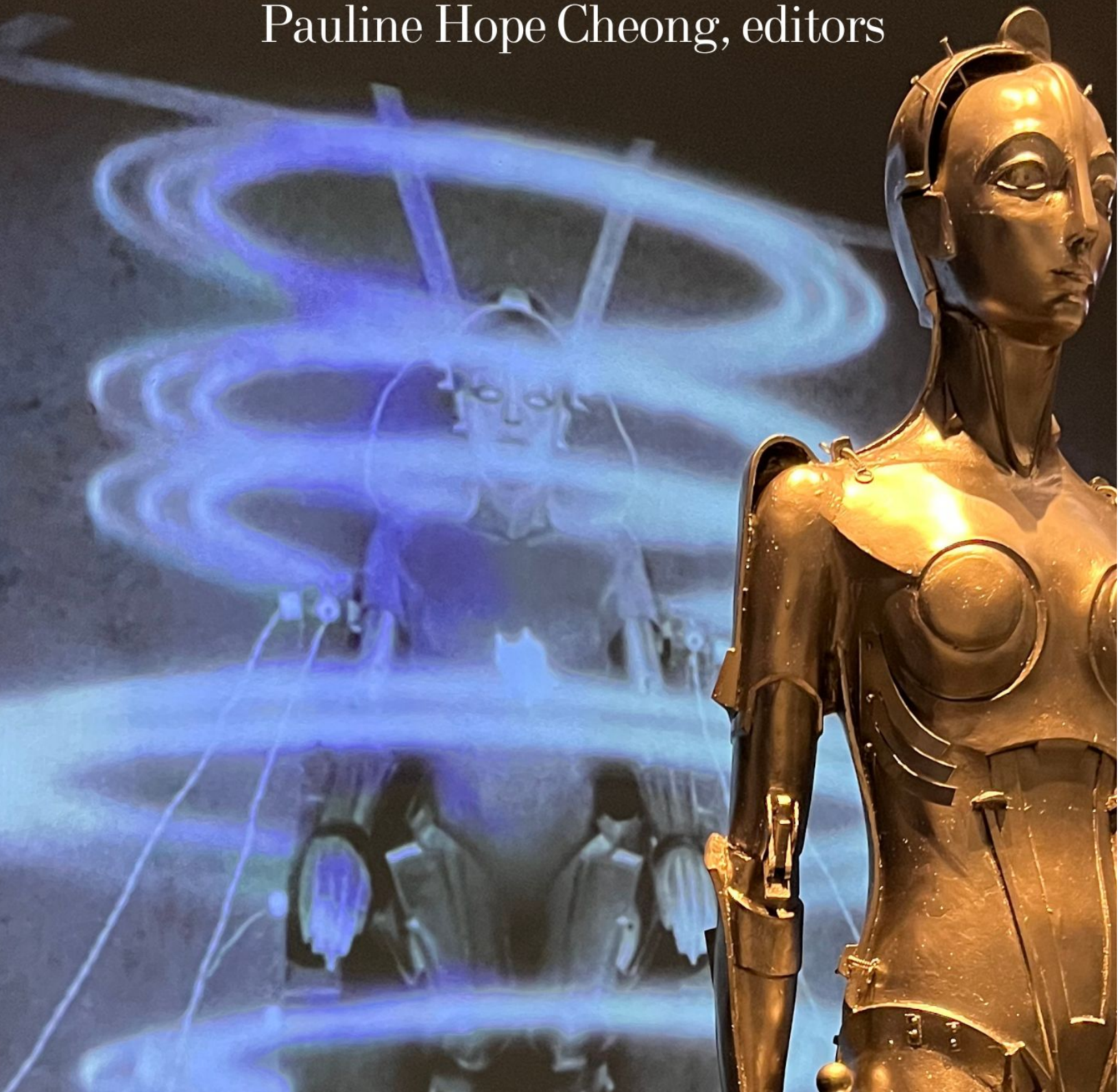


# Thinking Tools on AI, Religion & Culture

Heidi A Campbell &  
Pauline Hope Cheong, editors



*Thinking Tools on AI, Religion & Culture*

Edited by Heidi A Campbell & Pauline Hope Cheong

Editorial Assistance by Grayson Sparks

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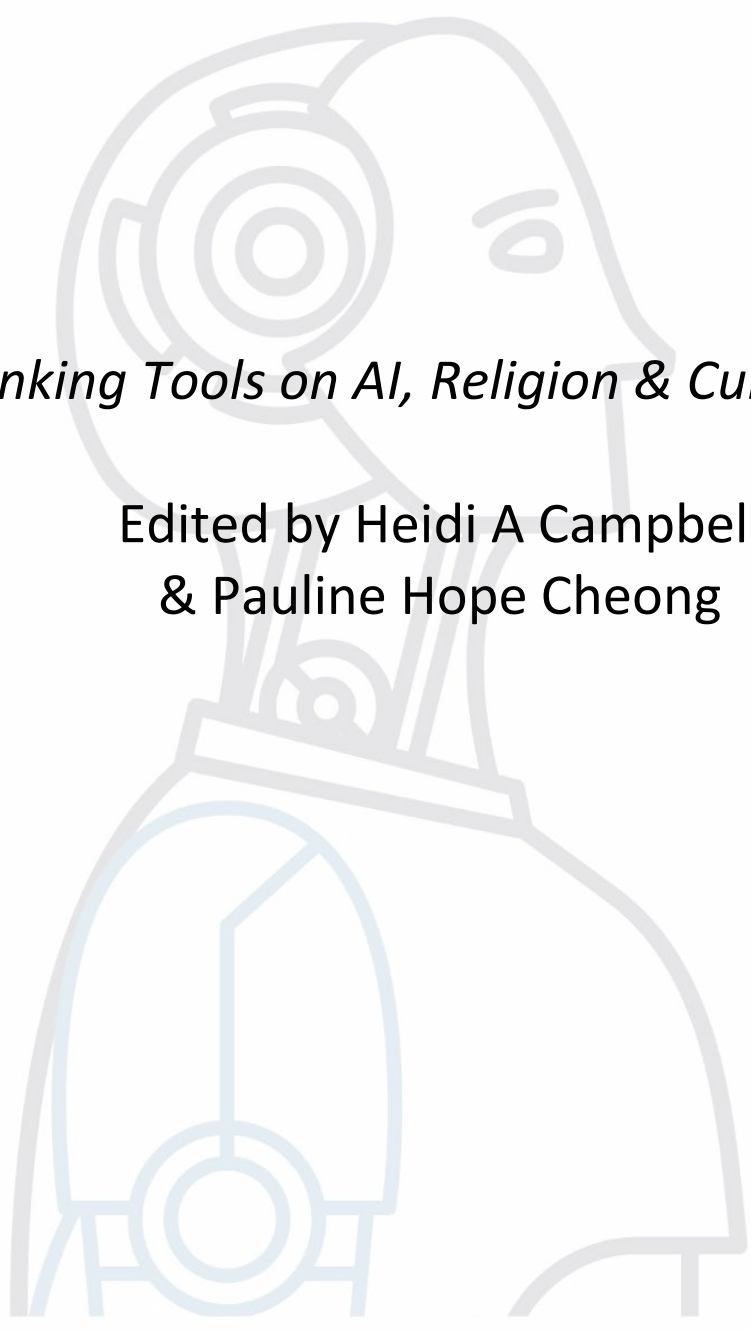


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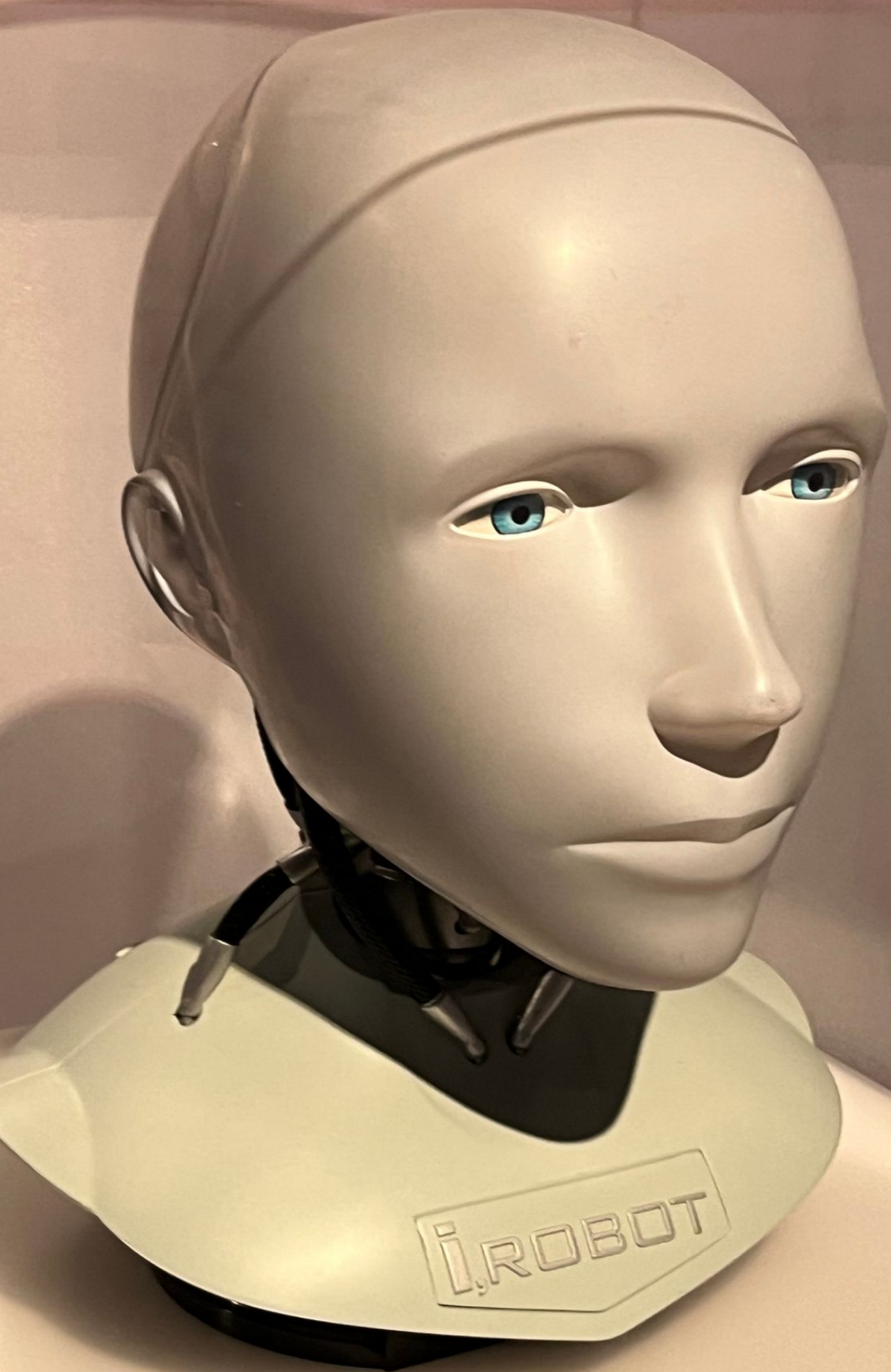
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Edited by Heidi A Campbell  
& Pauline Hope Cheong





