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# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, TRUTH AND WISDOM: A FRANCISCAN PERSPECTIVE

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is already embedded in our lives. While it provides “great possibilities for good,” it also poses “the risk of turning everything into abstract calculations that reduce individuals to data, thinking to a mechanical process” (Francis, 2024b). How can we live in truth and attain wisdom in this new life environment? This article shows that the Franciscan tradition can help us guide AI toward fostering a more humane and fraternal world.

Technical advancements can be used for both good and evil. They are not merely tools at our disposal, as they reflect the society that created them and, at the same time, shape it. The Pope reminds us that our ancestors used simple tools, like knives, to survive the cold, but also to “develop the art of warfare” (Francis, 2024c).

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AI, being a much more complex instrument, will have an even greater influence on our society. It is necessary to harness its enormous potential while avoiding its dangers, thus ensuring it serves human dignity. We must not allow everything to be reduced to calculations and statistical probabilities, neglecting “the essential values of compassion, mercy, and forgiveness” (Francis, 2024a).

The first part of this article analyzes the possibilities and challenges that Artificial Intelligence presents to the human yearning to live in truth. On the one hand, AI is bringing about “a revolution in processes of accumulating, organizing and confirming data.” It increases our knowledge, but it is also blurring the line between truth and falsehood. The second part focuses on the evolution of wisdom in the context of AI, referencing Socrates’ reflections on writing. The third part explores how the Franciscan tradition has addressed truth and wisdom, illustrating that this perspective can guide the development of AI to build a more humane and fraternal world.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. LIVING IN TRUTH IN THE AGE OF AI

AI facilitates the production and dissemination of convincing content that is hard to distinguish from real news, thus blurring the line between truth and falsehood. In fact, between May and November 2023, “websites hosting AI-created false articles have increased by more than 1,000 percent,” according to NewsGuard (Sadeghi et al., 2024). The Washington Post notes that AI is becoming a “misinformation super-spreader” (Verma, 2023).

Generative AI systems intensify these challenges. For example, they can create highly realistic images (“deepfakes”) and audio messages, which can be used for criminal activities.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, AI’s capability to autonomously complete academic assignments poses a significant temptation for many students.

### 1.1. Truth in the technical-scientific paradigm

The scientific method introduced by Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), which has shaped modern science, confines scientific truth to what is measurable, verifiable, and reproducible, excluding qualitative properties such as colors, sounds, flavors, and other sensory experiences. Rigorous scientific research can only be based on properties that can be measured and expressed in mathematical terms. This method

2 This article continues the reflection initiated by the author in: 1) Carbajo-Núñez, M. (2024). Artificial intelligence and Franciscan humanism of fraternity. *Carthaginensia*, 41(79); 2) Carbajo-Núñez, (2024). Education and Artificial Intelligence: The Role of the family. *Verdad y Vida*, 284.

3 About some scams carried out with AI, imitating the image and voice of family members: Atleson, 2023.

uses reason and logic to observe, verify, and experiment with natural phenomena, focusing on “primary qualities” such as size, shape, motion, and quantity. It considers that all of nature is written in the language of mathematics, so only what can be reduced to numbers counts. In this way, human experience is reduced to mere physical magnitudes.

Following this line of thought, the current technical-scientific paradigm seeks a truth that is universal, objective, quantifiable, and verifiable through the scientific method. To achieve this, it uses scientific rationality and the empirical method, while leaving aside other forms of knowledge, such as subjective experiences, traditional knowledge, and spiritual insights. In fact, “three of the five senses cannot be transmitted through technology. Three-fifths of reality, sixty percent” (Lynch, 2012).

This truth must be quantifiable in numerical data, so that results can be independently verified. Although this facilitates precision and consistency in analysis, it also hinders a comprehensive view of phenomena, as it ignores qualitative and contextual aspects.

#### **1.1.1. Pope Francis invites us to overcome this concept of truth**

Pope Francis asserts that artificial intelligence “could enable a democratization of access to knowledge and the exponential advancement of scientific research” (*FcoG7*), but it also carries serious risks. For instance, it could exacerbate scientific reductionism, which prioritizes technology and economic efficiency over the integral well-being of people and the environment (Francis, 2015).

The “rapidification” (*LS 18*) of our technological society fosters thoughtless agitation, globalized indifference, and irresponsible abuse of everything around us (*LS 225*). We are subjected to an overload of information that neither translates into wisdom nor aids in discerning the truth about our existence (Francis, 2013). Amidst a deluge of data, we struggle to achieve a deep and holistic understanding of reality.

“True wisdom, as the fruit of self-examination, dialogue and generous encounter between persons, is not acquired by a mere accumulation of data which eventually leads to overload and confusion, a sort of mental pollution.” (*LS 47*).

The omnipresence of technology as a source of information hinders critical discernment and leads to a superficial and fragmented vision of reality. The technocratic paradigm prioritizes pragmatism and individualism, weakening the communal and ethical sense of truth. Technology and science are often presented as