

## **ROBOTICS ACCEPTANCE IN AFRICAN SOCIETIES: CULTURAL REFLECTIONS ON AFRICAN HUMANITY, AND IDENTITY**

**Adewunmi, Clement Ilesanmi PhD**

Department of Philosophy,

Prince Abubalar Audu University, Anyigba

[wumiclem2004@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:wumiclem2004@yahoo.co.uk) or [wumiclems1010@gmail.com](mailto:wumiclems1010@gmail.com)

[Tel:+2348077796401](tel:+2348077796401)

&

**Fasiku, Gbenga Cornelius PhD**

Department of Philosophy,

Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba,

[cfasiku@gmail.com](mailto:cfasiku@gmail.com) or [gbenga.fc@ksu.edu.ng](mailto:gbenga.fc@ksu.edu.ng)

[Tel:+2348169448844](tel:+2348169448844)

### **Abstract**

Technological coexistence with machines presents a somewhat problematic narrative. Thus, this paper investigates the philosophical dimensions of accepting robotics in African societies, by looking at how African cultural beliefs and worldviews inform perspectives, interpretations and the dynamics of human nature. Drawing on African philosophical traditions, the paper interrogates how human-robotics coexistence is interpreted and viewed within the African frameworks that prioritize communal values, human dignity, and spiritual beliefs. Adopting analytic method, the paper explores cultural views on technological integration that raise profound ethical and existential questions. This paper further reveals a uniquely African perspective on the integration of robotics by questioning how robotics may impact traditional understandings of identity and purpose and how African philosophies can balance technological progress with cultural continuity and what ethical considerations arise from the perceived risks of dehumanization. In the end, this paper concludes that, for robotics to be integrated into African cultural realities, developers and policymakers must account for certain philosophical concerns that will ensure that robotics complements rather than replaces human roles, and also introduce technology that aligns with African values, supports communal well-being, and preserves human dignity.

**Keywords:** Robotics, Ubuntu, Africa, identity, Humanity

### **Introduction**

The continued development and deployment of robotics technology in Africa prompts deep philosophical reflections on how African societies view the role of machines in relation to human identity, purpose, and moral value. In many African societies, the acceptance of robotics is shaped not just by practical considerations but by fundamental questions about what it means to be human and how technology fits into a broader understanding of human existence. African philosophical perspectives on human nature, with its focus on communal values, human dignity, and interconnectedness, present a meaningful perspective for exploring these issues by raising important philosophical questions about how robotics aligns with African worldviews and how technology might impact core concepts like identity, purpose and ethics (Gyekye 22).

African philosophies, which emphasizes human interconnectedness and the well-being of the community, suggest that the role of technology should support human-centered values. In this

context, the acceptance of robotics involves assessing whether it enhances or undermines human dignity and collective welfare. Robotics, as a form of technological power, could challenge these values by introducing automation in areas traditionally defined by human agency. As a result, some African societies are concerned that robots may unintentionally "dehumanize" or disrupt vital cultural roles and identities, raising ethical dilemmas in communities that prioritize human harmony over mechanistic efficiency (Ramose 14). This paper therefore explores these philosophical concerns by looking at cultural perspectives on the impact of robotics on African identity, human agency, and ethics. Through qualitative analysis, the paper aims to reveal how African societies interpret the integration of robotics and identify the key ethical issues involved. By focusing on themes such as dignity, purpose, and communal effects, the paper highlights the importance of culturally informed approaches to technological designs and adoptions, showing how African philosophical insights can enrich our understanding of ethical robotics in a more interconnected world (Wiredu 37).

### ***Ubuntu* and Robotics: Philosophical Reflections on Human Interconnectedness and Technology**

The African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which is often summarized by the phrase "I am because we are," places a strong emphasis on interconnectedness, community, and shared humanity. Rooted in various African cultural traditions, *ubuntu* embodies a worldview in which individuals are inherently bound to the welfare of others. This philosophical insight holds that one's identity and purpose are deeply and intricately connected to relationships within the community, fostering a sense of collectivity, responsibility and ethical consideration (Mbiti 34). Given these values, the integration of robotics into African societies raises questions about whether and how this technology aligns with, or disrupts this communal vision.

