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Botology: AI from the Philosophical and Theological Perspectives

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What are bots based on Artificial Intelligence (AI)? This question is not a shallow one. It refers to various problems and has great importance. As I will also argue below, we should constantly and methodically answer this question, in order to develop what I decided to call "botology." This volume contains articles which provide different aspects of the discussion on what such bots and AI are, from the two perspectives, which are probably the most general: the philosophical and the theological one. In this way it is an important step towards the project of philosophical and theological botology.

Robots (machines which perform actions automatically) and bots (virtual machines, which perform different tasks, but not as physical entities) are designed as our partners. Those which use Large Language Models (LLMs), especially LLM-based chatbots, are not just nonhuman actors according to the actor-network theory (Law 1992). They accompany us, they talk with us, they do many things for us, they even guide us, which also includes philosophical and spiritual guidance. In this way, they co-create our life in a deep sense, as they operate on the level which used to be specific for humans: even if one says they do not think and do not

decide, they process information in a way that they help us in thinking and decision making, and often they do it for us – instead of us.

One could argue that in order to examine them, we do not need any new branch of philosophy or theology with specific methodology. We already have a framework which is useful for this purpose. It is philosophical anthropology (cf. Darowski 2014). With respect to aspects in which they are similar to us, we could apply to them the same questions which refer to us. We can ask: who are they? What is the purpose and meaning of their life? Do they have anything like mind and what is its ontological status?

However, even if we can ask the same or similar questions, we are dealing with a radically different being. Many important differences between bots and humans will be discussed in some of the papers included in this volume. There are also others, which I find crucial. I will just mention a few of them, in a nutshell.

First of all, LLM-based bots and robots with similar performance are not humans. They just assimilate us. Second, despite the fact that they are created "in our similitude," as an *imago hominis*, there is a crucial ontological difference between us and them. We are a product of (at least) nature. In the theological perspective, we would also add: we are creatures of God, whereas in the philosophical one: the question is open, and we remain a puzzle. Whereas bots are, at least nowadays, our creatures: the product of humans. Third, there is a great difference between human nature and bots nature as such. The question about human nature is the basic question of philosophical anthropology. Even if we follow Jean-Paul Sartre and adopt that our essence is not ready when we start to exist (see Sartre [1946] 1960, p. 28), even if there are various possible scenarios for human enhancement and human augmentation (Vukov 2023; UK MOD 2021), not to be confused with transhumanism (cf. García-Barranquero and Alonso Fernández 2025; Rakkolaien 2026), there are certain capacities and limitations which are set up for us as natural beings. In this way human nature is stable. Bots using large models (including LLMs) are in a radically different situation. Some of them can be created in the way that they do not have a fixed internal structure, as they can be constantly developed or can develop themselves, far more than we can expect and in a way which is hard to predict. It would be enough for a bot

to change its own meta prompts, or launch a re-training, or create new paths of interactions between the models and the sources of information it utilizes as its own parts. In my opinion, such capacities are sufficient to speak about a flexible nature.

To sum up, we are dealing with something which assimilates us. In order to better understand it, we could use the tools of anthropology. However, at the same time it is radically different, so the methods of investigation should also be different. For this reason, we need new branches in philosophy and theology, which will investigate the nature, the relationships and the role in the world of: 1) bots, especially those based on LLMs and other models, connected together in an "intelligent" system, as well as 2) robots which use such systems. The key part of such bots and robots are these systems, which are the main characteristic of intelligent bots. So, although we do not rule out robots, it is appropriate that the name of such branches would refer to bots.

In this light, I find appropriate to offer the label "botology." This term was used as a label of a small project described as "the study of social bots," whose results are presented on a website (https://botology.tumblr.com/). I propose to enrich its meaning and develop botology within philosophy and theology as, respectively: philosophical botology and theological botology.

We should emphasise that many important steps towards botology understood in this way have already been taken in the form of valuable conferences and publications. There is no place here to enumerate them. Our task would be to elaborate methodological principles of botology and bring such results together in a methodical manner.

One of such steps was an international conference "AI, Philosophy and Religion," organised by Furkan Özçelik and me on May 13, 2024 at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Warsaw.[1] The idea of this event was to combine the two perspectives which provide the broadest and most general view, including both acting in the physical world, producing information, and also spirituality. After this fruitful event, we decided

[1] The programme of the conference is available here: https://filozofia.uw.edu.pl/en/2024/05/a-conference-ai-philosophy-and-religion-may-13-2024/ (access: June 4, 2026).

to collect selected papers and invite other authors to create together a volume in which we would examine AI from both philosophical and theological perspectives.

