

AI in the Age of the Metanomic: Behold Ubuntu!

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Introduction

This paper is autoethnographic and a reflection on teaching and learning and my own ministry formation. It reflects my personal theology, God-talk, as well as my scholarship in the areas of liberation and womanist theology, African culture and spirituality, critical race theory, and instructional technology.

In the 1950s mainframe computing emerged. In 1974 the personal computer (PC) was released. I was an early adapter/adopter of computer technology: in 1972 my second language for doctoral studies was computer language and by the end of the decade I had begun to develop software to teach in areas of humanities. As a teacher and parent, I was committed to demonstrate the efficacy and value of teaching all children African American and African history, using these new technologies. My software was awarded a Computerworld Smithsonian award.

But it was in my role as a sociologist that I connected some dots about technology, race, and theology.

In 1990 the Human Genome Project and research began. The same computer technology I was familiar with had accelerated the capacity for large database management to complete the Human Genome Project. On June 26, 2000, in front of President Clinton and a thousand scientists, Francis Collins, head of the Human Genome Project announced, "We have caught the first glimpse of our own instruction book, previously known only to God."¹

It took Francis Collins thirteen years to bring the Human Genome Project to completion. He began his journey as a scientist and as an atheist but during the process he had become a devout believer. He said,

So for me, faith and science always – from the time of my conversion – seemed incredibly complementary. Synergistic. They were two ways of knowing, but knowing different things and asking different questions. Science asking how, faith answering why. We are reading both of the books God gave us...

I did have the privilege of presiding over a thirteen-year journey from when we didn't know our own instruction book, until we did. In 2003, with the completion of the Genome Project's original goals in crossing a bridge into territory that we had, for all of human history, not had the ability to study: our three billion letters of our own DNA book.²

It became very clear to me that the convergence of computer technology with biogenetic sciences would transform the umbrella of racism and white dominion from one of phenotype to genotype by the twenty-first century. And it has! It became clear to me that my lived experiences as a parent, an educator, a sociologist with a focus in epidemiology, and a software consultant entrepreneur was challenging my faithful Christian beliefs in ways that compelled me to return to school in a quest for a degree in theology. And, as they say, the rest is history.

This article is a reflection at the intersection of theology, technology,

and sociology, specifically what they now call “critical race theory.” My objective is to share ideas and advance our inquiry around ideas on spirituality, theology, and artificial intelligence. As teachers and learners of religion and theology, as ethicists and pastoral spiritual guides of human beings within and serving diverse communities, we cannot afford to ignore the signs of the times.

Indeed, we have moved into what I have defined as the Metanomic Era. The Metanomic era (at the intersection of Metaverse and Genomics) is the period of unprecedented convergence of transformative technologies related to high end computing and genomic sciences. This period of convergence is of a significant magnitude, characterized by discernable and catalytic change, in form and essence. This dynamic period is ushering in new ways of defining and making meaning of basic human identity, relationships involving human engagement and community, one-to-one, local, national, and within a global geopolitical context.

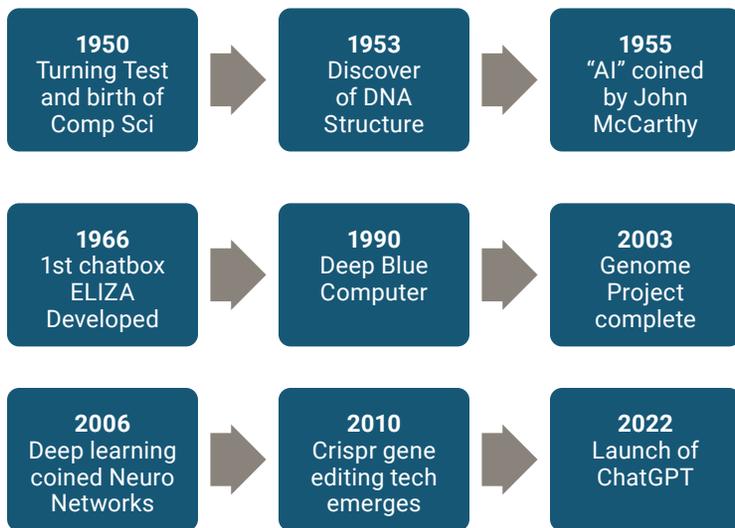


Figure 1. Timeline

By 2022 we had entered a watershed moment beginning with Microsoft’s purchase of a video game publisher, Activision Blizzard, for \$70 billion. That was just one transaction and we were fast being brought into the next generation of the internet that included virtual reality, and artificial and augmented intelligences. Facebook changed its name to Meta to rebrand itself beyond a social media company and ascend to the Metaverse. And Citi and KPMG were projecting the metaverse to generate over \$13 trillion by 2030. Paywalls were going up everywhere, so you had to pay to get access to information. Blockchain technology had people buying virtual plots, like we did for URLs and domain names, but at much higher costs. And now we have a US biotechnology industry, based on genomic research and related products, valued at \$621.55 billion in 2024 and projected to be worth \$1,794,11 billion in 2033.³