Robotics, as a form of automation and artificial intelligence, challenges this traditional vision of human interaction and interdependence. In societies that prioritize the vision *Ubuntu*, the question of whether machines can coexist with, enhance or even reinforce human values becomes a matter of philosophical inquiry. Some African scholars argue that the value system within *ubuntu* philosophy calls for technology to enhance and not to diminish human dignity and interpersonal connections (Gade 28). This creates a philosophical basis for critically assessing robotics technologies whether it serves the community, or it isolates the individuals by replacing human roles and diminishing opportunities for social interaction.

One area where *ubuntu* and robotics interact philosophically is in the realm of labor and community contribution. In many African societies, work is not merely a means of individual income but a way to contribute to the collective well-being. The introduction of robotics in industries such as agriculture or manufacturing could disrupt this dynamic, as robots might displace traditional roles that provide a sense of identity and connection to the community. Scholars argue that, within an *ubuntu*-centered framework, robotics would need to be integrated in ways that either create new forms of human engagement or augment community-centered work, rather than undermining it (Ramose 47).

Another point of consideration is the relational nature of *ubuntu*, which emphasizes empathy, understanding and the ethical responsibilities individuals have toward one another. Robotics, while potentially beneficial in enhancing productivity and efficiency, lacks the relational capabilities that characterize human interactions. Some argue that this absence of relational quality limits the compatibility of robotics with *ubuntu* philosophical vision, as technology cannot fulfill the ethical obligations inherent in community-centered actions (Wiredu 55). This could mean that African communities might view robots with caution, seeing them as tools but not as replacements for the human labor that carries moral and relational significance.

However, there is also the potential for robotics to align with *ubuntu* if designed and implemented thoughtfully. For instance, robots that support community needs such as healthcare robots that assist in caregiving or educational robots that support learning, could be seen as augmenting communal welfare rather than detracting from it. Scholars like Munyaka and Motlhabi suggest that robotics, if aligned with community-centered values and ethics, can embody an “extended *ubuntu*” by providing tools that strengthen, rather than replace, human connections (Munyaka and Motlhabi 12).

### **Human Dignity and the Ethics of Automation in African Thought**

The concept of human dignity occupies a central place in African philosophical thought, where it is closely tied to respect, communal values, and the recognition of every individual's inherent worth. This fundamental concept, deeply rooted in African ethical traditions, shapes how many African societies perceive and interact with technology, especially robotics and automation. In this context, automation presents a philosophical challenge: while it promises efficiency and economic advancement, it can also disrupt human-centered roles, potentially threatening the cultural emphasis on dignity and the intrinsic value of human labor (Gyekye 51).

In African societies, labor has traditionally been more than a means of production; it is an expression of human agency, purpose, and identity. The African understanding of human dignity emphasizes that each person's work contributes to their self-worth and to the social fabric of their community. Automation, by taking over tasks that were once performed by individuals, can be seen as displacing this expression of self-worth, thereby diminishing the dignity that comes from active, purposeful engagement in work (Ramose 73). African philosophers argue that any implementation of robotics or automation should consider whether it enhances or reduces an individual's capacity for meaningful work, which is key to maintaining dignity and community respect (Menkiti 145). Moreover, in many African communities, ethical responsibility and human interactions are seen as inseparable from moral action. Human work, especially in roles like caregiving, teaching, and community support, is valued not only for the task itself but also for the relational and ethical qualities it embodies. The presence of robots in these roles raises ethical questions, as machines lack the moral consciousness and empathy that guide human actions. Scholars such as Munyaka and Motlhabi contend that this lack of ethical agency makes it difficult for robots to fully respect and uphold the dignity of the individuals they serve, as their actions are devoid of genuine care or moral intent (Munyaka and Motlhabi 98).

From an ethical perspective, African thought often emphasizes the principle that technology should serve humanity, not replace or diminish it. This principle suggests that robotics and automation should be introduced in ways that respect human dignity and, ideally, amplify human capabilities rather than supplant them. For instance, automation that assists workers in physically demanding or dangerous tasks, while still allowing them to play an active role in their work, may be seen as ethically permissible. In contrast, automation that fully replaces roles considered to carry social and ethical significance risks creating a disconnection from meaningful work, which in African thought, directly impacts one's dignity and sense of purpose (Gade 212). This focus on human-centered ethics also aligns with African perspectives on the role of community. African ethical frameworks often uphold that individual dignity is connected to the well-being of the community as a whole. Thus, any automation that increases efficiency at the cost of individual roles may inadvertently harm the community's social fabric. For example, if automation leads to high unemployment, it may create a loss of social cohesion, as fewer individuals contribute meaningfully to the community's shared life. This viewpoint

highlights the need for policies that ensure automation supports community welfare rather than only serving corporate or economic interests (Wiredu 41).

