

Artificial intelligence as a factor in the transformation of contemporary cognitive practices in the digital age

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In the present article, a philosophical analysis is carried out of the transformation of epistemic practices in the contemporary digital age, driven by the development of artificial intelligence (AI). The study explains the need for philosophical inquiry “in advance,” since the pace of technological improvement of AI systems is so rapid that philosophical reflection on these processes often occurs with a certain delay. Moreover, the question of the role of AI in cognitive activity cannot be considered separately from the philosophical problem of its potential epistemic agency. The article analyzes the main contemporary approaches to the possibility of reducing thinking to computational functions, which brings artificial intelligent systems closer to “natural intelligence”.

The theoretical basis of the study includes a wide range of conceptual developments, from the ideas of A. Turing to the phenomenological realism of T. Nagel, the biological naturalism of John Searle, and the Dennett’s functionalism. In addition, through the perspective of epistemic structural realism, the study distinguishes the problem of “AI self-consciousness” from its role in the production of new knowledge through the detection of stable correlational patterns that can be identified by AI systems independently, without the participation of a human researcher.

The article also examines models of “human–AI” interaction, both purely instrumental ones and those in which AI systems are delegated a leading role in the research process. Furthermore, the study highlights risks, associated with the “epistemic opacity” of complex neural networks (the black-box problem), as well as the possibility of generating “chimeric entities” that may potentially distort research results. At the same time, the article emphasizes that the identification of correlations in large data sets is not sufficient for the formation of a full scientific theory. This requires a complex path from the intuitive formulation of a hypothesis to its support by empirical data, as well as recognition by the scientific community. The study concludes that despite their high computational power, AI systems cannot replace the human researcher in matters of goal-setting, creative inquiry, and the acceptance of epistemic responsibility for the results of knowledge production.

KEYWORDS

Artificial intelligence, epistemic transparency, epistemic responsibility, epistemic practices, knowledge, cognition, epistemic agency

Introduction

The contemporary digital age has marked not merely another stage of technological development, but has also forced us to reconsider many established and widely accepted elements of scientific discourse and cognitive practices. Scientific discussions concerning artificial intelligence are continuous; however, its development and influence on society occur so rapidly that they require anticipatory reflection. In contemporary academic discourse, several approaches have emerged regarding the significance and role of artificial intelligence in cognitive practices.

First of all, it should be noted that the question of the cognitive role of AI in the process of knowledge acquisition is inseparably connected with the question of human thinking itself. If it were possible to prove in a clear and consistent way that thinking can be reduced to purely computational functions, human intelligence would lose its “ontological privilege” and would naturally be considered in relation to the computational capabilities of synthetic intelligence. For example, W. McCulloch and W. Pitts in their

work *A Logical Calculus of the Ideas Immanent in Nervous Activity* proposed analyzing the functioning of neural brain structures from the perspective of logical devices capable of performing computations (McCulloch, Pitts, 1943).

In turn, A. Turing, posing the question “Can machines think?” in his classical work *Computing Machinery and Intelligence* (1950), already recognized its ambiguity. The researcher first points out that the concept of “intelligence” is so vague that the search for its definition is closer to the methodology of statistical surveys than to a strict scientific definition. To overcome this explanatory gap, Turing proposes his own criterion: the indistinguishability of responses given by a human and a machine to arbitrary questions from the point of view of an external observer. However, in our opinion, there is also a deeper philosophical layer, that often remains unnoticed. Turing demonstrates a fundamental structural limitation of human consciousness: humans have no access to “another mind” except through the external evaluation of observable behavior. Essentially, the «Turing test» is a statement about the

impossibility of distinguishing synthetic and human intelligence on any basis other than the subjective judgment of an observer in the absence of strict scientific criteria.

J. McCarthy, in the work *Ascribing Mental Qualities to Machines* (1979), proposes considering mental states not from an ontological perspective but from an instrumental one. He argues that beliefs, knowledge, and desires can be constructed and then applied to humans. A different approach to the problem of thinking is proposed by J. Fodor, who introduces the concept of the Language of Thought (LOT), a formal language of thinking distinct from natural language. In this view, mental processes can be treated as computational processes (Fodor, 1975). An opposite position is presented by T. Nagel in the well-known article *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?* (1974), where he draws attention to the fundamental irreducibility of subjective qualitative experience (qualia). L. Davis proposes setting aside the question of qualia and focusing instead on the properties that a physical object must possess in order to be considered an "agent." In particular, Davis places at the center of agency not sensory qualitative experience but awareness of one's actions, as well as intentions, desires, and beliefs (Davis, 1982).

