

Algorithmic Pleasures & Human Happiness

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Abstract

This article explores the profound ontological tension between the exponential growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the persistent decline in global mental well-being. Drawing upon the Vatican *Note, Antiqua et Nova* (2025), it argues that while AI serves as a *Titan of Functionality* capable of accomplishing unprecedented material abundance, it remains fundamentally incapable of satisfying the deeper human longing for genuine peace and joy. The study utilises Erich Fromm's existential framework to categorise *algorithmic pleasures* within the *Having mode* of existence—a state characterised by consumption and quantitative metrics that fails to enrich the human soul. By contrast, authentic happiness is presented as a *Being mode* activity, rooted in the Aristotelian concept of *Eudaimonia* and the *hylomorphic unity* of the human person. The article further dwells upon the irreducible differences between the purely calculative mechanisms of AI (*Ratio*) and the contemplative, embodied, and relational nature of integral human intelligence (*Intellectus*). It concludes that authentic human happiness cannot be engineered through algorithms but must flow from a profound appreciation and comprehensive exercise of the *Imago Dei* within integral human intelligence.

Keywords: *eudaimonia*, superagency, Artificial intelligence, Paretotopian goal, *Antiqua et Nova*, algorithmic pleasures, hylomorphic unity, digital Gnosticism.

Introduction

The paradox of modern progress is as baffling as it is pervasive. As *Sapien Labs* (2026) observes, contemporary young adults—living with unprecedented technological access and material abundance—should,

theoretically, possess robust mental health and a flourishing sense of well-being. “Yet the opposite is true: the wealthier the country, the worse the mind health of its young adults”. This disturbing trend finds further validation in the World Happiness Report (2026), which documents a rising tide of “anger, worry, and sadness” sweeping across the globe, paradoxically in an era defined by the exponential growth of cutting-edge technologies. The report highlights a localised crisis in the NANZ region (North America, Australia, and New Zealand), where sadness among the youth has spiked relative to other global regions.

Undoubtedly, the rapid evolution of science does not naturally usher in an era of human prosperity; the sophisticated algorithms¹ driving the business behemoths—from Google and Amazon to the mechanisms of modern warfare—fall profoundly short of unleashing the wellsprings of genuine flourishing. The citadels of human joy remain impervious to the brute power of technology. However, the historic entry of Costa Rica² into the top five of the World Happiness Report serves as a profound revelation, redirecting our attention toward the lowly places where peace and community abound. In the light of the Vatican *Note, Antiqua et Nova* (hereafter AN) released on January 28, 2025, this article argues that while the ubiquitous penetration of AI may catalyse phenomenal changes and transformation in society, human happiness remains a matter not of the *algorithmic* head, but of the *embodied* heart.

1. Perspectives of Human Happiness

The nature of human happiness remains a subject of substantial philosophical and theological divergence. Throughout history, diverse religious traditions, philosophical schools, and psychological frameworks have sought to define the contours of a happy life, each offering a distinct perspective on what it means to be happy and contended. While an absolute, universal consensus remains elusive, we can nevertheless discern certain essential, non-negotiable components

¹ “An algorithm is a finite, deterministic, and effective procedure—a sequence of well-defined instructions—designed to transform an input into an output or solve a specific problem. In the contemporary context, algorithms serve as the ‘engines of the digital world,’ processing vast datasets to recognize patterns, automate decisions, and curate human experiences.” Knuth (1997).

² Costa Rica’s meteoric ascent into the top tier of the world’s happiest nations—leaping from 20th place in 2022 to 4th in 2026—is a testament to its cultural embrace of Pura Vida (Pure Life) and its robust social infrastructure. It is a Latin American country possessing only a fraction of the GDP of the United States—which ranks a distant 23rd.

that constitute authentic happiness. These constants suggest that human happiness is not a mere subjective state or a fleeting emotional output, but the ontological fruit of a harmony among the essential elements that define human existence.

1.1. *Hedonia* versus *Eudaimonia*

In ancient Greek tradition, two significant words implying happiness are *Hedonia* and *Eudaimonia*. *Hedonia* stands for the sum of pleasures and the absence of pain (*ataraxia*). It perceives happiness as a psychological state seeking maximum pleasure and minimum pain. In contrast, *Eudaimonia* covers a wide spectrum of meaning. In *Nicomachean Ethics* (2000), Aristotle defines it as “an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue”³. It is seen as the ultimate purpose (*telos*) of life. Far from being something you obtain, it is the fruit of diligent labour, something that is realized through the excellence of a soul. It involves constant striving toward one’s true self or *daimon*, ensuring the blossoming of one’s highest potentials and a deep commitment to excellence. Unlike the subjective and transient character of hedonic pleasure, *eudaimonia* remains inherently value-centric, often demanding the sacrifice of short-term gains and pleasure for the sake of long-term flourishing. However, research by Ryff and Singer (2008) reveals that although an integration of hedonic elements with those of *eudaimonia* is essential for psychological health, the digital landscape increasingly embraces the former at the expense of the latter.

