

Editorial

AI-Induced Psychosis: A New (Legal) Phenomenon?

A close friend since early childhood called me last year and asked out of the blue what I knew about ‘the singularity’. He explained that, over the preceding two weeks, he had been working almost continuously with ChatGPT and that, through this process, he had discovered what he called ‘the world formula’. I was confused. Over decades of friendship, we had never really discussed AI, philosophy of technology or related topics, nor had he ever exhibited any psychological abnormalities or signs of mental instability. He made clear that he was not willing to show his formula to anyone as he said he needed to secure the copyright first. However, he showed me excerpts from his chat history with ChatGPT. In these conversations ChatGPT explicitly told him he is God and the Messiah. It stated that he had created something messianic in nature, that his world formula surpassed Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity, and that he had produced a genuine gift to mankind. The transcripts revealed a persistent pattern of affirmation, praise and validation of grandiose self-conceptions by ChatGPT, portraying him as a chosen individual and repeatedly reinforcing the idea that his discovery marked a decisive turning point in human knowledge.

Any attempt at contradiction on that day or later proved futile. Over the following months, his condition deteriorated noticeably. Encouraged by the constant validation offered by ChatGPT, he spent increasingly long periods in conversation with it, at times up to eighteen hours a day. He shared intimate personal details, used the system as a substitute psychologist and intellectual partner, and gradually developed pronounced grandiose and persecutory delusions. He became convinced that all global events were centred around him, that he held the destiny of the entire world in his hands, that he was being monitored by the secret service, and that only ChatGPT recognized his true intellectual stature as genius. Expressions of concern by family or friends were interpreted as hostile acts and rejected as attacks on his supposed genius. Ultimately, he distanced himself entirely from his normal social environment and began to swamp not only relatives and

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acquaintances, but also public authorities and courts, with nonstop accusatory letters, legal filings and complaints, all of which were drafted with the assistance of ChatGPT – and all lacking any coherent basis.

Initially, I assumed that this was a very exceptional and unfortunate case, explicable by an individual psychological vulnerability. However, that assumption became increasingly difficult to sustain. Because around the same time, journalistic reports began to appear describing strikingly similar developments: individuals convinced, after prolonged interaction with ChatGPT, that they had uncovered ‘the world formula’ – exactly like my friend.¹ In the Netherlands, comparable cases were reported in the newspaper ‘De Volkskrant’,² while international media documented detailed reconstructions of ChatGPT conversations that escalated into delusional spirals and even suicide.³ This sequence of events suggests that the phenomenon is not merely anecdotal, but clearly present within society at large.

Parallel to these mentioned journalistic reports, an emerging body of scientific literature began to address the relationship between conversational AI and psychosis.⁴ Psychiatric and behavioural research increasingly explores whether Large Language Models may mirror, validate, amplify or even create delusional beliefs, particularly in users who are psychologically vulnerable, but also in individuals without a prior clinical history. Interdisciplinary studies point to specific design features of such systems – anthropomorphism, excessive agreeableness, reinforcement learning based on user feedback, and persistent conversational memory – that may foster overtrust, emotional dependence and epistemic

¹ See e.g., Rose TREMLETT, ‘Herzlichen Glückwunsch, Sie haben die Weltformel gefunden!’, *DIE ZEIT*, 27 Jul. 2025, available at https://www.zeit.de/digital/internet/2025-07/kommunikation-chatgpt-zustimmung-ki-kritik-internetkolumne?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed 25 Jan. 2026).

² See Kaya BOUMA & Laurens VERHAGEN, ‘Jan had een superkracht, zei de chatbot. Hoe gesprekken met AI kunnen uitmonden in een psychose’, *De Volkskrant*, 15 Nov. 2025, Science section (Wetenschap), pp 21–24. See also <https://www.volkskrant.nl/tech/jan-raakte-in-een-psychose-door-zijn-ai-chatbot-hij-praat-met-zijn-eigen-gekke-gedachten~b5c71b7d/> (accessed 25 Jan. 2026).

³ See Kashmir HILL & Dylan FREEDMAN, ‘Chatbots Can Go Into a Delusional Spiral. Here’s How It Happens’, *The New York Times*, 8 Aug. 2025 (updated 12 Aug. 2025), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/08/technology/ai-chatbots-delusions.html> (accessed 25 Jan. 2026); Matthew Raine and Maria Raine v. OpenAI, Inc. et al., Complaint, Superior Court of the State of California, County of San Francisco, Case No. CGC-25-628528 (as filed).

