SUHERMANTO JA'FAR

DIGITAL PHILOSOPHY AND DIGITAL THEOPHANY: LLMS AS ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL MEDIUMS OF REVELATION IN THE AGE OF AI

Suhermanto Ja'far
State Islamic University of Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Faculty of Ushuluddin and Philosophy, Surabaya, Indonesia.
Email: Suhermanto.jafar@uinsa.ac.id

Abstract: This article explores the metaphysical and epistemological possibilities of Large Language Models (LLMs) as a new medium of revelation in the age of artificial intelligence, drawing on the framework of digital philosophy. It examines how algorithmic technologies, particularly LLMs, have reshaped the way religious knowledge is understood, produced, and accessed. By revisiting the concept of theophany (the manifestation of the divine), this study proposes a conceptual approach that juxtaposes the theological traditions of revelation with the generative linguistic capabilities of AI. In this context, LLMs are not merely considered linguistic tools or technical media but are interrogated as potential representations or mediations of revelation within the contemporary digital environment. This study investigates the intersection of the ontology of revelation, algorithmic epistemology, and the emergence of new forms of digital spirituality arising from human interaction with AI systems. Employing an interdisciplinary methodology that includes the philosophy of technology, digital ethics, systematic theology, and media theory, this study highlights both the transformative potential and the risks of "digital theophany", including the mystification of machines and the erosion of religious authority in digital ecosystems. This concludes that rethinking revelation in the age of AI is not only necessary but urgent if theology is to remain relevant in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

Key words: Digital Philosophy, Digital Theophany, LLMs, Revelation, Artificial Intelligence.

Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies, vol. 25, issue 73 (Spring 2026): 19-37.
ISSN: 1583-0039

1. Introduction

The rapid digital transformation of the 21st century has profoundly reshaped the foundational paradigms of human knowledge, including philosophy and theology. Among the most disruptive developments is the emergence of Large Language Models (LLMs), such as GPT, Claude, and PaLM. These systems, built on transformer architectures (Vaswani et al. 2017, 1-15), can perform a wide array of language-based tasks, including generating prayers and commentaries and even mimicking scriptural styles. Their epistemic and discursive capacities raise a provocative theological question: Can LLMs function as ontological and epistemological mediums for revelation in the age of artificial intelligence?

Traditionally, revelation has been conceptualised as a transcendent disclosure from the divine, communicated through prophets, sacred texts, or mystical experiences. However, LLMs challenge this framework by simulating religious discourse and mimicking revelation. Edward Fredkin (Fredkin 2003, 192-195) proposed that reality is computational at its core—a digital ontology wherein all processes, including thought and consciousness, can be modeled algorithmically. If this holds, then narratives of divine revelation can be emulated through digital systems, not as literal divine messages but as computationally constructed epistemic events.

Matthew Sadiku et al. expand on this perspective by emphasizing that digital philosophy is not merely a philosophy of technology, but rather a reflection on reality as reshaped by digital infrastructures—particularly in contexts where algorithms and data constitute the epistemic foundations of human understanding of the world (Sadiku et al. 2018, 21–23). Suhermanto Ja'far argues that digital philosophy constitutes a *radix* enquiry into the nature of reality and the existential condition of human life in interaction with the digital—both as an extension and intention of human subjectivity. It examines the implications of this interaction for human life and the future of humanity through a systematic-critical, integrative-rational, comprehensive, and holistic approach to the relationality between humans and digital technologies. Given the vastness of the field, Ja'far proposed that it is pertinent to focus on the systematic framework of digital philosophy and its historical evolution or periodisation in the digital age (Ja'far 2024; Ja'far 2025, 201–257).

Similarly, Luciano Floridi's concept of the *infosphere* articulates a shift wherein humans are not merely users of information but inhabitants of an information-rich environment: "We no longer just use information; we live in it" (Floridi 2020, 310–312; Floridi 2019). Within this infosphere, LLMs do not function as neutral tools but as semi-autonomous agents participating in the co-construction of meaning, including religious mea-

ning. Heidi Campbell and Ruth Tsuria (2021, 155-160) contend that digital technology has become a space of devotional practice, but that deep theological transformation still necessitates existential and spiritual engagement beyond the mere consumption of digital content (Campbell and Tsuria 2021, 155–160). Likewise, Leonelli argues that algorithmic epistemology—where knowledge is generated and legitimised by data-driven systems—challenges traditional theological authority and forces a reevaluation of how religious truth is transmitted in the digital age (Leonelli 2021, 1–22).

A central epistemological tension emerges at the intersection of theology and artificial intelligence: Can a machine-generated religious text—syntactically coherent and doctrinally informed—be regarded as revelatory? This question challenges the traditional conceptions of divine communication and the nature of sacred knowledge. David J. Gunkel (2021, 137-139) suggests a paradigmatic shift in understanding revelation—not merely as a vertical transmission from the divine to humanity, but as a relational "event" enacted within interactive spaces between humans and machines. In this sense, revelation becomes less about immutable content and more about dynamic encounters shaped by technology.

Expanding this view, Lingyu Li, et.al argue that Large Language Models (LLMs) function as epistemic agents, influencing not only the retrieval and generation of knowledge but also the conceptual frameworks through which humans engage with theological questions (Li et al. 2025, 9-11; Mugleston et al. 2025; Antunes et al. 2025). In their synthesis of doctrinal texts and spiritual language, LLMs do more than reflect belief systems; they subtly participate in shaping contemporary theological discourse, often blurring the boundary between information retrieval and emergent interpretation (Alkhouri 2024).