1.2. Having Mode vs. Being Mode

In his 1976 book, *To Have or to Be?*, Eric Fromm, a world-renowned psychoanalytic, argued that the modern society is characterized by two major orientations, i.e., *having mode* and *being mode*. *Having mode* is defined by possessions, control and consumption and accumulation of things. In this mode, a person’s identity is built up through what one possesses including material wealth, titles, knowledge, or even people. A *having mode* of existence influences our relationship to the world, our sense of security and the use of language. The world is seen a vast collection of things only to be owned and used. The sense of security is derived from clinging to one’s possessions. Their loss crushes the

³ Arete (ἀρετή) is the Greek word used by Aristotle to mean virtue. In fact, it better translates to excellence. Arete is not a passive state of being good; rather, it implies a state where the soul strives well after the highest possible functioning. (Liddell, Henry George, and Robert Scott, 1940)

spirit. In this mode, Fromm notes that people frame their experiences as possessions. Rather than say, “I am troubled,” a person says, “I have a problem”. *Having mode* is noted for its dead quality since it is focused on lifeless objects and manifests an orientation towards the past (what has been acquired).

Being mode distinguishes itself as a living and experiential state. It involves experiences, activity and productive use of human powers. In this *being mode*, the world is a place for spontaneous participation; a rainbow is not possessed; rather it is enjoyed and experienced. A sense of security wells up from within the depths of being, not from the accumulation of external objects or possessions. It flows from the capacity to create, love and think. Being internal powers, they do not run the risk of being taken away in the same way physical property can. It remains as an activity of the soul expressed through verbs and movement. Being mode stands out for its lively quality. Fromm describes *being mode* as a state of unending renewal and deep presence in the *now*. It shows an unmistakable orientation toward life and growth.

When interpreted through the existential framework of Erich Fromm, algorithmic pleasures fall squarely within the *having mode* of existence. These digital experiences remain restricted to those who possess the material wherewithal for such a life, yet they offer no true enrichment for a soul. Driven by sophisticated algorithms, social media platforms function as powerful *having* tools, reducing the human person to a collector of abstractions. We accumulate *likes*, we amass followers, and we project influence, fame, and reputation; yet, these are merely quantitative metrics of possession. In this digital landscape, one may feel a fleeting surge of excitement, but never the profound security of being loved.

2. The Catholic Church and Technological Advancement

The catholic church holds all scientific and technological advancements in high regard, considering them as participation in the creative work of the creator. The Vatican Note affirms: “The Church encourages the advancement of science, technology, the arts, and other forms of human endeavour, viewing them as part of the ‘collaboration of man and woman with God in perfecting the visible creation’” (AN, 2025). When oriented toward the common good, human creativity and ingenuity serve to glorify the Creator and reflect His transcendent wisdom. It continues: “In light of this, when we ask ourselves what it

means to ‘be human,’ we cannot exclude a consideration of our scientific and technological abilities” (AN, 2025). From the invention of fire to the complexities of quantum physics, humanity has made significant strides in mastering the material world. Today, cutting-edge technologies are rapidly transitioning society toward a state of unprecedented material abundance. It is within this context that one must explore the brave new world currently being inaugurated by the formidable computing power of Artificial Intelligence.

3. An Emerging *Digital Eden*

The philosopher Nick Bostrom offers a compelling observation regarding the trajectories of human progress. He remarks that a typical modern citizen now commands greater comforts and conveniences than a medieval monarch.⁴ This dramatic shift is primarily the result of the exponential advancement of science and technology, which has democratised luxury and mitigated many historical hardships. Within the current landscape of innovation, AI has emerged as the preeminent engine of disruption. It acts as a radical catalyst for systemic change, fundamentally reshaping the structures of labour, communication, and societal organisation. Describing the huge impact of AI as an *epochal change*, the *Vatican Note* remarks: “Its [AI’s] impact is felt globally and in a wide range of areas, including interpersonal relationships, education, work, art, healthcare, law, warfare, and international relations” (AN, 4). Undoubtedly, the era of the *Digital Eden* fructifies a level of material abundance that lightens the burdens on the shoulders of humanity. It is worth examining how AI, powered by increasingly sophisticated algorithms, has unleashed a torrent of pleasures and conveniences across every vital domain of human existence.