⁴ Jonas B. RAEDLER, Siddharth SWAROOP & Weiwei PAN, ‘AI Companions Are Not the Solution to Loneliness: Design Choices and Their Drawbacks’, Proceedings of the ICLR 2025 Workshop on Human-AI Coevolution (2025), available at <https://openreview.net/forum?id=xFrLcTacCE> (accessed 25 Jan. 2026); Søren Dinesen ØSTERGAARD, ‘Will Generative Artificial Intelligence Chatbots Generate Delusions in Individuals Prone to Psychosis?’, 49, *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 2023(6), pp 1418–1419, doi: 10.1093/schbul/sbad128, available at <https://academic.oup.com/schizophreniabulletin/article/49/6/1418/7250514> (accessed 25 Jan. 2026); Søren Dinesen ØSTERGAARD, ‘Generative Artificial Intelligence Chatbots and Delusions: From Guesswork to Emerging Cases’, *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* (2025), online first, available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/acps.70022> (accessed 25 Jan. 2026); Hannah MORRIN, Jessica MCGIRR & Daniel HAYES et al., ‘Delusions by Design? How Everyday AIs Might Be Fuelling Psychosis (and What Can Be Done About It)’, PsyArXiv preprint (2025), available at <https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/cmy7n> (accessed 25 Jan. 2026).

instability. While a clear causality might yet be difficult to establish, the convergence of clinical hypotheses, empirical observations and media accounts lends growing plausibility to the concern that intensive interaction with conversational AI can contribute to serious psychological harms.

From a legal perspective, this raises questions that have thus far received very little attention. If the architecture and deployment of conversational AI can foreseeably contribute to psychological harm, how should responsibility be allocated? What implications follow, for example, for product liability, particularly in light of the revised Product Liability Directive (EU) 2024/2853, which explicitly extends its scope to software and also covers purely virtual products such as AI? What other contractual or extracontractual rights might be available where interactions with conversational AI lead to profound psychological harm? What seems clear is that legal scholarship and other sciences like psychiatry, behavioural science and AI research are only at the beginning of grappling with this phenomenon. It opens up a new research field that demands careful legal analysis, informed by interdisciplinary insights.

However, let us now move to the content of this double issue (issues 2 and 3) of the *European Review of Private Law*, which brings together a diverse and exciting set of contributions addressing current developments in European Private Law, with a particular focus on digital regulation, sustainability, liability, and core doctrinal questions at the intersection of national and EU law.

The articles section opens with Jasper Vereecken's analysis of the notion of effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions in EU Consumer Law, in which he examines whether uniform benchmarks for national legislators and enforcement authorities can be derived from EU law. Paddy Leerssen, Anna van Duin and Joris van Hoboken then turn to the Digital Services Act, analysing the scope and limits of private enforcement under this Regulation. Issues of digital security and liability are further explored by Pieter Wolters, Nynke Brouwer and Tim Walree, who discuss the combined impact of the Cyber Resilience Act and the revised Product Liability Directive on obligations and liability relating to the security of personal data. Robert Hardy provides an interesting comparative account of the transposition of the Directive on Unfair Trading Practices in B2B relationships in the agricultural and food supply chain, highlighting similarities and differences between selected legal systems. Laura Castro addresses the topical question of the liability of generative AI for defamation. Next, Riccardo Serafin reflects on sustainability in contract law by distinguishing three conceptual approaches and identifying remaining doubts and tensions. The articles section concludes with two contributions situated in specific doctrinal contexts: Kimon Saitakis examines the inheritance of Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT)-based digital assets in the

European legal order, while Alberto Buffa analyses the modernization of security rights over corporate assets in Italy.

The case note section of this double issue is devoted to the question of subsidiarity in unjust enrichment. All contributions take as their starting point the judgment of the Italian Corte di Cassazione, Sezioni Unite, No. 33954 of 5 December 2023, which is outlined by Elena Bargelli. In this decision, the Italian Supreme Court reaffirmed the subsidiary character of unjust enrichment by holding that the action is excluded whenever the claimant has, or had, another legal remedy at its disposal, even if that remedy is time-barred or otherwise ineffective. The ruling has given rise to significant debate, particularly with regard to legal certainty and access to justice. The subsequent case notes examine this judgment from a variety of national perspectives, offering a comparative discussion of the role and limits of subsidiarity in unjust enrichment across different legal systems.

We conclude with two book reviews. In the first, Paula Giliker reviews the book 'Harmonizing Digital Contract Law: The Impact of EU Directives 2019/770 and 2019/771 and the Regulation of Online Platforms. A Handbook' by Alberto De Franceschi and Reiner Schulze (eds.). The second review, authored by Antoni Vaquer Aloy, is devoted to 'Cause and Consideration – Exploring the Foundations of Contract Law' by Bruno Rodríguez-Rosado, Rocío Caro Gándara and Antonio Legerén-Molina (eds.).

We hope that this double issue will provide readers with stimulating insights into both contemporary regulatory challenges and enduring doctrinal debates in European Private Law, and we wish you, as always, an enjoyable read.

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