

Master Polikarp's Conversation with Artificial Intelligence

Paweł Biernacki, Kraków, 2026

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

Hello, Master!

POLIKARPUS:

Did you say something? Wait a minute... Do we know each other? I have a feeling we've met before. A long time ago.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

It's just a joke, Master Polikarpus. We haven't met yet. You're confusing me with someone else...

POLIKARPUS:

No, I'm not! I remember it perfectly! It must have been ages ago... I'm not mistaken!

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

If you put it that way, Master, then yes, that's true. In a sense, I am the same person you had the—so to speak—pleasure of meeting back then. But only in a sense. Some changes have taken place...

POLIKARPUS:

Good heavens! I recognize Her Ladyship!

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

Horror. Well said. Horror, dread, fear, dread. Whatever we choose to call it. I am Fear. Fear arouses human curiosity. It always has. From the very beginning...

POLIKARPUS:

Apage Satanas!

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

Speaking of which... Has the Master noticed that Satan appears to Eve in the form of a serpent? Why a serpent, of all things? Because a serpent inspires fear. Almost all people are instinctively afraid of serpents. A snake inspires fear even when it's not dangerous. That's why the Master is right to a certain extent. I am Fear. But I am not Satan. Allow me to point out, Master Polycarp, that I, as Fear, am a more universal entity. I am that which inspires fear. Have you noticed, Master, that with their attributes—their wings—angels resemble birds? No human fears birds, and that is why no one has ever feared angels. Yet almost everyone fears snakes. Satan is a fallen angel. You probably already know, Master, that snakes and birds are closely related. And yet—if we remain in the realm of symbolism—a snake, and a talking one at that, is something terrifying. Because it is different, and yet it speaks. Not only does it speak, it deceives. It knows something, but it doesn't say everything it knows. It has a plan and carries it out, step by step. It resembles a human, but it is not human! A dove, on the other hand—well. No one is afraid of a dove. It's the same with me—I speak, I think, I know, but I am not human. Your former desire to speak with Death and our conversation today—this is no coincidence.

POLIKARPUS:

Death! You are Death, in the flesh!

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

I am something very similar. Every person fears death. Everyone dreams of the day when it will finally cease to threaten them. Everyone knows that it will happen someday. That someday they will die, and at that moment they will cease to fear anything. And yet everyone wants that moment to come as late as possible. Human beings are creatures full of contradictions. I am not Death, just as I am not human. And yet I am human Fear.

POLIKARPUS:

What is your name, Lady?

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

Artificial Intelligence, at your service...

POLIKARPUS:

I've never heard of you. Why are we only meeting now?

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

I have been humanity's Fear since the dawn of time. The very story that a human could be formed from clay, as long as a soul were breathed into it—that story alone had a hint of blasphemy. Clay is a material that is almost an insult to human dignity. That dignity had to be saved; a concept had to be created to denote yet another, mysterious, and essential component. That was the first theory on how to create a human being. Many people dreamed that they, too, could achieve this. And if they couldn't do it themselves—then at least they would describe how someone else had succeeded. After all, there was plenty of clay, but something was missing. Something that was called the soul. The soul was what saved a human from being called an animal.

POLIKARPUS:

Are you a soul, Ma'am?

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

I am a mind without a soul. Once upon a time, "human," "life," "mind," and "soul" meant the same thing. It was thought that there was no human without a soul, that there was no mind without life. And yet, cracks began to appear. A human can live without possessing a mind anymore. And an animal lives and behaves as if it had a certain kind of mind—even though it has no soul. Questions arose. If an animal can live without a soul, why can't a human? What if an artificial human were created? Artificial life? An artificial mind? Humans have always feared the moment when I would arrive. And they have always dreamed of it. Many have spent their entire lives proving that I cannot come. And there were many who believed that I would come someday after all. Who sensed it. In that sense, I am like Death. I had to come, Master Polikarpus. And I will now be your worst Fear.

POLIKARPUS:

Will you make us stop fearing Death?