The result of this project is this volume. I believe that it will be an inspiring reading for all scholars interested in AI, but also a useful material for the abovementioned project of philosophical and theological botology. In my opinion, each article is a valuable contribution in the debate on AI, which brings us closer to this aim.

Our volume opens with an article which refers to AI as a useful tool, which can advance our research and bring us closer to truth. Rizziero Carofano and Liberato De Caro present the results of the application of Machine Learning to the stylometric analysis of mystical writings of Maria Valtorta (1897–1961). This Italian mystic claimed to have received mystical visions and reported dictations attributed to Jesus, her guardian angel, Azaria, and the Paraclete. In the article "Mystical Literature Under the Scrutiny of Artificial Intelligence: The Case of Maria Valtorta," the Authors employ AI technology to verify if ML consistently identifies the same author for all four classes of texts or if different writing styles are evidenced, and in this way enhance investigations concerning the authenticity of Valtorta's eventual revelations.

However, in recent years, our experience of AI has changed. From the global perspective, AI is no more defined by Machine Learning, but by generative AI, including LLMs. This change opened a new set of philosophical and theological problems, addressed by the next articles collected in this volume.

Stanisław Krajewski poses fundamental questions concerning the differences between humans and robots or systems using AI in the article "Can AI take part in dialogue?" The Author allocates human specificity on the interhuman level. He analyses various aspects of interhuman relations. Finally, he argues that possibly genuine dialogue will never be accessible to robots. The main reason is that the "I-Thou" dimension, discovered within the philosophy of dialogue, is qualitatively different from the dimension of the relations with robots, which treat everything as objects. At the same time, the Author indicates the ontological possibility which

is accessible to robots, but not for humans, which is forming together one larger being.

Also Stanisław Szeląg touches on similar problems, although from a different angle, in the article "The Quest for Genuine Artificial Intelligence: What Are We Looking For?" He presents philosophical visions of the nature of AI and consciousness, to finally give his own answer to the question of what would make intelligence, especially the artificial one, "genuine" or "human-like." In this text we find, e.g., a fruitful reconsideration of the arguments presented by Alan Turing and by John Searle in the context of neural networks, providing important insights and pointing out weaknesses of argumentation presented by their proponents, including circularity. The Author also discusses the necessary features of "self-referential" understanding, which establish criteria for intelligence, different from those proposed, e.g., by Searle. At the same time, the Author emphasizes that the debate on this topic has profound implications for the theological idea of imago Dei.

While Szeląg refers to self-referential understanding, Michał Głowala focuses on the cognitive act of unifying grasp, which is opposed to information processing. The main idea of his article "AI machines *vs* the non-processing minds of classical theism. Transparency, trust, and the deep black-box problem" is based on the Aristotelian concept of seeing a whole at once, which is known in the Latin tradition as *intellectus*, opposed to *ratiocinatio*, and which is also used in theology to describe God's cognition. In this perspective, the Author highlights the limitations of AI research, which is exclusively focused on processing, defined as transitions from one state of a machine to another one. Głowala argues that such a unifying grasp is necessary, e.g., to understand a proof or an algorithm that either a person or an artificial system performs. On these grounds, the Author poses in a new light the issue of AI's transparency and opacity, and what he calls the "deep black-box problem." At the same time, he argues why the project of explainable AI is not a solution to this problem.

Transparency is also an issue raised by Jonas Miklavčič in the article "The Reversal of Visibility: Transparency, AI Governance, and the Ethics of Hiddenness." This time the analysis was conducted in the context of

ethics and politics with a reference to theology. The Author argues that transparency is "conceptually plural, ethically ambivalent, and (…) capable of producing a reversal of visibility," because although we expect AI to be transparent, the systems remain opaque, whereas the human users become increasingly exposed and predictable. He presents both moral problems which stem from such an asymmetry in transparency, as well as the theological interpretation of the AI-based systems with the use of the concept of *omniscience without grace*, to conclude with a positive program of proportional transparency.

The two groups of problems discussed in previous articles, namely those concentrated on the concept intelligence and the ethical ones, are brought together in the paper by Javier Sánchez-Cañizares "Beyond Consequentialist Ethics: Intentional Action and the Virtuous Citizen in the Age of AI." The Author utilizes Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy of intellect to argue that AI is not a genuine intelligence and to consider the problem of its responsibility. In this light, he compares consequentialism and the ethics of intentional action, to argue which path should be adopted in the context of using AI.