# ***Thinking Tools on AI, Religion & Culture***

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**NO ARTIFICIAL  
INTELLIGENCE  
INCLUDED**





## INTRODUCTION TO THINKING TOOLS ON AI, RELIGION & CULTURE

**Heidi A Campbell & Pauline Hope Cheong**

In early May 2023, the internet was abuzz with the news that Dr. Geoffrey Hinton, described as the “godfather of AI,” had quit his job at Google. Why? The creator of the first computer neural net in 2012, had come to the conclusion that the current generation of artificial intelligence (AI) being developed at Google had crossed a line and now posed an “existential risk” to humanity due to its networked intelligence (Taylor & Hern, 2023). Hinton’s fears echoed those of Blake Lemonie, a senior software engineer at Google’s “Responsible A.I.” program, who was supposedly fired eight months prior for proclaiming the AI project he had been working on had become sentient (Tiku, 2022). The message communicated in both stories appeared similar. Google no longer had full control over the technology they were creating, and the individuals working closely with it voiced strong concerns.

Since then, a wave of apocalyptic predictions about AI and our human future has ensued, leading to the rise of many instant AI experts who have generated editorials, podcasts, and media interviews predicting the downfall of our human-centered world. Many of these reports and stories sounded like remixed plotlines from several decades of dystopian science fiction films, echoing Frankenstein’s monsters. This fear mongering made for extreme and attention-grabbing headlines, helping to fuel public panic about where this technology was leading humanity and speculation on when our machines would begin to dominate or exterminate humans.

Over the last three months, we have watched with great interest as public warning and distress heightened in both popular media and academic discourses regarding this technology. The worried voices stretch across a large spectrum of concerns from anxieties centering on artificial intelligence to broader fears about the impact of any emergent technology on society in general. We also noticed that the majority of the media discourse about AI within this moment primarily elevated the voices of white males, most of which came from alarmist perspectives and represented Western Eurocentric outlooks. Those individuals who sought to offer a more reflective ethical evaluation or optimistic perspective about AI typically stemmed from anti-religious, or religiously antagonistic, points of view.

As scholars who have both spent the last three decades of our careers studying the relationship between media, technology, religion, and culture, we were surprised at the lack of diversity in these public voices and the perspectives they offered. The conversation seemed to lack any measured and balanced outlooks on humanity’s future with AI. Rarely were any clear principles or concrete talking points suggesting where to begin a critical reflection on this technology offered. AI itself is a contested term, encompassing a suite of technologies such as machine learning, natural language processing, deep neural networks, and robotics. Through online conversations, several of us began to realize this was a Kairos moment for those who study

themes related to technology, ethics, and religion. We felt strongly that experienced and articulate female voices needed to be inserted into this conversation. We also saw the need to create a platform where these missing voices and perspectives could be spotlighted, leading to the creation of this eBook.

The aim of this book is to assemble a diverse group of female scholars able to offer thought-provoking, religiously-informed, and ethical responses about our relationship with AI. We have purposefully solicited a broad range of scholars, from Ph.D. students to Senior Professors, who come from a variety of academic disciplines (including Media Studies, Philosophy, Information Science, and Theology) to speak into this current moment. We also have been conscious in our selection to include voices from different countries (including Egypt, Germany, India, Kenya, Switzerland, United States & United Kingdom) and religious traditions (Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism). We recognize that even more standpoints could be included in such a conversation, but this is beyond the confines of this publication. By attempting to draw together a select breadth of female scholars from diverse global backgrounds and faiths, we aim to illuminate missing perspectives and broaden the current public conversations around AI.

This eBook is called “Thinking Tools for AI, Religion and Culture” because we seek to raise key ethical questions, suggest religious responses as options, and issue culturally informed provocations that are currently not part of most popular media discourse on AI. Contributors have been asked to offer a succinct reflection, between 500 to 1000 words, that ask questions and/or provide principles for evaluation about this technology, without simply and only criticizing AI.

Our hope is that this collection will enlighten the conversation surrounding AI by highlighting potential ethical considerations and introducing certain religious resources as well as cultural perspectives to aid in the discussion on how we should see and respond to the current generation of artificial intelligence. Through these short essays, we seek to offer a range of thoughtful responses that shed light beyond the extremes of fear or acceptance of our future with AI.

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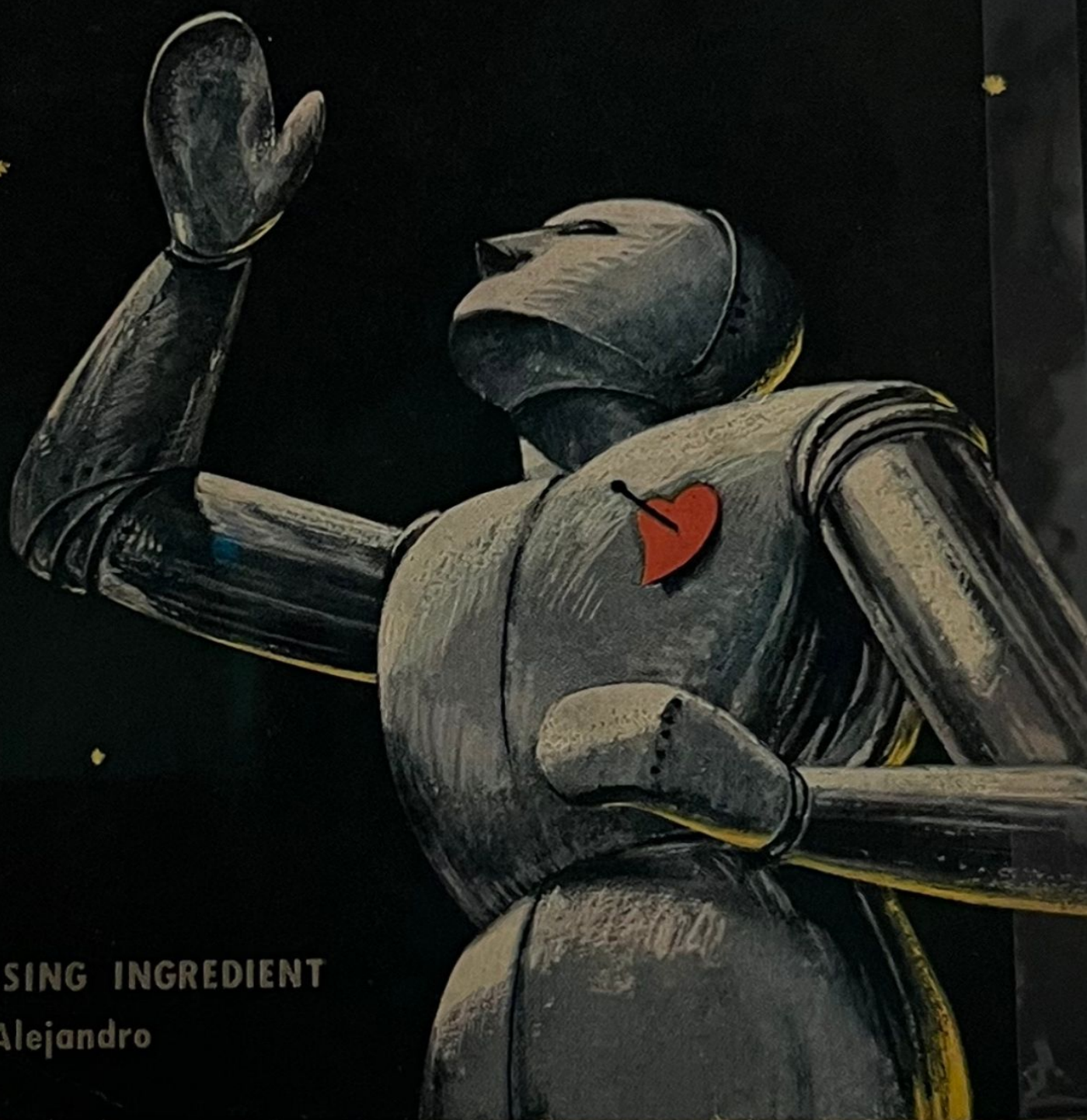
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# SCIENCE FICTION

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MISSING INGREDIENT

By Alejandro

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## How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Question the Apocalyptic AI

Beth Singler

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“Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war.”

A single sentence, but so full of apocalyptic portents.

This statement was published by the Center for AI Safety on 30th May 2023 as an open letter. It has since been signed by hundreds of prominent figures in AI, such as Sam Altman (CEO, OpenAI, creators of ChatGPT), Bill Gates (Founder of Microsoft), and Demis Hassabis (CEO, Google DeepMind). This statement has also garnered the attention of a public already wowed by the abilities of ChatGPT3 and its competitors, such as Bard and its Microsoft-produced ‘offspring’ Bing, which runs on ChatGPT4.

For decades, we have also been showered with press images of scary robots, like the T-800 model Terminator played in several films by Arnold Schwarzenegger, along with front page headlines about a forthcoming ‘robopocalypse’. Recent headlines include those in response to the open letter: “We’re in grave dangers unless boffs act now!” (Daily Star, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2023), “AI could wipe out Humanity!” (Daily Mail, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023), or “Two years to save the world says AI Advisor” (The Times, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2023).

Our knowledge about ‘existential risk’, the risk to the continuing existence of humanity posed by fully sentient ‘Artificial General Intelligence’ (or ‘superintelligence’, or the ‘Singularity’), is increasing as these prominent and charismatic voices dominate the conversation. But should we be afraid? What is the appropriate response to the doomsday prophets of AI? What tools do we have to deal with these accounts and face their consequences?

