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Imago Dei and AI Governance: Ethical and Theological Challenges in the Age of AI

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Abstract

This article explores the ethical, theological, and social implications of artificial intelligence (AI) through the lens of *imago Dei*—the belief that human beings are made in the image of God. By grounding the analysis in this theological framework, the study addresses the challenges AI poses to human dignity, moral agency, and justice, particularly as AI systems begin to replicate human cognition and decision-making processes. The ethical safeguards proposed in this study—such as regular bias audits, algorithmic transparency, and human oversight—are critically examined not only through secular ethical frameworks but also through *Imago Dei*, which emphasizes the intrinsic worth and moral responsibility of every individual. These safeguards differ from secular frameworks by insisting on a moral foundation, rooted in the protection of human dignity, social justice, and equity. Theological insights from *imago Dei* inform practical applications in AI governance by guiding policy recommendations that call for the rectification of historical injustices, the incorporation of ethical review boards combining secular and religious perspectives, and the design of AI algorithms that prioritize equity, justice, and compassion. This study argues that integrating *imago Dei* into AI policy can reshape regulatory actions, influence algorithmic designs, and ensure that AI systems actively promote human flourishing, social justice, and moral responsibility, rather than perpetuating inequality or dehumanization.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, *imago Dei*, Human Dignity, Ethics, Ethical AI

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly transformed critical sectors such as healthcare, criminal justice, and employment, providing notable advancements while simultaneously raising complex ethical concerns. In healthcare, AI enhances diagnostic accuracy and treatment outcomes by processing vast datasets to assist in decision-making (Jiang et al., 2017). In criminal justice, AI systems influence risk assessments, parole decisions, and sentencing recommendations, directly shaping individuals' lives (Angwin et al., 2022). Similarly, in employment, AI increases efficiency in recruitment and workforce management but has also sparked concerns about bias, fairness, and the displacement of human workers (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018). Despite these technological benefits, the widespread adoption of AI also raises significant ethical risks, including exacerbating social inequalities, compromising privacy, and dehumanizing individuals (Eubanks, 2018).

These concerns are typically framed within secular ethical frameworks, which emphasize principles such as fairness, accountability, and transparency (Boddington, 2017; Rawls, 1971). While these principles are essential for promoting responsible AI development, they often fall short to address the deeper moral and existential questions posed by emerging technologies. This study argues that the theological concept of *imago Dei* (Genesis 1:26-27) —the belief that human beings are created in the image of God—offers a more profound ethical framework that both challenges and complements existing secular principles.

Imago Dei provides a robust foundation for examining the ethical implications of AI, emphasizing the inherent dignity, worth, and moral agency of all individuals (Coeckelbergh, 2020). In this sense, *imago Dei* extends the principle of fairness beyond procedural equity, suggesting that fairness

must involve a moral commitment to rectifying historical injustices and protecting the vulnerable. Unlike secular frameworks, which often treat fairness as a technical requirement for ensuring unbiased decision-making, *imago Dei* views fairness as a matter of upholding the dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of their ethnic background or societal status (*Genesis 1:26-27, NIV; Bonhoeffer, 1995*). This deeper understanding challenges AI developers and policymakers to design systems that not only avoid bias but actively promote justice and inclusivity (*Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; Amos 5:24, NIV; Floridi & Cowls, 2019*).

Similarly, *imago Dei* enhances the secular principle of accountability by introducing a theological dimension of moral responsibility. While secular AI governance frameworks often focus on operational accountability—ensuring that AI systems function correctly and do not cause harm (*Floridi & Cowls, 2019;* Adamson et al., 2019)—*imago Dei* emphasizes the need for moral accountability that goes beyond functionality. It insists that human oversight must remain central in AI systems to ensure that ethical decisions reflect human dignity and the sacredness of life (*Genesis 1:26-27; Barth, 2003*). This theological perspective complements secular accountability frameworks by reinforcing the idea that AI must serve humanity, not replace human moral judgment (*Rahner, 1979*).

In terms of transparency, *imago Dei* deepens the secular focus on making AI decision-making processes visible and understandable. While transparency in secular terms ensures that AI systems can be audited and scrutinized for fairness (*Floridi & Cowls, 2019)*, *imago Dei* extends this concept by grounding it in the moral values of truth, justice, and compassion (Barth, 2003; Bonhoeffer, 1995). Transparency, from a theological perspective, is not merely about visibility but about ensuring that AI systems operate in ways that reflect ethical integrity and uphold the sanctity of human life. This approach calls for AI systems that are not only transparent in their operations but also accountable to moral and ethical standards that safeguard human dignity (Middleton, 2005).

