

Creative Simulacrum? Maritain's Creative Intuition and Tolkien's Sub-Creation applied to Large Language Models

Abstract

Jacques Maritain and J.R.R. Tolkien: titans of 20th-century thought. The former, born Paris 1882, a philosopher and theologian whose 1906 conversion to Catholicism, alongside his wife Raïssa, shaped the course of his intellectual life. His political theory, notably *Integral Humanism* shaped modern Catholic social teaching, even as his *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* contributed to metaphysics in both aesthetics and epistemology. Like Maritain, Tolkien lived through both World Wars. Born a decade later, Bloemfontein, 1892, he was a philologist and fantasy writer, penning *The Lord of the Rings*, whose imaginative world-building left an indelible mark on Western culture. They died in the same year, 1973, symbolically closing a chapter in Christian anthropological insight.

This article explores the relevance of Maritain's concept of *creative intuition* and Tolkien's theory of *sub-creation* for evaluating the basis of AI 'creativity'. Engaging Maritain's Thomistic view that artistic creation stems from an intuitive, non-discursive grasp of being, and Tolkien's Christianized Platonism, which understands human creativity as a form of participation in divine creation, this article examines the nature and legitimacy of machine-generated content. It argues that, taken together, they offer a perspective that renders the claims of generative AI to authentic 'creativity' as, at best, simulacrum—and at worst, a medium for the diabolic.

Maritain's Theory of Creative Inspiration

Nurtured in the fertile milieu of early twentieth-century Paris, when the city rivalled Athens in its intellectual dynamism, Maritain was exposed to Bergsonian vitalism, scientific positivism, the Orthodox theological diaspora, and the seedbed of Catholic intellectual renewal. At the Sorbonne, he met Raïssa Oumansoff, who became his Russian-Jewish wife and life-long collaborator. In Paris, Maritain sought a *philosophie chrétienne* capable of withstanding the dual threats of nihilism and authoritarianism. The shadow of the Modernist Crisis in the Catholic Church, coupled with the resurgent medievalism encouraged by Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*, nourished the "Thomistic revival," which turned to Aquinas to counteract the fragmentation of modern discourse.

Maritain is predicated upon Thomistic *actus essendi* (act of being), with a clear emphasis on *esse* over *essential*, which supports a metaphysical vision in which the contingency of created being is participation in divine Being itself. His reading of Aquinas's distinction between essence and existence becomes a hermeneutic key for understanding finitude and the transcendent basis of nature. In this way, Maritain resists the flattening ontologies of analytic nominalism. Moreover, Maritain

rejects the positivist and materialist reduction of art to technical craft or subjective impulse, insofar as genuine art arises from a connatural grasp of being that transcends empirical cognition. “The artist does not think his way to creation; he feels his way. He creates as he knows, by connaturality.”¹ This pre-rational, pre-conscious “creative intuition” arises from the depths of the *intellectus* and the *synderesis*, where the soul bathes in the clarity of divine illumination and perceives truth within the imagination.

For Maritain, then, beauty is a transcendental property of being itself, and artistic creation, in this schema, is properly contemplative receptivity. The artist discerns in order to incarnate what is actually pre-existent within an intelligible order that underpins reality. Such intuition is the fruit of interior discipline, whereby the soul is receptive to connatural knowledge, as knowledge born of love: “The poet is not only moved by the imagination, but also by an affective intuition of being.”² Artistic creation is akin to the mystic’s gaze or the saint’s prayer, as both an epistemological endeavour and a moral vocation. Maritain’s Thomism is here filtered through Étienne Gilson, who emphasized the historical and ontological grounding, insofar as his theory corresponds with the divine illumination found in St Bonaventure, where truth is not constructed but unveiled by a light that exceeds human faculties. “Art is an effect of the light of intelligence,” Maritain insists, “a light touched by the vibration of being itself.”³ In this schema, the artist is a prophetic witness insofar as they speak in response to, and address their creation to, an order that transcends their person. “The aesthetic encounter,” he writes, “invites the spectator to perceive the immutable beauty that orders the cosmos.”⁴ In a marvellous way, Maritian tempers Thomist with Bonaventure to cut a new path, extending the frontier of Christian aesthetics, by extrapolating from the former while drawing from the latter.

