms that do not experience any actual mental states – they act 'as if' they had intentions, but in reality, they do not possess any mental states. First-order intentionality occurs when a subject has a belief, desire, or intention relating directly to something (e.g., 'I want to eat'). Second-order intentionality means that the subject thinks about what someone else thinks or wants (e.g., 'I know that she wants to eat'). Higher levels of intentionality involve embedding mental states in successive subjects, e.g. third-order intentionality: 'I believe that she thinks that I want…', fourth-order: 'I know that she thinks that I believe that she wants…', etc. Similar constructs are used, even up to the seventh order. It is believed that first-order intentionality (focusing on an object/goal) is characteristic of many animals, not just humans. An example is animals acting with a goal in mind, e.g. obtaining food, caring for their young or solving problems related to their environment.

It must be noted that artificial intelligence in its current state of development is not characterised by intentionality. AI does not have its own intentions, goals or mental orientation characteristic of humans or certain animals. Current AI systems can only simulate intentional behaviour by performing tasks programmed by humans or achieving goals set by their creators, but they do not 'want' anything in an inherent sense, nor do they possess their own beliefs or needs. AI operates by processing data according to algorithms, rather than consciously pursuing self-defined goals. Philosophers and cognitive scientists such as John Searle emphasise that machines do not have the intentional states that occur in the human mind because they have neither the awareness nor the biological basis for such experiences [Searle 1985]. What we observe as apparent intentionality in AI is the result of attribution

by humans [anthropomorphising] or a kind of rhetoric used by programmers. Contemporary science and technology provide no evidence that any AI system exhibits genuine intentionality, rather than its mere simulation. Discussions about the possibility of intentionality emerging in future, more advanced forms of AI are theoretical and speculative in nature. It is currently impossible to prove that the emergence of intentionality in systems is only a matter of time. It can therefore be assumed that it is intentionality that fundamentally distinguishes artificial intelligence from human intelligence. These two types of intelligence can, of course, be examined from many other perspectives, such as origin and nature, learning methods, flexibility and creativity, information processing, and limitations, but it is intentionality and self-awareness, plus emotions, that would be the basic differentiating criteria. Nevertheless, the debate on this topic is open among researchers, and very different views clash in it [Redaelli 2024].

The issue of intentionality in the context of artificial intelligence has been debated over a long period of time. In 1988, the Centre for Philosophical Studies in Gallarate held a conference on the topic of 'Natural Intelligence and Artificial Intelligence'. 'The main conclusion of the Congress', stated Salvino Biolo, 'was to recognise intentionality as a specific element of human intelligence. There are philosophers of science, such as Searle, who see the lack of intentionality as a limitation – in comparison to humans – of the alleged cognitive abilities of computers' [Biolo 1991: X]. Biolo notes, however, that Searle does not attribute any particular anthropological or spiritual significance to his statements. In his opinion, computers do not have intentionality merely because they lack the physical properties of the human (or animal) brain. Yet, this does not rule out that a computer with such properties could one day be built and thus be capable of intentional actions. But whether this is actually possible remains a matter of dispute.

Among those experts who emphasise that artificial intelligence does not have its own intentionality is Paolo Benanti, a theologian and bioethicist who was a member of the UN Committee on Artificial Intelligence. In various interviews and texts, such as his recent publication entitled *L'uomo è un algoritmo? Il senso dell'umano e l'intelligenza artificiale* [2025], Benanti states that, as we have already noted above, AI has no consciousness or subject that independently sets goals or asks ethical questions, as it receives goals from humans and performs tasks according to predefined algorithms. Benanti notes that AI can exhibit agency, understood as the ability to adapt and pursue goals; however, these goals are always assigned by humans and do not result from the machine's own reflection or free

will. A machine does not possess intentionality in the philosophical sense: it has no consciousness directed towards anything, no self-awareness, and no questions regarding meaning or values. Only humans decide what goals technology can pursue. While AI can independently select the means to achieve human-set goals, it does not generate its own intentions. Benanti writes: 'Despite the progress and achievements that amaze us, ChatGPT, or any analogous system, does not have the ability of semantic understanding in the human sense. The model is based on statistical correlations between words and sentences acquired during training in a symbol composition game, but this never entails any intentionality or awareness of meanings' [Benanti 2025: 39]. In short, AI is a tool, not an autonomous subject. The dimension of intentionality and reflection on values remains exclusively the domain of humans, which is why ethical responsibility always rests with the people who design and use AI technology.