As AI systems increasingly replicate human cognition and decision-making, they challenge traditional understandings of human uniqueness, moral responsibility, and the sacredness of life (Bostrom, 2014). Theological ethics, particularly through the lens of *imago Dei*, provide a necessary counterbalance to purely technical approaches, encouraging deeper reflection on how AI technologies influence human relationships, communities, and societal structures (Barth, 2003; Middleton, 2005). While secular principles like fairness, accountability, and transparency prioritize procedural justice and operational efficiency (Floridi & Cowls, 2019), the *imago Dei* framework demands that AI be designed and governed in ways that prioritize human dignity and social justice, ensuring that AI technologies not only function efficiently but also contribute to human flourishing (Peters, 2018).

This study introduces a theological dimension to the ongoing conversation about AI ethics, grounding its analysis in biblical teachings on justice, stewardship, and compassion (Amos 5:24; Micah 6:8). By applying the *imago Dei* framework, the study advocates for the development of AI technologies that prioritize human dignity and social equity, challenging AI designers and policymakers to adopt ethical safeguards that ensure fairness while addressing structural inequalities. In doing so, the theological perspective provided by *imago Dei* does not simply coexist alongside secular ethical frameworks but actively enriches and deepens them, offering a more holistic vision for AI governance that upholds both moral responsibility and technological progress (Floridi & Cowls, 2019).

Furthermore, this study seeks to propose a pathway for AI development that respects human dignity, promotes social justice, and ensures compassionate use of technology. This approach aims to guide AI development in ways that not only prevent harm but actively foster the well-being and flourishing of individuals and communities.

The Concept of *imago Dei*

The concept of *imago Dei*, meaning "the image of God," is a foundational theological doctrine rooted in the Biblical creation narrative in Genesis 1:26-27:

> Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (Genesis 1:26-27, NIV)

This doctrine asserts that human beings are endowed with inherent dignity, moral worth, and relational capacity, which form the basis for ethical responsibility. Historically, theologians like Augustine and Aquinas expanded on *imago Dei*, linking the divine image to human rationality, moral choice, and intellectual potential (Augustine, 397; O'Donnell, 2012; Aquinas, 1265 - Salomão Teixeira, 2015). Augustine emphasized that the human capacity for reasoning and ethical decision-making reflects God's image, while Aquinas connected this image to human virtue and intellectual flourishing.

In modern theology, figures such as Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer deepened the understanding of *imago Dei* by

emphasizing its relational aspects. Barth argued that *imago Dei* manifests not only in individual capacities but also in human relationships with God and others, framing ethical obligations in terms of mutual respect and justice (Barth, 2003). Bonhoeffer extended this relational dimension, emphasizing that *imago Dei* calls for the pursuit of justice and recognition of every individual's inherent worth, regardless of external conditions (Bonhoeffer, 1995).

In the context of modern AI, *imago Dei* provides a profound ethical framework that calls for the protection of human dignity, particularly as AI systems begin to replicate human cognition and decision-making. As AI challenges traditional notions of human uniqueness, *imago Dei* reaffirms that human value is not defined by intellectual capability or technological function but by intrinsic worth. This principle serves as a counterpoint to utilitarian approaches in AI development, which may prioritize efficiency over the protection of human dignity (Floridi et al., 2018).

Imago Dei is directly relevant to the ethical concerns surrounding AI because it demands that human dignity be preserved even as technology advances. In AI applications such as healthcare, criminal justice, and employment, this theological framework emphasizes the moral imperative to develop technologies that promote justice and equity, especially for those marginalized by existing societal structures. For example, AI systems used in healthcare diagnostics or risk assessments in criminal justice must be designed to avoid perpetuating biases that disproportionately harm vulnerable communities (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; Angwin et al., 2022). *Imago Dei* calls for AI systems that not only prevent bias but actively promote fairness and inclusivity, reflecting the biblical mandate to uphold justice and protect the vulnerable: "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream" (Amos 5:24). This principle supports the idea that AI should not only avoid bias but actively work to promote inclusivity and justice. Furthermore, *imago Dei* informs the design and governance of AI systems by emphasizing moral agency and accountability. AI should not operate autonomously without human oversight, as humans must remain responsible for ethical decision-making. This theological perspective challenges secular approaches that focus primarily on technical accountability. Instead, *imago Dei* insists that moral responsibility for AI lies with human agents, who must ensure that these technologies serve humanity and align with values of compassion, justice, and the common good (Rahner, 1979; Peters, 2018).

Furthermore, *imago Dei* connects deeply with the principle of stewardship in AI governance. AI technologies, which have the potential to shape societies in profound ways, must be developed and deployed with an awareness of their impact on human lives and communities (Genesis 1:28; Rahner, 1979; Vallor, 2016). This theological perspective emphasizes that humans, as stewards of creation, bear the responsibility to ensure that AI serves the common good, promotes justice, and upholds the dignity of all individuals (Floridi et al., 2018). This theological principle reinforces the idea that AI should be designed not only to avoid harm but to actively contribute to human flourishing by fostering equitable outcomes across sectors (Dignum, 2020).