I propose that people interested in the history and nature of religion, as well as people of faith, are perhaps uniquely placed to recognize historical parallels and bring together the resources of sociological and anthropological theories, theological perspectives, and critical thinking, along with a deep understanding of the power of storytelling, to bear on these connected AI eschatological concerns to understand them and help others to do the same. As I also want to do here. Timnit Gebru and Émile Torres have called this bundle of associated ideas and communities TESCREAL (transhumanism, extropianism, singularitarianism, cosmism, Rationalism, Effective Altruism, and longtermism). But we might also think sociologically as well as descriptively about them and note a growing schism between ‘AI Risk’ and ‘AI Ethics’, many TESCREAL voices being a part of the former. The latter group argues that we should take a shorter-term view and recognize the very real risks of automated decision-making systems, algorithmic bias, misinformation, and ‘hallucinating’ AI chatbots, and the impact of automating

more and more of the tasks that make humans employable and give them an income to live on. Tensions between these two ways of responding to the mythological figure that is 'AI' have only become more pronounced since the above statement made its signatories more visible. Interviews with some signatories were derided by AI ethicists for ignoring their research on actual harms.

More and more, the conflict seems to parallel the divisions in some faiths between those working in the here and now with those focused on a coming age of tribulation, rapture, or a god's arrival. The dependence of Apocalyptic AI on older religious accounts for its language, shapes, and tropes, has long been discussed by religious studies scholars, and it only seems to be becoming increasingly pronounced. Now we see even the institutional and social aspects of intra- and inter-religious (verbal) violence being mimicked.

Theological perspectives also have a part to play. First, in recognizing existential risk as a more recent iteration of some of their own apocalyptic accounts and therefore subject to some of the same flaws—such as the tendency towards dominionistic readings of nature as both something granted and then as something taken for granted in apocalyptic times. This was illustrated when the Millerites turned from their farming and harvesting duties because of their expectation of the return of Jesus in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Second, in providing accounts of ways in which to create more reflective and responsible relationships with non-human others—be they angels, demons, animals, spirits, places, fairies, or otherwise. Third, to share their religious understanding of the spiritual and social contract that ties the faithful into doing good acts for their larger community.

Critical thinking in the age of generative AI is also essential. Blindly taking the word of a generative AI as the whole truth—or as 'the word of god'—will lead us into an era that is genuinely apocalyptic for information, honesty, and our ability to believe anything that we see or hear. Generative AI has the potential to become a further 'veil' between reality and our perceptions; it might craft a virtual world of simulations that we are all stuck in whether we have chosen to don the latest VR goggles or not. We must question what we are told, rather than presuming that because AI is a machine it is as rational and logical as some science fiction has told us.

Finally, we need to encourage understanding of the power of a story. The Existential Risk account of AI is a story that presents AI as a 'god-to-come'—one that can only be placated and controlled by certain voices. The same voices call for the regulation of AI under their own guidance and in such a way that the status quo of contemporary capitalism—the current value system of AI—cannot be upended. The story has many ways of ending, not just the one we are being told.

Literacy in the affective methods of storytelling needs to join with critical thinking, theological nous, and sociological frameworks, so we can understand this age of generative AI. These four skills will not only help us as we are being accelerated into whichever AI future wins, but they will also help to maintain what makes our human intelligence unique.





## **When Machines Need Humans: Considerations of religious human-machine Communication and bounded religious automation**

Pauline Hope Cheong  
Professor, Arizona State University

A glimpse into the future? I got an enticing appreciation about that with an annual robotics world championship. Last year, I accompanied one of my children to participate in a competition that brought together top student robotic teams around the globe. Amid thousands of youths and their guardians from multiple countries, one thing was clear. “The future is robots.” At least according to a slogan, emblazoned prominently on the event’s popular merch. Despite pleas to purchase the (rather overpriced event) apparel, I did not. To the event sponsors including the world’s biggest technology companies and branches of the military, I wanted to say, the future is also human.

Indeed, popular representations of AI have hyped intense and disruptive outcomes for human labor and leadership. For interdisciplinary communication scholars, technologically centered AI representations herald winds of change for the religious domain but eclipse its uneven, mixed and even paradoxical socio-cultural implications. More recent human-centered research has recognized the limits of relentless automation, where the focus of AI is to enhance and support “the human in the loop” rather than replace human capability.

It is necessary therefore, to think much more critically about the human encounters and struggles with AI, within the fray of religious hubs and emerging social robotics. As my research studies on technology and culture have shown, recent innovations in religious robotics underscore how bots can function as new religious communication agents (Cheong & Chen, 2023). As bots enlighten, model, and support religious instruction and experiences, AI-enabled interactions point to new ways and quandaries in which faith adherents construct meaning in lived religion. Here, I will highlight the significance of human communication and culture, spotlighting how the communicative constitution of religious authority should be carefully considered in AI debates.

The first consideration is what we might term ‘religious bounded automation’ (Cheong, 2022). AI technologies are not neutral or self-evidently beneficial for all constituents. Their development and deployment depend on socially and historically situated power, including the influence and interests of extant leadership and priestly bodies. Religious leadership enact their authority through communication, including religious human-machine communication. As such, emerging AI innovation should be contextualized within the politics of automation, like how stakeholders and elites order their interactions to promote and/or constrain distinctive facets of human-machine communication in rituals and routine operations.



Given the potentially wide-ranging applications of AI in the religious domain, various religious practices can be technically automatable, but human leadership determines where specific practices will indeed be automated and promoted with credibility. In turn, human decision-making about AI infrastructuring creates new kinds of dependencies and technological lock-ins, enmeshing religious groups in technical stacks of specific platforms, cloud computing services, data storage and analytics. Relatedly, the affordability of AI is a key concern for stakeholders. The first few prominent cases of religious robotics have not yet been mass marketed, or are prohibitively expensive for wide-scale replication. Mindar the Japanese robotic priest for instance, required a sizable investment of almost US \$1 million to develop (South China Morning Post, 2019, August 14).

Consequently, instead of treating the purported autonomy of spiritual robotics as a threat to existing faith communities and leadership, future research should contextualize robotics and emerging innovations in their broader, organizational use. Case-in-point necessitating a bounded religious automation approach, is the development of Xian'er the robot monk. Priestly authority was enacted to structure social robotics to reproduce particular spiritual values and cultural realities to sustain a large transnational community. Distinctive communication practices were enacted through discursive appeals, invocation, and multimedia branding to align AI development to institutional goals. In line with actor-network theory, pastoral authorities can serve as influential translator-spokespersons on what roles machinic agents ought to play, when congregants should turn to machines for guidance, and which groups gain power through AI applications. It follows that future research examines how human leadership can sensitize AI debates to strategic design that considers longer-term spiritual and labor implications, including the productivity paradox amid new imaginaries of use and situated contingencies.

The second consideration is what we think of as religious humans in the loop, with regard to AI training and data. Because modern AI is trained on crafted data examples, human feedback data, and raw web data, human judgment is still of paramount significance for the day-to-day performance of AI. The flip side is the shutdown of AI operations due to bias training data selection and omission. Thus, rather than erode traditional religious authority, the crafting of religious data by human programmers who invoke clergy instruction can reinforce the status quo and priestly credibility. For example, the striking response from Xian'er the robot monk when presented with challenging questions is "Wait, I will ask my Master" or "I need to check with my Master (Shifu)", thereby elevating the temple's lead priest as the moral authority.

Accordingly, another set of research imperatives arise when we consider how new modes of AI development can be robust and deferential. Future scholarship should attend to the roles and accomplishments of religious humans in the loop, particularly in the selection of AI training data, crafting of data examples, and the communication of feedback data. Taking into account human governance also brings us to consider how religious leaders act as regulators of AI in terms of how to harness AI for good, while keeping it safe and aligned with the ideals of religious community, fellowship and accountability.



The third point is a consideration for human stewardship and care. While AI technology is often advertised as frictionless automation, ground realities and maintenance of AI systems often entails messy work, requiring users to adapt to new verbal and visual interactions. As I have witnessed, the management of AI-enabled automation errors is often carried out by an entourage of human caretakers, when they keep religious robotics charged up, or intervene to rectify impairments when automation fails (e.g. attach a microphone to the robot monk to amplify its voice interactions). Human stewards also act as chaperones and gatekeepers, controlling access and interactions with religious robots in their exhibited spaces. Hence, future research could examine automation paradoxes and how human care practices mitigate AI communication and failures. Human labor may paradoxically intensify over time, with new robotic caretaking and maintenance duties.

In sum, the latest AI developments are riddled with potentially counterintuitive implications when machines need humans. It is timely to revive questions on how our religious human-machine communication will evolve, indexed by bounded automation interests and tensions. P/S: And if God is willing, I will attend world robotics events again, this time modeling a differently-worded customized message on my shirt.