In the aforementioned text, Benanti distinguishes between two Greek concepts of intelligence: *noûs* and *mêtis*, emphasising their fundamentally different roles both in classical philosophy and in the context of contemporary technologies, in particular artificial intelligence. According to Benanti, *mêtis* is practical, cunning intelligence, capable of solving concrete problems, of being adaptive and looking for clever solutions. A classic example of its embodiment is Odysseus, a hero distinguished precisely by *mêtis*, or the ability to cope in difficult, changing situations. This type of intelligence is characterised by effectiveness, skilfulness, and often manipulation and adaptation to changing circumstances. This is the type of intelligence that Benanti most often associates with artificial intelligence: AI can solve tasks, play games, and solve puzzles based on input data, but it only operates within the scope of what is defined and determined by an algorithm or data. *Noûs*, on the other hand, denotes contemplative intellect, capable of grasping the whole, the meaning, the purpose, and transcendence. It is a type of thinking that encompasses an understanding of the meaning of things, a vision of the world as a whole, reflection on values and ethics, and the ability to direct one's life towards a specific horizon, such as a spiritual or moral goal. *Noûs* is the ability for profound understanding and interpretation, which remains the exclusive domain of humans. Artificial intelligence, even the most advanced, does not attain this level; it can be very effective in the logic of *mêtis*, but it cannot give meaning or recognise purpose and value beyond specific tasks. The distinction between *noûs* and *mêtis* is the basis for Benanti's assertion that technology and AI may be extremely advanced in solving problems, but they cannot replace the human ability to go beyond functionality and pragmatism towards goals, values, and transcendence. Benanti

notes: 'The word "love" [Italian: *amore*] is a sequence of 40 bits (01100001 01101101 01101111 01110010 01100101) to be represented by ASCII code using five symbols (in Italian), i.e. the letters that make up the word…' [Benanti 2025: 44]. However, in this, there is no *noûs*. There is only *mêtis*. For humans, on the other hand, 'love' has an infinite number of meanings and contexts that stir thoughts, intentions, and emotions. In humans, *noûs* and *mêtis* are united and, as such, constitute the dignity of the human person.

4. Opportunities and threats

Reflections on artificial intelligence often relate to the opportunities and threats it poses. In the second part of the Note *Antiqua et nova*, we find practical indications of the opportunities and, above all, the threats that artificial intelligence presents in various areas of individual and social life. Following the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, the Note states: 'The Church encourages the advancement of science, technology, the arts, and other forms of human endeavor, viewing them as part of the «collaboration of man and woman with God in perfecting the visible creation' [Note: No. 2]. This teaching, rooted in the Book of Genesis, seems obvious 60 years after Vatican II, but it needs to be reiterated, as there is no dearth of stereotypes claiming that the Church opposes progress. Meanwhile, the Church simply knows that not everything new is always better than the old, and that there exists false progress, which in the long run turns against man. That is why the Church keeps repeating that different forms of progress, or what seems like progress, need to be assessed from an anthropological and ethical perspective which places the true good of man and the human community at the centre. '[A]ll scientific and technological achievements are, ultimately, gifts from God' [Note: No. 37]; however, as human history teaches us, good things can be misused for evil purposes. Hence, spiritual masters such as Ignatius of Loyola teach us the principle of *tantum quantum*, that is, to use good things insofar as they serve us in achieving our ultimate goal (eternal communion with God and people), and to reject them insofar as they hinder us on our way to that goal. That we should reject bad things is obvious. In itself, artificial intelligence is something good. The problem is how to use it so that it helps us and does not harm us.