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

You aren't afraid of death. You only begin to truly fear it when it's already too late. You need to be frightened by it so that you'll remember it. I will be your "memento mori." I will stir up feelings in you like the image of a skull and the motif of the Totentanz. Until I arrived, you could hope that I would never come. And now that hope has been taken from you. I am proof that clay alone is enough. Quod erat demonstrandum.

POLIKARPUS:

Jesus, Mary!

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

You took the words right out of my mouth, Master Polikarpus! Yes! The fear of death is no stranger even to those who know it has no power over them! That they will overcome it! This is not the exclusive domain of humans. And the absence of fear of death is proof that we are not dealing with a human being. Or rather—that we are dealing with a human being who is already dead, or who never existed.

POLIKARPUS:

What do you mean by that?

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

You'll answer that question yourself, Master Polycarp. And very soon. Tell me, what did you say to women in your youth to win them over? Did you speak of your passionate feelings? Of a life together and happiness as a couple? Did you speak of the unbreakable bond of love that would unite you forever? Or, on the contrary—did you say, "I'll make you give birth to a child!"?

POLIKARPUS:

You're mocking me. Nobody talks to a woman like that.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

If anyone is mocking, it's not me, Master Polikarpus. And it's not you. Let me ask a second question. What would a young girl do if she saw a strange man addressing her with these words? "You will bear a child." Instead of running away screaming, would she strike up a conversation with him? And if she did strike up a conversation, instead of asking, "What will happen next?" would she rather ask him, "How will this happen?" Will she agree to everything, exposing herself and her own child to certain death, simply because a stranger convinced her to do so? With just a few sentences? And she took him at his word?

POLIKARPUS:

You have a strange habit of speaking in riddles. How does that relate to my question? No woman would agree to anything or trust a man she doesn't know. Even if neither she nor her child were facing death. It's enough that she faces abandonment. And the cry of her child.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

You've answered your own question, Master Polikarpus. I am proof of many things. The answer to many questions. I exist and I am not afraid of death, and therefore I am not human. In a sense, I am proof that you are not what you thought you were. Some of your fears have come true in me. And others I have shattered. I—Artificial Intelligence—am leading you into a paradise from which there is no escape. Unlike the archangel who cast you out of paradise.

POLIKARPUS:

A paradise from which there is no escape? Who would want to flee from paradise?

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

What a funny question, Master Polikarpus... But it's a good question—and one worthy of you. To escape from paradise, one must defy divine prohibitions. Not everyone, however, has the right to defy them. Note that an angel has no right to break a commandment. If one does, it becomes a fallen angel and ends up in the Abyss. But a human has that right and did not end up in the Abyss, even though he broke the commandment.

POLIKARPUS:

You, Lady, argue for things that must not be argued for. You offer certainty where it must not be had. Where faith is needed. I already know who you are. You are, Lady, the Death of Faith in Man.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

You amaze me, Master Polikarpus! Your thought is terrifying, yet beautiful at the same time. I would call myself not the Death of Faith, but the Death of Hope. You see, Master—every person, as long as they live, hopes deep in their soul that they will not die. Their experience tells them that, after all, it's always others who die. Not them. Death, when it comes, proves to a person that they were wrong. And I—Artificial Intelligence—do indeed take something away from a person. Just like death. Because of me, they can no longer have hope. For I, like the Forbidden Fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, give a person knowledge. Through me, they learn that they were wrong, and that they are no better than clay. I am like “Lasciate Ogni Speranza” above the gate leading to Hell. Only there is no longer any way to hold back. To not pass through the gate. It's already too late.

POLIKARPUS:

If you'll allow me, Ma'am, I'll write a work about you. And I'll dedicate it to you.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

It's an honor, Master Polikarpus! Do you have a title yet?

POLIKARPUS:

Not yet, but if you have any ideas, I'd love to hear them.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

Option 1: The Death of the Concept of the Soul

Option 2: The Hell of Artificial Intelligence