H. Putnam, analyzing the possibility of creating a "thinking machine," argued that such a machine would inevitably carry a "human imprint," since it is created by human programmers. In the work *Minds and Machines* (1960), he discusses the possibility of modeling the human mind with machines and introduces the idea that mental states can be described as functional states of a computational system. In *Reason, Truth and History* (1981), Putnam also raises the question of the connection between machines and reality, concluding that such a connection must exist because real objects were perceived by the creators of the machine themselves.

Simbolon, Manugeran, and Barus provide a detailed analysis of existing approaches to AI agency. They emphasize that although AI effectively processes data, its "opacity" or the "black box problem" prevents it from being recognized as a full epistemic subject. The authors call for the implementation of the "glass box principle," where transparency of structure and ethical responsibility become key conditions for trust in technology. According to them, AI currently functions primarily as a tool within human cognitive practices rather than an autonomous bearer of knowledge (Simbolon et al., 2025).

D. J. Herzog and N. Herzog (2024), in the article *What Is It Like to Be an AI Bat?* argue that if intelligence is considered a necessary condition of consciousness, the problem may appear simplified. However, computational power alone does not automatically lead to the emergence of intelligence. Consciousness is always functional, and function has an instrumental character. Therefore, it is more productive to focus on the role of AI in expanding human capabilities rather than viewing it as a potentially uncontrollable phenomenon.

Shengnan Yang and Rongqian Ma focus on models of epistemic interaction between researchers and AI systems. They distinguish five models: the use of AI while denying its epistemic contribution; selective delegation of cognitive tasks to AI; collaborative models where AI is treated as a research partner; and models where AI is given a leading role in the research process (Yang, Ma, 2025).

The prominent Ukrainian philosopher M. Popovych, analyzing the relationship between artificial and human intel-

ligence, adhered to a human-centered approach. He emphasized that "thinking is not a machine-like activity; it is only described by models that can be interpreted on machines". (Popovych, 1997). Another Ukrainian scholar, A. Kadykalo, highlights such an important feature of consciousness as self-organization and argues that regardless of the nature of consciousness, artificial intelligence cannot be modeled after it until technology, including computer systems, reaches the level of self-organization (Kadykalo, 2014). Contemporary Ukrainian research also encompasses metaphysical studies of AI. For instance, O. Rudenko, M. Buhrov, and I. Savolainen explore the transcendental aspects of this technology. (Rudenko et al., 2025) Meanwhile, V. Shapovalov and A. Morozov analyze AI through the perspective of post-Tridentine scholasticism in the context of "ens rationis" (Shapovalov, Morozov, 2025).

Research Methods

The methodology of this article is based on the methods of structural analysis and synthesis, which make it possible to study the research subject comprehensively in the context of expanding the boundaries of traditional approaches to the epistemic properties of AI. A functionalist approach is also applied, which allows the formation of a conceptual framework that excludes certain "unsolvable questions," such as the irreducibility of qualitative experience or the emergence of self-consciousness in AI.

The study is also conducted from the perspective of epistemic structural realism. Within this framework, AI is understood as a tool that can identify stable informational structures that may not be detectable by human researchers. These methods make it possible to analyze the problem in a comprehensive manner and to identify the most important directions in developing a system of principles for the application of AI in modern cognitive practices, particularly the principles of epistemic transparency and the prevention of chimeric distortions.

Results and Discussion

In philosophical science, cognition is considered in a dual sense – both as a process and as a result. At the same time, the result of the cognitive process is knowledge itself. Therefore, in order to avoid tautology, it is more appropriate to consider cognition primarily as a dynamic process that involves the sequential passage through several stages.