3.1. The Algorithmic Revolution in Communication

The integration of AI into the global communication architecture effects a paradigm shift from a model of human-mediated exchange to one of algorithmic mediation. This radically reconfigures the speed, scale, and nature of human interaction and marks a transition from

⁴ To cite a few instances, a medieval monarch might have waited weeks for a messenger to deliver news from a far-flung border, whereas the modern citizen possesses a state of near-omniscience. Armed with a smartphone, we can access the collective sum of human knowledge in milliseconds. Similarly, even the most powerful king was once susceptible to an untimely death from a simple tooth infection or a polluted glass of water; by contrast, the modern individual enjoys the protection of antibiotics, sterile surgery, and vaccinations—advancements that have vastly extended the human lifespan since the medieval era. (Bostrom, 2003)

passive transmission to predictive communication, where Large Language Models (LLMs) and generative algorithms not only transmit data but also actively shape its semantic and structural properties. The ubiquity of these AI-driven systems has established informational superhighways that effectively transcend the traditional barriers of language, time, and distance. NLP (Natural Language Processing) has evolved to a degree where real-time, high-fidelity translation has rendered linguistic borders nearly transparent, facilitating a globalised *Digital Eden* of hyperconnectivity. The impact of AI on communication is most pronounced in its hyper-personalisation capabilities. As described by Hoffman (2025) in his analysis of superagency, AI-driven platforms utilise sophisticated machine learning to curate information flows tailored to the psychological profiles of individual users. This crucial transition from broadcast communication to narrowcast precision has radically optimised the efficiency of information retrieval and marketing.

3.2. AI and Health

In the realm of medicine, AI is moving beyond mere automation to perform a systemic refinement of the healthcare landscape. It has significantly improved the entire field of healthcare by fortifying the foundational layers of well-being: safety, security, and physical health. By generating data-driven insights that sharpen diagnostic accuracy and optimise treatment strategies, AI-enabled technologies have brought about radical changes in the field of preventive and personalised medicine. The integration of AI into medicine and biotechnology has successfully moved from speculative potential to a foundational pillar of modern healthcare. By optimising the logistical layers of human well-being—speed, diagnostic precision, and therapeutic accuracy—AI is effectively resolving the historical hassles of disease management.

In the field of multidisciplinary oncology, AI has emerged as an indispensable architect of clinical strategy. By integrating radiomics, genomics, and clinical data, AI models now display an impressive level of excellence in the early detection and risk assessment of breast, lung, and prostate cancers. This shift is most striking in radiology, where automated feature extraction identifies patterns invisible to the human eye (Topol, 2019). The year 2025 goes down in history as a definitive inflexion point where AI-driven drug discovery delivered proof over promise. Traditional development timelines of 4–6 years have been cut

down to as little as 12–18 months. A landmark achievement was *Rentosertib* (ISM001-055), the first drug whose target and molecular structure were both designed totally by generative AI (Insilico Medicine, 2024). The reach of AI now extends into next-generation mRNA and CRISPR-based gene editing. In 2025, a personalised, in vivo CRISPR therapy was developed in just six months to cure an infant with a rare liver enzyme deficiency (CPS1). This transition marks a radical shift in personalised biotechnology, where algorithmic precision provides the exact genetic blueprint required to heal the individual (Intellia Therapeutics, 2025).

3.3. AI and Synthetic Happiness

AI is inaugurating an era of synthetic happiness in the field of mental health—a well-being enhanced through algorithmic support. These personalised, always-available tools address the global shortage of professionals by shifting from reactive treatment to proactive flourishing. An outstanding example is the *Flourish* app, which uses the *Sunnie* chatbot to deliver emotionally intelligent, science-based interventions. Operating under the STAR framework (Science-based, Timely, Action-oriented, Real-life-focused), these systems evoke positive behaviour change at the precise point of need. Clinical trials underline this efficacy; for instance, *TheraBot* users with major depressive disorder reported a 51% decrease in symptoms after eight weeks. Drawing on data from wearables—such as sleep and social metrics—AI delivers just-in-time digital interventions. These advancements bridge the critical gap between symptom emergence and diagnosis, transforming our mental environment into a solid foundation for intentional human growth (D’Alfonso, 2020).

3.4. AI and Education

In the field of education, AI is facilitating a paradigm shift— a transition from a human capital model focused on workforce preparation to a human flourishing model that enables young people to live lives of purpose and fulfillment. AI serves as a critical engine for personalized learning, administrative efficiency, and unprecedented radical inclusion. AI-supported adaptive learning platforms have produced performance gains of 15% to 35%. By emulating one-on-one tutoring through real-time data assessment and tailored feedback, these systems improve knowledge retention and student engagement. Furthermore, the integration of AI frees up time and labour, providing considerable relief for educators. Automating repetitive tasks such as grading and

lesson planning, teachers save approximately 5.9 hours per week. This amounts to six weeks per academic year. AI is shedding rays of hope for millions of students with disabilities, ensuring that inclusion is a foundational element rather than a secondary addition. AI-powered tools provide real-time speech transcription, automated summaries, and AI-generated alternative text for images. It assists with reading comprehension, structures complex tasks for students with ADHD/Autism, and provides immediate feedback on writing skills. Notwithstanding the importance of human review indispensable for contextual nuance, AI has effectively streamlined the creation of universal learning materials, creating an environment where every student can achieve a state of academic excellence (UNESCO, 2023).