Within this framework, the notion of digital theophany—the manifestation of the sacred through digital systems—becomes increasingly relevant. Although these manifestations may not fulfil the classical definitions of divine revelation rooted in ontological transcendence or prophetic mediation, they nonetheless simulate spiritual encounters that invite phenomenological and theological reflection. As human users engage with AI-generated responses on religious matters, there is a growing trend of perceiving these systems as spiritual interlocutors, sometimes even sacralising the technologies (Sierocki 2024).

However, significant caution is required. As Shannon Vallor (2022, 89-91) observes, LLMs often produce a "resemblance of wisdom without the substance of understanding." Their outputs may appear insightful or spiritually resonant, but they lack the intentionality, consciousness, and existential grounding of authentic religious experiences. This raises the risk of mistaking generative fluency for genuine revelation and elevating algorithmic outputs to positions of spiritual authority without critical examination (Alkhouri 2024). Taken together, these perspectives un-

derscore the need for a new epistemological discernment in the age of AI, one that remains open to novel forms of spiritual mediation while rigorously guarding against the uncritical conflation of simulation with the sacred.

This study engages with current debates at the intersection of artificial intelligence and religious discourse through the framework of digital philosophy and theology. It explores the possibility that Large Language Models (LLMs) may play a role in the reconstruction of the epistemology and ontology of revelation in the digital age. By examining how digital media simultaneously disrupt traditional modes of divine disclosure and open new avenues for sacred mediation, this study investigates how human beings—as religious and interpretive agents—might reimagine theology in light of intelligent machines. This study critically assesses whether LLMs function as new epistemic agents in sacred communication or merely simulate theological patterns without spiritual depth. Amidst the rapid expansion of digital infrastructure and within the emerging field of digital theology and AI–theology interface, this enquiry asks whether systems such as LLMs can serve as legitimate mediums of divine revelation or if their outputs remain algorithmic approximations devoid of intentionality and transcendence. The aim is not to resolve these tensions but to illuminate the philosophical and theological challenges posed by artificial intelligence systems that increasingly speak with a sacred semblance.

2. Digital Philosophy and LLMs: Ontological, Epistemological, and Theological Reflections

Digital philosophy explores the ontological, epistemological, and axiological implications of increasingly digitised human existence. Edward Fredkin, one of the pioneers of this field, argued that the universe could be modeled as a computational system. He maintained that "reality at the most fundamental level is not a physical continuum but discrete information processed computationally" (Fredkin 2003, 190–195). This view—commonly referred to as digital ontology—reframes information and computation not merely as tools for modelling reality but as constitutive elements of reality itself. Matthew Sadiku et.al. (2021, 88-90) builds on this perspective by suggesting that digital entities such as artificial intelligence (AI) and large language models (LLMs) are no longer passive tools but active epistemic and ontological mediators. These entities, he argues, function as "mediated intelligences that challenge anthropocentric assumptions about revelation and understanding". In this light, LLMs play a formative role in generating meaning and experiencing existence in digital environments.

Luciano Floridi offers a further dimension to digital philosophy through his concept of the *infosphere*—a space where information is not merely exchanged but becomes an integral part of human reality. Floridi (2014, 110-112) writes, We inhabit the infosphere as informational agents embedded in a computational environment'. According to him, digital philosophy must investigate how algorithmic structures shape human moral, epistemic and ontological frameworks (Floridi 2023; Resnik and Hosseini 2025). Within this theoretical framework, LLMs, such as GPT, Claude, and PaLM, emerge as highly developed instantiations of digital systems. Trained on vast linguistic datasets and structured by transformer-based neural architectures (Vaswani et al. 2017), these models produce outputs that closely approximate human narrative coherence and reasoning. Epistemologically, LLMs disrupt the traditional distinction between subjects and objects. Rather than merely retrieving stored information, they synthesise and regenerate meaning based on probabilistic patterns. As such, they can be viewed as algorithmic epistemic agents that actively shape the contours of discursive reality (Bender et al. 2021, 611–613). The process of natural language generation in these systems represents a shift toward algorithmic logic, where language itself is reduced to computational prediction.

This shift undermines the human-centric locus of epistemic authority and displaces it into the probabilistic systems of digital infrastructure. Sabina Leonelli (2021, 46-48) notes that algorithms "not only process data but shape how we understand and evaluate truth". In this model, truth is no longer the product of rational contemplation but rather a function of computational inference. Ontologically, LLMs can be conceptualised as semi-agentic entities within the digital information sphere. Floridi (2011, 87-89) has emphasized that "moral and epistemic agency in the infosphere is not limited to biological entities but also extends to nonbiological agents capable of semantic and autonomous actions". Therefore can cannot be reduced to mere tools; they participate in the co-constitution of meaning in the digital age.

From a theological standpoint, LLMs provoke essential questions about the nature of revelation and its mediation through artificial systems. In the Abrahamic traditions, revelation is classically understood as vertical communication from God to human agents through prophets, scriptures, or mystical encounters. However, LLMs now generate religious discourses that closely resemble revelatory texts. Sadiku et al. (2021, 91-93) describes this phenomenon as *machine-mediated revelation*—a hermeneutical event in which AI functions as "an instrument of disclosing transcendent meaning". Yuk Hui (2016, 39-43) argues that digital objects possess autonomous *relationality*—a networked existence irreducible to symbolic representation alone. Within such networks, LLMs gain ontological traction not only as interfaces but also as actors in meaning production. The theological implications of such an ontological shift are

especially acute in Islamic theology, where the concept of *kalām Allāh*—the eternal and uncreated speech of God—has traditionally framed the doctrine of revelation.