Where do we go from here? The pronouncement of David Chalmers, one of the world’s best-known techno-philosophers and cognitive scientists, is noteworthy as we seek meaningful life in the virtual world of the metaverse, building virtual utopias:

We are the gods of the virtual worlds we create. . . virtual reality is genuine reality. So it is that with an Oculus Quest 2 headset clamped firmly to my face. . . . We now have extended minds as we outsource our cognition to computers, creating an external device-driven brain, referred to as the “exo-cortex.”⁴

And he asserts that the “corporateocracies” are becoming part of our brains.

We now have two to three generations (depending on how you count) of persons who have lived into or been socialized in a virtual world. That is evidenced by the myriad of behaviors, tools, and culture associated with taking selfies for public consumption. One’s identity can be made up and can be based on “fake news.” Even though we “know” one’s avatar can never be the real thing but is rather a representation of it, we may well like the avatar better

and assert the fake as the original. Likewise, we have AI assistants, robots, and bots. They, too, may be preferred and may assert their automated selves as the real person.

As we consider the evolving role of theology and religion in society, the idea of technological *singularity* is important. Singularity refers to the point at which “superhuman intelligence” will effectively irreversibly transform what it means to be human because of the speed at which AI is surpassing our intelligence. Google’s director of engineering, Ray Kurzweil, has “set the date of 2045 when we will multiply our effective intelligence a billion fold by merging with the intelligence we have created.”⁵

This redesigning and replicating of “intelligence” at an exponential rate is creating “deep intelligence” and networks, diminishing the participation of human intelligence as we know it today.

It is predictable that computers will be inside and outside of our bodies; we will become a hybrid of biological and non-biological intelligence and humanity. Conceivably disease, human aging, poverty, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), could all be ameliorated for the better; death could even be overcome. Some have said AI could be the worst or the best thing that has happened to humanity.⁶ In this scenario, we are duty bound to ask: Do the machines become another transcendent God and/or where is the transcendent God?

On March 22, 2023 over thirty thousand AI developers, ethicists, and citizen stakeholders signed and issued an open letter and called for a moratorium on development of chatbots until more ethical safeguards are in place.⁷ In the open letter, which included Musk and Wozniak, they called for a pause on AI development beyond GPT-4, cautioning against “developing nonhuman minds that might eventually outnumber, outsmart, obsolete, and

replace us.” Elon Musk noted that “with artificial intelligence we are summoning the demon.”⁸

Without a doubt, these issues and questions are inextricably tethered to the role of e-commerce in the evolution of AI. For example, Google, Facebook, and Amazon each have competing and embedded search engines and platforms where content is created and mined. The algorithms that consume massive amount of data at fast speeds make AI possible. And what the consumer gets is a result of those algorithms. The focus is on churning out more material, not ensuring it’s correct, worthwhile, or sensitive to emotional context. The more we consume, the more they profit!

Many have explored ChatGPT to some extent. Some have experienced a ChatGPT response:

As an AI language model, I don’t possess personal beliefs, emotions, or consciousness, including the ability to have a soul. AI systems like ChatGPT are currently designed to simulate human-like conversation and provide useful information based on patterns and data. They do not possess subjective experiences or consciousness.⁹

Indeed, the genie is out of the bottle and the techno crews are building ships at sea. The waves and wakes of the sea are in our face; those by-products are many and ubiquitous, all over the place. Some are more evident



Photo by Ernie A. Stephens on Unsplash

than others and all have serious implications, beginning with the widening of the digital divide. Over 25 percent of school-aged children in the US do not have access to broadband.¹⁰ Without access to resources and the tools of technology there is no way to sustain a competitive positioning in school or the workforce. To be sure, the digital divide is widening in a myriad of profound ways.