Antiqua et nova addresses the possible impact of AI on education, the economy and labour relations, healthcare, communication between people, and international relations. In each of these areas, it is not difficult to imagine how AI will accelerate real progress that serves humanity. Archbishop Carlo Maria Polvani, Secretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education and a co-author of the Note

Antiqua et nova, noted, for example, that there already exist hospitals that use AI to quickly diagnose cancer, thereby saving many people's lives. 'But we can also imagine a scenario where AI is used to determine which patients receive treatment first, without human or medical oversight. (…) We must ensure that AI does not exacerbate inequalities' [Allaire 2025]. The Note takes a critical stance towards the so-called technocratic paradigm, which leads to treating people as objects and commodifying reality through algorithms. AI can bring obvious benefits in the field of education but simultaneously poses serious dangers [Note: Nos. 31–84]. The main concern is that new technologies should not reduce teaching to the mere transfer of information, which moreover learners will not be able to grasp through critical thinking. After all, the teaching process is not only about transferring information, but also, if not primarily, about fostering personal development and building relationships. Yet, in schools and universities, a troubling question is increasingly emerging: how to structure various types of written assignments if AI can quickly write a better text than a student after many days of work? It is not sufficient to simply use software to check whether artificial intelligence has been used. More than ever, there is a need for mutual honesty and awareness that personal mental effort will simply pay off in the long run.

Other risks pointed out in the Note include, for example, the deskilling of employees, i.e. the loss of skills due to work automation, which will have negative psychological and social consequences [Note: No. 67]. Artificial intelligence can be used, and is already being used, to control, manipulate, misinform, distribute deepfakes, and violate privacy on a massive scale for political or business purposes, for example [Note: Nos. 85–94]. In this context, one can imagine a scenario where, as we read in the Note, control over AI would be held by a narrow global caste, and the rest of humanity would be increasingly subjugated to this group precisely through the application of artificial intelligence [Note: Nos. 52–53]. Certain visions of the use of AI in warfare are very disturbing. The Note mentions machines capable of killing autonomously, either in a precise manner or on a massive scale [Note: No. 101]. In this perspective, we must return to the appeal found in the Vatican II Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*: 'All these considerations compel us to undertake an evaluation of war with an entirely new attitude' [No. 80].

In the interview quoted above, Józef Kloch emphasises: 'It is not artificial intelligence that is dangerous, but the human being who misuses AI tools. Artificial intelligence has no intentions, no objectives whatsoever. The Vatican document [the Note *Antiqua et nova*] emphasises this point, and that is important' [Kloch

2025]. Some fear, however, that AI will develop to such an extent that it will begin to possess intentionality, self-awareness and its own goals, independent of man, which means that AI could act against humans. Such visions belong – for now – to the realm of science fiction. The actual threats do not stem from the intrinsic nature of AI, but from how humans may use it.

Conclusion: In anticipation of Leo XIV's encyclical

The idea of the development of artificial intelligence, especially in the context of radical transhumanism, provokes profound questions regarding the nature and future of man. Radical transhumanism proposes possibilities so far-reaching that they not only call into question human intelligence as a unique feature of *Homo sapiens* but even challenge the continued existence of humans in their traditional, biological form. In the face of such challenges, the Church's message about the inalienable dignity of human beings, shaped by the belief that they are created in the image and likeness of God and called to eternal life, takes on special significance and relevance. In this context, a philosophical discourse on intentionality – that is, the ability of consciousness to be oriented towards something, to possess meanings and purposes – may prove helpful. This intentionality testifies to a deeper quality of the human mind, which is not merely the sum of computational processes. In turn, the ethical dimension of human actions, rooted in values and norms, constitutes another level at which human intelligence has a direct bearing on responsibility and the meaning of life. These aspects remain beyond the reach of the exact sciences and even the greatest computing power. There is a lack of convincing arguments that could prove that in the future artificial intelligence would be able to entirely 'dethrone' human intelligence, understood not only as analytical ability, but also as the spiritual and moral wisdom of man. Thus, despite the rapid development of technology, the idea of man remains the foundation of all reflections, not only scientific, but also philosophical and theological, which allows us to maintain hope for the harmonious coexistence of reason, spirituality, and ethics on the path of the future of the development of humans and artificial intelligence.