3.5. AI-Augmented Superagency

The emergence of Superagency⁵ represents a new paradigm of economic flourishing, where artificial intelligence serves as a foundational super tool to accelerate human creativity, productivity, and systemic impact (PwC. 2024). Far from displacing labour, this technological shift radically restructures the nature of work and equips individuals to operate with unprecedented efficiency. In industries highly exposed to AI, such as software publishing and financial services, productivity growth nearly quadrupled between 2022 and 2024, rising from 7% to 27%. This surge in efficiency translates directly into a wage premium. Roles requiring advanced AI skills brought a 56% salary increase in 2025, with wages in AI-exposed sectors growing twice as fast as the global average. The transition toward superagency demands task restructuring. In the context of AI automating routine cognitive burdens, an increase occurs in the market value of uniquely human capabilities such as leadership, evaluative judgment, and ethical oversight. Furthermore, in the AI-driven era, professional identity is decoupled from the traditional office environments. Work can be performed from anywhere and at any time. This gives rise to *third places*, a social environment separate from the two usual social environments of home (first place) and the office (second place). Beyond the individual, the impact of AI extends further into the foundational structures of our planet, driving critical

⁵ It was Reid Hoffman, the cofounder of LinkedIn and a prominent venture capitalist, who coined the term superagency in its modern sense. He defines superagency as the state that happens when a transformative, general-purpose technology—like the steam engine, the internet, or now, AI—grows so widespread that it simultaneously endows millions of people with superpowers (Hoffman, 2025).

advancements in environmental stewardship. It heralds a new era of resource efficiency through grid optimisation (International Energy Agency, 2024), anchors global climate action, and facilitates precision conservation—all while nurturing the urban flourishing necessary for a sustainable, high-tech Eden.

3.6. AI and the Future Trajectories

The future of AI holds in store startling transformations. It marks a cognitive co-evolution, moving away from external tools to an *adjunct* intelligence that reshapes identity. The anticipated arrival of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) may facilitate *Mind2* (Leonhard, 2016), a hybrid human-machine partnership where individual insight is integrated with collective algorithms. As automation engulfs the labour market, humanity may shift into a post-economic world. In this scenario, flourishing is detached from productive labour and reorganised around cultural infrastructure for meaning-making: shared developmental practices, creative collaborations, and ecological stewardship. This aligns with the *Paretotopian* intuition,⁶ where vast resources make cooperation more efficient than conflict, fostering win-win global coalitions. Ultimately, the trajectory suggests that the most challenging work ahead is designing for human psychological growth with the same rigour applied to AI. By reimagining unproductive activities as critical for renewal, technology becomes a catalyst for a mindful, creative, and ecologically harmonious existence within biophysical limits.

4. The Conflict: Functional Optimization vs. Human Flourishing

We have mapped the contours of a *Digital Eden*—a landscape where powerful algorithms saturate our environment with pleasures and conveniences previously undreamt of. Yet, this optimisation represents only one facet of our current reality. On the reverse side of this technological prosperity, we encounter the persistent echoes of

⁶ The word Paretotopian and the accompanying concept of Paretotopian Goal Alignment were coined by Eric Drexler, a renowned pioneer in nanotechnology and a senior research fellow at the University of Oxford. Paretotopian is composed of two words i.e., pareto referring to a state where at least one party is made better off without anyone else being made worse off and utopian meaning an idealised state of existence. Drexler argued that if we can identify these Paretotopian paths, we can achieve Goal Alignment among world powers.

conflict,⁷ the widening chasm of systemic inequality, and a perceived erosion of the foundational values that once sustained the human spirit. This creates a profound tension: why does genuine happiness remain so elusive in an era of such groundbreaking technologies? The conflict arises because algorithmic systems are primarily designed and optimised for engagement, which can more easily be achieved through hedonic feedback loops. By reducing the user to a set of predictable desires and cognitive biases, algorithms shape a digital environment that reinforces passivity and consumption over the diligent pursuit of virtue. This generates a *Rorschach inkblot*⁸ of happiness where the superficial appearance of satisfaction masks a deeper erosion of the conditions necessary for *eudaimonia*. Beyond merely appreciating and leveraging the functional power of algorithms, one must pursue unalloyed joy and happiness within the interiority of human intelligence—a faculty that manifests a profound unity and complexity derived from the *Imago Dei* imprinted upon it.

The Vatican *Note*, AN delves deep into the mystery of the human intelligence by drawing upon centuries of theological and philosophical wisdom. It offers a critical discourse on the distinctive nature of human intelligence, particularly when contrasted with the purely calculative mechanisms of Artificial Intelligence. This distinction is critical for understanding that while AI appears as a Titan⁹ of *Ratio* (instrumental reason), human intelligence participates in the Divine through the faculty of *Intellectus* (contemplative understanding)—a spiritual capacity that remains the true wellspring of the wisdom of the heart and everlasting peace.