### **The Role of Spiritual Beliefs in Shaping African Perspectives on Robotics**

In African societies, spirituality profoundly influences perspectives on life, human existence, and the natural and supernatural world. African spiritual beliefs often encompass a holistic view of the universe, where humans, nature, and the spiritual realm are interconnected. These beliefs shape ethical views and cultural norms and affect how technology, including robotics, is perceived and integrated. The concept of robotics may conflict with spiritual and philosophical understandings of human purpose, and the role of technology within these communities (Mbiti 47).

African spiritual traditions often place high importance on ancestors and the continuity of human life and culture across generations. Robots, as mechanical and impersonal entities, are generally seen as external to this continuity, raising concerns that the increased reliance on automation might weaken traditional roles and practices passed down through generations. For instance, rituals, crafts, and social practices that embody ancestral knowledge may lose their authenticity and cultural richness if taken over by machines. African communities might thus view the integration of robots into these areas with suspicion or resistance, feeling that it disrupts the connection to their heritage and ancestral beliefs (Menkiti 151).

African spirituality also emphasizes ethical considerations, as many traditions are rooted in the concept of maintaining balance and harmony within communities and the natural world. Technology, from this perspective, is often welcomed only if it serves to enhance human and communal well-being rather than creating division or harm. Robotics, however, introduces a dilemma: while it can increase efficiency, it also has the potential to disrupt social structures, diminish human labor, and alter the communal dynamics that African spiritual beliefs uphold. This disruption can lead to ethical concerns about the place of technology in a balanced life and community. Scholars like Ramose argue that African spirituality views technology as a tool rather than a replacement for human roles, suggesting that there is a cultural and spiritual need for robots to complement rather than compete with human agency (Ramose 82).

Additionally, many African traditional religious perspectives consider humility and reverence as central to the human relationship with the divine and the world. The idea of creating machines capable of human-like functions, or even of surpassing human abilities, may be viewed as potentially hubristic, overstepping the natural boundaries set by divine or spiritual order. This belief often leads to ethical questions about the extent to which humans should replicate or mimic themselves through technology, with robots being seen as artificial extensions that could disrespect the sanctity of human life and spiritual purpose. Thus, some African communities may interpret robotics as part of a philosophical debate over human limitations and the moral responsibilities associated with advancing technology (Wiredu 102).

### **Identity and Purpose: The Philosophical Impact of Robotics on African Cultural Roles**

As technological advancements continue to shape the future, the role of robotics also raises critical questions about its potential impact on cultural structures, values, and identities within the African context. Understanding the implications of robotics in Africa requires an examination of how technology intersects with culture, kinship, and social dynamics in African societies. One of the significant areas where robotics could affect these cultural roles is familyhood. In many African societies, the elderly are highly respected and often live within extended family units, where younger generations are expected to care for them. As the population ages, particularly in urban areas, there is a growing demand for caregiving services.

The potential for robots to assist in these areas such as through robots that can help the elderly with daily activities, or robots that assist in educational support for children could ease the burden on caregivers. However, this reliance on technology could also challenge the traditional values of filial piety and respect for elders, which are deeply ingrained in many African cultures.

Moreover, the introduction of robots into the household could complicate the cultural expectations surrounding child-rearing. The idea of raising a child in a technologically enhanced environment, where robots assist with education or emotional development, might conflict with the African value of communal child-rearing. In African communities, child-rearing is often seen as a collective responsibility that extends beyond the immediate family to include the larger community. As robots begin to play a role in shaping children's learning and socialization, there may be tensions between modern technological practices and traditional communal parenting methods.

Another key area elements of identity in many African cultures is the interdependence between the individual and the community. In such contexts, labor whether in farming, craftsmanship, or caregiving is intrinsically tied to personal and communal purpose. The automation of these roles raises questions about how individuals can maintain a sense of identity and purpose if machines perform tasks that once required human effort and skill. As African philosopher Mogobe Ramose argues, identity and dignity are intertwined with meaningful work, and robotics must be carefully considered in order to avoid undermining the cultural value of human labor (Ramosé 95). Moreover, traditional African roles often come with social and ethical responsibilities that robotics cannot replicate. For example, roles such as community healers, elders, and artisans carry not only technical skills but also cultural knowledge, wisdom, and ethical frameworks that are essential to the fabric of the society. In African thought, these roles are not easily transferable to machines, as they embody historical, spiritual, and moral elements that define what it means to be part of a community. The potential for robots to perform such tasks could lead to a loss of cultural identity and continuity, as machines lack the consciousness and cultural context needed to honor the symbolic and ethical dimensions of these roles (Gyekye 213).