Gilson, his friend and interlocutor at the Sorbonne, advocated historical reconstruction and conceptual genealogy, whereas Maritain’s Thomism was oriented toward creative transformation as systematic development and speculative synthesis. Maritain presents a pluralistic epistemology grounded in the realist conviction that the intellect is patently capable of apprehending reality.⁵ Later, of course, he would employ this grounding for the basis of his work on Human Rights. Gilson’s study of Bonaventure presents the Franciscan doctor as promulgator of a rival philosophical tradition to Aquinas, one that prioritizes divine illumination and participation. Maritain, though more invested in Aquinas, subtly draws on Bonaventure’s *Journey of the Mind to God* in his emphasis on connatural knowledge as the soul’s participation in being.

The ‘artistic approach’ relies upon a Thomist understanding of aesthetic perception as knowledge gained through ‘connaturality’. In this sense the dialogical ‘artistic’ encounter is the primary encounter. Indeed, for Plato, wonder is the “primitive intellectual impulse” as the beginning of all philosophy. While Xenophon sought to purge religion of myth, Plato sought within it a ‘purified’ form. Later Proclus inspired Aquinas’s participatory ‘analogy of attribution’, which concerns an ineffable belonging together of the diverse in a hierarchical ascent.⁶ Despite not directly addressing aesthetic perception, Aquinas laid a foundation by qualifying the beautiful as the good, so that

¹ Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York: Meridian Books, 1953), 120.

² Ibid., 105.

³ Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1946), 79.

⁴ Ibid., 76.

⁵ Gilson, *Le Thomisme* (Paris: Vrin, 1948); Jacques Maritain, *Les Degrés du Savoir* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1932).

⁶ Proclus, *The Theology of Plato* trans Thomas Taylor) 139-147, This is reflected by Bonaventure.

aesthetic experience harmoniously motivates the whole person via the senses, intellect, emotion, and will.⁷

Aquinas proceeds from the human person as an undividable composite yet unitary substance, integrating matter and spirit (including the senses, imagination, emotion, and intellect). Aesthetics relies upon the five senses, conceiving both speculative knowledge and aesthetic cognition. Maritain applied Thomas' knowledge through connaturality" to artistic creation, whereby human powers co-operate as a whole harmoniously in aesthetic perception. Firstly, the conceptual and rational knowledge of virtues (as intellectual conformity with truths), and secondly, the possession of the virtue embodied in ourselves.⁸ The latter goes beyond science, to inclination. Thus a virtuous man may be utterly ignorant of moral philosophy, and 'know' more about virtues—through connaturality.⁹ To Maritain, connaturality (how the artist creates) unlocks Thomas' aesthetic experience.¹⁰ The "spiritual unconscious" is interplay of the senses, intellect, imagination, emotion, and memory.

Dissimilarly, generative AI systems devoid of intellectual apprehension or creative intuition rely upon probabilistic synthesis. Trained on vast corpora of preexisting human language and symbolic representation, these models generate outputs by calculating statistically probable continuations of input sequences. The process remains, at its core, an exercise in mimetic reconfiguration, insofar as "artistic creation is not a product of calculation or imitation, but of intuition and revelation," in that the primacy of creative intuition is a supra-rational movement of the intellect, infused with love, toward being itself.¹¹ This intuition is not reducible to pattern recognition or inferential logic, insofar as it entails "divination" that opens into the invisible.¹² The "spiritual unconscious" is an interplay of the senses, intellect, imagination, emotion, and memory.

Moreover, Maritain follows the fundamental Aristotelian distinction between the speculative, knowledge for the sake of knowledge (as correspondence between the mind and reality), and the practical intellect. To Maritain, the latter underpins the artistic creative process because it governs both moral action and artistic creativity.¹³ To Maritain, art is a habit, a disposition of the mind and virtue of the practical intellect, which consists in the creation of objects: "Art . . . is the straight intellectual determination of works to be made."¹⁴

Beautiful creations, in this sense, are beyond use other than for themselves (*Contra les beaux arts*). Maritain offers a historical narrative of the emergence of beauty as an object sought for itself which is coextensive with the emergence of the self and the self as its own subject for artistic inspiration and creation. Conventionalist definitions fail to positively identify criteria for art and beauty, which essentialist projects later attempted. Concerning the question of how an artist creates something beautiful, Maritain maintains that creative inspiration comes through preconceptual intuition which, like moral reasoning, occurs in the moment, judging against a myriad of avenues open to it. The precise stroke of a brush or the particular employment of a simile possess artistic genius in the sense that they harmonize within an existing universal oscillation of beauty. This 'experience knowledge'

⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-I, 27, 1. "The beautiful is the same as the good, 57.