In summary, *imago Dei* offers a robust theological framework that complements and challenges existing secular approaches to AI ethics. It emphasizes human dignity, moral agency, and the responsibility to promote justice and equity in the development and deployment of AI technologies. As AI continues to evolve, the principles of *imago Dei* will remain vital in ensuring that these technologies enhance, rather than diminish, the well-being and dignity of all individuals.

Methodology

This research employs a theologically informed interdisciplinary ethical analysis to evaluate the complex ethical challenges posed by artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. The choice of methodology reflects the necessity to integrate theological principles with secular ethical frameworks to provide a comprehensive understanding of AI's impact on human dignity, justice, and moral responsibility.

The study utilizes theological ethics, particularly the concept of *imago Dei*, as the foundational lens through which AI technologies are evaluated. This theological approach is essential because it emphasizes the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals, which is often underexplored in secular ethical frameworks that focus primarily on procedural fairness, transparency, and accountability. *imago Dei* serves to deepen the analysis by ensuring that AI systems are designed and implemented in ways that promote human dignity, protect the vulnerable, and foster social justice (Barth, 2003; Bonhoeffer, 1995).

Additionally, this study engages with secular ethical frameworks, such as the European Commission's High-Level Expert Group on AI and the IEEE's Ethically Aligned Design (Shahriari & Shahriari, 2017), to ensure that the theological insights are grounded in practical, widely recognized standards of fairness, transparency, and accountability (Floridi & Cowls, 2019). By bridging theological and secular ethics, this methodology allows for a more robust and nuanced evaluation of AI systems, addressing their technical efficacy and moral implications.

Case studies in sectors such as healthcare, criminal justice, and employment are used to apply these interdisciplinary

ethical frameworks in real-world contexts. These case studies provide practical relevance and demonstrate how theological insights from *imago Dei* can be integrated into the ethical design, development, and governance of AI systems. For instance, in healthcare, AI tools are evaluated not only for their accuracy but also for their ability to maintain compassionate, patient-centered care (Jiang et al., 2017). In criminal justice, the study critically examines AI risk assessments like COMPAS for potential racial biases, drawing on theological principles to advocate for justice and fairness (Angwin et al., 2022).

The use of philosophical inquiry alongside theological ethics broadens the analysis, allowing the study to address fundamental questions related to free will, moral agency, and justice. Philosophers such as John Rawls provide additional insights into the theory of justice, which is then placed in dialogue with Biblical teachings on divine justice and stewardship (Rawls, 1971; Barth, 2003).

By combining these methodologies—theological ethics, secular frameworks, and philosophical inquiry—the study ensures that the ethical analysis of AI technologies is both comprehensive and deeply grounded in principles that prioritize human dignity, justice, and social equity. This interdisciplinary approach is necessary to address the multifaceted ethical challenges that arise as AI technologies become more pervasive and influential in shaping society.

Literature Review

The concept of *imago Dei*, drawn from Genesis 1:26-27, emphasizes the intrinsic dignity, worth, and moral responsibility of human beings. Historically, theologians like Augustine and Aquinas connected *imago Dei* to humanity's capacity for reason and moral agency, which distinguishes humans from other forms of life (Augustine, 397; Aquinas, 1265). Augustine emphasized human rationality and ethical decision-making as reflections of God's image, while Aquinas linked *imago Dei* to intellectual potential and virtue (O'Donnell, 2012; Teixeira, 2015).

In modern theology, Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer expanded *imago Dei* to highlight its relational aspects, focusing on how human relationships with God and others reflect divine image-bearing. Barth emphasized that ethical obligations arise from human interconnectedness (Barth, 2003), while Bonhoeffer emphasized the ethical imperative for justice and the recognition of every individual's inherent value (Bonhoeffer, 1995). These theological insights remain critical as AI technologies increasingly mimic human cognitive and decision-making processes, raising profound ethical questions about human uniqueness and dignity.

Secular AI ethics frameworks, such as the European Commission's High-Level Expert Group on AI, the OECD AI Principles, and the IEEE's Ethically Aligned Design (Shahriari & Shahriari, 2017), emphasize core principles like fairness, transparency, and accountability (Floridi & Cowls, 2019). These principles are crucial in guiding responsible AI development. However, they often fall short in addressing deeper moral imperatives, such as the pursuit of justice and the protection of human dignity, particularly when AI systems replicate biases and exacerbate social inequities (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018).

The Biblical principle of justice, as expressed in the prophetic books of the Old Testament, offers a complementary ethical lens through which AI's shortcomings can be addressed. For example, Amos' call for justice—"But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:24, NIV)—challenges AI developers to move beyond technical fixes and adopt a moral commitment to rectify historical injustices. This echoes the work of Wolterstorff (2008), who highlights that Biblical justice requires not just avoiding harm but actively promoting the well-being of the vulnerable. While secular frameworks address algorithmic fairness in terms of procedural justice, Amos' vision of justice insists on active efforts to eliminate systemic biases and ensure that AI serves marginalized communities. This deeper commitment to justice enhances discussions on algorithmic fairness by framing fairness not just as a technical standard but as a moral obligation to promote equity and rectify past harms (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; Noble, 2018).