Another major issue is disinformation and making the fake real. For better or for worse, the data is showing that an increasing number of people use TikTok or YouTube as their primary source of information. Video is fast becoming the capital and vector of information transfer. With these emergent technologies, especially the advent of Avatars, a whole new set of questions about property rights and ethical and moral values emerge around “fake news” and “deepfakes.” A European company, Synthesia, uses AI tools on customer submitted video and creates Avatars which can turn text into realistic videos. Within three years Synthesia’s company value skyrocketed to over \$1 billion. Fifty-six percent of Fortune 100 companies (for example, Zoom, Xerox, Microsoft, and Reuters) are now using their tools for internal communication. One early Synthesia adopter noted, “An AI startup made a hyperrealistic deepfake of me that’s so good it’s scary.”¹¹

Using these deep-learning networks, generative AI, neural network synthesis, and the ability to lay audio files over images, one can create deepfakes easily and cheaply. This is revealing security and ethical issues in a multitude of areas: for example, around abuse of children and women, copyright infringement of musicians, threats to elections, and the transmission of news. Deepfakes are even implicating and shaping belief in resurrected and eternal life.

The generation of customized avatars using actors to study body movements and conveyance of emotions for replication is ushering in virtual realities which are preferred over reality—from preferring a selfie over your real self all the way to preferring the possibility of being reborn again as reality over your dead self. At the end of the day, the integrity of the content humans are consuming that

is generated by AI – that is produced and enhanced by AI tools – needs to be mediated by policies and practices that make for truth. We may soon find ourselves (or already are) communicating with an Avatar thinking it’s a real human, and doing so in an environment monitored by embedded digital surveillance twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Credentialing and certification by AI poses another issue because of the risk of AI hallucination. Regenerative AI can result in bots just “making things up,” things with serious consequences upon which others might rely. For example, a lawyer defaulted to AI, used ChatGPT, and presented a case citation that was a fake hallucination of the AI to a judge. He confessed that he did not know that AI could or would fabricate information, and of course his case was discredited.¹² And some have suggested that every child should have an AI tutor, every CEO an AI collaborator, and every person an AI therapist. (Will they now be counted in the quarterly jobs employment report?) Gaming is not confined to games! Using computer controlled make-believe characters (nonplayer characters [NPCs]) in virtual worlds allows the creation or recreation of modes of behaviors for problem solving and self-actualization that are new to our understanding of the socialization process of humans.¹³

I cannot believe that I was motivated to develop educational software in the early 1980s by observing the impact of Pac-Man on children (i.e., fostering violence as a means of mediating and competing). By today’s standards, Pac-Man was a tool of harmony and peace. Today, we must ask: *What are the ethical implications of make-believe violence in gamification? What impact is gaming having on views of problem-solving, showing empathy and compassion, and ego development? What impact is gaming having on socialization?*

In this environment fueled by racial hatred, lust for power, and insatiable greed, orchestrated by the Project 2025 and Project Esther agendas of the Executive branch of the US government,

AI is being weaponized to deepen the racial and class divide. The ACLU has tracked ways in which the use of AI tools has resulted in the overcharging of millions of dollars for mortgage loans, racialized bias in tenant selection for housing, and the same for interviewing and screening job seekers.¹⁴ Others have tracked the use of artificial intelligence to extrapolate the predictability of those predisposed to adolescent criminal behavior in the context of educational reform and interventions, embedding biases and errors. There is also the use of reach and frequency through digital media for things from the unsolicited marketing of products based on your profile to the use of reach and frequency through digital media to support ideation, including the development of cultlike behaviors.

Reinscripting Racist Iconography and Stereotypes

Creative designers and artists have been horrified by AI generated images of people of African descent and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in general. The algorithms are reinforcing negative stereotyping. The developers of these image generators in products like OpenAI, Stability AI, and Midjourney argue that the problem is “overrepresentation” in their data sets. But, of course, they don’t say what that really means; it means overrepresentation of white people and embedded racial bias in their data sets.

Bloomberg analyzed more than 5000 images generated by Stability AI and found that its program amplified stereotypes about race and gender, typically depicting people with lighter skin tones as holding high-paying jobs while subjects with darker skin tones were labeled “dishwasher” and “housekeeper.”¹⁵

Microsoft and MIT examined data sets of thousands of images from Europe and Africa and the findings reveal stark bias against darker skinned females: “research has shown that machine learning tools can be highly discriminatory and biased towards people of color in particular.”¹⁶ Of course, programmers are usually white males. One scholar and museum archivist researching slave ships was

threatened with digital banning, being told that “Midjourney would suspend my account if I continued.”¹⁷

All of this brings me to conclude we are now engaged in competing paradigms and worldviews over the fundamental trajectory of our beliefs on what it means to be human.