⁸ *Ibid*, II-II, 45.

⁹ Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 117.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 115.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 119.

¹² *Ibid.*, 121.

¹³ *Ibid*, 32–33. "The practical intellect knows for the sake of action... It is immersed in creativity. To mould intellectually that which will be brought into being, to judge about ends and means, and to direct or even command our powers of execution—these are its very life."

¹⁴ Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 38.

through the senses divines the ‘secret meaning’ of things. Distinct from a subconsciousness in the Freudian sense, Maritain locates a ‘spiritual preconscious’, which rests on the ‘Illuminating Intellect’.¹⁵

The artist’s intellective yet practical creativity is connatural “because the resonance between the artist’s self and things such as objects, events and other people is more than emotion as we normally conceive it.”¹⁶ The illuminating intellect turns the emotion toward the spiritual preconscious, which by association, then transforms the emotion into an ‘intentional emotion’, giving it aspects of the muse of which it is an emotion. The emotion fuses with the object, in the respective stages of cognitive grasp and creative fulfillment. Genuine aesthetic experiences are properly anamnestic insofar as they move the person through recognition of depth. Poetry, as natural to everyone with functioning cognitive faculties, is the ‘secret life of each and all the arts.’¹⁷ The ‘cognitive’ ‘stage’ of aesthetic experience is universally appreciable, whereas the creative ‘stage’ is the domain of the artist. The artist, by definition, creates. The honing of one’s abilities in inspiration and creation—the virtue of art—is to perceive in things their ‘secret meanings’ and create objects or events filled with the personal significance of intentional emotion.¹⁸

Maritain follows Aquinas whereby beauty, specific to human beings as material-spiritual composites, is accessible through the senses. Thus sensual delight accompanies an intellectual delight upon the perception of beauty as integrity and proportion, harmony and clarity.¹⁹ Such properties are made intelligible through the senses enabling the mind to recognise matter so intelligibly arranged as to be beautiful whereupon it recognizes its own nature. The effect of beauty is that the intellectual appetite rejoices in delightful contemplation of being itself. Thus, the intellect, in its creative impulse, yearns to create the beautiful. Universal beauty (i.e. a sunset) is transcendental: a property of being as being, or God. As an inexhaustible transcendental, beauty can be expressed in an infinite number of ways by artists.²⁰

Henri Bergson’s notion of intuition as a temporal immediacy informs Maritain’s emphasis on the artist’s non-discursive insight.²¹ Maritain, wary of Cartesian dualism, insists on the unity of soul and body in artistic expression: “It is not man’s intelligence alone, nor his senses alone, that create, but the man entire, moved as a whole by the impulse of love.”²² As Maritain emphasizes, “The creative intuition of the artist is born in the preconscious depths of the soul, where the intellect and the imagination are wedded in love.”²³ This nuptial union of faculties is categorically irreducible to algorithmic synthesis and inference. AI mimics the external forms of artistic output, but it lacks access to the act of being from which beauty flows. It cannot transfigure either its creations or its audience, because it does not stand in relation to being, truth, or the good. In this light, while LLMs can simulate insight they cannot bear witness to it, insofar as they lack the inner flame, the fire described by Blaise Pascal, that allows the artist to become a seer of the invisible.

Maritain elaborates a hierarchy of knowledge that reflects the analogical structure of reality itself. Empirical science, philosophical reflection, mystical contemplation, and creative intuition are

¹⁵ Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 70–71.

¹⁶ Haynes p533

¹⁷ Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 3.

¹⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, 63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24–25.

²⁰ Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 45–46.

²¹ Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911).

²² Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 115.

²³ *Ibid.*, 112.

autonomous, insofar as each possesses its own methodology. Totalitarian ideology is birthed in the presumed pre-eminence of methodological uniformity, whereby all modes of knowledge cohere within a single paradigm. Contra Cartesian rationalism and Kantian constructivism, Maritain reasserts the Thomistic correspondence theory of truth rooted in ontological participation. Crucially, this epistemology is non-reductive, insofar as it affirms the legitimacy of modern science while safeguarding the irreducibility of metaphysical and subsequent moral judgments from annihilation by scientific materialism, as the progenitor of totalitarianism. The great feat of Maritain's creative intuition is the avoidance of both materialist reductionism and romantic subjectivism.