Theological ethics further emphasize the notion of stewardship, a Biblical principle that calls for responsible management of resources and the protection of creation. *imago Dei* ties into this concept by asserting that humans, as image-bearers of God, are entrusted with the moral responsibility to care for the world and its inhabitants. This principle directly informs AI governance by framing accountability not merely in terms of operational responsibility but as a moral duty to ensure that AI technologies are used to promote the common good, preserve human dignity, and foster social justice (Barth, 2003; Floridi & Cowls, 2019). Hauerwas (1991) also argues that stewardship implies a responsibility to use technology in ways that uphold ethical principles and protect human flourishing. Stewardship also extends to ensuring that AI systems do not exploit vulnerable populations or degrade social structures but instead contribute to the flourishing of all individuals and communities (Johnson, 1993).

One of the critical shortcomings of secular AI frameworks is their tendency to treat fairness and accountability primarily as procedural or technical issues, often neglecting the broader societal implications of AI systems. For example, Eubanks (2018) highlights that algorithmic fairness is

frequently framed in terms of improving accuracy and reducing bias within existing systems, without challenging the underlying social structures that produce and perpetuate inequities. Floridi & Cowls (2019) argue that while these frameworks are valuable, they can fall short in addressing the more profound ethical dimensions that influence society at large. Theological ethics, particularly through the lens of *imago Dei* and Biblical calls for justice and stewardship, push AI developers and policymakers to consider the deeper moral implications of their work. Wolterstorff (2008) asserts that justice in the Biblical sense demands not just technical improvements but a fundamental reshaping of societal structures to reflect moral commitments to equity and dignity.

In practice, this means that AI systems must be designed to avoid harm and actively promote justice and equity. For example, Buolamwini and Gebru (2018) reveal how facial recognition technologies disproportionately impact communities of color, mirroring and perpetuating existing racial biases. Secular calls for algorithmic fairness may focus on improving the accuracy of these technologies, but theological ethics demand a more profound transformation—one that seeks to dismantle the systemic injustices embedded in these systems and prioritize the well-being of marginalized communities. Noble (2018) further emphasizes that theological ethics broaden the scope of fairness by challenging the social structures that underlie algorithmic bias, pushing for a more holistic vision of justice that accounts for both technological and societal inequities. By emphasizing stewardship, Barth (2003) and Rahner (1979) suggest that AI should be governed with a view toward long-term social and moral outcomes, not just immediate operational gains.

The principle of stewardship further enhances the notion of accountability within AI governance frameworks. Secular ethics often define accountability in terms of ensuring that AI systems function correctly and do not cause harm. However, Biblical stewardship demands a more comprehensive view of accountability—one that includes moral responsibility for the impact of AI on individuals, communities, and the environment. Wolterstorff (1983) highlights that stewardship involves the responsible management of all that has been entrusted to humanity, particularly in protecting vulnerable populations and the environment. AI systems must be designed and deployed in ways that honor the sacredness of human life and the integrity of creation. Vallor (2016) emphasizes that developers have an ethical duty to ensure that their technologies promote sustainability, social responsibility, and the common good, rather than merely advancing technological progress for its own sake. This aligns with Rahner's (1979) call for moral accountability that reflects care for creation and future generations.

Moreover, the theological concept of relationality, as emphasized in *Imago Dei*, highlights the importance of human agency and moral responsibility in the development and use of AI. Bonhoeffer (1995) and Barth (2003) both stress that human beings are relational creatures created to live in community with others and God. AI systems must not be allowed to operate autonomously without human oversight; rather, they should be designed to support human decision-making in ways that align with ethical principles of justice, compassion, and care. Floridi & Cowls (2019) argue that this perspective calls for a rethinking of the role of AI in society, ensuring that these technologies enhance human relationships and contribute to the flourishing of individuals and communities rather than undermining them.

In conclusion, integrating *Imago Dei* and Biblical principles such as justice and stewardship into AI ethics provides a deeper and more holistic ethical framework than what is typically offered by secular approaches. By grounding fairness, transparency, and accountability in a commitment to justice, equity, and the common good, theological ethics challenge AI developers and policymakers to go beyond technical fixes and embrace a moral responsibility to promote human flourishing. Wolterstorff (2008) argues that this approach ensures that AI technologies not only prevent harm but actively contribute to a more just and equitable society, aligning with both secular ethical standards and religious moral imperatives.