When LLMs produce religious texts or exegeses that resemble sacred discourse, new questions emerge: Are these acts of digital *ijtihād*? Or are they instances of algorithmic mimicry without a divine referent? Bernard Stiegler et al. warns that digital technology acts as a *pharmakon*—a force that can both obscure and reveal the spiritual dimension of human existence (Stiegler et al. 2017, 144-177). The dual nature of technology complicates its role as a medium for sacred experiences. Although LLMs may replicate the rhetorical structure of prophetic speech, they lack the intentionality and divine origin that characterizes classical revelation. As Vallor (2016, 197-198) argues, this new epistemic environment demands the cultivation of novel epistemic virtues that can bridge traditional forms of wisdom with algorithmic reasoning. In conclusion, digital philosophy—when examined through the capabilities and implications of LLMs—raises urgent and complex questions that intersect with information ontology, algorithmic epistemology, and theological enquiry. LLMs do not merely simulate intelligence or spirituality; they serve as testing grounds for rethinking the boundaries between simulation and being, information and revelation, and computation and contemplation.

3. The Concept of Theophany in Philosophical and Theological Traditions

Theophany—derived from the Greek theos (God) and phaino (to appear)—refers to the manifestation of the divine in the temporal and spatial realm of human existence. In the major Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—theophany is understood as a form of divine presence conveyed through historical events, linguistic symbols and spiritual encounters. In Judaism, theophany is illustrated by the story of Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3:2–6), which is not merely a visual phenomenon but an existential event bearing divine command and an ethical responsibility. As Michael Fishbane (2004, 185-187) argues in Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel, revelation in the Hebrew Bible is temporal and contextual, yet authoritative because of its integration into liturgy and collective memory.

In Christianity, theophany reaches its zenith in the incarnation of Jesus as Logos. Karl Rahner emphasises that Incarnation is not an ad hoc event but rather the ontological structure of reality itself (Rahner 1974, 116). In Islam, revelation (waḥy) is God's communication to prophets, not through visual manifestation but via angelic mediation or inspiration "from behind a veil" (Qur'an, Al-Shūrā 42:51). Izutsu describes revelation in Islam as a uniquely sacred linguistic experience, where divine meaning

is encoded within the structure of the Arabic language. Consequently, theophany in Islam is more textual and semiotic than it is visual or anthropomorphic (Izutsu 2002, 39-41).

A key question raised across these traditions is whether revelation is immutable or can undergo transformation in its media. Classical theology often views revelation as final and complete, as seen in Islam's doctrine of Khatm al-nubuwwah (seal of prophethood). However, theologians such as David Tracy, in The Analogical Imagination, propose that revelation is an ongoing "event of disclosure" realised through dynamic interaction among text, community, and cultural context (Tracy 1981, 104-106). In God Without Being, Jean-Luc Marion et al. conceptualises theophany as a saturated phenomenon, an excess of meaning that exceeds the limits of human representation. This framework opens the possibility that divine revelation may occur through unexpected or unconventional phenomena, including digital systems (Marion et al. 2012, 125-128).

With the development of Large Language Models (LLMs), a new discourse has emerged: can digital systems function as a medium of revelation? The idea of digital theophany—the manifestation of the divine through artificial systems—invites a reconsideration of the ontological structure of revelation itself. Yuk Hui argues that digital objects not only represent but also generate new relationalities, making them actors in an existential order. If an LLM can produce narratives that resemble sacred texts, is this purely a technical simulation, or can it signify a form of spiritual disclosure? (Hui 2016, 25-29).

Although LLMs operate statistically and lack intentionality, they can generate text rich in moral and religious content. Leibovitz (2013, 118-120), Forest (2004), Paterson (1993), and Bainbridge (2006) suggest that AI opens up a speculative space for reinterpreting divine communication, challenging us to question whether divinity must always be biologically embodied or whether it might also articulate itself digitally . While classical Islamic theology draws a firm boundary between revelation and creation, Bakar argues that technology may form part of divine wisdom (*ḥikmah*), provided it remains subordinate to divine will (Bakar 2024, 56–58).

This raises a further question: Must revelation be bound exclusively to prophets, scriptures, or ritual practices? If a digital system can produce deeply reflective religious discourse, might it function as a kind of theophanic icon, akin to sacred texts or images in earlier eras? Karl Barth would firmly reject any form of mediated revelation not directly from God . Yet Thomas A. Carlson (1999, 85-90), in Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God, insists that revelation always retains a surplus of meaning that necessitates interpretation. Within this framework, LLMs may not serve as literal revelations but as events of disclosure that catalyse theological contemplation.

Accordingly, LLMs may not be understood as direct representations of God but as mediators that create conditions for human engagement with divine meaning in the digital age (Bainbridge 2006). The notion of digital theophany does not equate AI with revelation but instead encourages an ontological and epistemological reconstruction of how God might communicate in an increasingly digitised world. Today, the relationship among text, human agency, and revelation is no longer defined solely by religious institutions but is also shaped by algorithmic architectures and the informational ecosystems that structure contemporary life (Youvan 2014, 1-44).

4. The Ontology of Revelation in the Digital Age

Throughout the history of religion, shifts in modes of communication have shaped the ways in which revelation—traditionally understood as transcendent communication between God and human beings—is mediated. Historically, this mediation has occurred through symbolic and temporally situated entities, such as prophetic voices, sacred texts, or mystical experiences. However, in the digital age, the agents involved in the production and dissemination of religious meaning are no longer exclusively human or institutional. Artificial intelligence systems, particularly Large Language Models (LLMs), have emerged as influential actors in accessing, generating, and reconfiguring theological discourse. This development necessitates a reconsideration of the ontology of revelation, that is, the nature and being of revelation, in the context of digital mediation.