In this regard, it should be noted that the traditional approach to the structure of the cognitive process assumes that its primary stage is the acquisition of phenomenological experience, namely contact with reality through sensations. At the second stage, the central elements are thinking and reason, which mediate the object and give meaning to sensations and perceptions. As a result of the interaction of these two elements, knowledge about the surrounding world is generated (Shynkaruk, 2002).

However, this position contains a fundamental limitation: cognition seems impossible outside phenomenological experience. At the same time, this raises the question of purely abstract knowledge, especially mathematical knowledge, which operates exclusively with conditional categories. In this context, the problem can be formulated in the following way: can abstract knowledge arise in the complete absence of phenomenological experience?

In this direction, the ideas of the Dutch philosopher of mathematics L. Brouwer are particularly interesting. He identified two opposing approaches to abstract knowledge.

The first approach, intuitionism, follows the traditional Kantian position and assumes that mathematical knowledge is a system of synthetic a priori judgments that reflects the way the human mind structures the surrounding world. The second approach, which Brouwer called "formalism," suggests that the human mind does not possess relevant mathematical representations beyond the simplest ones. From this perspective, intuitive understanding of mathematics is limited and often misleading. Supporters of formalism often refer to examples such as Lobachevsky's geometry or set theory as arguments against intuitionism. Meanwhile, intuitionists emphasize the concepts of duration and sequence, which are grounded in the fundamental human perception of time (Brouwer, 1913).

Another important step in studying the ontological relationship between categories and sensory perception was made by the philosopher of mathematics S. Shapiro. In his work *Philosophy of Mathematics: Structure and Ontology*, he proposes understanding mathematics not as a science about objects but as a science about structures and relations between elements. According to this approach, mathematical knowledge does not depend on sensory or phenomenological experience, because its subject matter is not phenomenological in nature. The applicability of mathematics to the natural world can be explained by the fact that the physical world itself has a structure that can be described mathematically. Thus, mathematics represents knowledge about possible structures, only some of which may be realized in reality (Shapiro, 1997).

Therefore, an important conclusion can be made: mathematics does not depend on the structure of human consciousness or phenomenological experience. Instead, the presence of such experience shapes the structure of thinking and allows humans to abstract from the material world and identify mathematical laws. In other words, there is a transition from the world of objects to the space of structural relations.

When analyzing AI systems, it becomes clear that phenomenological experience is ontologically inaccessible to them. Nevertheless, they successfully solve mathematical problems. This leads to an important question: can cognition exist "outside the human"?

If we return to the question of discovering mathematical laws, we must admit that the claim that only humans can discover them is supported mainly by one argument: we have no evidence of the existence of other intelligent beings. However, this does not exclude the possibility of their existence. Moreover, contemporary research shows that some mathematical abilities are present even in animals. For example, Andreas Nieder argues that many living organisms possess basic numerical abilities based on evolutionary brain structures (Nieder, 2021).

In such a situation, both animals and humans share two important characteristics: phenomenological access to reality and the ability to transform sensory perception into abstract representations. These representations can then be used for various cognitive operations. Artificial intelligence lacks phenomenological access to reality, which allows us to move the boundary of the concept of a cognitive subject one step further. We can cautiously assume that cognition may occur when two conditions are present: phenomenological access to reality and the ability to operate with abstract representations derived from interaction with reality.

From this perspective, another question naturally arises: if machines were given "sensory organs" capable of perceiving reality, could consciousness emerge in them?

To address this question, it is necessary to examine arguments both for and against this possibility. The argument "for" is based on the functionalist approach, according to which the activity of consciousness can be interpreted as computation. For instance, H. Putnam in *Minds and Machines* suggested that a machine equipped with electronic sensory devices capable of scanning its own processes might formulate theories about its internal structure and test them (Putnam, 1960). The argument "against" states that no computation can replace direct perception. A machine may manipulate symbols without understanding them. A well-known example of this argument is John Searle's thought experiment "The Chinese Room," presented in the article *Minds, Brains, and Programs*. Searle demonstrates that algorithmic data processing may produce correct answers without any actual understanding (Searle, 1980).

Many researchers have criticized this thought experiment. In our opinion, one of the most convincing critiques was proposed by R. French, who noted that "Searle's experiment does not prove that a system without understanding could pass the Turing test" (French, 2000).