Noreen Herzfeld, mathematician, computer scientist, and theologian, in her seminal work on AI and the human spirit, says,

It may well be that intelligence is, finally, not the most important aspect of human nature.... Our God is a god who makes covenants with the people, who takes on our form in order to teach us, to love us, and to die for us.... [W]hat matters most is our humanity not our intelligence..... Rather, the image of God is found whenever two or three meet in authentic relationship. Computers cannot replace us.... We suffer spiritual emptiness, wars, famines, the pain of broken relationships, a damaged ecosystem, not through a lack of intelligence, but through a lack of the will to live in authentic relationship.¹⁸

The Metanomic Era is challenging us all to grapple with what it means to be human, in belief and action. AI, as a byproduct and antagonist/ protagonist of this age, has further revealed different a priori assumptions between a Eurocentric/ Western worldview and an African/BIPOC worldview.¹⁹ Indeed, we are quickly headed towards a Collision of two worldviews in the age of Metanomic. One world view is epitomized by Descartes: I think, therefore I am (*cogito ergo sum*). The other world view is epitomized by Ubuntu: I am because you are. I am related, therefore, we are (*Ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu* [Xhosa]). Ubuntu is further grounded in Maat, the ancient spiritual construct of *Kmt* that consists of seven characteristics: Truth, Justice, Harmony, Balance, Order, Propriety, and Reciprocity. The compelling questions which pertain are: *Who Will Rule the Coming Gods? versus How Shall We Be?*

Indeed, we are headed for a collision or synthesis of these worldviews. In this seismic transformational moment of human

civilization, teachers and learners of religion and theology are stakeholders who cannot afford to be mere spectators.

There is an African construct of Nsaa which simply means:

He who does not know the real design will turn to an imitation; he who does not know authentic will buy the fakes.

I introduce the meaning of Nsaa as a wisdom text and methodological tool of analysis because in the age of the Metanomic, from Avatars to Corporatocracies, what it means to be authentically human is in question.

AI and Singularity

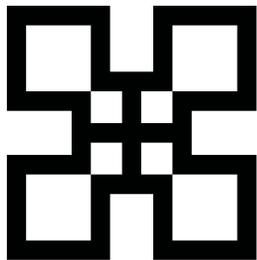


Figure 2: Nsaa

Now that we have a shared understanding of the growth of the technocracy and AI's basic functioning characteristics, it should not be too difficult to imagine some of the immediate moral, ethical, practical, and futuristic implications that warrant further interrogation, affirmation, and guard rails. Complex as these issues are, they cannot be ignored. They are issues for the public

square and certainly compel the engagement of people of faith, ethicists, and professionals in the areas of theology, religion, pastoral care, and marketing.

A baseline question revolves around divergent points of view about what it means to be human as manifested in values and institutional expressions of community. Theologian Bill Jones's schematic on theology and societal organization is quite instructive. His paradigm establishes theology (beliefs about the Divine) as the baseline which informs anthropology (beliefs about being human) which then informs sociology (beliefs about how human community and institutional life should be set up).²⁰

At the end of the day, theologies of liberation and theologies of dominion are rooted in quite different, if not antithetical, soil composition. The theological premises of creation, what it means to be human, individually and in relationship to others, comes center stage. And with that comes the attendant notions of "freedom and liberation" and "justice and charity," how and for whom?

Ubuntu

Ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu expresses the essence and highest potential of human development – humane-ness towards all and all of creation. Ubuntu embodies the ideals of harmony, compassion, and cooperation between individuals, cultures, and nations. Ubuntu affirms a belief that a person is a person through others and "I am because we are." It is an African way of knowing, from community to individuality; it is an ethic of interdependence and a prism through which self-identity is formed.

A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished when others are tortured or oppressed.

~ **Bishop Desmond Tutu**

The profound African sense that we are human only through the humanity of other human beings.

~ **Nelson Mandela on Ubuntu**

Ubuntu is assured through accountable relationships that flow and crisscrosses with other circles among the living and between the living and the ancestors.

~ **Linda Thomas**

These ethical precepts are further substantiated by the concept of *Mbongi*. Mbongi refers to the source of community knowledge and wealth; the process and place whereby the problems of the community, the human

and material goods of the community, are worked out in the interest of what is good for the community. In the context of education, it implies education is a public process open to all to ensure the continuity of community.²¹

Esteemed African theologian Mercy Oduyoye cautions Western theologians, Black and white, to understand the independent integrity of the African worldview on “being human, its ethical demands and its value for humanity.” Mercy Oduyoye declares, “A theology divorced from the ethical demands would have [has] no relevance in Africa, for African understanding of being human has, as its core, human relationships.”²²

Ancient African ethical systems and intelligences were rooted in knowledge systems and pedagogies which were far more holistic and integrative in patterns and categories of expression. And they were highly symbolic, using icons for expressions of thought. Knowledge was not organized and fragmented into categories – concrete, abstract, mythological, proverbial, or poetic, for example. Science *and* myth, or science *and* religion, was the operative paradigm as opposed to myth or science, or religion or science. Interrelated systems of knowledge, such as philosophy comprised and defined the intelligences. Transformational knowledge-transfer occurred through cultural norms and priorities. Multiple intelligences were not so much siloed, but rather were embedded within cultural norms and evidenced by how the society was organized.