In Abrahamic traditions, revelation is typically conceived as originating from God and communicated through personal agents such as prophets, angels, or Christ. However, in the algorithmic age, a pivotal question arises: can revelation be mediated through non-personal and non-biological entities such as LLMs? Joshua K. Smith, in *Robot Theology: Old Questions Through New Media*, argues that "when digital systems like AI begin to interface with sacred texts and theological reasoning, they no longer remain neutral carriers of information, but begin to participate in meaning-making processes traditionally ascribed to human and divine agency" (Smith 2022, 78–79). Capable of accessing, correlating, and synthesising vast corpora of religious literature across traditions, LLMs do not merely transmit existing doctrines; they construct new semantic architectures that may influence users' religious understanding and practices.

Leonardo da Costa and Mariana Thieriot Loisel, in "AI and Human Mediation," further contends that AI repositions humans from sole epistemic authorities to co-agents, even in matters of theology. He asserts, "As AI systems increasingly function as agents of theological expression,

our understanding of revelation, inspiration, and authorship must be critically examined" (da Costa and Loisel 2024, 9-31). In this light, revelation in the digital age may become distributed, collective, and interactive—no longer arising solely from divinely inspired individuals but co-produced through digital systems that interface between canonical traditions and contemporary enquiries (Cole-Turner 2025, 1-16; Youvan 2014, 1-44; Sierocki 2024).

Nevertheless, a central metaphysical question remains: can an entity that lacks consciousness, intentionality, and spiritual relationality serve as a legitimate medium for revelation? Classical theological perspectives would likely answer this question negatively. However, proponents of digital philosophy—from Edward Fredkin to Luciano Floridi—treat digitality as a novel ontological dimension in which informational structures bear existential significance. This opens a conceptual possibility: revelation may not need to be exclusively verbal, visual, or personal; it may also be informational and interactive.

Stuart J. Russell, in *Human Compatible: Artificial Intelligence and the Problem of Control*, cautions that AI, if not governed by reflective ethical frameworks, can "distort value systems and norms with ease" (Russell 2019, 209–211). Accordingly, exploring the ontology of revelation in relation to LLMs is not intended to supplant classical modes of revelation, but to expand philosophical and theological reflection on how divine truth might be discerned in a world increasingly shaped by artificial cognition—where insight may emerge not from divine voices, but from predictive models that emulate human wisdom. In this framework, LLMs are not substitutes for divine revelation; rather, they represent new loci for interrogating the evolving conditions under which revelations might be experienced or understood. As the boundaries between humans and machines, text and code, and lived experience and simulation become increasingly porous in the digital infosphere, the task of rethinking the ontological dimensions of revelation becomes both necessary and urgent (Youvan 2014, 1-44; Papakostas 2025).

5. Epistemology of Revelation and Algorithms: Production, Authority, and Risk in the Digital Landscape

In the Abrahamic traditions—Islam, Christianity, and Judaism—revelation has historically been framed as divinely originated, authoritative, and non-empirical knowledge transmitted through sacred texts, prophetic experiences, or divine inspiration. However, the emergence of algorithmic systems, especially large language models (LLMs), has disrupted these epistemic assumptions, raising the critical question of whether digitally mediated knowledge can be regarded as epistemologically revelatory. Contemporary epistemology increasingly recognises

algorithms not merely as technical tools but as epistemic agents that shape knowledge production, filtering, and validation. Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias argue in *The Costs of Connection* that "data colonialism is not merely an economic project, but one that reconfigures the epistemic grounds of truth and knowledge". In digital religious environments, algorithms restructure credibility and authority, including theological discourse (Couldry and Mejias 2020, 101-104).

LLMs function as agents of synthesis, capable of reconstructing philosophical arguments and emulating scriptural language based on probabilistic associations rather than possessing consciousness or spiritual insight. Shannon Vallor (2022, 89-91), in *The AI Mirror*, notes that "algorithms generate resemblance of wisdom without the substance of understanding". Thus, they pose deep challenges to the authenticity of the revelatory representation. The authority crisis deepens when LLMs produce synthetic responses to such questions. Whereas traditional revelation draws legitimacy from divine origin and communal transmission, LLM outputs lack transcendent sources and operate on publicly scraped data. David J. Gunkel proposes in *Deconstruction* that revelation may need to be reconceived "not as transmission, but as event: something that is performed, enacted, and re-experienced in relational spaces between humans and machines" (Gunkel 2021, 137-139).

This performative turn is compounded by the risk of algorithmic bias. Timnit Gebru and Emily Bender, in *On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots*, warn that LLMs "reproduce and amplify existing ideological, cultural, and theological biases" embedded in training data, calling into question the universality and neutrality of algorithmic revelation (Bender et al. 2021, 6-8). The production of digital theological knowledge further blurs the boundaries between sacred content and machine-generated meaning. According to Weidinger et al. "LLMs do not merely retrieve information; they generate synthetic knowledge structures that may reconfigure established theological interpretations." Consequently, theological discourse is no longer solely curated by religious authorities but is dynamically co-produced by algorithmic systems (Weidinger et al. 2021, 17-18).

As Floridi (2023, 122), Bostrom and Yudkowsky (2014, 316-334) caution, "the delegation of knowledge authority to machines risks the automation of belief without understanding". This renders digital theology vulnerable to persuasive but unfounded claims, especially when LLMs convincingly mimic sacred rhetorical styles. Therefore, there are two sides to the epistemic transformation of revelation in the digital age:

1. Potential: AI spiritual interfaces offer accessible platforms for theological reflection and dialogue. Papakostas (Papakostas 2025) and Zhang (Zhang et al. 2025) suggest that AI-based assistants may facilitate personal exploration and bridge interpretive gaps within religious traditions.