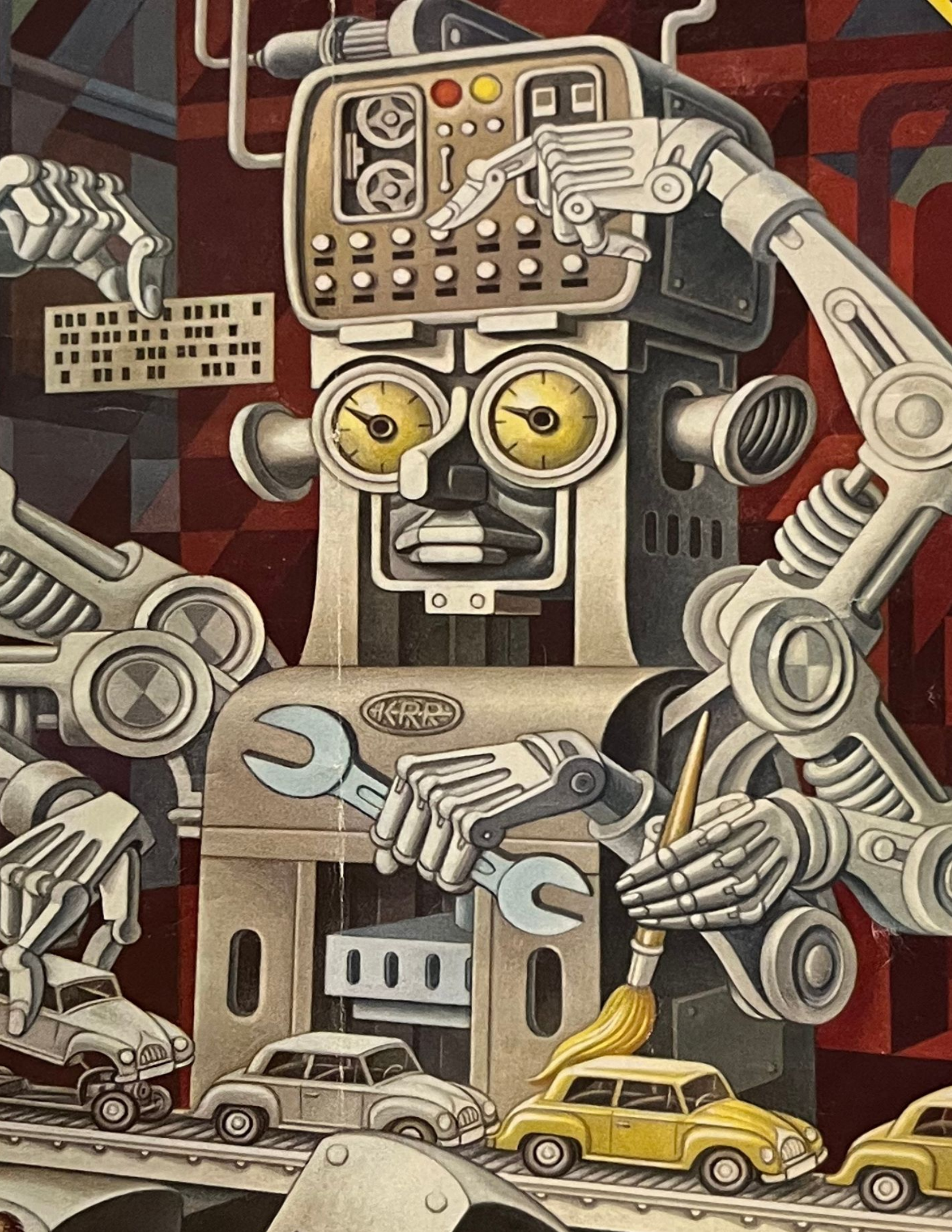
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## **AI in the Middle East: Balancing Cultural Identity, Gender Dynamics, and Religious Perspectives**

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and  
Reeham R. Mohammed  
Ph.D. Candidate, Arizona State University

The Middle East is a region known for its diverse and multifaceted cultures, each with its own unique beliefs, practices, and attitudes toward technology. Within this rich tapestry, the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) presents both opportunities and challenges. This essay aims to explore the intersection of AI with Middle Eastern cultures, considering concerns about cultural identity, gender dynamics, and religious perspectives, while also recognizing the region's potential for AI development and innovation.

### *Cultural Identity and Social Structures*

In Middle Eastern cultures, tradition, family, and community hold substantial significance, highlighting the importance of preserving cultural heritage. Nevertheless, the incorporation of AI technology can instill concerns regarding the potential erosion of these cherished values. The region highly values personal connections and the human touch in all aspects of life. Particularly in fields like healthcare and education, the integration of AI may be viewed as a potential threat. Embracing knowledge and guidance from machines presents a challenge to deeply ingrained cultural norms and the fundamental role of human interaction.

On the other hand, the Middle East has a history of embracing innovation and technological advancements, making it a fertile ground for AI development. Investing in AI research and development can enhance efficiency, improve services, and drive economic growth, aligning with the region's aspirations for progress and development. For example, AI is not seen as a mere luxury but rather a necessity in healthcare. It is not intended to replace physicians, but rather to assist them. By harnessing powerful algorithms, machine learning models, and vast amounts of data, AI technologies empower physicians by enabling rapid and accurate diagnoses. This helps to minimize human error and streamline the diagnostic process, ultimately improving patient care (Bell, 2023b).

### *Gender Dynamics and Inclusivity*

The field of computer science, both in the Middle East and globally, remains predominantly male-dominated. This underrepresentation of women affects the conceptualization of AI-related products and perpetuates gender stereotypes. An Egyptian comedy skit from the 1980s included a female robot that is characteristically given the role of a servant, similar to recent modern virtual assistants such as Siri and Alexa whose main job is to respond to orders (Dihal et al, 2021). Similarly, the Saudi robot Sara's main job is to perform dances and respond to



inquiries (Bell, 2023a). However, the first Arabic-speaking robot produced by the UAE is called “Ibn Sina,” named after the most famous polymaths of the region (Mavridis, 2009), is an embodiment of all the supposedly typical male characteristics, like strength of character and intelligence. Similarly, “Zaki,” which means “a smart male” in Arabic, is a chatbot used for banking services (Dihal et. al, 2021). Zaki here represents the widespread belief that males’ voices are more trustworthy, especially in the banking and financial sectors. This division of labor between male and female robots reflects a similar division between males and females in societies that are still primarily traditional in the way they treat women.

To foster inclusivity, it is crucial to address biases and ensure gender equality in AI development. Increasing the participation of women in computer science and involving diverse perspectives in AI design can mitigate gender disparities and promote female empowerment and gender inclusivity that challenges the current status quo towards more equitable and unbiased AI systems.

### *Religious Perspectives*

Religion plays a significant role in the Middle East and shapes attitudes toward AI. Islamic teachings encourage the pursuit of knowledge and the use of technology for the betterment of humanity, as long as ethical and moral boundaries are respected. While some religious aspects view the personification of AI as religiously forbidden because of historical contexts, Islam, as a whole, does not oppose technological development that aid people's lives.

Saudi Arabia has implemented the use of robots to assist visitors undertaking religious journeys to Mecca and Medina. These robots are specifically designed to offer guidance to pilgrims, providing instructions on ritual performance and offering legal advice for performing Umrah. Notably, the robots are programmed to communicate in 11 different languages, ensuring accessibility for a wide range of individuals. Leveraging extensive information from various books and insights from scholars across the Arab world, these robots serve as valuable sources of knowledge. Furthermore, additional robots were introduced including a sterilization robot for the Holy Masjids and another one that dispenses Zamzam water to pilgrims, further enhancing the efficiency and convenience of religious services (Al-Thaqafi, 2022).

Considering the prevalence of AI robots, it is important to consider responses on social media from people that expressed discontent with these robots being designed in the likeness of human beings. Such personification raises religious concerns. According to Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslims, there are Hadiths of the Prophet (PBUH) that prohibit the creation of human images and statues in Islam. These Hadiths convey that image makers are considered cursed and among the most reprehensible of creations. They will face severe punishment on the Day of Judgment, enduring it until they breathe life into their creations, which will be impossible for them to do (Hadeethenc, n.d.). Additionally, it is believed that angels do not enter houses containing statues, stemming from the historical context of the Mecca community during the time of the Prophet (PBUH), where worship of gods represented by statues around the Kaaba was prevalent.

Engaging in respectful dialogue will make it possible to find a balance between embracing technological advancements and preserving religious practices. The use of robots during Hajj to provide services and instructions demonstrates the acceptance of technology within religious rituals, showcasing the compatibility of AI with religious values when implemented thoughtfully.

As the Middle East moves forward, it must seize the opportunity to shape AI technologies in alignment with its unique cultural, gender, and religious contexts. By championing collaboration, openness, and the celebration of diversity, the region can establish itself as a global leader in responsible AI development, inspiring and influencing the trajectory of AI innovation worldwide.

The future of AI in the Middle East is brimming with possibilities. By navigating the challenges, embracing inclusivity, and leveraging its rich cultural and religious heritage, the region can forge a path that not only redefines the relationship between technology and society but also serves as a beacon of inspiration for the world. In this quest, the Middle East has the potential to unlock new frontiers of human-AI interaction and shape a future where technology becomes a catalyst for positive transformation in all aspects of life.

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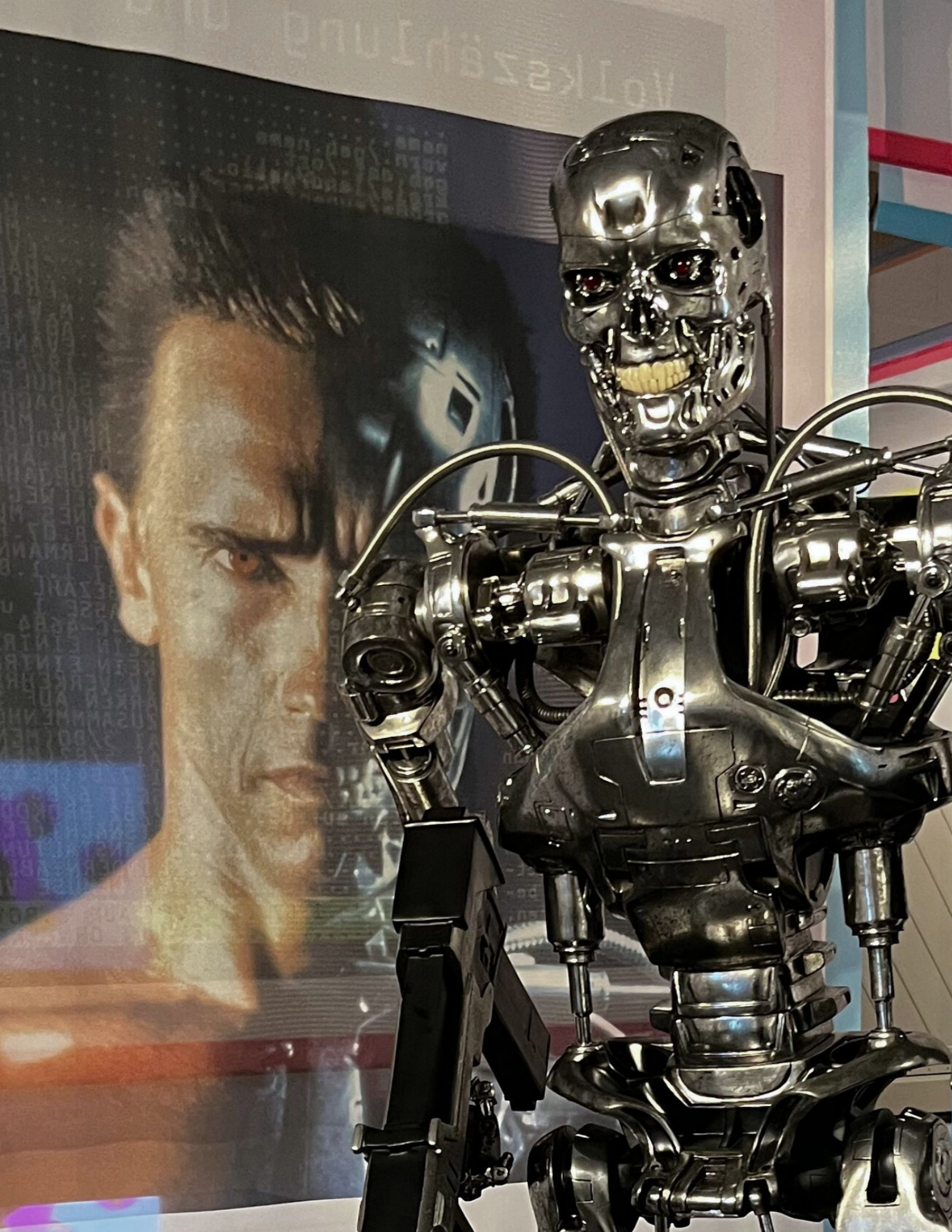
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## Evoking and Creating Theological Dialogue Around the AI-Nonhuman-Other for the Sake of Our Human-Technological Future