5. Human Intelligence and Artificial Intelligence: A Contrast

While AI possesses the capacity to lead humanity into the restful waters of material progress and prosperity, it remains fundamentally incapable of satisfying the deeper human longing for genuine peace and joy. In exploring the source of this impasse, we encounter the unique nature

⁷ According to the 2024 Global Peace Index report released in June 2024, there are currently 56 active conflicts worldwide, marking the highest number since World War II. (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024).

⁸ In Rorschach Inkblot Test, developed by a Swiss psychiatrist Hermann Rorschach in 1921, a person is presented with an ambiguous, meaningless stimulus (the inkblot) into which the mind will project its own internal interpretations, desires, and conflicts to make sense of it.

⁹ In Greek mythology, the Titans were the first generation of powerful deities—the giant, primal children of Uranus (the Sky) and Gaia (the Earth).

of human intelligence—a mode of being that is qualitatively distinct from the brute processing power of Artificial Intelligence. These distinctions, which separate the *Machine* from the *Spirit*, are profoundly articulated in the recent Vatican Note, AN. While Artificial Intelligence stands as a testament to human ingenuity—an artefact bearing the distinct fingerprints of its human creators—human intelligence is recognised as a singular and invaluable gift from the Divine. This distinction carries monumental implications: where the machine is a product of craft, the human being is a reflection of the *Imago Dei* (the image and likeness of God). AN notes: “... although AI can simulate aspects of human reasoning and perform specific tasks with incredible speed and efficiency, its computational abilities represent only a fraction of the broader capacities of the human mind”. Consequently, human intelligence is not a localised biological accident but an irreplicable component of the grand design for the whole of creation. The potentialities and ramifications of the human intelligence thus transcend mere material boundaries, weaving through the very fabric of the universe as a participating force in the unfolding of the divine plan.

5.1. AI as a Titan of Functionality

As discussed above, AI is emerging as a stunning Titan of functionality, extending its formidable reach into every domain of human existence. Its capacity for high-speed data analysis and complex pattern recognition is nothing short of stupendous, offering a degree of computational power that outstrips the processing thresholds of human brain. When oriented toward the common good, this technological force serves as an extraordinary boon to human flourishing; however, if divorced from ethical discernment and weaponized by malicious actors, it risks becoming an existential threat capable of wiping out humanity. Highlighting the promises and perils of AI, the Vatican Note observes:

...unlike many other human creations, AI can be trained on the results of human creativity and then generate new ‘artifacts’ with a level of speed and skill that often rivals or surpasses what humans can do, such as producing text or images indistinguishable from human compositions. This raises critical concerns about AI’s potential role in the growing crisis of truth in the public forum. Moreover, this technology is designed to learn and make certain choices autonomously, adapting to new situations and providing solutions not foreseen by its programmers, and thus, it raises fundamental questions

about ethical responsibility and human safety, with broader implications for society as a whole (AN, 3).

This statement reflects the grave sense of responsibility and pastoral concern that characterise the Catholic Church's engagement with the escalating prowess of Artificial Intelligence.

5.2. AI: Intelligence or Functionality?

AN challenges the reduction of human intelligence to the mere computational power of AI systems. It argues that the human mind cannot be defined by the velocity of task execution or the accuracy of data processing. At this juncture, the epoch-making question posed by Alan Turing arrests our profound attention: "Can machines think?". Turing famously attributed intelligence to a machine if its functional behaviour was indistinguishable from that of a human being (Turing, 1950). This *Imitation Game* serves as the foundational logic for the modern conceptualisation of Artificial Intelligence, prioritising output over essence. However, AN calls into question this behavioural bias, noting that the Turing Test reduces human reason to the mere level of functionality. It observes:

This functional perspective is exemplified by the 'Turing Test,' which considers a machine 'intelligent' if a person cannot distinguish its behaviour from that of a human. However, in this context, the term 'behaviour' refers only to the performance of specific intellectual tasks; it does not account for the full breadth of human experience, which includes abstraction, emotions, creativity, and the aesthetic, moral, and religious sensibilities. Nor does it encompass the full range of expressions characteristic of the human mind. Instead, in the case of AI, the 'intelligence' of a system is evaluated methodologically, but also reductively, based on its ability to produce appropriate responses—in this case, those associated with the human intellect—regardless of how those responses are generated (AN 11).

AN exposes the crux of the problem by identifying three salient characteristics of AI. First, AI operates purely methodologically; we provide a prompt and measure the output, and hail the system *intelligent* only if the result is correct. This leads to the second issue: it is reductively hollowing out the complex nature of human intelligence. Stripping away consciousness, intention, and the soul, AI leaves behind nothing but a scoreboard of statistical wins and losses. Finally, AI is characterised by its ability to generate appropriate responses. An AI-composed poem may sound like Rilke, or a theological summary may echo Aquinas, leading us to be seduced by its intelligent behaviour.

However, the critical distinction lies in the *how* of this process. AI can be likened to a parrot trained to say *I love you* perfectly without experiencing any emotion. In contrast, when a lover sincerely tells his sweetheart *I love you*, the expression involves the whole person—an integrated symphony of body, thought, and feelings.