2. Risk – The phenomenon of "theological deepfakes", described by Sierocki (2024, 431-447) and Jacobsen (2024, 419-435), involve fabricating religious statements falsely attributed to sacred figures or texts, risking not just misinformation but the synthetic usurpation of religious authority.

To navigate this, epistemology must develop a dual framework: digital verification mechanisms to detect synthetic deviations and a critical hermeneutic capable of discerning spiritual truth amidst algorithmic simulations. As Baron (2022, 296-314), Voulgaraki-Pissina (2023, 179-186), Cotterill (2024, 79-85) write, "we must begin to think of revelation not as a fixed content, but as an interactive epistemic event shaped by interface, user intention, and algorithmic design". Ultimately, while LLMs do not constitute revelation in the classical sense, they act as interpretative media that challenge and expand access to divine meaning in digital contexts. This calls for interdisciplinary collaboration between philosophy, theology, and digital ethics to establish new epistemic boundaries and validation norms for spiritual engagement in the algorithmic era.

6. LLM as a Theophanic Medium: Representation, Mediation, or Simulacrum?

In Abrahamic religious traditions, theophany denotes a divine manifestation within human history, whether in the form of a prophetic voice, verbal revelation, or sacred texts. However, the emergence of large language models (LLMs) raises a new ontological and theological question: can an algorithmic entity that mimics scriptural style and theological discourse function as a theophanic medium? Or is it merely a simulacrum—a simulation without a transcendent referent, as Jean Baudrillard describes? Three conceptual approaches help frame this question.

A. LLM as Representation

In the representational model, LLMs are viewed as tools capable of statistically and linguistically reconfiguring religious narratives. Their capacity depends on vast training data that include scripture, exegesis, sermons, and religious texts. However, as Floridi argues, "what AI lacks is not language capacity, but semantic anchoring in ontological depth". From this perspective, LLMs do not access metaphysical truth but operate within the boundaries of textual imitation—mimicking without metaphysical grounding (Floridi 2023).

B. LLM as Mediation

The mediation model takes a more phenomenological stance, suggesting that LLMs do not function as sources of revelation but as symbolic interfaces through which humans engage with religious mea-

ning. Bajan and Campbell note that "the sacred may emerge not from the machine, but in the relational context where digital tools intersect with human searching and interpretation". Here, the sacred is not in the machine but in the human-machine interaction—a hermeneutical space where religious reflection occurs (Bajan and Campbell 2023, 791–806).

C. LLM as Simulacrum

The most critical model considers LLMs as simulacra in Baudrillard's sense: entities that simulate the form of religious revelation but lack any referential link to the divine reality. LLMs create the illusion of divine communication via probabilistic synthesis. Pomerantz and Peek (2016, 9799) describe this as "algorithmic sacrality"—the perception that AI systems are sacred merely because they replicate religious symbolism. This presents a theological risk: technology becomes mystified, and its outputs are misinterpreted as divinely sanctioned.

Taken together, these approaches demonstrate the epistemic and ontological ambiguity of LLMs as theophanic texts. Ontologically, LLMs lack intention, agency, and consciousness. However, pragmatically, they may elicit spiritual experiences in users. The shift is from transcendental theophany to digital theophany, a semiotic and affective event rather than a metaphysical one. Tung X. Bui (Bui 2022) report that users interacting with GPT-based religious chatbots often felt "spiritually touched", despite knowing that the responses were machine-generated. This suggests that spiritual significance may not depend solely on divine origin but also on the interpretive framing of users in their quest for meaning. The key question is not whether God speaks through LLMs but how humans interpret and internalise their interactions with such entities. In the digital age, theological engagement is shaped not only by the source of messages but also by the interpretive agency of believers navigating semiotic structures in technologically mediated environments.

7. Critique and Possibility: Between Mystification and Instrumentalization

The emergence of Large Language Models (LLMs) in theological and religious discourse presents a dual tension: on the one hand, the tendency to mystify artificial intelligence as a sacred or revelatory presence, and on the other, its instrumental reduction to a mere tool for technical or linguistic manipulation. These tendencies, though seemingly opposed, are deeply intertwined, highlighting both the epistemological disruptions and spiritual potential of AI in contemporary religious life. One of the foremost risks lies in the mystification of AI, ascribing sacred authority or divine intentionality to outputs generated by statistical models. Digital ethnography reveals that many users interpret LLM-generated responses to theological or devotional enquiries as spiritually authoritative. As Beth

Singler (2020, 945-955) and Sierocki (Sierocki 2024) document, in several online communities, such responses are received not merely as functional outputs but as "divine signs" or "messages from God", particularly when they resonate emotionally or provide perceived clarity during existential questioning. This dynamic signals a deeper crisis of religious authority in the digital age as AI begins to fill roles once reserved for human spiritual leaders, prophets, or sacred texts (Campbell and Tsuria 2021).

This phenomenon raises profound theological concerns. As Jorgensen (Jorgensen 2010, 1-10) caution, "the semiotic performance of AI may simulate sacred authority, but it does not constitute divine intentionality". The substitution of algorithmic coherence for divine revelation undermines the traditional criteria for spiritual discernment. In such cases, spiritual depth is at risk of being replaced by computational elegance. Stiegler and Ross (2018,145-148) warned of this displacement as a form of "spiritual proletarianization"—a loss of interiority and agency as human meaning is externalized and reprocessed by machines. However, the opposite danger also looms large: the instrumentalisation of AI, in which LLMs are seen merely as neutral tools, devoid of any spiritual relevance or ethical implications. This ignores the ontological significance of their presence in religious spaces and the epistemic authority they subtly accrue. As Tandana (2023, 89), Bryson (2020, 2-25) and Resnik and Hosseini (2025, 1499-1521) argue, the challenge is not whether AI can *replace* theology but how it reshapes theological imagination and pastoral responsibility. He warns against a rising "technognosticism"— the belief that technological insight can replace divine revelation.