Integrating *imago Dei* and Biblical Teachings into AI Ethics

The concept of *imago Dei* offers a strong ethical foundation for AI development, emphasizing human dignity and the need for AI systems to do more than just avoid bias. They must actively rectify historical injustices, as AI technologies that perpetuate discrimination in areas like criminal justice, facial recognition, or hiring are ethically unacceptable (Crawford, 2021). Grounding fairness in *imago Dei* requires continual auditing of AI systems to address and correct these biases, ensuring equity, particularly for marginalized communities. Moreover, *imago Dei* underscores the importance of moral agency, demanding that ultimate accountability for AI decisions remains with humans, not machines, so that AI serves humanity by supporting, rather than replacing, human decision-making (Gunkel, 2018).

This theological framework critiques prevailing trends in AI that prioritize efficiency over human values. *Imago Dei* calls for AI technologies to be designed with compassion, empathy, and respect for human life, ensuring that they enhance rather than diminish human capabilities and freedoms (Barth, 2003; Rahner, 1979). Barth (2003)

emphasizes that the relationality inherent in *imago Dei* — our ability to form deep connections with others—should guide the ethical design of AI systems. AI must support, not undermine, human relationships, particularly in areas where human interaction is critical, such as healthcare and criminal justice. Rahner (1979) further reinforces that ethically developed technology should foster human flourishing and uphold human dignity. AI systems that depersonalize care or reinforce biases run directly counter to this theological framework, calling for designs that promote respect, equality, and relational support.

In addition to *imago Dei*, biblical teachings on wisdom, justice, and stewardship offer essential ethical guidance for AI development. The wisdom literature of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes stresses the importance of prudence and discernment in making decisions that ensure long-term well-being. Proverbs 4:6-7 encourages the pursuit of wisdom as a guiding force, promoting human dignity, fairness, and sustainability over short-term gains: "Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:6-7, NIV). This wisdom is critical for responsible AI practices that balance technological progress with protecting fundamental human values (Barth, 2003).

Biblical teachings on justice, particularly in the prophetic books of Amos and Micah, further emphasize fairness and equity as core principles for AI systems. These values demand that AI technologies, whether in healthcare, criminal justice, or employment, be developed with an unwavering commitment to equity and justice for all individuals, regardless of their background:

> He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8, NIV)
>
> But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! (Amos 5:24, NIV)

When AI perpetuates discrimination, it violates the biblical mandate for justice and righteousness. Therefore, AI must be not only technically proficient but also, just, and socially responsible, ensuring fairness across all applications (Noble, 2018).

Finally, the principle of stewardship, as outlined in Genesis 1:28, speaks to humanity's responsibility to manage creation responsibly, which in contemporary terms includes the ethical development and deployment of technology.

> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:28, NIV)

Shannon Vallor (2016) highlights the relevance of this ancient biblical principle for AI ethics, arguing that AI must be developed in sustainable and beneficial ways for all of creation. Stewardship calls for AI systems to minimize harm, promote environmental sustainability, and contribute to the common good, ensuring that technological progress serves society and the planet.

By integrating *imago Dei* and biblical teachings on wisdom, justice, and stewardship into AI ethics, we establish a comprehensive framework that guides AI development toward efficiency, innovation, compassion, fairness, and sustainability. These theological and ethical imperatives ensure that AI contributes to human flourishing while upholding justice and promoting the common good for all of creation.

From Principles to Practice: Case Studies and Practical Recommendations

Theological principles like *imago Dei*, wisdom, justice, and stewardship offer a strong ethical foundation for AI in healthcare, criminal justice, and employment. Integrating these values ensures AI technologies uphold human dignity, promote fairness, and foster ethical responsibility. As AI adoption presents both opportunities and challenges in these sectors, *imago Dei* provides a guiding framework for addressing bias, promoting justice, and ensuring that AI contributes to the common good.

Case Study 1: AI in Healthcare

AI has the potential to significantly transform healthcare by improving diagnostic accuracy and personalizing treatment plans, enhancing early detection and treatment of diseases like cancer (Jiang et al., 2017). For instance, AI algorithms are increasingly used in oncology to analyze medical images, detect early signs of cancer, and assist in treatment decisions with remarkable precision (Aftab et al., 2025). However, these advancements raise pressing ethical concerns around privacy, patient consent, and the potential for dehumanizing patient care, particularly when AI systems replace or diminish personal interactions between patients and healthcare providers (Crawford, 2021).

A key ethical dilemma centers on the risk that AI, when making critical healthcare decisions, could overshadow human judgment, potentially compromising patient dignity. Overreliance on AI-driven diagnostics and treatment recommendations might undermine the relational and empathetic elements of care, which are essential for maintaining trust and patient well-being (Obermeyer &

Emanuel, 2016). Moreover, the opaque nature of AI systems—often described as "black boxes"—can challenge the principles of informed consent and autonomy, leaving patients uncertain about how AI contributes to their care decisions (Floridi & Cowls, 2019).