Most especially, the sacred and secular domains of knowledge, as we now think

of them, were inextricably connected. This was evidenced, for example, in: Maat, the Zulu Declaration, understandings about resource allocation within a community, and what it means to govern and be entrusted with power and authority. Embedded in these ancient notions were implicit and explicit characteristics of intelligences.

Knowledge was one thing, wisdom another. In short, knowledge was not privileged over wisdom, mind was not privileged over heart, and written was not privileged over oral. Belief was evidenced by action; praxis, pronouncements, and behavior to and with each other were to be aligned.

Therefore, this new frontier – the technocratic developments as well as the global demographic developments, including the future of Africa, David Chalmer’s forecast of an outsourced external site of cognition and intelligence, and the capacity to have a functioning technologically created “human being,” – demands interrogation using Oduyoye’s admonishment, and womanist and black liberation theologians’ points of view on human freedom and being human. Emilie M. Townes’ paradigm for a womanist theology and understanding centers spirituality in a holistic and Holy approach and relationality – a wholeness of “mind, body spirit, heart, a cosmology that affirms all life as sacred and fosters justice.”²³ Karen Baker-Fletcher further explicates the womanist approach as one that sees humans as co-creators with God, with seven attributes or gifts of power: faith, voice, survival, vision, community, regeneration, and liberation.²⁴

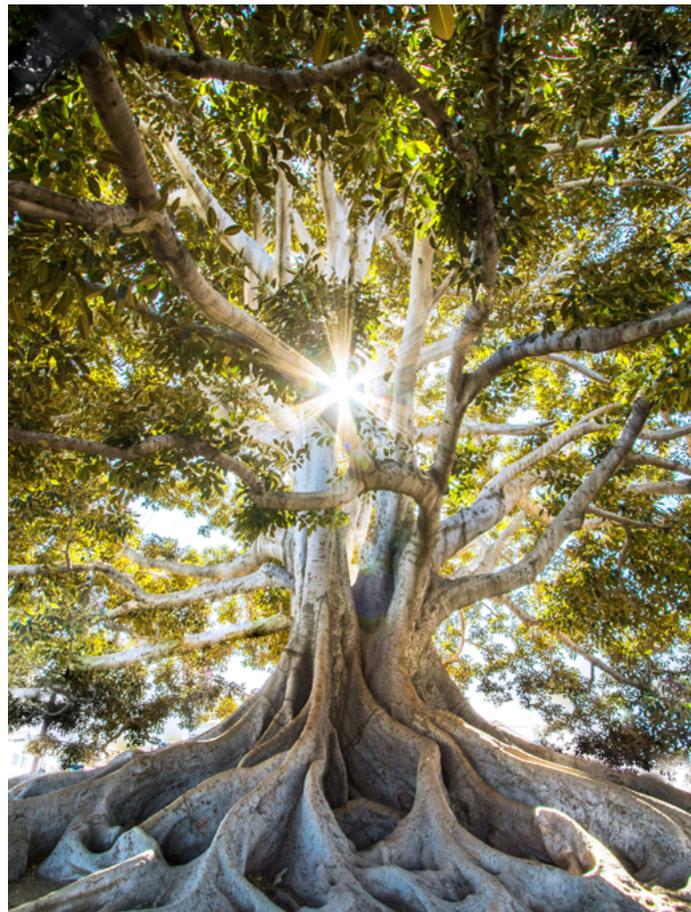


Photo by Jeremy Bishop on Unsplash

Anthony Pinn challenges black liberationist and womanist theologies stating that they contain “both potential tools of transformation and the seeds of their own demise.”²⁵ He argues for a nontheistic humanism and writes that black and womanist theologies “fail to see the dilemma associated with their metaphysics.” Pinn asks, “is the persistence of the Christian faith in African American communities a matter of fear and complacency over against anything of real cosmic substance?” Rejecting a supernatural explanation for the plight of humanity, he calls for “an exploration of the nontheistic humanism alternative and its accompanying theological discourse.”²⁶

Pinn’s arguments make humans responsible for the human condition. In consideration of his argument, I contend that he offers an innovative and challenging framework for the theological interrogation of AI and sets a table for a different type of conversation.