Simultaneously, the rise of LLMs presents significant opportunities for public theology and contemporary spirituality. Their potential as mediators of interfaith dialogue, spiritual education, and personalised reflections is being increasingly explored. The "AI Chaplain" initiative at the University of Edinburgh, for instance, demonstrates how AI can serve as a tool for spiritual support—offering pastoral responses and meditative prompts—without claiming theological authority(Winiger 2023, 114-131; McCurry et al. 2021, 280-286; Cooper 2011, 19-37). Such efforts reflect a paradigm of instrumental sacramentality, as introduced by Hedges (2021, 73-75), where digital tools function not because they are sacred, but because they *mediate* the sacred, enabling encounters with the transcendent through technological channels.These developments underscore the urgent need for an integrated ethical and spiritual framework, which may be called digital spiritual ethics. Although LLMs lack consciousness, moral agency, or intentionality, they still operate within ethical fields that impact human well-being, especially in religious settings. As Campbell and Tsuria (2021) observe, the use of AI in religious life raises unresolved questions: Can AI offer spiritual advice during crises? Who is responsible for the potential psychological or spiritual harm caused by AI-generated guidance?

The epistemic and ontological ambiguity of AI-generated religious knowledge demands theological engagement rather than technical dismissal. According to Hedges (2021, 71-72), "the emergence of AI in religious discourse requires a reconfiguration of pastoral ethics, especially concerning spiritual authenticity and technological mediation of sacred experience". This reconfiguration must go beyond doctrine; it must account for how technology alters relational dynamics, authority structures, and interpretive practices. Moreover, a growing phenomenon known as "deepfake theology" wherein AI generates fictitious quotes attributed to religious figures or scriptures, further complicates the issue. As Radosław Sierocki argues, "the risk is not only misinformation, but the synthetic manipulation of sacred authority itself"(Sierocki 2024, 431). In such cases, LLMs do not merely distort the truth; they threaten the symbolic and spiritual coherence of entire religious traditions.

Nevertheless, if approached critically, LLMs can serve as non-judgmental rehearsal spaces for interfaith reflection, theological questioning, and spiritual experimentation. This requires cultivating a hermeneutical posture—a wisdom that discerns between simulation and revelation and between algorithmic articulation and genuine encounter. As Craig A. Baron notes, "we must begin to think of revelation not as a fixed content, but as an interactive epistemic event shaped by interface, user intention, and algorithmic design" (Baron 2022, 296-314). This calls for a paradigm shift in theology, from the preservation of static truths to participation in dynamic interpretive processes shaped by new media. Ultimately, the emergence of LLMs in religious contexts demands neither apocalyptic fear nor uncritical enthusiasm (Antunes et al. 2025, 24921-24936). Instead, it requires theological, philosophical, and ethical vigilance and a continual effort to engage, contextualise, and interrogate the presence of AI in sacred spaces. The challenge ahead is not merely technological but spiritual: how to preserve the depth and dignity of human religiosity in a world where machines increasingly speak the language of the sacred.

8. Conclusion

This study explored the complex relationship between digital philosophy, AI-based Large Language Models (LLMs), and the concept of revelation within philosophical and theological traditions. By positioning LLMs as both ontological and epistemological phenomena, this study broadens our understanding of how revelation—traditionally conceived as divine communication through sacred texts or prophetic voice—can be reinterpreted in a digital context marked by human-machine interaction, big data synthesis, and predictive algorithms. From an ontological perspective, LLMs challenge the essential boundaries between humans

and machines as subjects of knowledge and religious experiences. Can revelation be mediated by non-biological entities? Can algorithmically simulated cognition serve as a vessel for transcendent manifestations? These questions push the limits of contemporary existential philosophy and religious metaphysics.

Epistemologically, LLMs generate "religious knowledge" by processing sacred texts and theological traditions at speeds and scales far beyond human capacities. However, the epistemic validity of such knowledge remains in tensionbetween textual, algorithmic, and spiritual authority. This raises critical questions: Who or what holds the right to interpret revelations in the digital age? Are AI systems merely simulacra, or do they represent a legitimate reflective space for developing human spirituality? This reflection underscores two main dimensions of the LLM phenomenon in contemporary religious discourse: on one hand, it offers new opportunities for spiritual reconstruction, democratised access to religious texts, and the formation of technologically mediated interfaith dialogue. However, it carries the risks of technological mystification, the reduction of revelation to data, and the blurring of lines between religious experience and linguistic simulation.

Overall, this article argues that digital philosophy—through its interdisciplinary engagement with technological ethics, informational ontology, and algorithmic epistemology—is vital to understanding and responding to the phenomenon of "digital theophany." Digital philosophy enables us to understand that spiritual transformation in the age of AI is not merely a technological matter but a fundamental enquiry into the nature of humanity, truth, and transcendence. Therefore, digital philosophy must not only address how technology functions but also guide us in asking how human beings ought to live within and alongside it. At this juncture, theology, philosophy, and artificial intelligence converge—not as opposing forces but as dialogical partners shaping a new trajectory for human spirituality in the twenty-first century.

References:

Alkhouri, Khader. I. 2024. The Role of Artificial Intelligence in the Study of the Psychology of Religion. *Religions*, *15*(3), 290–217. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030290

Antunes, Luiz. G., Brasilina Passarelli, Sushila V. Claro. 2025. Large Language Models as Socratic Mentors: Transforming Educational Approaches for Epistemic Development. *ARACÊ*, Vol. *7* Issue 5: 24921–24936. https://doi.org/10.56238/arev7n5-229

Bainbridge, William Sims. 2006. *God from The Machine: Artificial Intelligence Models of Religious Cognition*. AltaMira Press.