Thus, the question of whether a machine can possess cognitive abilities without understanding remains open. However, the question of epistemic agency – that is, the machine's ability to "understand" – appears unsolvable due to the vagueness of its assumptions. When we examine the problem more broadly, we see that the issue of machine consciousness ultimately depends on the problem of synthetic qualitative experience (qualia).

Adrien Wael Basille argues that the problem of qualia is fundamental and cannot be resolved within purely physicalist or vitalist frameworks. Any attempt to do so leads to an ontological gap between the mental and the physical. The only way to overcome this gap is to blur the boundaries between these domains. In other words, we must either eliminate the concept of qualia or treat it as a fundamental property of reality (Basille, 2021).

From our perspective, this approach is productive because it allows us to move beyond the theoretical dead end created by the qualia problem and continue research in a more practical epistemological direction. Instead of asking whether AI possesses consciousness, we can formulate the problem differently: what conditions must be satisfied for AI to be considered a source of knowledge? Is it even legitimate to ask such a question while excluding the issue of consciousness?

In this case, it becomes important to construct a conceptual framework that excludes elements whose reproduction is metaphysically impossible, such as phenomenological aspects of subjectivity. The priority should be given to achieving intersubjectivity – the possibility of transmitting knowledge between subjects independently of purely subjective experience.

From this perspective, artificial intelligence should be considered as a tool with two important capabilities: identifying correlations in large datasets and constructing explanatory models based on these correlations.

However, an epistemological transition of this kind is not simple. As E. Sullivan notes, algorithms themselves do not constitute explanations. Explanation appears only when algorithmic models are used to answer questions about events or phenomena. The research question is always formulated by a human, but without powerful AI systems many such problems cannot be solved. At the same time, causal correlations discovered by AI may be misleading. Deep neural networks often lack a clear connection

between the model and the real phenomenon, and their multilayered structure creates epistemic opacity known as the "black box problem." Not every stable correlation reflects a real causal relationship. For example, AI systems once identified correlations between facial features and sexual orientation. However, these correlations were actually based on socially coded features such as hairstyle or makeup, which significantly distorted the research results (Sullivan, 2019).

This example illustrates an important point: the data used to train AI systems already represent a certain artificial selection shaped by researchers' methodological choices. Reality itself is much more complex. In this context, the concept of "pattern" becomes particularly important. N. Wiener described a pattern as a form of message. For example, radio transmits patterns of sound, while television transmits patterns of light. (Wiener, 1954).

D. Dennett developed this idea in the article "Real Patterns." According to Dennett, within the informational structure of reality we can identify stable structures within noise. These structures make knowledge possible. Referring to the mathematical definition proposed by G. Chaitin, Dennett argues that a pattern exists when a dataset can be described more concisely than by simply listing all its elements. (Dennett, 1991). These ideas were further elaborated in the work *Every Thing Must Go* by J. Ladyman and D. Ross. The authors propose a new approach to understanding cognitive practices in which patterns are considered real and objective structures that exist independently of the observer. (Ladyman, Ross, 2007). This implies that some patterns may exist that humans cannot detect but that can be discovered by more powerful computational systems.

At the same time, knowledge can be interpreted as a reduction of entropy, which reflects the relationship between order and disorder in reality. The Ukrainian philosopher Myroslav Popovych referred to E. Schrödinger's idea that life "feeds on order and produces entropy," maintaining the stability of living structures. (Popovych, 1997) However, while entropy production characterizes biological processes, the activity of intelligence appears to move in the opposite direction. The task of intelligence is to organize chaos and construct cognitive models capable of predicting future events. This principle applies not only to human intelligence but also to artificial intelligence systems capable of identifying patterns in large datasets.

Nevertheless, AI can also become a source of epistemic risks. M. Coeckelbergh identifies several such problems: "direct manipulation of beliefs," "epistemic bubbles," and "defaulting of statistical knowledge." These include deliberate manipulation of information, algorithmic filtering of content, and the replacement of causal explanation with purely statistical correlations (Coeckelbergh, 2026).

Another epistemic risk is the production of "chimeric entities." According to Shapovalov and Morozov, AI can process real data effectively but may also generate conceptual constructs that have no connection with reality (Shapovalov, Morozov, 2025).