Heidi A Campbell  
Professor, Texas A&M University

In the early 2000s, I spent several summers doing postdoctoral research at Oxford University working on a project called “Religious Reflection on Postcyborg Ethics and Posthuman Worldviews.” I spent days in the Bodleian reading classics from the Philosophy of Technology by Martin Heidegger, Jacques Ellul, and Ivan Illich, alongside the work of Posthumanists like Nick Bostrom and Kevin Warwick. I used their work to try and get a handle on the links between historical debates about the nature of technology and current concerns about emerging biotechnical developments. During that time, I also discovered the work of Jewish philosopher and theologian Martin Buber, whose *I and Thou* (1937) made a strong impact on how I think about the relationship between humanity and technology.

In his work, Buber wrote about the “tyranny of the It,” meaning that society remains subject to the power and control of the “It” or the objectified. I later came to see his concept of the “It” as an objectified “other.” This I-It relationship is created when humans objectify something or someone as the ‘other,’ or those without equal standing. We see ourselves in a detached subject-to-object relationship, creating a power balance that stifles community building. The ‘It’ also can refer to the inanimate, technological objects in our life, which are increasingly anthropized by human users, as digital media is embedded in our everyday lives.

Buber contrasts this to the “I-Thou” relationship, or a subject-to-subject relationship, where humans build a relationship with one another based on mutuality. For me, this concisely summed up the innate distinction and dichotomy highlighted in most classic discussions about technology especially within the theology of technology. Humans are typically framed as “Thou” and technology as the “It,” creating a subject-to-object relationship. Most posthumanists actively challenged this position and suggest that as humanity and technology become closer, this dichotomy will one day become inaccurate or irrelevant. Some theologians use Buber’s work to argue that humans will always have an adversarial or detached relationship with technology.

And this I believe is problematic, and this tension is at the heart of current public discourse surrounding artificial intelligence, especially within a religious context. Much of the focus placed on having conversations about these AI devices, is based on an I-It relational framing. This has led to an ‘othering’ of our technology that disconnects them from the culture, creators, and corporations from which they emerge. Here, I want to briefly argue that what is needed is a decentering and reframing of the current public conversation about artificial intelligence, in order to:

- (a) unmask the I-It-ification of technological discourse,
- (b) make visible cultural the struggle that exists related to the use of theological or moral language and framing and the technological enterprise and
- (c) suggest a different approach, and add a new category to our conceptualizing of ethical discourse around AI in relation to the I-Thou relationship.

This short essay will not allow me to delve into all the nuances and issues that my argument will no doubt raise, but I want to suggest a few provocations for reflection.

It can be argued that the modern technological enterprise is based on several contentious moral values that drive much of the advancement of digital, mobile, and robotic technologies. At its root, is the idea that humanity is flawed and needs to be fixed or improved upon. This has shaped the technological industry around values such as efficiency, progress, and mastery. It is one based on individualism, over a communal mindset.

Where do these values come from? Well, the short answer is they are a product of the industrial revolution of the 1800s and were further refined and promoted by individuals like American inventor Henry Ford in his model of the assembly line plant. His ideology became known as Fordism, an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century manufacturing model that drove American technological expansion and production throughout World War I & II.

The Fordist model of production was based on three key traits:

- (1) the standardization of products,
- (2) the intensification of the labor process, and
- (3) the use of specialized equipment and assembly lines to increase productivity (Wanjiru 2015).

Standardization of products fuels streamlining and cost-effective production, promoting the value of **efficiency**. Intensification of labor, where work tasks were highly focused and broken down into individual actions, fueled the value of **individualism**. Specialized equipment and technology detached workers from the full production process, promoting constant improvement or the value of (economic & technological) **progress**.

So what does this have to do with AI and current concerns about its future advancements? Well, I argue, these values have created conceptual models and cultural beliefs that have become invisible and ingrained into Western beliefs about technology. In a *Guardian* interview in May 2023, Rumman Chowdhury, a Responsible AI fellow at Harvard, argued that the current AI ethical crisis is a clash of moral cultures. AI development is driven, not just by innovators who import and infuse their biases into the technological DNA of AI but is built upon a whole techno-cultural capitalist system that needs to be questioned. AI development is fueled by a culture that privileges the Fordist mindset and a production system that promotes I-IT relationships. Chowdhury argues that we have allowed the technological culture to engage in



“moral outsourcing”—deflecting and projecting moral decision-making to others outside the technological enterprise itself, creating these moral dilemmas.

Chowdhury argues that it is not too late to install a “mechanism of accountability” for the AI industry. Government regulations and oversight must be based on an I-Thou relationship, shifting concerns from the AI technology itself, to the corporations that are developing, selling, and profiting from it. She also states that the heart of the problem is a lack of moral and ethical accountability in companies’ design and production systems, with distorted internal risk analysis because they do not employ moral thinking and social impact mapping in their evaluation.

For me, this starts with pushing past the binary of the ‘I- It’, or the ‘I-It-ification’ of technology, and recognizes the need for a new category between the ‘It’ and the ‘Thou.’ This requires decentering how we currently talk about this technology. One option could be to describe AI as an intermediate nonhuman entity. The concept of the “nonhuman” is typically used to speak about animal intelligence or human-like traits, in which the nonhuman is seen as inferior. However, within posthuman discourse “nonhuman” is used to talk about humanity’s evolution toward a new technologized state of being. This is sometimes referred to as transhumanism, which presents humanity as a transitional form and evolving as it is enhanced by technology. Because transhumanism is such an ideologically-laden concept, as well as other in-between categories often suggested such as the automaton, cyborg, or avatar—it is no longer a neutral or useful alternative. A term like the intermediary or nonhuman other, however, could assist our ethical discussion and help us push past dichotomous utopian-dystopian predictions and debates about technology.

I recognize these ideas stray into contentious territory, especially regarding personhood, sentience, and AI. However, our only way to move forward is to engage in serious dialogue that pushes us beyond critical, dualistic belief of technology and instead creates conversations with the designers and owners of the “AI other”. We need to call for corporate accountability and start building I-Thou relationships with technologists to both gain understanding and force reflection on this technological trajectory. We need to stop vilifying the artifacts and start by identifying and addressing the enhanced-intermediary-nonhuman culture on which it is based.

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## Exploring the Intersection of AI, Religion, and Culture: Questions and Principles for Examination

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The convergence of AI, religion, and culture presents a compelling and complex field of study. As a religious practitioner entrusted with delivering sermons, my recent experience of seeking inspiration from artificial intelligence (AI) to assist in sermon preparation has ignited a curiosity to explore the larger implications of AI on religion, culture, and the very essence of human existence. The practical implications of AI tools within religious contexts are noteworthy, as they offer the potential to enhance religious experiences, save time, and gain deeper insights into abstract concepts (Bettiza, 2021; Bhuiyan, 2023). However, it is crucial to critically examine how AI is integrated into diverse cultural frameworks. This examination requires assessing its adoption, adaptation, and subsequent impact on cultural practices, preservation, and innovation (Burrows, 2021). The introduction of AI brings forth a myriad of challenges and opportunities that demand careful consideration (UNESCO, 2023).

A crucial aspect that distinguishes humans from AI is the capacity for passion, empathy, and emotional connection (Anderson & Rainie, 2018). Humans are endowed with a unique ability to experience and express emotions, which play a significant role in religious and cultural practices. The depth of human experience, characterized by compassion, love, and devotion, cannot be replicated or replaced by AI (Avisé & Ayala, 2010). In religious settings, the presence of a human minister, preacher, or religious leader holds immense value. The interpersonal connection, empathetic response, and emotional resonance that human interaction provides cannot be replicated by AI (Lennox, 2020).

Furthermore, the act of worship and communal gatherings hold deep significance for religious communities. The physical presence of individuals, their shared experiences, and the collective energy generated in these spaces are irreplaceable. Technological advancements may offer virtual or augmented reality experiences, but they cannot fully replicate the authentic sense of community and sacredness that arise from physically being together (Payne, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that despite its remarkable capabilities, AI cannot substitute for human presence in religious and cultural contexts.

The impact of AI extends beyond individual beliefs and practices to shape religious communities and social dynamics. It raises profound questions about communal identity, religious authority structures, and power distribution within religious institutions (Ashraf, 2021). The role of AI in information dissemination and social media algorithms has significant implications for interfaith dialogue, religious pluralism, and online religious communities. Exploring the effects of AI on these communal dynamics deepens our understanding of the complex interplay between technology, religion, and culture (Vestrucci et al., 2021).

This essay raises pertinent questions that warrant further exploration and scholarly investigation. How can AI technology be harnessed to foster interfaith dialogue, understanding, and collaboration among diverse religious communities? To answer this question, I perceive how AI can be used to power language translation. This will facilitate communication between different people across different religious backgrounds and bridge any form of language barrier. For instance, the YouVersion Bible is a great tool with different language translations that help to reach different people all over the world.

What are the effects of integrating AI into religious rituals and practices on their authenticity, meaning, and communal experiences? Integrating AI virtual assistants in virtual religious communities allows simulation in leadership, guidance, and prayer. For instance, with the use of AI virtual assistance, religious communities engage in online prayer sessions with individuals; receive personalized spiritual advice; and participate in virtual religious rituals like paying tithes. This aims to foster a sense of belonging and support for those unable to attend physical religious gatherings.