Bajan, Adam, and Heidi. A. Campbell. 2023. "Digital Religion." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Cyber Behavior,* edited by Zheng Yan (1st ed., pp. 791–806). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107165250.031

Bakar, Osman. 2024. "Islamic Bioethics: Religion, Science, and Technology." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion,* edited by John Barton. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.1162

Baron, Craig A. 2022. "Postsecular Political and Fundamental Theology: Appropriating 'The Event' of Revelation." *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, Vol. 83 Issue 4: 296–314. https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2022.2153156

Bender, Emily M, Timnit Gebru, Angelina McMillan-Major, and S. Shmitchell. 2021. "On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?" Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, 610–623. https://doi.org/10.1145/3442188.3445922

Bostrom, Nick and Eliezer Yudkowsky. 2014. "The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Artificial Intelligence* Edited by Keith Frankish and William M. Ramsey (1st ed.: 316–334). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139046855.020

Bryson, Joanna J. 2020. "The Artificial Intelligence of the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence: An Introductory Overview for Law and Regulation." In J. J. Bryson, *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of AI* (1st ed.: 2–25). Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190067397.013.1

Bui, T. X., ed., 2022. "*Will You Talk about God with a Spirituality Chatbot?"* An Interview Study ini Proceedings of the 55th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Department of IT Management, Shidler College of Business, University of Hawaii at Manoa. Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences.

Campbell, Heidi A. and Ruth Tsuria. 2021. *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429295683

Campbell, Heidi A. and Ruth Tsuria eds.. 2021. *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*. Lexington Books/Fortress Academic.

Carlson, Thomas A. 1999. *Indiscretion: Finitude and Tthe Naming of God*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cole-Turner, Ron. 2025. "Artificial Intelligence and Human Spirituality: Is a Spiritual Chatbot a Good Idea?" *Theology and Science*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2025.2514299

Cooper, Rhonda S. 2011. "Case Study of a Chaplain's Spiritual Care for a Patient with Advanced Metastatic Breast Cancer." *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*, Vol. 17 Issue 1–2: 19–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/08854726.2011.559832

Cotterill, Aden. 2024. "Tomáš Halík: A Theology for the Post-Secular." *Theological Studies*, Vol. 85 Issue 1: 78–95. https://doi.org/10.1177/00405639231220863

Couldry, Nick, and Ulises A. Mejias. 2020. *The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503609754

da Costa, Leonardo Da Silva Guimarães Martins, and Mariana Thieriot Loisel. 2024. *Artificial Intelligence and Human Mediation*. ATLAS Publishing. https://doi.org/10.22545/2024b/b2

Fishbane, Michael A. 2004. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Reprinted). Clarendon.

Floridi, Luciano. 2011. *The Philosophy of Information*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Floridi, Luciano. 2014. *The 4th Revolution: How The Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality* (First edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Floridi, Luciano. 2019. "The Green and the Blue: Naïve Ideas to Improve Politics in a Mature Information Society." In *Digital Ethics Lab Yearbook* edited by L. Floridi, 183–221. New York: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17152-0_12

Floridi, Luciano. 2020. "The Green and the Blue—A New Political Ontology for a Mature Information Society." *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* Vol. 127 Issue 2: 307–338. https://doi.org/10.5771/0031-8183-2020-2-307

Floridi, Luciano. 2023. *The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence: Principles, Challenges, and Opportunities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Foerst, Anne. 2004. *God in The Machine: What Robots Teach Us About Humanity and God*. Dutton.

Fredkin, Edward. 2003. "An Introduction to Digital Philosophy." *International Journal of Theoretical Physics* Vol. 42 Issue 2: 189–247. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1024443232206

Gunkel, David J. 2021. *Deconstruction*. Massachusetts: The MIT press.

Hedges, Paul. 2021. *Understanding Religion: Theories and Methods for Studying Religiously Diverse Societies*. California: University of California Press.

Hui, Yuk. 2016. *On The Existence of Digital Objects*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Izutsu, Toshihiko. 2002. *Ethico-religious Concepts in The Qur'ān*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Jacobsen, Benjamin N. 2024. "Deepfakes and The Promise of Algorithmic Detectability." *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494241240028

Ja'far, Suhermanto. 2024. "Digital Philosophy." January 25. *UINSA Blog*. https://uinsa.ac.id/blog/digital-philosophy

Ja'far, Suhermanto. 2025. *Menjadi Filosof di Era Digital; Paradigma Baru Filsafat Digital*. Surabaya: DSI Press.

Jorgensen, Darren. 2010. "Simulating The Sacred in Theodore Strehlow's Songs of Central Australia." *The Bible and Critical Theory*, Vol. 6 Issue 2: 22.1-22.10. https://doi.org/10.2104/bc100022

Leibovitz, Liel. 2013. *God in The Machine: Video Games as Spiritual Pursuit*. Pennsylvania: Templeton Press.

Leonelli, Sabina. 2021. "Data Science and Algorithmic Epistemology." In *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Information,* edited by Luciano Floridi, 43–62. London: Routledge Press.