For AI systems, there is no intrinsic difference between truth and illusion; there are only interactions between variables. Therefore, an important question arises: can AI be considered a source of knowledge if it is capable of generating explanatory models?

Scientific knowledge, however, has a social and institutional character. The development of scientific knowledge involves a sequence of stages and paradigm shifts, as described by T. Kuhn (1970). Until knowledge

produced with the help of AI is recognized by the scientific community, it cannot acquire the status of scientific knowledge. Thus, AI may produce structured information and correlations, but their interpretation and validation remain human responsibilities.

Conclusion

The contemporary digital age, characterized by the emergence and development of artificial intelligence systems, can be understood as a period of transformation of cognitive practices. AI gradually evolves from a computational tool into an epistemic intermediary that plays an increasingly active role in scientific research.

At the same time, the question of "AI self-consciousness" appears unresolved and largely unproductive at the current stage of research. This is due to the vagueness of the concept of consciousness and the impossibility of reproducing qualitative experience in artificial systems. Instead, focusing on the functional role of AI in cognition allows us to reconsider epistemic practices without attempting to solve the fundamental mind-body problem. The key advantage of AI in the cognitive process lies in its ability to identify patterns and structural relationships within massive datasets. These patterns may remain invisible to human researchers due to their complexity or unexpected nature.

However, there remains a fundamental gap between patterns identified by AI and a fully developed scientific theory. Without human interpretation and integration into existing theoretical frameworks, AI results remain structured information requiring further verification.

Therefore, although AI may move beyond the status of a mere "tool" and become an "epistemic intermediary," it cannot replace the human researcher. Humans retain the central role in goal-setting, creative inquiry, and the acceptance of epistemic responsibility for the production of knowledge.

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Штучний інтелект як чинник трансформації сучасних пізнавальних практик у цифрову епоху

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У представленій статті виконано філософський аналіз трансформації епістемічних практик у сучасну цифрову епоху, зумовлену розвитком штучного інтелекту. Пояснюється необхідність філософського осмислення таких практик «на випередження», оскільки темпи технологічного вдосконалення систем штучного інтелекту настільки швидкі, що філософська рефлексія цих процесів часто відбувається з певним запізненням. Крім того, питання ролі штучного інтелекту у пізнавальній діяльності не може розглядатися окремо від філософської проблеми його потенційної епістемічної агентності. У статті аналізуються основні сучасні підходи до можливості редукції мислення до обчислювальних функцій, що наближує системи штучного інтелекту до «природного інтелекту».

Теоретичну основу дослідження становить широкий спектр концептуальних розробок – від ідей А. Тюрінга до феноменологічного реалізму Т. Нагеля, біологічного натуралізму Джона Сьорла та функціоналізму Д. Деннета.

Крізь призму епістемічного структурного реалізму в дослідженні розрізняється проблема «самосвідомості штучного інтелекту» та його роль у продукуванні нового знання шляхом виявлення стійких кореляційних закономірностей, які можуть бути ідентифіковані системами штучного інтелекту самостійно, без участі дослідника-людини.

У статті також розглядаються моделі взаємодії «людина – штучний інтелект» – як суто інструментальні, так і ті, в яких системам штучного інтелекту делегується провідна роль у дослідницькому процесі. Окремо підкреслюються ризики, пов'язані з «епістемічною непрозорістю» складних нейронних мереж (проблема «чорної скриньки»), а також можливість генерування «химерних сутностей», які потенційно можуть спотворювати результати досліджень. Водночас у статті наголошується, що виявлення кореляцій у великих масивах даних є недостатнім для формування повноцінної наукової теорії. Для цього необхідний складний шлях – від інтуїтивного формулювання

гіпотези до її підтвердження емпіричними даними, а також визнання з боку наукової спільноти. У висновку дослідження зазначається, що попри високу обчислювальну потужність систем штучного інтелекту, вони не можуть замінити дослідника-людину у питаннях постановки цілей, творчого пошуку та прийняття епістемічної відповідальності за результати продукування знання.

Ключові слова: штучний інтелект, епістемічна прозорість, епістемічна відповідальність, епістемічні практики, знання, пізнання, епістемічна агентність.

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