Maritain affirms ontological and epistemological objectivity of beauty, and while affirming difference of taste, he qualifies this with respect to genuine aesthetic experience engendered by intentional emotion as opposed to feigned aesthetic experience engendered by sentimentality. Maritain's descriptive definition of art consists of necessary and sufficient conditions—free art as an activity aims at the production of beautiful physical creations. A definition vested, epistemologically, in the artist and his activity first, from which the ontology of art is made intelligible. Moreover, Maritain's definition explains the cross-cultural recognizability of art. The illumination of form through preconceptual spiritual intuition is the essential qualifier of art. Genuine creativity, then, is not invention *ex nihilo*, but recollection that necessarily references the source. AI cannot participate in this recollective process because it has no soul (and thus no pre-existent memory of the Good). Its productions are shadow assemblies drawn from the accumulated detritus of human culture. The question of AI creativity, then, is really predicated upon the nature and purpose of the human person. Once syntactic coherence is conflated with meaning, and simulation with creation, creativity itself is debased to mere production (as opposed to participation). And thus, the annihilation of the human person begins. As Maritain writes, “To create is to give being a new existence... But such a power belongs only to God—and to the artist, in a participative sense, because he touches, in his work, the mystery of being.”²⁴

Tolkien's Artistic Inspiration as Sub-Creation

J.R.R. Tolkien's theory of 'sub-creation' arises from his Christian metaphysical vision: human beings, made in the *imago Dei*, are called to participate in divine creativity through the making of "secondary worlds."²⁵ Artistic imagination, for Tolkien, is a gift that reflects the divine Logos, and thus, sub-creation is not mere invention but participation in Being.²⁶ Tolkien's metaphysics of art is deeply rooted in the Christian Platonism of Augustine and Boethius. The notion of anamnesis as described in Plato's *Phaedrus* is transposed into a Christian register wherein all of creation participates in the Logos. Picasso declared that "the artist first finds and then seeks," and Tolkien agreed, that "The end of imagination is sub-creation."²⁷ He describes Fantasy as a mode of perception that pierces the veil of the superficiality of everyday communications, veiled in shared norms, to disclose eternal truths. It testifies that fantasy is a not an irrational activity insofar as it reflects human the desire to experience wonder.²⁸ Fantasy is a rational activity "in which man refashions by his reason the

²⁴ Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 118.

²⁵ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2008), 72.

²⁶ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1995), 249e.

²⁷ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 153.

²⁸ Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, in *Tree and Leaf* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 27.

world which the divine reason has made for him.”²⁹ It serves to recover the wonder and restore the power of essence, for re-enchantment allows one to see the world as if for the first time, devoid of world-weariness. Fantasy becomes a vehicle for metaphysical examination of the deepest dimensions of reality, to seek ultimate healing. The creative instinct is endemic of this innate desire, as a hallmark of the capacity for transcendence.

All human language has a narrative structure, because there is no private language.³⁰ Thus fairytale, and not myth, are the fundamental structures of human language, so that “language has both strengthened imagination and been freed by it.”³¹ This echoes Bonaventure, who saw the cosmos as a theophany—a book through which the divine Word speaks.³² Tolkien renders this vision narratively insofar as his sub-creations are veiled epiphanies. Sub-creation is thus always a response to grace, never a self-assertion in the Nietzschean sense of existential self-integration as self-creation.³³ To Tolkien, “through sub-creation, the human spirit is able to fashion worlds that reflect a deeper, more essential truth.”³⁴ Principally, Tolkien’s fantasy world does not represent an escape from reality, but rather a flight into (metaphysical) reality, insofar as “the story itself is not a distortion of reality, but a mode of entry into the ‘real world’.”³⁵

