

# Editorial

## 1/2026 Artificial Intelligence and the Transformation of Society – reflection on current perspectives and future challenges for the social sciences and humanities

The history of human civilisation is, in many respects, a history of adaptation to changing conditions such as climate and environmental shifts, epidemics, and the discovery and invention of new materials and technologies. Whether in the form of agriculture, pastoralism, metallurgy, new sources of energy, or the processes that have produced the materials upon which contemporary civilisation rests, namely ammonia, cement, plastics, and steel, as emphasised by Václav Smil, each transformation has reshaped human life in ways that are at once liberating and unsettling. In our own time, marked by an accelerating pace of change, another transformation is underway: the digital revolution, increasingly enhanced by artificial intelligence. Nearly every aspect of contemporary life is now shaped by it. Digital technologies have become ubiquitous, transforming fields such as research, education, healthcare, entertainment, finance, military conflicts, and even religion. These technologies are not neutral; they actively shape and mediate how individuals and communities understand the meaning of their lives and, for those who are religious, how they practice their faith. As one of the previous issues of *Caritas et Veritas* (1/2021) indicated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, moments of sudden collective disruption tend to reveal both the fragility of established social orders and the resilience of the human spirit. In such moments, the social sciences, the humanities, the helping professions, and philosophy, disciplines most directly concerned with human dignity, meaning, and well-being, are called to do what they have always done: to reflect and to ask what is required of us at this point in history. This task cannot be entrusted to any single field of expertise. The conditions we face call for genuinely transdisciplinary forms of inquiry and for renewed attention to the formation of judgment and character, in line with a Neo-Aristotelian insight that responsible individual and collective action depends on cultivated intellectual and moral virtues rather than on techno-scientific knowledge alone. What is required, in classical terms, is *phronesis* (φρόνησις), a form of practical wisdom that enables sound judgment under conditions of uncertainty and complexity. Hence this special monothematic issue as a small contribution to this important reflection. We begin with three contributions that draw on theological traditions.

The issue opens with **Michal Černý**, whose study deals with two encyclicals of Pope Francis (1936-2025), *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli tutti*, as a framework for understanding the social and spiritual risks of generative AI. The Church has engaged with technological change at least since the late nineteenth century; Černý argues that it must do so again, and urgently, and that both social work and spirituality will be transformed in ways we are only beginning to map. His contribution sets the theological and ethical stakes for the contributions that follow. From reflections on Catholic magisterial teaching, we move to hermeneutics. **Jiří Dosoudil** confronts a question that large language models (LLMs) make newly pressing: can language carry meaning without a speaking subject? Drawing on the biblical concepts of *dābār* (דָּבָר) and *logos* (λόγος), the author argues that the genuine challenge of artificial intelligence is not to theology but to logocentrism, and that 'Scripture need not

be understood as a repository of divine intention, but as an event of address and response. In other words, we could perhaps say, the biblical Word, it is not mere data. **Milan Urbančok**, **Jozef Žuffa**, and **Lucia Malíčková** ask what theological research requires. Their article traces how the use of LLMs in theological scholarship reshapes the formulation of research questions and interpretive operations. Building on their interdisciplinary work at the National Supercomputer Center in Slovakia, they argue for a methodological framework grounded in dialogical hermeneutics, one that treats the human interpreter's responsibility as non-negotiable.

The next three contributions are more empirical in character and/or engaging with empirical research. **Ivana Olecká** and **Josef Smolík** offer publish results of the representative survey of 521 Czech respondents on patterns of AI use, segmented by age, gender, and education and collected in 2024. Their findings are probably somewhat surprising. Daily AI use remains rare. Translation tools dominate, while image generation and automotive AI remain marginal. Age and education, rather than gender, correlate with adoption. The authors also discuss exposure to disinformation, privacy risks, and the unequal distribution of AI's benefits. The same inequalities appear in clinical settings. **Kristýna Hellerová**, **David Urban**, and **Jana Hamhalterová** address aftercare clients in addiction recovery, a population rarely mentioned in AI ethics debates. Through reflexive thematic analysis of written responses from five clients, the authors identify AI's capacity for emotional availability and cognitive structuring alongside a deep ambivalence concerning relational authenticity and data privacy. AI can complement psychosocial care; it cannot, however, replace the therapeutic alliance. From therapy we shift to consumer behaviour. Applied philosophers **Ehsan Arzroomchilar** and **Daniel Novotný** apply postphenomenological theory of technological mediation to the case of payment cards. These seemingly mundane instruments do more than facilitate transactions—they actively shape our self-understanding, fuel consumerism, and can even contribute to compulsive buying disorder. Their analysis serves as a powerful reminder that the effects of technology invariably surpass the intentions of its designers, a dynamic that becomes ever more pervasive as increasingly sophisticated tools dissolve into the all-encompassing Internet of Things. Finally, we broaden the horizon beyond European and Western perspectives. **Chileshe Mulenga Nicholas** and **David Mutemwa** situate digital technology within global power dependencies and asymmetries. Western platforms such as Google and Wikipedia, and their successors, they argue, systematically privilege certain epistemologies while eroding indigenous knowledge systems. This may be described as a form of technological epistemicide. Drawing on African philosophical insights on relationality and the concept of technopoly developed by Neil Postman, they call for a context-sensitive, dignity-affirming approach to technology in the Global South.

This issue closes with a review untouched by the subject of AI, which is a refreshing reminder that not everything has yet fallen under the influence of this technology. **Jan Hábl** explores Pavel Hošek's spiritual portrait of Karel Kryl from the perspective of an educationist. The contributions gathered here span theology, philosophy, sociology, clinical practice, and other disciplines. They do not agree in every detail but share a common conviction: that the measure of any technology lies in what it does to the human person and society. That measure, we believe, is never merely technical and cannot be confined to a single discipline or just to policymakers. It demands an enquiry that is broadly human, trans-disciplinary, and ultimately philosophical. Remarkably, just as this issue was being completed, Pope Leo XIV published his first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of AI*. This is a truly fitting affirmation of the timeliness of this special issue.

On behalf of the entire editorial team, we wish you inspiring reading.

**Daniel D. Novotný, Chileshe Mulenga**  
(co-editors of this issue)