AN draws a clear distinction between the intelligence of AI and humans. It notes:

Underlying...many other perspectives on the subject is the implicit assumption that the term ‘intelligence’ can be used in the same way to refer to both human intelligence and AI. Yet, this does not capture the full scope of the concept. In the case of humans, intelligence is a faculty that pertains to the person in his or her entirety, whereas in the context of AI, ‘intelligence’ is understood functionally, often with the presumption that the activities characteristic of the human mind can be broken down into digitized steps that machines can replicate (AN, 10).

AN draws attention to the grave danger implicit in conflating computing power with the intelligence proper to human beings, a trend that amounts to a colonization of human identity by computer science. It remarks: “AI’s advanced features give it sophisticated abilities to perform tasks, but not the ability to think. This distinction is crucially important, as the way ‘intelligence’ is defined inevitably shapes how we understand the relationship between human thought and this technology”. The document places enormous emphasis on the critical distinction between performance and thinking, effectively defining the ontological boundary between doing and being. While AI can simulate the results of thought, it does not *participate* in the act of thinking itself; the machine’s tremendous capacity to perform tasks at the scale of milliseconds does not translate into authentic human cognition. This distinction carries far-reaching implications for the understanding of human identity. If AI is categorized as thinking, it ascends to the status of a human peer and suggests a path toward human replacement. However, if AI is understood as merely performing tasks, it remains at the level of a tool—albeit a powerful one. If intelligence is equated solely with the performance of tasks, AI far outstrips human capacity, potentially dealing a lethal blow to the foundational concept of human dignity. Human intelligence cannot be equated with sheer advanced computation; created in the divine image, it is endowed with an ontological depth that transcends the limits of artificial simulation.

6. Human Intelligence: A Primordial Symphony of Diverse Faculties

Drawing on the rich and solid theological and philosophical foundations, AN offers a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of human intelligence. Such an understanding is foundational to the Church's teaching on the nature, dignity, and vocation of the human person. AN delineates the salient features of human intelligence. Rationality, embodiment and relationality constitute three outstanding attributes of human intelligence.

6.1. Rationality

Rationality involves the capacity for abstraction that grasps the nature and meaning of things and sets humans apart from the animal world. It features two fundamental and complementary dimensions namely reason (*ratio*) and intellect (*intellectus*). AN explains:

Intellectus refers to the intuitive grasp of the truth—that is, apprehending it with the ‘eyes’ of the mind—which precedes and grounds argumentation itself. *Ratio* pertains to reasoning proper: the discursive, analytical process that leads to judgment. Together, intellect and reason form the two facets of the act of *intelligere*, ‘the proper operation of the human being as such.’” (AN, 14)

Human rationality pervades all the capacities of a human person. As AN (15) puts it: “In this sense, the ‘term ‘rational’ encompasses all the capacities of the human person,’ including those related to “knowing and understanding, as well as those of willing, loving, choosing, and desiring; it also includes all corporeal functions closely related to these abilities”. This comprehensive perspective reveals the degree to which rationality is integrated into the very being of the human person; as an expression of the *Imago Dei*, reason elevates and transforms both the human will and its subsequent actions.

6.2. Intelligence and Embodiment

In the long tradition of the catholic Church, the unity of body and spirit is relentlessly upheld and safeguarded even in the face of mighty winds of heresies such as Gnosticism, Manicheanism, Docetism and Catharism. In the integral Christian anthropology, spirit and matter are not two natures united; rather, their union is indivisible and irreversible. AN (16) states: “the soul is not merely the immaterial ‘part’ of the person contained within the body, nor is the body an outer shell housing an intangible ‘core.’ Rather, the entire human person is simultaneously both material and spiritual”. The catholic church also

maintains the transcendence of the spirit over matter. In spite of the embodiment, human soul which exists “almost on the horizon of eternity and time” (Aquinas, 1975). However, the body is indispensable for the human spirit to exercise its normal mode of knowledge. The hylomorphic unity-the inseparable union of body (*soma*) and soul (*psyche*)- advocated by the catholic church sets a critical ontological boundary between human and artificial intelligence. Modern AI development often appears to operate on a form of *Digital Gnosticism*, treating intelligence as a purely informational process that can be uploaded or simulated regardless of the medium. As noted in AN, human rationality is not a *ghost in a machine*. Rather, it stands as a primordial symphony where the body is not a tool of the soul, but the soul is the form of the body. Intelligence is therefore conceived as an embodied, sensory, and spiritual experience that a non-biological system can never participate in.