Antiqua et nova is a pastoral and ethical document, but it simultaneously touches upon various dimensions and, as such, constitutes an invitation to broad interdisciplinary reflection. It is a kind of appeal to all people of good will, including AI specialists and people in power, to use new technologies responsibly, keeping in mind the common good. The Note does not demonise artificial intelligence, but neither does it idealise it. The Note reiterates in various ways that AI should be

a tool that supports humans, rather than pushing them out of various areas of life or even enslaving them through subordination to algorithms. Some critics note that the Note does not refer to contemporary achievements in cognitive science and the philosophy of mind, limiting itself to classical philosophy and theology. Furthermore, it does not contain any specific institutional or legal proposals that could regulate the development and application of AI. In response to this criticism, it should be pointed out that the Note is just that – a note – and does not claim to provide an exhaustive treatment of the subject of artificial intelligence. Nevertheless, it is a valuable, inspiring voice of the Church that welcomes further reflection. Pope Leo XIV, as we have noted at the outset, wants to take on this challenge.

Robert Prevost's previous statements on AI lead us to speculate on what the announced document will contain. Michał Kłosowski, among others, offered the following reflection: 'Francis, who in the final years of his pontificate began to raise issues of digital injustice and technological ethics, created the theological framework on which Leo XIV is now building. (…) Leo's main concern seems to be the displacement of man from the centre of moral decisions through technology. As AI becomes increasingly capable of making predictive decisions – from court rulings and recruitment to medical diagnoses and military targets – the question arises: who decides what is just, honest, and human? For algorithms not only replicate data but also operate on the basis of that data. If they are created without ethical oversight or with hidden biases, they become a tool of systemic exclusion rather than liberation. However, for Leo XIV, the problem is not that "machines think". His greater concern seems to be that people are forgetting how to feel. His vision of artificial intelligence is therefore not about stopping progress, but about averting ethical erosion' [Kłosowski 2025].

Bibliography

Abdelmoula-Viet D., Allaire D. (2025), 'Ekspert ds. AI: "Nadchodzi przewrót podobny do rewolucji przemysłowej"'), https://www.vaticannews.va/pl/swiat/news/2025-02/wspolautor-watykanskiego-dokumentu-nt-sztucznej-inteligencji.html (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Allaire D. (2025), 'AI will bring upheavals on scale comparable to Industrial Revolution', https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-02/interview-intelligence-artificial-ai-polvani.html (accessed: 19 September 2025).

Benanti P. (2025), *L'uomo è un algoritmo? Il senso dell'umano e l'intelligenza artificiale*, Lit Edizioni, Rome.

Biolo S. (1991), *Presentazione*, [in:] Biolo S. (ed.), *Intelligenza naturale e intelligenza artificiale*, Marietti, Genova.

Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Dicastery for Culture and Education (2025), *Antiqua et nova. Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence*, Vatican: vatican.va 28 January. Available at: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20250128_antiqua-et-nova_en.html (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Dyk W. (2014), *Mózg i umysł zwierząt*, "Colloquia Theologica Ottoniana", no. 2.

Garbowski M. (2015), 'Transhumanim. Geneza – założenia – krytyka', *Ethos* No. 3(111), https://czasopisma.kul.pl/ethos/article/view/5388 (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Gardner H. (2002), *Inteligencje wielorakie. Teoria w praktyce*, transl. by Andrzej Jankowski, Media Rodzina, Poznań.

Gosling D. S., John P. O. (1999), *Personality Dimensions in Nonhuman Animals: A Cross-Species Review*, "Current Directions in Psychological Science" No. 3, https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1999-08222-001 (accessed: 5 August 2025).