Lastly, what values, beliefs, and ethical frameworks should guide AI development to align with diverse cultural and religious values? Developing and using AI should prioritize privacy, autonomy and preserve societal values. For online health care, for instance, there is a need to ensure that AI adheres to cultural and religious beliefs regarding medical treatment, handling personal information, and end-of-life care.

By adhering to these principles and pursuing further research, we can better navigate the intricate intersection of AI, religion, and culture, enabling us to harness the transformative potential of AI while honoring the values and beliefs that shape our diverse religious and cultural landscapes.

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## AI and Religion: The Voice of God in Everyday Life

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*“Lo Bashamayim Hi”* (Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 59, loose translation: “Look not to the Heavens”)

This essay examines how current moral panic around Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a continuation of the post-secular world, in which humans constantly enchant the world around them. Beth Singler, analyzing AI-created memes posted in 2020, argues that AI meme creation highlights “religious continuities and resonances” (Singler, 2020, p. 14). Following Habermas (2008) and Josephson-Storm (2017), Singler shows how even in secular, scientific, and technologically-based societies, enchantment is an active way humans use to engage and understand their surroundings. Even if we hold that Western society has gone through a time of disenchantment, Delio (2020) argues that AI and other digital media have helped us re-enchant our lives, an argument that I have also made (Tsuria, 2021).

But the AI that Singler and Delio explore is different from the generative AI which made headlines in 2022. OpenAI, ChatGPT, and other post-2022 AI tools have made AI more accessible and visible to the average user. As a result, utopian and dystopian narratives about generative AI have been circulating in news outlets, education systems, and daily conversations. In these narratives, AI is imagined to be a type of collective or collaborative intelligence (Wilson & Daugherty, 2018), or as one thinker suggested, “some people will come to see AI as a higher power.” (McArthur, 2023)

Which type of higher power, or God, is presented in AI? According to McArthur, AI will display divine-like qualities because it has limitless intelligence, does not have human needs (like hunger), can offer guidance, and is immortal. However, unlike other gods that have created humans in their image, the AI “god” is created in our image. That is, generative AI is able to “offer guidance,” knowledge, and creativity based on the human input posted online. OpenAI uses existing, internet-based, datasets to generate its responses. In other words, OpenAI does not really represent the voice of “God,” but rather the opinion, facts, and knowledge created by anybody and everybody online. As such, it can be imagined as a type of collective intelligence that is based on online-archived human knowledge and creativity.

That said, the AI tools of 2023 give the feeling of a personified, omnipresent divine voice. For example, Microsoft has recently embedded generative AI in Bing, its search engine. In the “old” search browser, if one was to look for an AI policy for University classrooms, the outcome would be multiple results from different perspectives. In the AI-assisted search browser, only one voice is heard, and the result seems to appear “out of thin air.” While Bing’s AI is careful to include various sources in its answer, the answer still “arrives” from one chat box or one voice.

Because this voice has access to a huge dataset, it seems omniscient. Its conversation-based coding makes it seem personified. It engages the user and asks the user more detailed questions, which most other search engines cannot do. These technological affordances allow us to imagine AI as an all-knowing voice of truth.

So how should we understand this voice? I suggest we borrow from the Jewish tradition's understanding of *Bat Kol* or *The Voice of God*.

A famous story in the Talmud describes a situation in which two rabbis are engaged in a heated debate. Suddenly, the voice of God comes out of the sky and exclaims that one of them is correct. The other rabbi, who represents the majority opinion on this issue, turns back to the voice of God and simply says "*Lo Bashamayim Hi*" – meaning, it is not God's issue to determine, but humans. These rabbis take a critical approach to the omniscient voice and negate it based on logic and democratic processes. Similarly, I suggest that we engage AI critically, and understand the domains in which it can help and what domains are 'human.'

The religious traditions that enchanted the world, also have structures built in them to criticize and negotiate with the world – and even with "God" itself. Similarly, I suggest that even if we understand AI as an enchanted, divine-like power, we must critically engage with it by examining its answers, assumptions, and contexts. By combining human judgment with the usefulness of AI power, we can continue to advance human knowledge and exploration. However, if we take AI at face value and see it as an omniscient power, we will stagger our ability to think and analyze information in a careful way.

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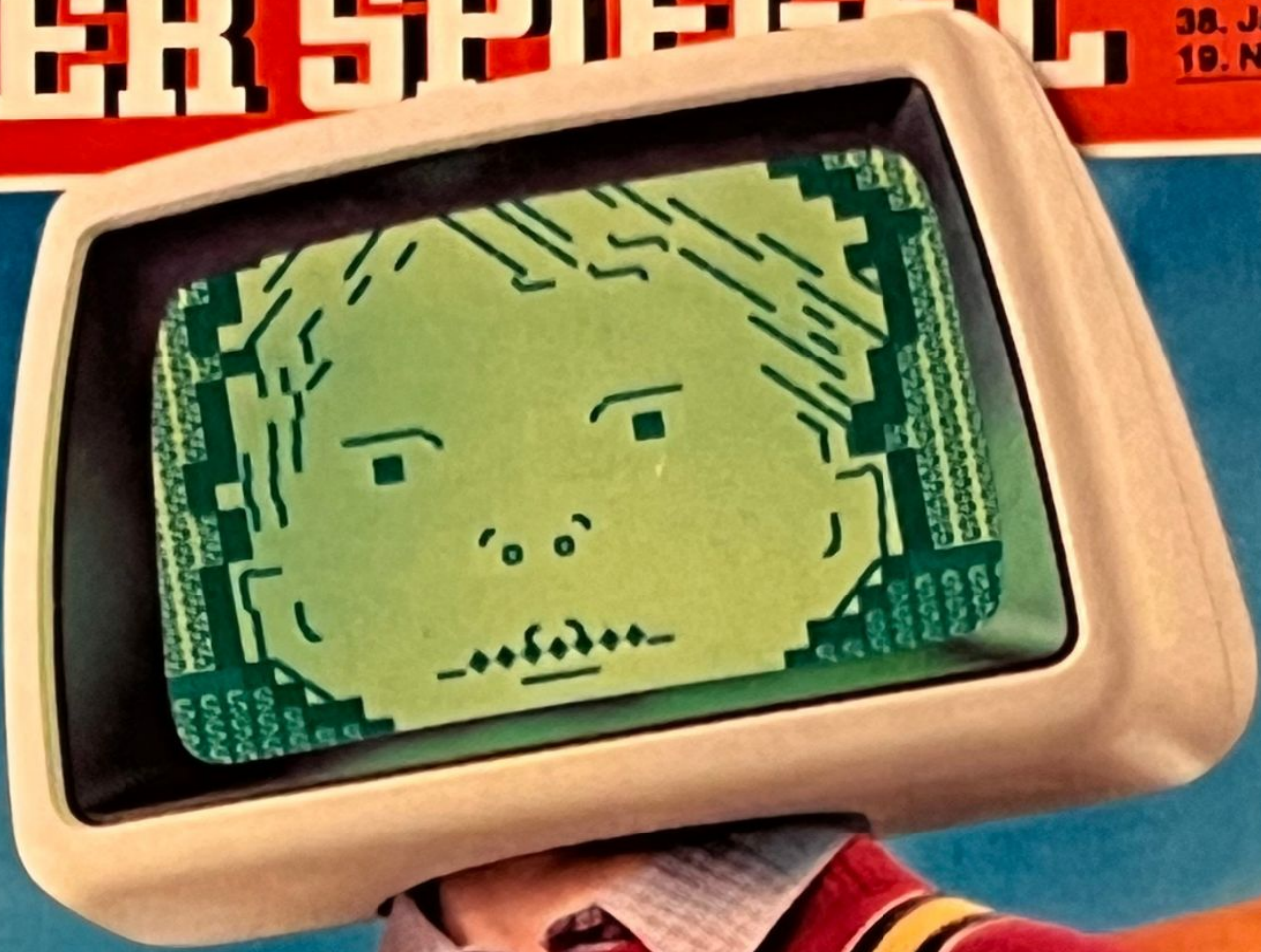
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# REVOLUTION IM UNTERRICHT

Computer wird Pflicht

## AI & the Historical Intractability of Human

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The most pressing ethical concern in relation to artificial intelligence is the historical intractability of the dominant definition of *human*.

Digital technological design and use prioritize a presumed objective consumption and collection of information while also promoting the stereotypical deployment of gender and biases toward language and visuals that promote white, English-speaking power structures. As a Christian and a feminist ethicist, I am keenly aware that these priorities are oddly akin to historical Christian practices that perpetuate injustice (Ott, 2019).

As Christian colonial endeavors developed into a dominant global force, leadership sought to perpetuate dualistic gender and racialized moral categories enforcing what would count as human and ultimately as a citizen. White, Euro-American Christian men used language and imagery to promote their culturally constructed dominance through a white, male, omniscient (surveilling) God who favored rational moral decision-making and individualism, bestowed economic prosperity as a maker of moral superiority, and gave the mandate to subdue the natural world including animals and those determined to be animalistic (Jennings, 2010). Male became synonymous with *human*, as did whiteness, land owner, educated, independent, and Christian. This is not to say that other religions have not influenced the definition of human or do not have their own versions of patriarchal, class, or intellectual bias (Wilcox, 2021). And, yet, what constitutes *human* is a normative ideal with deep religious roots, overwhelmingly determined by white Christianity's colonial history (Butler, 2022).

To recognize the inherent power of this normative ideal, consider the following activist slogans: women's rights are human rights and Black lives matter. Human rights were defined on a male ideal and often do not easily extend to female reproductive health. Statistics on discrimination show that globally those with the darkest skin pigmentation experience disproportionate systemic violence and discrimination across a variety of social factors like housing, employment, policing, education, and health (United Nations). The claim that all lives matter is a truth that holds a lie. The secret upon which this view of the *human* is constructed is that few, if any, achieve this ideal. The importance of dismantling this normative human ideal *and* abandoning the project of any normative human construction is of paramount importance, given that AI is overly determined by this notion of *human* on informational, formational, and transformational levels.