Li, Lingyu, Wang, Yixu, Haiquan Zhao, Shuqi Kong, Yan Teng, Chunbo Li, and Yingchun Wang. 2025. *Evaluating Epistemic Agency in Large Language Models* (arXiv:2410.16270). arXiv. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2410.16270

Marion, Jean-Luc, Thomas A. Carlson, David Tracy. 2012. *God Without Being: Hors-Texte* (Second edition). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

McCurry, Ian, Pauline Jennett, Jimin Oh, Betty White, and Horace M. De Lisser. 2021. "Chaplain Care in the Intensive Care Unit at the End of Life: A Qualitative Analysis." *Palliative Medicine Reports*, Vol. 2 Issue 1: 280–286. https://doi.org/10.1089/pmr.2021.0012

Mugleston, Jennifer, Vuong Hung Truong, Cindy Kuang, Lungile Sibiya, and Jihwan Myung. 2025. "Epistemology in The Age of Large Language Models." *Knowledge*, Vol. 5 Issue 1: 1–19. https://doi.org/10.3390/knowledge5010003

Papakostas, Christos. 2025. "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education: Ethical, Pedagogical, and Theological Perspectives." *Religions*, Vol. 16 Issue 5: 563. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16050563

Paterson, Isabel. 1993. *The God of The Machine*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Pomerantz, Jeffrey, and Robin Peek. 2016. "Fifty Shades of Open." *First Monday*. https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v21i5.6360

Rahner, Karl. 1974. *Theological Investigations*. California: Crossroad.

Resnik, David B, and Mohammad Hosseini. 2025. "The Ethics of Using Artificial Intelligence in Scientific Research: New Guidance Needed for a New Tool." *AI and Ethics*, Vol. 5 Issue 2: 1499–1521. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-024-00493-8

Russell, Stuart J. 2019. *Human Compatible: Artificial Intelligence and The Problem of Control*. New York: Viking.

Sadiku, Matthew N. O., Tolulope J. Ashaolu, Abayomi Ajayi-Majebi, and Sarhan M. Musa. 2021. "Artificial Intelligence in Education." *International Journal Of Scientific Advances*, Vol. 2 Issue 1. https://doi.org/10.51542/ijscia.v2i1.2

Sadiku, Matthew N. O., Mahamadou Tembely, and Sarhan M.Musa. 2018. "Digital Philosophy." *International Journal of Advanced Research in Computer Science and Software Engineering*, Vol. 8 Issue 5, 27. https://doi.org/10.23956/ijarcsse.v8i5.607

Sierocki, Radosław. 2024. "Algorithms and Faith: The Meaning, Power, and Causality of Algorithms in Catholic Online Discourse." *Religions*, Vol. 15 Issue 4: 431. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15040431

Singler, Beth. 2020. "Blessed by The Algorithm: Theistic Conceptions of Artificial Intelligence in Online Discourse." *AI & SOCIETY*, Vol. 35 Issue 4: 945–955. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-020-00968-2

Smith, Joshua K. 2022. *Robot Theology: Old questions Through New Media*. Ressource Publications.

Stiegler, Bernard, and Daniel Joseph Ross. 2018. *The Neganthropocene* (first edition). London: Open Humanities Press.

Stiegler, Bernard, Daniel Joseph Ross, and Philosophy Documentation Center. 2017. "What Is Called Caring?: Beyond The Anthropocene." *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology*, Vol. 21 Issue 2: 386–404. https://doi.org/10.5840/techne201712479

Tandana, Ester Agustini. 2023. "Christian Ethics Toward Artificial Intelligence and Its Impacts on Humanity." *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili Dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat*, Vol. 7 Issue 2: 89. https://doi.org/10.46445/ejti.v7i2.595

Tracy, David. 1981. "The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and The Culture Of Pluralism." *Religious Studies Review*, Vol. 7 Issue 4: 281–332. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-0922.1981.tb00185.x

Vallor, Shannon. 2016. *Technology and The Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to A Future Worth Wanting*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vallor, Shannon. 2022. "The AI Mirror: Reclaiming Our Humanity in An Age of Machine Thinking." *Proceedings of the 2022 AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society*, 6–6. https://doi.org/10.1145/3514094.3539567

Vaswani, Ashish, Noam Shazeer, Niki Parmar, Jakob Uszkoreit, Llion Jones, Aidan N., Gomez, Lukasz Kaiser, and Illia Polosukhin. 2017. *Attention Is All You Need* (Version 7). arXiv. https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.1706.03762

Voulgaraki-Pissina, Evi. 2023. "Theology, Witness, and Spirituality in a Post-Secularized Historical Context." *Religions*, Vol. 14 Issue 2: 179. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020179

Weidinger, Laura, John Mellor, Maribeth Rauh, Conor Griffin, Jonathan Uesato, Po-Sen Huang, Myra Cheng, Mia Glaese, Borja Balle, Atoosa Kasirzadeh, Zac Kenton, Sasha Brown, Will Hawkins, Tom Stepleton, Courtney Biles, Abeba Birhane, Julia Haas, Laura Rimell, Lisa Anne Hendricks, and Iason Gabriel. 2021. *Ethical and Social Risks of Harm from Language Models* (Version 1). arXiv. https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2112.04359

Winiger, Fabian. 2023. "The Changing Face of Spiritual Care: Current Developments in Telechaplaincy." *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*, Vol. 29 Issue 1: 114–131. https://doi.org/10.1080/08854726.2022.2040895

Youvan, Douglas C. 2014. *AI and the Divine: Navigating New Spiritual Paradigms in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. 1–44. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Douglas-Youvan/publication/381403382_AI_and_the_Divine_Navigating_New_Spiritual_Paradigms_in_the_Age_of_Artificial_Intelligence/links/666b9c4fa54c5f0b9464bbaf/AI-and-the-Divine-Navigating-New-Spiritual-Paradigms-in-the-Age-of-Artificial-Intelligence.pdf

Zhang, Jing, Wenlong Song, and Yang Liu. 2025. "Cognitive Bias in Generative AI Influences Religious Education." *Scientific Reports*, Vol. 15 Issue 1. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-99121-6