To address these concerns, the theological principle of *imago Dei* offers a critical ethical lens that AI be designed to support, rather than replace, healthcare professionals. This principle reinforces the need for AI systems that enhance the caregiving process while ensuring that empathy and personal attention remain central to patient care (Barth, 2003). AI should be viewed as a tool that complements human judgment, helping healthcare providers make more informed decisions without displacing the human elements of compassion and connection (Rahner, 1979).

Additionally, AI systems in healthcare must be transparent and explainable, ensuring that patients have a clear understanding of how AI contributes to their diagnosis and treatment (Floridi et al., 2018). This transparency is vital for preserving patient autonomy and for fostering trust between patients and their caregivers, as it allows for more informed consent and shared decision-making (Mittelstadt et al., 2016). In doing so, AI can help strike a balance between technological efficiency and the ethical imperative to uphold the dignity and humanity of each patient.

Case Study 2: AI in Criminal Justice

AI is increasingly employed in criminal justice for risk assessments, parole decisions, and sentencing recommendations. However, tools like COMPAS (Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions) have been criticized for perpetuating racial biases, often assigning higher risk scores to Black defendants, leading to disproportionately harsher sentences compared to white defendants with similar profiles (Angwin et al., 2022; Eubanks, 2018). This raises significant ethical concerns about fairness and justice in AI applications.

The theological principle of *imago Dei*, asserting the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals, offers a moral framework for addressing these challenges. Grounded in the belief that all humans are created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27), *imago Dei* emphasizes the need for AI systems that treat all people with equal dignity, irrespective of race or background. This calls for regular algorithmic audits and the inclusion of diverse datasets to reduce bias and ensure fairness (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; O'Neil, 2016).

Moreover, *imago Dei* advocates for human oversight in AI decision-making to ensure that ethical and moral judgment remains central. AI systems should support, not replace, human discretion, ensuring that justice is applied fairly and equitably (Rahner, 1979; Floridi et al., 2018). This aligns with broader ethical discussions emphasizing that AI should enhance human judgment rather than undermine it. Incorporating *imago Dei* into AI governance in criminal justice ensures that AI systems contribute to a more just and equitable system by promoting fairness and safeguarding human dignity (Crawford, 2021; Noble, 2018).**Case Study 3: AI in Employment**

AI is increasingly utilized in employment processes such as resume screening and preliminary interviews, offering efficiency gains but also raising significant ethical concerns regarding fairness and bias. Automated systems, often trained on biased historical data, can replicate and amplify existing discrimination. For instance, Amazon's AI recruiting tool was discovered to systematically downgrade resumes containing terms associated with women, effectively perpetuating gender bias in the hiring process (Dastin, 2022). This highlights the risk of AI systems reinforcing structural inequalities rather than alleviating them.

Theological principles, particularly *imago Dei*, provide a robust ethical framework for addressing these issues in employment. *Imago Dei* asserts the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, emphasizing that AI systems must prioritize fairness, equity, and inclusivity over mere operational efficiency (Genesis 1:26-27). By recognizing every person as created in the image of God, the principle demands that AI be designed to promote justice and equality, ensuring that individuals are evaluated fairly based on their qualifications rather than biased algorithms (Rahner, 1979).

To address these challenges, bias audits and algorithm retraining are essential to prevent AI from perpetuating discriminatory patterns (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; O'Neil, 2016). These audits should involve regular assessments to identify and correct biases embedded within AI models, particularly those that discriminate based on gender, race, or other protected characteristics (Autor, 2015). Moreover, AI developers and employers should ensure that their systems are transparent, allowing job seekers to understand how AI influences hiring decisions. This transparency respects the agency of applicants, providing them with opportunities to appeal unfair decisions or improve their qualifications, ultimately fostering a more just and equitable employment process (Floridi et al., 2018; Noble, 2018).

Imago Dei calls for AI systems in employment to respect human dignity by promoting fair and just outcomes for all individuals. By integrating theological ethics with practical safeguards such as bias audits, retraining, and transparency, AI technologies can be developed to advance both efficiency and fairness, contributing to a more equitable workforce.

Practical Applications and Recommendations

AI in Healthcare: Prioritizing Human-Centered Care

The concept of *imago Dei* shapes ethical AI in healthcare by emphasizing dignity, compassion, and the centrality of the patient. AI should support, not replace, human judgment in critical decisions (Floridi et al., 2018). Ensuring transparency allows patients to maintain control over their treatment, while regular bias audits help reduce disparities and promote equitable care tailored to individual needs.

Key Recommendations

1. Ethical Audits: AI systems must undergo regular audits to identify biases, ensuring equitable healthcare for marginalized populations. Collaboration between theologians, AI ethicists, and policymakers should guide these efforts to align with both secular and religious ethical mandates.