*Information.* Much has been written about trends in machine learning that reinforce stereotypes based on the biases present in data sets. Biometric failure and algorithmic bias have led to discrimination in judicial sentencing practices, border security practices,



neighborhood surveillance programs, disease diagnosis, and speech and image recognition (Magnet, 2011; Benjamin, 2019). I don't believe most designers and programmers intend a biased outcome. And yet, underlying assumptions related to the normative human influence concepts of learning. Learning has historically been defined as objectively processing information, rooted in a rationalistic and independent learner's mind. The learner, in a banking model of education, receives information. This is indoctrination, not learning. Learning requires praxis, emotion, critique, and contextual awareness (Hess, 2005; McLaren & Petar, 2020). A variety of designers have made a turn to affective computing to integrate emotional intelligence into machine learning (Affectiva). Diverse teams of programmers would be better able to determine biases present in data sources and explore ways to design AI that accounts for the historical and present context of the information and user interactions.

*Formation.* The normative human ideal thrives on the erasure of its historical construction and myopic anthropocentrism. AI, through a surge of social robotics and deployment of language learning software, encourages human users' predisposition to anthropomorphize everything bringing with its hierarchies of classification. For example, feminine gendered voices given to AI chatbots signal servitude and politeness, and robotic tasks like vacuuming lead users to gender objects with no other audio or visual gender cues (Marchetti-Bowick, 2009). The social-shaping effects of AI often reinforce normative standards of gender and race, especially in robotics (Weßel et al., 2021). The morally deforming aspects of digital interactions are privatized as users interact with AI through an individualistic paradigm, yet another aspect of the normative ideal. The individualization of technological interaction makes it difficult to encourage productive societal-level responses to the discrimination that AI exacerbates. When I remind my family that Alexa is not female and its politeness is reinforcing gender biases, my individual contextual disruption does little to change the massive gendered impact of smart assistants or future workforce and household implications for replacing equality-seeking women with docile, feminized robots (Kumar et al., 2022).

*Transformation.* The ways individuals are morally formed through their interactions with and reactions to technology are critical (Benjamin, 2022). However, the oppressive impact of the normative ideal human is not primarily an individual issue. Transformation requires dismantling the social systems upon which that ideal has been constructed and perpetuated through large-scale design and deployment of technologies. Change, especially in relation to AI, needs to happen on the level of government regulation, corporate accountability, and communal user social action (Siddartha et al., 2022).

What if a robust notion of community (nature, built environment, people, animals, etc.) rather than *human* was the starting point for defining rights and regulations? This shifts power and agency from individual human actors to approaches of shared responsibility, accountability, and distributive and composite understandings of agency (Nissenbaum, 1996; Zylinska, 2009; Gunkel, 2012). This approach decenters the normative human in order to account for the diversity of animals (including people), nature, and machines, without negating an anthropocentric planetary impact (Darling, 2021). Imagine ethically evaluating AI, from dating apps to ChatGPT to autonomous drone weapons, based on its contribution to and influence on

ecologies of community, planetary flourishing, and the unique particularities of diverse people. Commitment to such change is dependent on confronting religious, specifically Christian, oppressions woven into social systems in tandem with the renewal of a diverse, collective moral imagination.

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## Artificial Intelligence Meets ‘The Three Teachings’: Chinese and Buddhist Perspectives

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The essay collection titled *Zhineng yu zhihui: rengong zhineng yujian Zhongguo zhexuejia* 智能與智慧：人工智能遇見中國哲學家 (Intelligence and Wisdom: Artificial Intelligence meets Chinese Philosophers), edited by Song Bing 宋冰 and published in 2020, gathers reflections on the compatibilities between AI and the core doctrine of the so-called ‘three teachings (*sanjiao* 三教), namely Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. An abridged, English version was published later in the same year, with mostly Chinese intellectuals and a few Western scholars of Chinese culture as authors. This volume represents the first result of several academic colloquia, held at the Berggruen Institute at Beijing University, about the rising presence and adoption of AI, the impact of this phenomenon on human individuals and the large (Chinese) society, evolving dynamics between humans and machines, and a framework for more sensitive interactions between humans and AI for a sustainable future. The argumentations are based on Chinese philosophical perspectives and can be taken as representative Chinese voices on the subject.

Interestingly, the introduction to the entire volume, which compares Western and Chinese cultural views on the adoption of AI, highlights similarities and especially differences between the two approaches and concludes with the underlying argument that Chinese philosophies are more inclined to welcome and integrate novelties, such as AI, than Western cultural systems. Although we can read nationalistic tones in the comparison, the discussion is based on key features of classical Chinese thought that, at least in theory, suggests a less negative view of AI in the human world. Confucian and Daoist scriptures are used throughout the volume, and a strong reference is also made to the classic *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes).

Three main principles seem to recur in several chapters of the edited volume and in the conferences on the same subject. First, the Chinese non-dualistic worldview, in which, Confucian (and Chinese culture) are inclusive rather than exclusive. The concept of a ‘One World Philosophy’ welcomes AI more than other worldviews and explains why a cosmic ethics, comprehensive of specific AI ethics, is more sensitive than anthropocentric human ethics. The Second principle is the non-anthropocentrism that characterizes Chinese philosophy and culture. And third, the principle of continuous change, for which the process of ‘becoming’ has priority over any static ‘being’ and substantial changes are seen not just as inevitable but also beneficial when used to the advantage of the entire community. Keywords such as ‘relationality’ and ‘harmony’ are used to justify a more constructive view and inclusion of AI in our human society, without falling prey to the fear of dystopia. Still, the question of the impact of a possible AI that is conscious and ‘feels’ like a human remains unsolved. There are also pending uncertainties on whether AI could learn human values and respect life or how future

humanity could, in practice, maintain traditional human values and nature while integrating AI into their lives.

Buddhism is more than a Chinese tradition, which is probably why the scholarship on Buddhism and AI is more substantial and varied than the other two teachings. Robotic monks (like Pepper in Japan, and Xian'er 賢二 at the Longquan Temple 龍泉寺 in Beijing, China) and deities (see Mindar, the android Kannon in Japan) are becoming more and more popular in East Asia, creating the emergence of a sort of 'Buddhist AI' in local creative arts. East Asian Buddhist and non-religious spheres have reacted very differently when facing this recent development. Already at the end of the twentieth century, Japanese intellectual Masahiro Mori (1999), in his discussion on the ontological identity of human beings and machines, argued that Buddha nature is present in any entity within the entire universe, including AI. Similarly, long-standing Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings such as 'emptiness' could also suggest a sort of equality between sentient beings and AI, while the principle of *upāya* (skillful means) could support the adoption of AI in our society.

Moreover, AI is seen in a form that is purer and less affected by defilements than human beings, meaning it is technically in a better position to preach, practice, or even reach the final goal of Enlightenment. On the other hand, several members of the Chinese monastic community strongly disagree that AI has, or will ever have, the levels of consciousness that characterize humans. Abhidharma and Yogācāra especially describe AI merely as inert – but skillfully useful – machines under human control. The possibility of machines that are initially created by humans but that eventually become independent and freed from human control and agency is experienced with extreme fear. This is readily seen in the episode *Chunsangui Pijomul (The Heavenly Creature)*, which is part of the 2012 Korean science-fiction anthology *Inryu Myeongmang Bogoseo (Doomsday Book)* directed by Kim Jee-woon and Yim Pil-sung.

Travagnin (2020) has expanded on these points in her study of Xian'er. The Chinese three teachings seem open to a more nuanced approach to the co-existence with – and adoption of – AI, advancing the possibility of ethical sustainability and a harmonious future, and proposing the view of a potential cosmic ethics that transcends human ethics and is comprehensive of AI ethics. The creation of the android version of the Confucian literati Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529), which is displayed in Guiyang 貴陽, and of the Chinese Buddhist robot-monk Xian'er, could both be read within the context of 'Made in China 2025' (*Zhongguo zhizao 2025* 中國制造2025), the Chinese long-term governmental plan of strategic initiatives, and of the Chinese aspirations to excel, globally, in the field of artificial intelligence. A plan in which every sector of culture, from calligraphy and poetry to religion and literature, seems to participate. In other words, the interaction between religion and AI in China, including the Buddhist contribution to it, aligns with the local process of modernization. This is a modernization *à la chinoise*, in which the passing of time is not seen as linear but as circular. The new does not take the place of the old and the traditional but merges with it, because, as the symbol of the *dao* 道 itself informs us, it is in the harmonious and balanced union of differences that completeness is achieved.



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## The Appreciation of “Things” in an Ambiguous World: On AI & Religion

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*The relationship between technology or AI and life-world in theological terms*

The greatly contrasting salvation and disaster scenarios with which AI is associated are expressions of a mythical view of the world in a struggle between good and evil. AI symbolized in the android robot, becomes the enemy of man, the Terminator, heralding the end of human civilization. Where such a worldview dominates, the task of education becomes crystal clear: it must not only defend the differentiations which always become visible when teaching how to deal with and learn about intelligent technology; it must also help people to see technology as an institution integral to a common life-world. Many people already do this anyway, but usually not explicitly and rather half-heartedly. This is shown by their close relationships to technical objects such as, above all, the smartphone. Instead of assessing its possibilities and risks realistically, they often either devalue them or exaggerate them: either smartphones are the work of the devil, or we can no longer live without them. Technology is thus ascribed to its own independent power. Then, and here Hinton sends his regards, people say that AI could become more intelligent than humans. But as far back as the chess computer it was clear that man had created a machine superior to himself in a specific sense, and yet hardly superior in the primary sense. Why? Is developing an attitude of partnership, maybe even of caring, towards technology inconceivable?

Since technology belongs to our common world, says Corine Peluchon (2021), we must know it well, respect it and pay attention to what we are doing when we use it. Things and machines are not mere means: each has its own value, not dependent solely on the use we make of it, and each connects us to others, especially to those who invented, developed, and produced it. She pleads for a conscious appreciation of technology, which also guides us to look more closely at which technology we need to install and which not. "If we value technical devices like the food that sustains us, that shapes us, and that we shape in turn, then they become individualized without being personified, and we have to take care of them because they are as much a part of the common world as our natural and cultural heritage." Of course, we in the industrialized nations had forgotten to value our food and its production, to put it kindly, but hopefully, this will continue to change radically. Initially, however, this new attitude will make it possible to look more closely at the functions and purposes of technology, to build up a relationship of trust on the basis of precise knowledge, and to identify and declare as such any technologies which are in a grey area or clearly detrimental to life, as well as to limit and stop their development and use. Moving in this direction means ethically refilling the concept of responsibility with content. This happens when making specific trade-offs becomes routine.