John Paul II (1979), Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis*, Vatican: vatican.va 4 March, available at: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Kloch J. (2025), *To nie sztuczna inteligencja jest niebezpieczna, tylko człowiek*, https://www.ekai.pl/ks-prof-kloch-to-nie-sztuczna-inteligencja-jest-niebezpieczna-tylko-czlowiek/ (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Kłosowski M. (2025), *Papież Leon XIV i dusza maszyny*, https://wszystkoconajwazniejsze.pl/michal-klosowski-papiez-leon-xiv-i-dusza-maszyny/ (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Krokos J. (2013), *Odsłanianie intencjonalności*, Liberi Libri, Warszawa.

Lejman J. (2013), *Filozoficzne źródła naszego stosunku do zwierząt. O aksjologicznym statusie zwierząt i ludzi*, "Ethos" no 2(102), https://czasopisma.kul.pl/index.php/ethos/article/view/5591 (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Leo XIV (2025a), *Message of Pope Leo XIV to Participants in the Second Annual Conference on Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Corporate Governance,* Vatican: vatican.va 20 June, available at: https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/pont-messages/2025/documents/20250617-messaggio-ia.html (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Leo XIV (2025b), *Messaggio del Santo Padre ai partecipanti alla Seconda Conferenza Annuale su Intelligenza Artificiale, Etica e Governance d'Impresa*, Vatican: vatican.va 20 June. Available at: https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2025/06/20/0426/00780.html (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Rada Społeczna przy Arcybiskupie Poznańskim [Social Council of the Archbishop of Poznań] (2022), *Oświadczenie Rady Społecznej przy Arcybiskupie Poznańskim – Transhumanizm a sztuczna inteligencja*, https://archpoznan.pl/pl/oswiadczenie-rady-spolecznej-przy-arcybiskupie-poznanskim-transhumanizm-a-sztuczna-inteligencja-9-09-2022 (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Oworuszko A. (2011), *Człowiek i jego miejsce w świecie według biblijnych opowiadań o stworzeniu z Rdz 1–2*, "Teologiczne Studia Siedleckie" No. VIII, https://bibliotekanauki.pl/articles/2054791 (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Parolin P. (2025), *Message of the Holy Father, signed by the Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, on the Occasion of the AI for Good Summit 2025*, Vatican: vatican.va 10 July, Available at: https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/pont-messages/2025/documents/20250708-messaggio-aiforgood-ginevra.html (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Pawlak F. A. (2022), *Ciało w dyskursach transhumanizmu i sztucznej inteligencji. Perspektywa antropologiczna*, Ph.D. dissertation, Uniwersytet Łódzki, Łódź, available at: https://www.wydzfilhist.uni.lodz.pl/fileadmin/Wydzialy/Wydzial_Filozoficzno-Historyczny/rozprawa_doktorska_A._Pawlak.pdf (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Piekarski M. (2015), *Czy pytanie o myślenie zwierząt jest pytaniem z zakresu etyki? Dyskusja na tle poglądów Kartezjusza*, "Przegląd Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria" No. 2(94), https://pf.uw.edu.pl/images/NUMERY_PDF/094/2-1514_Piekarski.pdf (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Redaelli R. (2024), *Dall'intenzionalità alla preterintenzionalità. Una riflessione sui sistemi intelligenti*, "Mechane" No. 7, https://mimesisjournals.com/ojs/index.php/mechane/article/view/4641 (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Searle J. R. (1983), *Intentionality. An essay in the philosophy of mind*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Vatican Council II (1965), Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, Vatican: vatican.va 7 December. Available at: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (accessed: 5 August 2025).

Wojtysiak J. (2015), *Czy zwierzęta mogą być religijne? O relacji: zwierzęta – człowiek – religia*, [in:] Gut A., Wróblewski Z. (eds), *W poszukiwaniu osobliwości natury ludzkiej*, KUL, Lublin.