

Living in Truth in the AI Era

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(From the [Alphonsian Academy Blog](#))

Artificial intelligence is already part of our lives. It is not a mere instrument, but a living environment. How to inhabit responsibly this new cultural environment in which we are all immersed? How to “live in truth” in the AI era?

“Exciting opportunities and serious risks”

AI, in its many forms, offers “exciting opportunities and serious risks”[1]. It promises, for instance, “a revolution in processes of accumulating, organizing and confirming data” as well as “important innovations in agriculture, education and culture”[2]. It can also “help to

overcome ignorance and facilitate the exchange of information between different peoples and generations” (WCD 2024).

At the same time, AI is making it easy for anyone to produce and disseminate content that can be hard to differentiate from real news, thus blurring the distinction between truth and falsehood. In fact, from May to November 2023, “websites hosting AI-created false articles have increased by more than 1,000 per cent, according to NewsGuard”. The Washington Post says AI is becoming “the next great misinformation superspreader”[3]. Another article shows that ChatGPT offers different results according to the version used. Curiously, sometimes updated versions do not provide more accurate results[4].

Before the qualitative leap of generative AI, Nicholas Carr had already affirmed that “the Net prevents our minds from thinking either deeply or creatively,” and Alessandro Baricco talked about the “new barbarians,” who prefer speed to reflection and emotions to feelings. Some authors have jokingly called the media: “weapons of mass distraction.”

Generative AI systems are increasing these challenges, potentially becoming a source of “cognitive pollution.” For instance, they can create very realistic images (“deepfakes”) and audio messages (WDC 2024). Besides, it is also known that many students are presenting papers entirely made with AI applications, without any personal involvement in their elaboration.

Learning from the past to live in truth

In the first century, the poet Decimus Iunius Iuvenalis lamented the populism of the Roman emperors, who kept people anaesthetized and quiet by providing “bread and circuses” (*panem et circenses*). In that social context, the Church Fathers warned about the danger of becoming spectators and actors in a pseudo-reality with no ontological consistency. The main risk they perceived was not so much about the spectacles’ violent or immoral content, but about the danger they posed to truth, since they blurred the distinction between reality and fiction. Watching these shows, people got strong emotions, but they did not feel moved to revise their own lifestyles and fight injustice.

“Why is it that a person should wish to experience suffering by watching grievous and tragic events which he himself would not wish to endure? Nevertheless, he wants to suffer the pain given by being a spectator of these sufferings, and the pain itself is a pleasure. What is this but amazing folly? If the human calamities, whether in ancient histories or fictitious myths, are so presented that the theatregoer is not caused pain, he walks out of the theatre disgusted and highly critical. But if he feels pain, he stays riveted in his seat enjoying himself”[5].

Tertullian (155-240) affirmed that those shows were unsuitable for Christians since they contradicted the “*ratio veritatis*” of creation. Nobody felt responsible, only excited and curious.

Today, we need to live in truth

In the AI Era, we also need to “live in truth,” i.e. with continuous discernment and responsibility. The current socio-economic system does not invite us to think but to buy, as Aldous Huxley and Neil Postman have reminded us in a suggestive way[6]. Pointless distraction and insubstantial amusement are shaping a bright but superficial culture. Many people are more connected, but they “have no sense of involvement or compassion” (WDP 2016). This can lead us to relativism and indolent triviality, losing empathy, solidarity, and capacity to contemplate creation.

Human formation and growth require silence, discernment, and interiorization. The emotions, intense and ephemeral, must give way to feelings, which are always “expressions of the subject’s personal and thoughtful interpretation” (A. Bissi; cf. M. Scheler).

Plato said that a human being needs seven years of silent search to know the truth, and at least fourteen to learn how to communicate it to others. Indeed, we need “to enjoy the value of silence and contemplation and to receive formation in understanding one’s experiences and listening to one’s conscience”[7]. In this way, we would be able “to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously” [LS 47].

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[1] Francis, «Message for the 58th World Day of Social Communications» (WCD) Jan 24, 2024.

[2] Francis, «Message for the 57th World Day of Peace (WDP), Jan 1, 2024.

[3] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/12/17/ai-fake-news-misinformation/>; cf. <https://www.newsguardtech.com/special-reports/ai-tracking-center/> (accessed: Jan 26, 2024)

[4] Chen Lingjiao – Zaharia Matel – Zou James, «How is ChatGPT’s behavior changing over time?», in *Internet*: <https://arxiv.org/abs/2307.09009> (accessed: Jan 26, 2024)

[5] Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 2,2.

[6] Postman N., *Amusing ourselves to death*, New York 2006; Huxley A., *Brave new world*, New York 1932.

[7] XV Synod of Bishops (2016), «Preparatory document, 4. Cf. Carbajo-Núñez Martín, *Being a Franciscan in the Digital Age*, Tau Pub., Phoenix (AZ) 2021,174.