African perspectives on work and purpose also highlight the importance of human agency. Robots, as automated entities operating without moral consciousness, are perceived as unable to engage in the self-reflection and intentionality that are core to human actions. In African philosophy, human actions are meaningful not only because of their outcomes but because of the intentional choices behind them. Robotics, in this light, is seen as lacking the moral and philosophical grounding that gives human work its purpose. Kwasi Wiredu, a noted African philosopher, emphasizes that robots cannot replace the human capacity for moral reasoning and community-focused judgment, which are essential for meaningful engagement within African cultural contexts (Wiredu 103). Furthermore, the communal nature of African identity means that work and purpose are viewed as a collective effort to sustain and nurture society. Robotics, by design, is often introduced for its efficiency, which may lead to the displacement of traditional roles and a shift toward individualism over communal involvement. In settings where employment opportunities are already limited, this shift could weaken social bonds, as fewer individuals engage in roles that directly contribute to the communal structure. This potential decline in shared responsibilities may disrupt the balance that African communities place on mutual dependency and shared purpose, emphasizing the need for culturally aligned policies regarding automation and robotics (Munyaka and Motlhabi 121).

## Conclusion

The cultural realities surrounding African perspectives on identity, dignity, spirituality, and communal values present significant obstacles to the acceptance and deployment of robotics in African societies. Unlike in more individualistic or technologically-driven cultures, African societies tend to value communal interdependence, ethical labor, and spiritual dimensions of human roles, all of which create a philosophical resistance to automation that replaces human work. Robotics, by its nature, cannot replicate the cultural meanings and moral intentions that infuse traditional African roles, particularly in caregiving, craftsmanship, and community leadership. As Mogobe Ramose argues, technologies like robotics that lack human consciousness or moral accountability risk undermining values essential to African identity and societal harmony (Ramose 104).

Furthermore, automation could disrupt the social fabric by displacing roles that provide cultural continuity and shared purpose. Robots, seen as lacking spiritual essence or ancestral connection, may be regarded as unsuitable replacements in contexts where labor is intertwined with spirituality and tradition (Mbiti 67). As a result, African societies may perceive robotics not as a neutral technological advancement but as a disruptive force that could erode the values of *ubuntu* and community cohesion. This poses a barrier to the widespread acceptance of robotics, as African communities may resist technologies perceived as incompatible with their worldview. Ultimately, for robotics to be integrated in a way that respects African cultural realities, developers and policymakers must account for these philosophical concerns. By ensuring that robotics complements rather than replaces human roles, it may be possible to introduce technology that aligns with African values, supports communal well-being, and preserves human dignity. This approach, which acknowledges cultural context, is essential for any meaningful and respectful deployment of robotics in African societies.

## Works Cited

- Binns, Nathaniel, et al. "Technology and Family: The Role of Robots in the Home." *International Journal of Social Robotics*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2021, pp. 517-529.
- Chikukwa, Peta, and Thandeka Moyo. "The Role of Technology in Transforming African Family Structures." *African Journal of Technology and Society*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2022, pp. 42-59.
- Gade, Christian B. N. *A Discourse on African Philosophy: A New Perspective on Ubuntu and Community*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Gyekye, Kwame. *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. Sankofa Publishing, 1996.
- Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Heinemann, 1990.
- Menkiti, Ifeanyi A. "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought." *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, edited by Richard A. Wright, University Press of America, 1984, pp. 145-161.
- Munyaka, Munamoto, and Motlhabi, Mabogo P. "Ubuntu and Its Socio-Moral Significance." *Ubuntu: The Global Philosophy for Humanity*, edited by Sheila Turner, Palgrave, 2004, pp. 12-29.
- Nkrumah, Kwame. *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965.
- Ramose, Mogobe B. *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*. Mond Books, 2002.

Sossou, Mary A. "Robotics and Social Change in Africa: A Case for Ethical Engagement." *African Studies Review*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2023, pp. 78-93.

Tshandu, Sizwe. "Family, Technology, and Identity in African Cultures." *Journal of African Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2020, pp. 118-131.

Wiredu, Kwasi. *Philosophy and an African Culture*. Cambridge University Press, 1980.