2. Transparency: Patients must be able to understand how AI influences their care. Theological and secular ethicists can collaborate on transparency guidelines to uphold moral responsibility and patient autonomy.

3. Cross-Sector Collaboration: Establish ethics committees involving theologians, medical professionals, AI developers, and policymakers to ensure AI systems balance technological innovation with patient dignity and justice.

AI in Criminal Justice: Promoting Fairness and Accountability

In criminal justice, *imago Dei* highlights the need for equal dignity and fairness in AI systems. Tools like COMPAS, used for risk assessments and sentencing, must be rigorously audited to prevent racial or socioeconomic bias (Angwin et al., 2022).

Key Recommendations

1. Algorithmic Audits: Regular audits should address disparities in sentencing and risk assessments. These audits should be informed by Biblical principles of justice, particularly the call for fairness in Amos 5:24 and Micah 6:8.

2. Human Oversight: AI systems should not autonomously make critical decisions. *Imago Dei* mandates that human oversight ensures moral accountability. Mechanisms should be established for collaboration between religious leaders and criminal justice professionals.

3. Collaboration Between Theologians and Legal Experts: Create interdisciplinary working groups involving theologians, legal scholars, and AI developers to develop more equitable and humane AI policies that align with both legal frameworks and moral obligations.

AI in Employment: Ensuring Fairness and Inclusivity

In employment, *Imago Dei* principles emphasize fairness, transparency, and inclusivity. AI systems in hiring and evaluation processes must avoid perpetuating discrimination based on gender, race, or other characteristics (Dastin, 2022).

Key Recommendations

1. Bias Audits: Mandatory audits should ensure hiring algorithms do not reinforce historical inequities. Theological principles of justice and equality should guide these audits, ensuring that every individual is treated with dignity.

2. Ethical Oversight: Establish oversight boards that include theologians, human resource professionals, and AI ethicists to ensure AI promotes equity and diversity in hiring.

3. Collaboration for Ethical Employment: Encourage collaboration between religious institutions, secular organizations, and policymakers to develop policies that ensure AI is both fair and aligned with values of human dignity and moral responsibility.

Strengthening Religious and Secular Collaboration for AI Governance

Collaboration between theologians, AI developers, and policymakers is critical for ensuring AI systems uphold human dignity and social justice.

Why Did You Choose Your Major?

1. Interfaith and Secular Ethical Councils: Establish councils that work alongside regulatory bodies to align AI with both moral principles and secular standards.

2. Ethical Guidelines for AI Development: Develop guidelines that integrate Imago Dei with secular principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability, serving as a blueprint for AI developers.

3. Training Programs: Implement programs for AI developers, policymakers, and theologians to foster dialogue and ensure AI systems are designed to serve the common good while adhering to ethical standards.

Conclusion: Integrating *imago Dei* into AI Governance

Embedding *imago Dei* into AI governance frameworks ensures that AI systems uphold human dignity, promote social justice, and ensure fairness and transparency. Collaboration between theologians, AI developers, and policymakers will help create ethical AI governance frameworks that align with both secular and religious values, fostering human flourishing through justice and compassion.

Collaboration Between Religious and Secular Policymakers

To ensure comprehensive AI governance, collaboration between religious and secular policymakers is essential. Interfaith dialogue brings diverse ethical perspectives into the discussion, enriching AI policies with values like compassion, justice, and stewardship (Dignum, 2020;

Rahner, 1979). Establishing interdisciplinary ethics boards—composed of religious leaders, theologians, ethicists, AI experts, and policymakers—could oversee the ethical development and deployment of AI technologies. These boards would ensure that AI aligns with both secular ethical standards and theological principles, emphasizing the protection of human dignity and the promotion of social justice (Floridi et al., 2018).

Such collaboration fosters inclusive AI policies that address complex ethical challenges while upholding fairness and accountability at both local and global levels. Religious insights on justice and care for the marginalized complement secular approaches, helping to create AI systems that contribute to societal well-being rather than perpetuating inequality (Floridi, 2023).

International Implications and Global AI Policy

Religious ethics, particularly the concept of *imago Dei*, offer a valuable framework for shaping global AI policies that transcend cultural and religious differences. As AI reshapes the global economy and labor markets, international cooperation is essential to establish governance frameworks that prioritize human dignity, fairness, and transparency (Floridi et al., 2018). By embedding *imago Dei* into global AI policies, organizations like the United Nations and the European Union can create systems that respect universal ethical principles while addressing global challenges such as inequality, bias, and environmental impact.

The *imago Dei* framework emphasizes the intrinsic value of every human being, guiding AI systems to prioritize moral responsibility over mere technological efficiency. For example, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) already promote equality, justice, and sustainability, aligning with *imago Dei* to provide a moral basis for AI policies (United Nations, 2015). International organizations can use these principles to address the growing economic inequality caused by AI's disruption of labor markets, helping mitigate disparities between developed and developing countries (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014).