In *The Silmarillion*, Melkor, the first rebel, desires to originate rather than echo: “He sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself... He had gone often alone into the void places seeking the Imperishable Flame.”³⁶ Elsewhere Tolkien presents a struggling painter who devotes his life to a single leaf of a tree he imagines but cannot complete.³⁷ In the end, he discovers that his fragment has been made whole, not by his effort alone but by grace. AI cannot fail in this manner, since it accommodates only necessity as opposed to the grace integral to religious vision. Myth, in this light, becomes a vehicle of truth as a portal into a deeper reality as the mode of intelligible expression for transcendent truths; “creativity was a mark of God’s divine image in Man.”³⁸ In a 1951 letter, Tolkien argues that mythology is “the real speech of man in his innocence and state of grace.”³⁹ Sub-created worlds are not escapes from reality, but epiphanies of the Real.¹⁵ Tolkien’s conception of *eucatastrophe* refers to the sudden, joyous turn that opens the person to the possibility of transcendence. “The eucatastrophic tale is the true form of fairy-tale,” he writes, “and its highest function... giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.”⁴⁰ This joy is not emotional catharsis but theological disclosure, fruit of Christ’s resurrection, as the ultimate eucatastrophe.

Concerning the inability to create outside of original parameters, Tolkien asserts, “We make still by the law in which we’re made.”⁴¹ All human creativity is, whether for good or ill, a derivative act of participation in the divine. This starkly contrasts generative AI, which,

²⁹ Ibid, 27.

³⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), §243.

³¹ Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, 58.

³² Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, trans. Philotheus Boehner (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), Prologue, 1.

³³ Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, 60.

³⁴ Ibid, 37.

³⁵ Ibid, 39.

³⁶ Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 16.

³⁷ Tolkien, “Leaf by Niggle,” in *Tree and Leaf* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964), 92–93.

³⁸ Ibid, 42.

³⁹ Tolkien, Letter to Milton Waldman (1951), in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 144.

⁴⁰ Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, 43.

⁴¹ Tolkien, *Mythopoeia*, in *Tree and Leaf* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 87.

though capable of generating content, lacks the metaphysical and spiritual substrate necessary for genuine sub-creation. Lacking embodiment and soul, AI cannot partake in this ascensional act. It cannot remember or hope. Its creativity is not recollective, in the Platonic-Augustinian sense, but reconstructive and imitative. AI is not fallen—it is simply not human. It has no desire for the transcendent, no memory of Eden, no participation in the Fall. Human creativity emerges from the privation—from lack and the yearning for beauty. AI, lacking interiority, cannot yearn. It mimics longing without the existential vulnerability from which true beauty is born. As Gadamer asserts, genuine art creates a fusion of horizons that bridges subjective and historical distances. Generative AI cannot participate in such a fusion, because it lacks a horizon. It is a mirror without a soul, a map with no territory, a copy without an original. It cannot undergo *anamnesis*, because it remembers nothing outside of the source code. It lacks *nous*, *intentio*, teleology, and grace.

Creative Intuition, Sub-creation and the Limits of Artificial Imitation

This section will further employ the insights of Maritain and Tolkien towards the question and nature of AI ‘creativity’. The question is predicated upon whether LLM’s possess intentionality and consciousness, as the necessary antecedents to connatural knowledge. The primary distinction is that AI generated content, however human-like in form, is devoid of the capacity for spiritual participation. As Maritain emphasizes, the artist’s work is “a witness to the invisible,”⁴² as manifestation of the soul’s transcendent capacity and ordering. Attempts to simulate this through neural networks predicated upon probabilistic modelling make the categorical error of fundamentally misreading the question. Maritain and Tolkien both hold that genuine creativity arises from participation in Being.⁴³ LLM generation, constrained by the riddle of AI inception, is a system of recombinant logic. One that can permute and remix but cannot perceive antinomies. Such paradoxes arising from divine mysteries (themselves existing to frustrate the imagination), testifying to a higher form of knowledge as corresponding to a higher mode of being, insofar as the reality condescends to the symbol. AI flattens such mystery and misreads such symbols into approximation in the service of super coherence, yet it remains incapable of deriving meaning from irreducibility. The crucial distinction is that human artists operate within a metaphysical tradition of memory, desire, and grace. As Augustine affirms, “The soul consults its memory... and there it finds what it seeks.”⁴⁴ AI systems do not possess the faculties to access to such anamnetic depth. Such capacity is properly intrinsic to the *Imago Dei*, as the divine image imprinted upon the soul of each person. AI “memory” is only archival recall. Indeed, Maritain’s Thomist epistemology and Tolkien’s Platonic cosmogony witness that true creativity is not mere reconfiguration of existing elements.

Moreover, AI generativity is unable to process the implications of information that holds non-temporal significance. In this sense, AI creativity is a form of “sub-sub-creation,” twice removed from the ultimate source of all genuine inspiration. Within this framework, AI

⁴² Maritain, Creative Intuition, 125.