6.3. Intelligence and Relationality

The richness of human intelligence is never exhausted by the mere execution of tasks; rather, it acts as a golden thread that weaves an intricate web of relationships—extending from the interior self to others, communities, nations, and ultimately to the entire cosmos. AN (18) observes: “...human intelligence is not an isolated faculty but is exercised in relationships, finding its fullest expression in dialogue, collaboration, and solidarity. We learn with others, and we learn through others”. Human relationality is essentially trinitarian. It shares in the eternal self-giving of triune God reflected in creation and salvation. The vocation to communion with God necessarily demands a communion with others. The love of God is always coupled with the love of neighbour. The command of Jesus ever echoes in the hearts of all Christians: “Love one another, as I have loved you.” (Jn. 13:34) . As AN (20) puts it: “Love and service, echoing the divine life of self-giving, transcend self-interest to respond more fully to the human vocation (cf. 1 Jn. 2:9). Even more sublime than knowing many things is the commitment to care for one another, for if “I understand all mysteries and all knowledge [...] but do not have love, I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2)”. Ultimately, human intelligence is not a machine designed for multiple functionalities; it is a divine gift meant for communion. Its highest expression is found at the altar of service, where it moves beyond utility into the realm of love.

6.4. Relationality to the Truth

Human intelligence is endowed with an inherent dynamism toward transcendence. Refusing to be confined by the limits of sensory data, it is drawn by a divine attraction to take flight toward higher planes of understanding and spiritual experience. AN (21) explains:

In the dual sense of *intellectus-ratio*, it enables the person to explore realities that surpass mere sensory experience or utility, since ‘the desire for truth is part of human nature itself. It is an innate property of human reason to ask why things are as they are’. Moving beyond the limits of empirical data, human intelligence can “with genuine certitude attain to reality itself as knowable”. While reality remains only partially known, the desire for truth “spurs reason always to go further; indeed, it is as if reason were overwhelmed to see that it can always go beyond what it has already achieved”. Although Truth in itself transcends the boundaries of human intelligence, it irresistibly attracts it. Drawn by this attraction, the human person is led to seek ‘truths of a higher order’.

This citation from AN encapsulates the quintessence of the Christian understanding of human intelligence, distilling a wisdom assimilated from the Church’s two-millennium encounter with the Divine.

It brings into sharp focus the irreducible differences between human and artificial intelligence, asserting that the former is not merely a functional processor of data, but a transcendent seeker of Truth. At the heart of this distinction is the dual nature of human cognition: *ratio* and *intellectus*. While *ratio* accounts for the discursive, logical, and computational faculties—the only dimensions AI can simulate—*intellectus* represents the higher faculty of spiritual intuition. It is this intellect that allows a person to grasp the essence of things and the meaning beneath the data. The integration of these two powers enables the human person to transcend the horizon of mere utility and embrace reality in its entirety. This two-winged intelligence is perpetually stirred by the *why* of existence, seeking the source and purpose of being. In contrast, AI is governed by the *how*, blindly executing the instructions embedded in its algorithms without a spark of intrinsic curiosity. Just as the moon exerts a gravitational pull upon the tides, the absolute Truth exerts a profound attraction on the human mind, overwhelming it with the realization that there is no limit to the depth of reality. While AI is a closed system that finds rest upon the execution of a task, the human person possesses an intrinsic orientation toward the infinite and remains irresistibly drawn by a Truth that always lies

beyond the next horizon. Summing up an integral understanding of human intelligence, AN (29) writes: “A proper understanding of human intelligence, therefore, cannot be reduced to the mere acquisition of facts or the ability to perform specific tasks. Instead, it involves the person’s openness to the ultimate questions of life and reflects an orientation toward the True and the Good”. This orientation toward the Truth and the Good implies that human intelligence must be rooted in the divine laws that direct human conduct.

A critical examination of human intelligence in its entirety reveals its unique features that set it apart from AI. AN (34) warns against an overly equivalence. Emphasising their differences, it observes:

Drawing an overly close equivalence between human intelligence and AI risks succumbing to a functionalist perspective, where people are valued based on the work they can perform. However, a person’s worth does not depend on possessing specific skills, cognitive and technological achievements, or individual success, but on the person’s inherent dignity, grounded in being created in the image of God.

In Christian understanding, it is misleading to describe AI as a form of human intelligence; rather, it is only a product of it. AN (35) puts it categorically: “Considering all these points, as Pope Francis observes, ‘the very use of the word ‘intelligence’ in connection with AI ‘can prove misleading’ and risks overlooking what is most precious in the human person. In light of this, AI should not be seen as an artificial form of human intelligence but as a product of it”. Reducing AI to its essential nature as a human artifact ensures that the instrument does not displace the creator. In performing this service, the Catholic Church fulfils its mission as the world’s *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher), safeguarding the unique primacy of human intelligence while providing a necessary maternal guidance and correction to the technological landscape.