Another pressing challenge is the inherent bias in AI algorithms, particularly when these technologies are developed using data from specific demographic groups (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018). By promoting regular algorithmic audits and ensuring diverse datasets, global AI governance frameworks can create more inclusive systems. Furthermore, *imago Dei* encourages responsible environmental stewardship, which is increasingly critical as AI technologies demand significant energy resources (Strubell et al., 2020). Embedding sustainability into AI development will help mitigate the environmental harm caused by AI's growth.

A globally unified ethical approach to AI, grounded in *imago Dei*, can ensure that AI serves as a force for good across diverse populations. This approach promotes fairness, transparency, and moral responsibility, creating policies that foster human dignity, social justice, and sustainability on a global scale (Floridi et al., 2018).

Discussion

Interfaith dialogue plays a key role in shaping inclusive AI policies. Engaging multiple religious traditions allows policymakers to reflect diverse cultural and ethical perspectives, ensuring that AI systems respect global diversity (Asdi et al., 2024). This collaboration bridges gaps between religious and secular worldviews, leading to AI policies that promote ethical development across various communities.

Ultimately, the incorporation of *imago Dei* into AI policy provides a safeguard against the dehumanizing potential of AI technologies. Embedding principles of human dignity and justice into AI systems ensures that technological progress aligns with social responsibility and enhances human flourishing. As AI evolves, integrating religious and secular ethics will be essential in shaping a future where AI contributes positively to both society and the environment.

Conclusion and Final Recommendations

Expanding Interdisciplinary Research on Bias and Fairness

The persistence of algorithmic bias highlights the need for more interdisciplinary research, integrating ethics, sociology, and law (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; Crawford, 2021). Research should refine technical solutions like algorithmic audits and bias correction mechanisms while also assessing AI's broader societal impacts, particularly how it affects inequality. Collaboration between researchers and developers is essential to ensure that AI actively mitigates bias and promotes equity across all sectors.

Developing Global AI Policy Frameworks

Global cooperation is crucial as AI evolves, requiring policies that protect individual rights while fostering innovation (Russell & Norvig, 2016; Floridi et al., 2018). Policymakers should work with international bodies like the United Nations and the European Union to create standardized AI ethics guidelines that integrate both secular and religious values. These standards should ensure that AI upholds human dignity, promotes justice, protects privacy, and encourages responsible innovation globally.

Promoting Public Engagement and AI Literacy

Public engagement and education are vital to aligning AI development with societal values. Governments and institutions should promote AI literacy programs to help the

public understand AI's benefits, risks, and ethical implications (Rainie & Anderson, 2017). Inclusive and accessible initiatives will enable citizens to participate in AI governance discussions and hold developers accountable, fostering ethical AI practices that reflect collective values of justice, fairness, and dignity.

Fostering Interfaith Dialogue on AI Ethics

Interfaith dialogue brings diverse moral perspectives into AI ethics. Religious traditions from Christianity to Islam and Buddhism offer valuable insights into justice, stewardship, and compassion (Dignum, 2020; Hashmi, 2002). These conversations can inform AI policy, ensuring global AI standards reflect a wide range of ethical principles and promote inclusive, equitable AI governance.

Conclusion: A Path Forward for Ethical AI

The future of AI ethics requires an integrative approach that blends secular principles with religious and moral insights, creating a comprehensive framework for AI development. As AI becomes increasingly embedded in daily life, ethical guidelines must evolve to keep human dignity, justice, and accountability at the forefront. The concept of *imago Dei* offers a strong foundation for this evolution, emphasizing that AI must respect the intrinsic worth of every person.

Achieving ethical AI requires continuous research, policy development, and public engagement. Collaboration between technologists, ethicists, policymakers, and the public will ensure that AI technologies serve the common good while protecting fundamental rights. By fostering interdisciplinary research, global policy cooperation, and interfaith dialogue, we can shape AI that advances technological progress, enhances human life, promotes equity, and addresses ethical challenges thoughtfully. Embedding the principles of *imago Dei* and other moral frameworks into AI ethics will help create technologies that uphold justice, stewardship, and compassion, contributing to a more humane and equitable future.

Limitation of the Study

The theological framework, based on the Christian concept of *imago Dei*, may have limited applicability across global and multi-religious contexts. As a result, it may not fully resonate with secular or non-Christian audiences, particularly in the diverse cultural and religious landscapes where AI is developed and governed. While the study aims to foster a broader, more inclusive dialogue between secular and theological perspectives for more holistic AI policies, the focus on *imago Dei* requires the discussion to remain narrowly within this specific framework due to space constraints.

Conflict of Interest

We, the authors, hereby declare that we have no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could affect, or be perceived to affect, our objectivity in the article titled "Imago Dei and AI Governance: Ethical and Theological Challenges in the Age of AI."

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