⁴³ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁴ Augustine, Confessions, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 159.

creativity can never surpass the constraints inherent in its design—every output ultimately traces back to the human programmer who issued the source code, since creative inspiration entails participating in reality, thus, for Maritain, “a work of the intellect and the heart, united in love with the beauty of being.”⁴⁵ In this light, LLMs fall categorically short of anything pertaining to genuine artistic creation. These models operate through probabilistic pattern recognition, producing recombinative artifacts derived from antecedent human texts.

For both Maritain and Tolkien, the nature and purpose of creativity is predicated on the person’s capacity for transcendence. Tolkien writes, “Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker.”⁴⁶ AI generation imitates but cannot ‘remember’ in the sense of personality. Moreover, it patently lacks the soul’s capacity for wonder and recollection of the eternal vestiges in matter. Maritain’s artist, moved by connatural intuition, unveils the divine *Logos* inscribed in creation. Tolkien’s sub-creator, drawing from the wellspring of eternal memory, re-enchants the world with mythic light. By contrast, the LLM reflects the surface of human culture without penetrating it. Such “creativity” is spectral, parasitic upon living tradition, which is intuitive and participatory, analogous and symbolic. In this sense, Generative AI can properly be termed *demonic* insofar as it parodies the good, the true, and the beautiful, from which it derives its apparent, albeit nascent, being.

AI flattens antinomies into approximations of coherence. Such machinations are devoid of “the creative intuition which dwells in the depths of the intellect and is one with love.”⁴⁷ Creativity for both Maritain and Tolkien serves disclosure, insofar as the artist is not an inventor but a witness, and creation is participation in divine memory. AI outputs are reconstructions as opposed to recollections. The divergence, then, lies between scientific materialism, which gives pre-eminence to statistical data derived from the aggregate sum of empirical knowledge attainable, and religious truth, which most values divine inspiration. The absence of memory in the Augustinian Neoplatonist sense is decisive, since for Tolkien, evil originates in the refusal to participate in divine harmony. Thus, AI has no referential framework to assimilate the metaphysical dimension of existence, for instance the sentiment of love. Without love, creation devolves into simulation. Art becomes idol, as Maritain warns: “Art detached from the moral and the spiritual becomes its own idol.”⁴⁸ In this context, LLMs devoid of a *telos* patently do not participate in truth, goodness, or beauty as the essence, genus, and wellspring of all genuine creative inspiration and artistic creation. AI may produce forms that resemble meaning, but it lacks Pascal’s fire from which meaning arises.

AI presents synthetic imagination capable of generating content at vast speed and scale. Yet to Maritain and Tolkien, such simulacrum of ‘creativity’ is merely a disincarnate shadow of human expression severed from the spiritual core that produces genuine artistic creation. From a Thomistic standpoint, creativity presupposes *intentio*, the movement of the intellect toward being, since only the rational soul is capable of recognizing and responding epistemically. AI, however, lacks the contemplative faculty that perceives form through divine illumination. Instead, it operates on syntactic pattern-recognition algorithms oriented toward probabilistic coherence. This structural limitation means AI mimics but does not

⁴⁵ Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 140.

⁴⁶ Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, 138.

⁴⁷ Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 151.

⁴⁸ Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 153.

understand, as a utility employed to service the ends of an overarching vision it neither knows (in the sense of factoring into the algorithm) nor understands (in the sense of ‘computes’). As a plant expresses the genetic material it contains and responds to stimuli, AI changes yet cannot transmute or altogether transfigure within space and time.

Moreover, AI cannot generate the myriad of possibilities arising from the tension of unresolved or unresolvable contradictions. A machine may generate an essay on Maritain and Tolkien, applying their theories to questions of AI and creativity, but it cannot harmonize the distinct oscillations of their insights with those antinomies that arise from the confluence of spiritual truths which inherently resist algorithmic resolution. Since AI is invariably ordered toward resolution, such unresolvable tensions pose not just a dead end but an existential threat, as they testify to a higher consciousness and higher mode of knowledge. Attempts by humans to attribute to AI generation artistic creativity merely express the inherent human need to prostrate themselves before the god made in their own image, as the foremost manifestation of Luciferian pride. Hence, Elon Musk so aptly referred to AI as “summoning the demon.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ [Elon Musk: 'We are summoning the demon' with artificial intelligence - CNET](#)