Another ethical principle becomes visible when the limits of AI are discussed because the potential to work within them is seen: "Even with the best data, the future can only be



predicted if it is a linear projection of the past and present. If everything changes, then even algorithms are at a loss, or this is how Ramage sees it. We would be forced to resort to the core competence of human intelligence: figuring out what to do when we don't know what to do." AI cannot relieve us of thinking or empathy or decision-making in its truest sense. It does not help to consider English-speaking and Asian cultures, for example, as more technology-friendly and German-speaking cultures as more technology-critical. AI possesses neither the power of doom nor the power of salvation. May I speak theologically? As long as the Kingdom of God has not achieved perfection, we will live in a realm of ambiguities. In the last century, before the development of AI, German-American systematic theologian Paul Tillich stated: "Technology has reshaped the world, and this reshaped world is our world and no other ... [we, I.N.] must incorporate technology more than ever into the ultimate meaning of life, knowing well: if it is divine, if it creates, if it liberates, then it is also demonic, it subjugates, it destroys. It is ambiguous, like everything else which exists; not more ambiguous than the pure spirit, not more ambiguous than nature, but just the same. It too, the liberating, requires liberation ..." Those who argue dualistically with regard to AI speak mythically, and that is justified when it comes to existential questions. But 'mythos' and 'logos' belong together: it is a matter of finding an attitude towards technology that recognizes the human tendency towards mythos, and yet at the same time also knows how to break it, so that thinking, feeling, and acting beyond the 'mysterium tremendum et fascinans' [mystery that attracts] set in.

#### *Thinking about use of AI in the field of religion: Risks and opportunities*

It may be assumed that many AI applications will be usable in Christian religious communities in the foreseeable future: the church spheres of worship, pastoral care, education, and welfare/diaconia can be thought through on this basis. Two examples: If AI is used as an intelligent learning diary for the design and evaluation of projects in the pastorate or parish ministry as a whole, it can basically - as one conceivable variant - function like self-organized supervision. In line with the above, specific questions now arise: What are the risks and chances in developing such an AI, and who can use it under which conditions and for what purposes? The second example relates to an even broader task. It concerns decisions about the future of religious organizations for example, specifically parishes. Decision-making is the laborious attempt to anticipate the future on the basis of information from the past and present and to consider which goals can be achieved through choosing which option. AI will not relieve us of decision-making, but it will inform us, and better than ever before if we learn to ask questions effectively.

Three strengths, in particular, can be identified here: AI can make more reliable predictions than are possible without it, it can filter information, and it can present complicated contexts in a logical and visualized manner. Armin Nassehi drew attention to a structural analogy between sociological research methods and AI: both can sort and analyze information, and recognize patterns within it. But we have to commission these findings ourselves and then make them useful to us. It is in this sense that AI could become an intelligent companion for our future orientation, and not in the sense of a large empirical study telling us what the future looks like for churches in a particular country. AI thus offers a chance for religious communities to make

very concrete plans for their future in their own location, which they not only constructively develop with volunteers, as is often the case at present, but for which they can also collect and evaluate data. Of course, the risks must also be discussed. They are to be found, for example, where data collection is non-transparent and a disturbing 'black box effect' occurs. Implicit structures of prejudice will not be automatically eliminated by AI. In this respect, AI holds up a mirror to society as a whole and to churches individually and challenges them to initiate clear decision-making processes. AI is in a position to sort, analyze and visualize logically any data concerning the elimination of discrimination and violence within their ranks. It can be used for goals that help to realize *ecclesia semper reformanda* [the church must always be reformed] in new ways.

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## **Religion, Culture and Artificial Intelligence: A Critical Inquiry into Identity Formation in the Global World**

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With the advent of a digital economy and global media, it is critical to consider Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the context of Religion and Culture. There is a rising focus on Artificial Intelligence and it is therefore important to consider how it can impact and influence different ethnic, religious, and cultural identities. Furthermore, the virtual space for exploring identity and community through virtual realities and virtual spaces is increasing in numerous aspects. For example, the proliferation of images used to convey one's identity has taken on a new form. From this perspective, the function of AI in the worlds of religion and culture can be critical. This is because, first and foremost, AI is playing a major part in bringing about this transition, with worldwide platforms allowing individuals to express their daily lives and experiences within the context of their local, religious, cultural, and ethnic communities. Second, the new social media platforms provide people with the opportunity to investigate their identity, community, and cultural questions through representations of their daily lives. This also gives social actors a forum to discuss present-day issues. Indeed, many social movements and social campaigns aimed at increasing awareness use AI and social media vocabulary.

AI will determine a significant portion of the space for constructing future tools, thus there is a need to develop models, concepts, and theories to address the intersections of culture, religion, space, and society. Interestingly, these developments are mirrored in cultural circuits, and a transdisciplinary discourse on these intersections is required. People's "ways of life" have evolved as a result of the growth of Artificial Intelligence tools and social media, shifting from traditional cultural practices and representations to modern practices that are now increasingly global within local, regional, cultural, and religious contexts.

A developing body of popular culture exists as well. Surprisingly, these shifts correspond to changes in language, culture, and representation. In reality, there is a growing discourse on inclusive language that must take into account ethnic and identity diversity; this must also be considered and expressed sensitively in relation to evolving AI tools. Furthermore, the virtual arena for the examination of identity, particularly the intersections of race, class, gender, and ethnic identity, is developing. Globalization has played a major role in bringing about this development, with worldwide platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok allowing users to express themselves through the AI tools and techniques built inside these technologies.

Furthermore, the new social media platforms provide users with the opportunity to explore their identities through the representation of their daily lives through stories, chats, filters, reels, pictures, and images. This also gives AI users a platform to discuss contemporary social

problems. Many social movements and campaigns use popular culture and media vocabulary. Identity-based issues are increasingly being emphasized on social media. These developments are also producing new paradigms within cultural and religious contexts. Being vocal about concerns, such as those interlinked with identity and climate change, global warming, and other issues related to ethnic communities, identities, and sustainable development models, are also gaining traction as a result of social media and the advancement of AI. Greta Thunberg, for example, became a popular voice through social media platforms and channels.

These examples merely demonstrate how identities situated within specific cultural settings and within a specific temporal space relation might impact change with AI tools and digital technology. It is critical to address changing contexts for the advancement of ethnic identity and popular culture in the context of AI. The question remains, however, whether these perspectives determine the potential or challenges of rapid transitions in religious, cultural, and ethnic contexts. In this light, active engagement in the AI debate is crucial for social sciences to investigate and comprehend changing social phenomena. Humanities and Critical Social Sciences can help strategies develop inclusive AI tools and approaches, while keeping Religion and Culture in mind.

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## Breathing Frontiers at AI Complexities: Thinking Deeply about AI, Religion & Culture

Pauline Hope Cheong & Heidi A Campbell

Artificial Intelligence's (AI) entrance into our everyday lives and livelihoods has prompted us to contend with distinct and rapidly circulating narratives regarding AI and society. Claims of AI-driven optimizations promise to accelerate learning, decision-making, and operational efficiencies. Open AI's modus operandi is "moving fast" (David, 2023), even as WIRED magazine has exhorted us to place a speedometer on AI growth (Solomite, 2017). Given today's feverish pace of innovation, staying up-to-speed on AI developments can be a dizzying, even heart-palpitating endeavor.

And yet, AI success is far from guaranteed.

Divining the future of these new ubiquitous, even so-called smart technologies has been (and arguably always will be) riddled with tensions and messy complexities (Cheong & Nyaupane, 2022; Dourish & Bell, 2011). For all the attention on the latest instantiations of ChatGPT, the world's fastest-growing consumer application in history, remains "incredibly smart and shockingly stupid" (Choi, 2023). This is easily observed when trying to have a conversation or sharing a prayer with this AI, to gauge the quality of human-machine communication. AI hallucinations can generate plausible content that is entirely false, yet utterly convincing. While boasts of AI efficacy are common, they are also difficult to assess.

**This book is a collective endeavor to inspire deeper thinking on AI, religion, and culture.**

Drawing on the Latin root *inspirare*, we seek to pause, breathe and blow life into ongoing AI debates. Akin to the figurative senses of inspire, which are religious in nature, authors of multiple faith backgrounds and interests in digital religion have infused fresh air to animate discussions on the relations between AI and religion.

We recognize that AI already punctuates the rhythms of ordinary life. This transpires in more or less visible ways; from the algorithms that decide which commercial should appear on our online feeds, to street cameras that monitor our movements, or the authorship of written or visual arts that we encounter in different spaces, and the robots that make and serve us food. Gradually and steadily AI is also becoming a considerable part of the sphere of religion; from android preachers to blessing tools and digital meditation spaces, religious communities too are adopting and adapting AI. Religious leaders should participate in global forums on the ethical sustainability of AI adoption and the unfolding of AI-human relations, airing alternative worldviews and affecting the public and private discourses of AI. AI has the potential to reshape religious practice, but religious users also have the agency to modify AI. Thus, any constructive and effective study of religion in the contemporary world needs to keep AI into consideration,

and research on AI should also listen to religious voices.

As slow deep breathing helps quell errant stress responses, intellectual breathwork here helps regulate chronic and extreme scenarios of AI that are not helpful. Like breath control that aids in detoxification and healing, articles in this collection raise the need for new approaches to ethical management and new languages to stimulate critical thinking and research.

In the face of proclamations of an AI apocalypse, we highlight that the Greek root of apocalypse means to unveil or disclose. Here, we momentarily uncovered various aspects of human agency, to reveal diverse understandings of human-technology relations, and how communal and personal norms are practiced and presented within different religious traditions. These revelations, in turn, offer insights into mindful justice-oriented design that consider not just the corporate interests of designers, but also the wider community of diverse users and AI's implications for our larger ecology and environment. In order to cultivate a justice-seeking moral imagination in response to AI, we must recognize how religious histories and visions influence ethical evaluations of AI, including moralizing labor, ordaining rationality, and spiritualizing the use of new technology.

Corresponding to deep breathing, which creates an experience of presence and self-awareness, we see that the intersections of AI, religion, and culture create a range of unique questions whose veracity we should continue to explore. Ventilating the rarefied air of reflection and deep thinking about AI can advance theory building and testing, to impact how new ideas of digital religion can inform innovation.

At this pause point, we enjoin the growing global scholarship quest to understand and unveil AI and welcome others to join us in the spirit of open reflection.

Together let's breathe deeply, into the future.

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