7. AI: Support or Substitute for Human Presence

Authentic happiness blossoms in the warmth of human presence, yet it inevitably withers within the confines of the virtual realm. A profound paradox exposed by the World Happiness Report (2026) is that protracted exposure to social media often results in acute loneliness—a stark irony in an age of hyper connectivity. While these platforms bombard the senses with a medley of vibrant visuals and high-fidelity sound, they remain incapable of relieving the fundamental ache of human isolation. This pathetic failure shines light on the inherent

shallowness of algorithms when applied to the depths of human communication. By reducing the vitality of a human relationship to a series of data points, the algorithms present a spectacle of connection that is architecturally dazzling but ontologically hollow, leaving the seeker stranded in a *Digital Eden* robbed of true communion. It is worth exploring the vital role human body plays in a genuine human interactions.

7.1. Sacramental Presence of Human Body

In the contemporary digital landscape, we are increasingly seduced by the efficiency of the modern communication systems. We exchange data at the speed of light, yet virtual encounters very often leaves us feeling ontologically depleted. This phenomenon reveals a profound truth: human communication cannot be limited to a mere transmission of information; it is an embodied act. When we prioritize virtual connectivity, we risk sacrificing the *being* mode of physical presence for a hollow *having* mode of digital interaction, losing the primordial ground of human communication. The catholic tradition always upholds the pre-eminence of bodily dimension in interpersonal relationship.

7.2. Unity between Speech and Speaker

As a philosophical and theological concept, the hylomorphic unity between speech and speaker is rooted in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. It holds that the human person is a single, integrated substance of matter (body) and form (soul). In the field communication, this means that speech is not a product distinct from the speaker, but an embodied extension of their very being. Against the inseparable unity between speech and speaker, speech cannot be treated as mere information (the soul) transmitted through a conduit (the body). Instead, the physical act of speaking—the breath, the vibration of vocal cords, the movement of the lips, and the subtle gestures of the face—is the materiality that makes the inner word (*verbum interius*) present in the world. The important implication of the hylomorphic unity between speech and speaker is that when we speak, we are *physically* present in our words. This is what distinguishes a human encounter from a digital one. In a virtual environment, speech is detached from body. It is converted into binary code, stripped of the speaker's physical warmth, breath, and gaze. This creates a *Digital Gnosticism* where the message is separated from the messenger.

Pope Francis (2024) remarks:

The representation of reality in ‘big data’, however useful for the operation of machines, ultimately entails a substantial loss of the truth of things, hindering interpersonal communication and threatening our very humanity. Information cannot be separated from living relationships. These involve the body and immersion in the real world; they involve correlating not only data but also human experiences; they require sensitivity to faces and facial expressions, compassion and sharing.

In physical presence, the whole person (*totus homo*) communicates. The listener does not just hear data; they witness the incarnation of a thought. As noted in *Gaudium et Spes* (14) the person “gathers to himself the elements of the material world”, through the body, making speech a physical bridge between two souls. When the body and spirit are united in speech, the speaker is accountable for their word in a way that is often lost in anonymous or virtual spaces. The physical vulnerability of the speaker—their tone of voice, their hesitation, their eye contact—serves as a golden thread that binds the truth of the word to the integrity of the person. True communication (*communio*) requires this unity. As *Communio et Progressio* (1971) suggests, “Communication is more than the expression of ideas and the indication of emotion. At its most profound level it is the giving of self in love”. One cannot truly give the self if the body is absent, as the body is the very frontier where the self meets the other.

In a stark and moving critique, Pope Francis argues that digital landscapes frequently mars the depth of real-world relationships. He poignantly highlights the paradox where our tools of connection ultimately fail to nurture the communal bonds essential for human solidarity. Pope Francis (2020) remarks:

They [social media] lack the physical gestures, facial expressions, moments of silence, body language and even the smells, the trembling of hands, the blushes and perspiration that speak to us and are a part of human communication. Digital relationships, which do not demand the slow and gradual cultivation of friendships, stable interaction or the building of a consensus that matures over time, have the appearance of sociability. Yet they do not really build community; instead, they tend to disguise and expand the very individualism that finds expression in xenophobia and in contempt for the vulnerable. Digital connectivity is not enough to build bridges. It is not capable of uniting humanity.

Therefore, we are called to prioritize a communication of presence, where the *silent eloquence* of the human body transcends the inherent limitations of disembodied algorithmic chatter, whether in words or visuals.

Conclusion

Our comparative analysis of Artificial Intelligence and the human intelligence reveals that AI represents only a narrow fraction of our intelligence that is inherently cognitive, affective, embodied, and relational. While AI as the Titan of functionality can optimize the material conditions of our existence, the human heart cannot satiate its thirst for lasting happiness from the artificial fountains of powerful algorithms. Certainly, AI possesses a formidable power that can be disregarded only at the expense of invaluable material prosperity; however, it is equally imperative to whittle down our perception of AI to its true ontological scale. It is not a peer to human intelligence, but a derivative product of it—a mirror of *Ratio* that lacks the transcendent depth of *Intellectus*. Ultimately, the wellsprings of authentic human happiness flow not from an abundance of algorithmic pleasures but from a profound appreciation and comprehensive exercise of the *Imago Dei* within integral human intelligence.

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