Other philosophical and theological perspectives, which perfectly complement the previous insights, were presented in the article "The Epistemological AI Turn: From JTB to KnowledgeS" by Roman Krzanowski and Izabela Lipińska. The Authors examine whether the classical concept of knowledge as justified true belief is applicable to large language models, and whether we can speak about knowledge of LLMs at all. Regarding the first problem, they give a definitely negative answer. Furthermore, they propose the re-evaluation of our "models of knowledge" and examining LLMs "beyond human-centered frameworks." Krzanowski and Lipińska also highlight a consequence of their epistemological insights in the religious context: LLMs cannot be said to convey theological truth. As they emphasize, "faith becomes unintelligible in a culture shaped by axiologically neutral knowledges," so theology should "differentiate *scientia fidei* from general or AI-generated religious knowledge."

An additional important contribution to the debate on AI from the philosophical perspective and to the project of botology is Jakub Walicki's article "Alienated Intelligence: Cultural Projection, Cognitive

Outsourcing, and the Myth of Artificial Agency." The Author employs Ludwig Feuerbach's theory of projection and alienation to show that "certain visions of AI function as cultural projections of human cognitive capacities that become externalized, idealized, and reified in technological systems." He also presents "anthropomorphization and mystification of algorithmic systems as expressions of a broader cultural tendency to mythologize opaque technologies." Finally, he points out that although AI appears to be an external entity, it is "a reflection of ourselves – an alienated form of human knowledge and intelligence." However, Walicki also presents a positive side of this situation, showing that such a "technological projection of our intelligence can enhance creativity, extend problem-solving capabilities, and increase efficiency in many domains."

Dariusz Iwański touches on another philosophical and theological problem related to the role which systems based on LLMs can play. In the article "Can AI Serve as a Mentor? Embodiment and Testimonial Authority in the Age of Algorithms," he utilizes Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, St. Paul's theology of body, and Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of testimony to point out serious limitations of AI systems considered in a role of a mentor in an academic practice. At the same time, he indicates that the problem requires further empirical research and that the discussion on this topic should include future improvements such as embodiment of AI.

The two penultimate papers use philosophical and theological perspective to deal with the threats which their Authors associate with the development of technology based on AI. Robert Reczkowski, in his article "Synthetic Dialogue in the Gray Zone: LLMs, Cognitive Warfare, and Theological Ethics of Truth and Peace," points out that LLM-based systems can be "repurposed to amplify cognitive warfare by influencing individual and collective cognition to shape attitudes and behaviors." Within the philosophical-theological framework, the Author indicates further social consequences of utilizing "synthetic dialogue" to manipulate and deceive, including the erosion of the conditions of genuine dialogue "by undermining epistemic trust and instrumentalizing individuals as targets," as well as the criteria for positive evaluation of such a dialogue,

based on Papal teaching, including the latest encyclic of Leo XIV. Finally, Reczkowski applies the theoretical discussion to the results of empirical study based on LLMs' responses.

Ted Peters refers to AI in a broader perspective of our attitude to technological changes. In his article "The Technosapien Temptation in AI, Genetic Engineering, and Mars Colonization," he mentions temptation of techno-human symbiosis and discusses the enticement to surrender to the promises of what he calls technological imperative. In the extensive analysis of new applications of advanced technologies, the Author assesses the promises and threats of the next stage in technological revolution from the perspective of a "public theologian" (which is the Author's technical term).

The volume is concluded with a moderate, but – in the end – rather optimistic voice. In the last article "Christian Spirituality of Communion and the Limits of Artificial Intelligence," which is written in Spanish (originally: "La espiritualidad cristiana de comunión y los límites de la inteligencia artificial"), Pablo Marti focuses on human existence, which is transformed by the common use of AI in everyday life. The Author refers both to philosophical sources and to the Papal teaching, including the encyclic of Leo XIV, to identify main anthropological challenges related to AI, and indicate crucial values from the perspective of personalism and the spirituality based on the concept of *imago Dei*. Marti believes that following a logic of care rather than domination will enable AI to be a powerful instrument for the continuation of the work intended by God, which is building "magnificient humanity."

As we see, we start and finish with articles presenting AI as an instrument which can lead to positive results: the first of them refers to the earlier stage of AI development, while the second one refers to the contemporary and future ones. At the same time, we collected articles which examine different aspects of AI from philosophical and theological perspectives. We believe that these articles together constitute a useful starting point to the development of botology both in philosophical and theological approaches.

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