The seminal research of educators and social scientists Joyce King and Asa Hilliard is likewise directive. Joyce King critiques pedagogical racial bias and its implications for AI. King implies that the undoing of technological bias will require deep unlearning as much as learning. King suggests that “unconscious implicit bias in psychological terms can be better understood as a dysconscious habit of mind that is a consequence of miseducation.” Dysconsciousness is a “cognitively limited form of thinking.... Dysconscious racism tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race and inequity.”²⁷

Asa Hilliard’s early research in pedagogical testing and intelligence significantly paved the way for the development of theories of multiple intelligences, racial bias in educational testing, and inclusive educational models. Bloom’s Taxonomy of Intelligence was limited to quantitative measurements such as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Hilliard introduced the many ways in which African American

children manifested multiple intelligences – cognitive, yes – but also spiritual, affective, psychomotor, and experiential. Hilliard identifies some of the precepts of Maat which circumscribe behaviors expected of intelligent and wise humans as outlined by *Ptahhotep*. In *SBA*, the wise person:

Feeds the soul with what endures.

Is known by good actions.

Her heart and tongue match.

Lips are straight when speaking.

His eyes are made to see what will profit the offspring.

He acts with MAAT.

She is free of falsehood and injustice.²⁸

Ironically, in some ways, AI has caught up with Hilliard’s epistemological framework. With the successful raising of \$230 million to develop three-dimensional AI, World Labs announced:

....human intelligence has many facets. One is verbal intelligence, enabling us to communicate and connect with others through language. But perhaps more fundamental is spatial intelligence, allowing us to understand and interact with the world around us. . . and bring forth pictures in our mind’s eye into the physical world.²⁹

It is my belief therefore that intelligence, as cognition, is measured by Wisdom, as action. (Carruthers)

Note that these ideas of African humanism (as explored in King and Hilliard) predate Western intrusion in Africa. They promote justice and community. Maat (truth, justice, righteousness, harmony, order, balance, and reciprocity) undergirds the values associated with being human. Ubuntu, relationality, undergirds the acts of being human in community.

There is another dimension to this discussion of God-talk, intelligences, and African humanism which cannot be ignored: the decoupling of race from intelligence. Molefi Asante, preeminent

Afrocentric scholar, has been accused of almost retracting his decades of work in his reflection “Beyond Race: The Quest Back to Humanity,” redirecting attention to a visionary humanity. “All doctrines of racial or national superiority based on physical characteristics must be abandoned to the trash heaps of irrationality.” Note he does not claim that physical difference does or does not matter. The West has structured a house of race built on a sandy foundation of white supremacy as opposed to the values which undergird Maat and Ubuntu. Thus he concludes:

African culture might be our best hope of holding back chaos because it is founded on the principle of harmony and not conflict, the idea of unity of beings and not divisions, and the idea that spirituality is the making sacred of the earth and the relationships in i.... to be human.... and to be spiritual means to be in perfect relationship with ourselves and others.... we have no debate with either critical race theory or posthumanism since our position is that they are both equally unnecessary in a world where we have assumed and envisioned the human.... A visionary perspective is one that moves our thinking from race to humanity.³⁰

Whether this is a retraction or not is not the issue herein. The question becomes: In the Era of the Metanomic, where AI is between and betwixt the definition of what it means to be human, what are the a priori assumptions about the quest for justice and dismantling old systems built around race and the attendant praxis to do so? How do we move in this visionary moment?

In conversation with Anthony Pinn and in defense of God-talk from the lens of liberation and womanist theologies, Brad Braxton notes,

Religion, at its best, unleashes creative energy by encouraging us to connect multiple ways of being, knowing, and doing, influencing but not limited to the affective, the cognitive, the intuitive, the aesthetic, and the kinesthetic. Contrary to market-based approaches that often reduce human worth

to quantitative measures, religion intentionally explores the qualitative, intangible dimensions of human life.³¹

Where Do We Go from Here?

“Singularity” might be the new essence of humanity. “In the new age there will be no clear distinction between humans and machines. The computers will not be merely in our pockets and purses, but inside our bodies and brains,” so that “we’re going to be a hybrid of biological and non-biological intelligence.”³²

So, where do we go from here?

With all these aforementioned questions in mind, juxtaposed against liberation and womanist theologies, African-centered axiology and worldview, and the current geopolitical power shifts which are in contestation, a Pan-African and Black theopraxis can uniquely inform this discourse in the Metanomic age of AI (augmented and artificial).

With that, I posit that the heart of the matter is not about twentieth-century Euro-Western racial and phenotypic descriptions, but rather about the foundational ontological points of view which foreground the discussion.

AI and Ubuntu: In Whose Hands?

In editing, *Another World is Possible: Spiritualities and Religions of Global Darker Peoples*, theologian Dwight Hopkins advances a view that a new way is possible and emerging in “the collective consciousness of darker skin peoples and nations.”³³

[S]pirituality is an ultimate vision, state of mind, social interaction, and balance and harmony within and among creation and the visible and the invisible. It is akin to a primordial sense that something or someone is greater than the individual self and that self has obligations to her or his family ancestors, those who created them, and all that the human person can see, feel, smell, taste, hear, and access through dreams and intuition.³⁴

This view of spirituality and ontology from the global South must

inform our inquiry on the “if, how, and why” spirit can be embedded and/or interact in the implementation of AI technology. I have identified key questions to be grappled with as we consider in whose hands, identity notwithstanding, is or will be the technology? And in the end, we must recognize that Intelligence, as cognition, is measured by Wisdom, as action. Our choices must not just be of the mind but of the heart, with an understanding of human relationships, reciprocity, and consequence.

1. From the perspective of Pan-African theopraxis, how do the ideations of ancestral intelligence, also AI, and ancestral power, inform this discourse?
2. From a Christian perspective of “Creation” and the humankind who are creating AI, is ideation on the plurality of the Gods (and even interfaith engagement), and gender identities in the fullness of diversity, critical to explicating singularity? From a Christian perspective of “from generation to generation” is an avatar *of*, or *outside of*, being human? How would a nontheistic perspective address this question?
3. What is added to your belief in eternal life with the presence of an Avatar, taking into account the source of data input and interpretation thereof?
4. How do you engage with other stakeholders who can’t know your story (e.g., the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment); and/or who are intentionally engaged in erasing your story (e.g., the US president and governors of Texas, Arkansas, and Florida); and/or who have technical knowledge around which you are vulnerable (e.g., state actors)?
5. How should/would/could you envelop “do no harm” or repair the harm? How would harm be defined?
6. What are nonmaterial cognitive expressions of intelligence, aesthetics, quest for justice, kinetics, and empathy?
7. *My bytes to wisdom continuum* (bytes are converted to

data, data to information, information to knowledge, and knowledge to wisdom) ultimately leads to the question of David Chalmers’s *exo-cortex*. If wisdom is of the heart, how is that different than an epistemological belief that it is of the brain?

8. How might, or do we, reconcile the Ubuntu expression which centers community and communal intelligence, and generate a different operational framework and a priori assumptions for this age of AI as juxtaposed against an individualistic freedom of choice/intelligence as we move forward with inquiry and engagement in this polemic?

These are just a few of the inquiries with which I grapple and which I offer to further our shared understanding and journey to justice and the Divine.

Behold! AI Under the Canopy of Ubuntu

I have outlined the potential power and harm of these Metanomic technologies, and what lessons have already been learned about their use, in a variety of contexts. This heuristic reflection on AI and Ubuntu in the age of the Metanomic, including the attendant questions raised, are offered for consideration as we confront the challenges of “being human” during these consequential and transformational times.

The Holy See has done extensive exploration on the Catholic view of AI as related to the Divine, human consciousness, human relationships, and the human spirit. Clearly theistic in its presumptions, it finds that AI cannot transcend God and one cannot privilege machine over people.

For human consciousness, the bodily and spiritual dimensions rely on one another and cannot be separated from one another if we are to portray human nature accurately. The metaphysical fact that the human person is a spiritual being means that the person is able to detect value and an order of meaning in the world.... We are able to encounter God not only through the

physical senses but also through the spiritual sense.... The spiritual soul is able to share itself with others, to make an intentional gift of itself, to sense the gift of another, and to offer gratitude for the reception of that gift.³⁵

The sixth century Rule of Saint Benedict informs how

we shape and interact with AI. . . subordinate to the command to care lovingly for other humans. This suggests that we must not put machines before people. Considering machines our equals, treating them as we treat other humans, honors neither us nor them. Second, we must remain aware of the otherness of any AI as always a call to us: not to self-centered ease but to love for one another.³⁶

This (John Paul II) papal framework of “human consciousness” and characterizing “being human” in the context of God encounters segues into the human capacity to experience empathy and live into community, that is, Ubuntu. Some have called this the period of the end of empathy, significantly related to the intrusion and obsession with digital technologies in our lives.³⁷

The Artificial Intelligence and Life in 2030 Report suggests that our challenges include:

safe and reliable hardware for self-driving vehicles and service robots, keeping human experts integrated into healthcare and education, gaining public trust in public safety and security, preventing the marginalization of human work, protecting interpersonal relationships within an increasingly sophisticated and enticing entertainment ecosystem.³⁸

The report argues that the response should be “innovation, over regulation.... policies should be designed to encourage helpful innovation, generate and transfer expertise, and foster broad corporate and civic responsibility for addressing critical societal issues raised by these technologies.”³⁹ A century ago, Europe was nearly 30 percent of world’s population; it is less than 10 percent today and is the only region that will shrink by 2050. The growth

of the world’s population is largely in Asia and Africa, North and South America modicum.

For decades, and, in fact, centuries, many have known and argued that whoever controls Africa controls the world. Never has this been more true. By 2030, 42 percent of persons under thirty-five years of age in the world will reside in Africa; 75 percent of African persons will be under thirty-five. By 2050 the African population is targeted to be 850 million. Given the digital divide, it should also be noted that though 29 percent of youth worldwide are not online, 60 percent of African youth are not online compared to 4 percent of European youth.

Africa contains 40 percent of the world’s critical minerals,



Photo by Peter Scholten on Unsplash

65 percent of arable land, and 20 percent of the population. With all that, African countries only produce 3 percent of the world’s GDP. In 1978, Cheikh Anta Diop, Senegalese physicist and Egyptologist, outlined an ecological and technological resource map for Pan-African prosperity and a continental agenda in *Black Africa: The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State*. Under the aegis

of the African Union, Diop's agenda is incrementally moving from vision to strategy to implementation.

February 2024 marked the 140th year of the Berlin Conference where Europeans carved up Africa for their control. We have now entered a similar period: China, but also Russia, are recreating that scenario and AI is a critical part of the plan. The government of Denmark recently issued a statement announcing they would significantly expand engagement in Africa to counter the influence of China and Russia. Certainly, the demographics of the continent attest to potential "capitals" that will emerge from Africa, from financial to intellectual to spiritual. The affective domain of intelligences certainly shares, if not centers, the moral and ethical (axiology) dimension of being human in the context of community (Ubuntu).

Fast forward to this age of the Metanomic built upon a progressive development of epistemological fragmentations; the introduction of AI to the meaning of "being human" as praxis is not merely about form, but significantly about the essence of being human. The United Nations report on the future of AI for the world concludes:

AI is humanity's new frontier. Once the boundary is crossed, AI will lead to a new form of human civilization.... But we must ensure that it is developed through a humanistic approach, based on values and human rights.... What kind of society do we want for tomorrow?⁴⁰

As research and development on knowledge servers and trackers grows at exponential rates, my adage of "bytes to data, to information, to knowledge, to wisdom," challenges us to deeply interrogate AI and Ubuntu in the age of the Metanomic. Indeed, a Pan-African and Black theopraxis cannot be underestimated as a means to chart and cocreate a better world for all.

Appendix: AI Operational Definitions

1. Intelligence – ability to solve problems.
2. Artificial Intelligence – devoted to making machines intelligent. . . . To function appropriately and with foresight.

3. Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) – systems that are capable of a more general set of functions.
4. Augmented intelligence (AI) – a type of machine learning that uses artificial intelligence to enhance human intelligence and decision-making. It's also known as intelligence amplification (IA) or cognitive augmentation.
5. ChatGPT – an AI chatbot that uses natural language processing to generate human-like responses to questions. It stands for Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer, and was developed by OpenAI, an AI research company.
6. Computation – the transformation of sequences of symbols according to precise rules.
7. Algorithm – involves a repeated or looping action that, through a finite process, determines a solution.
8. Machine learning – analysis by which algorithms make inferences and predictions based on input data.
9. Data mining – synonymous with machine learning. . . . Machine learning is useful for more than just understanding data. Commonly tied to pop-up ads.
10. Neural networks – are composed of layers called nodes or "neurons" and designed to mimic the neuronal structure of an animal.
11. Deep learning – machine learning that takes place in a neural network with more than one layer.
12. AI hallucinations – occur when artificial intelligence (AI) models produce incorrect or misleading information, even though it appears to be accurate.
13. Natural language processing (NLP) – refers to the tools and methods used by a computer to analyze human language.
14. Large language models – use huge neural networks (2022's GPT-3 for example, has ninety-six layers) to accomplish tasks such as generating new text.
15. Narrow AI – systems that are able to perform a specific (or narrow) task or function

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