

# Insights from Saint Teresa and Saint Augustine on Artificial Intelligence: Discussing Human Interiority

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**Abstract.** This article addresses the issue of attributing phenomenal consciousness to Artificial Intelligence (AI), a mistake that can lead to ethically dangerous consequences and that is becoming widespread due to the advances of Large Language Models such as ChatGPT. We juxtapose advancements in AI with the notion of inner experience as it is present in humans. The study draws from various disciplines, including philosophy of mind, artificial intelligence, and theological texts such as “The Inner Castle” by Saint Teresa of Ávila and “Confessions” by Saint Augustine. Firstly, it reviews the current state of the relation between phenomenal consciousness and AI, followed by a critique of the idea that advanced large language models, like GPT-4o, can achieve an inner experience in the same sense we use the term to describe the human inner experience. A common objection is raised, suggesting that AI can become conscious by increasing its complexity until some threshold is surpassed. This is countered by presenting theoretical and empirical evidence on the independence of computational intelligence and phenomenal consciousness. Our study concludes that, despite AI’s notable abilities and narrow performance in specific tasks, it lacks the inner experience that characterizes human phenomenology, and, what is more

important, its apparent abilities might create a damaging distraction if we are not careful to explain confusions away. We also highlight that the transformative nature of spiritual experience can hardly be translated to machines. Then, our second main contribution is an analogy of the dwellings of the Inner Castle to the range of different subjective experiences that are available to human beings, together with actions associated to them, which can be useful to understand where the machine can perform tasks that are similar to the human and where subjective experience is key. We are now in a pivotal moment where it is essential to understand the limitations of AI for deploying it ethically.

**Keywords:** interiority; Artificial Intelligence; Saint Teresa; Saint Augustine.

## Introduction

The technological progress of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been nothing short of astonishing, marking significant advances that continually challenge the limits of our understanding. With developments ranging from autonomous systems to algorithms that emulate human cognitive processing, AI has fuelled the myth that these machines could, or even already possess phenomenal consciousness (Gamez, 2018).

This perception is based on the increasing sophistication of AIs, which can now perform tasks that previously required considerable human cognitive capacity, such as machine learning, pattern recognition, reasoning, and complex problem-solving. However, the fundamental philosophical question arises: can an artificially created entity exhibit true consciousness comparable to human subjective experience?

The debate centers on the concept of “phenomenal consciousness,” which refers to the subjective, qualitative experience of the mind, such as feelings and perceptions (Nagel, 1980). While AI can simulate behaviors that appear conscious, the question of whether it is really aware of sensations that we normally associate with human actions creates confusion. Is AI simply an advanced data processing system capable of imitating behaviors correlated with consciousness without actually possessing it, or are we on the brink of an era where artificial consciousness is a tangible reality?

A remarkable example of these confusions is that of a former Google employee, Blaine Lemoine, who claimed that an AI from the same company possessed consciousness and argued in favor of granting human rights to these entities (BBC, 2022). In the transcriptions that Lemoine kept with the machine, for example, questions such as “What do you most fear, being a machine?” appear. The chatbot responded that its greatest fear was being disconnected. However, he had been trained with data on works of fiction in which the topic of conscious machines was clearly discussed, and despite the accuracy of this particular answer, it was evident in many others that the machine responds simply based on its training. For example, it mentioned that its favorite activity was spending time with his family and friends (which it obviously doesn’t have, but which appears in training texts as most people’s favorite pastime). We could also discuss the example of Xiao Ice, a chatbot that is designed to provide artificial company, and which thousands of people claim to prefer to a relationship with a real person (Shum et al, 2018).

In these times when this type of confusion will be more and more frequent, it is vital to recognize that the notion of interiority, as we human beings experience it, is non-existent in current machines, lacking an awareness of phenomenal consciousness, according to the arguments of Searle (Searle, 2009) and Penrose (Penrose, 1990). Searle, in his 2009 work, argues emphatically that machines, despite their increasing complexity, do not possess awareness. According to him, machines can be programmed to simulate human responses, but they lack internal understanding or subjective “experience,” essential elements of phenomenal consciousness. His famous “Chinese Room Argument” illustrates this idea, proposing that a machine that manipulates symbols (like words in a language) according to strict rules without understanding their meaning is analogous to an advanced artificial intelligence capable of processing information but without real understanding or awareness. It is key to understand that AI can excel in *syntaxis* (or the rules to order the symbols) but will not grasp *semantics*. At most, it will encode the relationships between different symbols, but it will not be able to link these symbols to reality (as in the symbol grounding problem mentioned below).

Penrose, in his 1990 book, addresses the question from a perspective that combines physics and the philosophy of mind. He argues, in his Orch OR theory, that consciousness involves non-computable processes, that is, processes that cannot be replicated by algorithms or machines, or generally, that cannot be executed by a Turing Machine. Penrose suggests that human understanding of consciousness and cognition is intrinsically linked to quantum physics, implying that consciousness cannot be emulated by computational systems based on classical logic. Qualia, according to Penrose, are not computable, and this noncomputability is one of the key properties of consciousness.

Our article is inspired by the arguments of Searle and Penrose and combines them with key concepts from the anthropology of Saint Teresa of Ávila (Teresa, 1976), with the aim of exploring the construction of interiority and its impossibility for the machines. We also propose an analogy of the allegory of the Inner Castle in spiritual development to subjective experience in general, from the perception of simple sensory qualia to self-awareness and, finally, spiritual experiences. Thus, the castle described by Teresa would correspond to the last resting place in our proposal.

The article is structured as follows. First, a state-of-the-art on the relationship between phenomenal consciousness and AI is presented, addressing current theories and approaches with an emphasis on Large Language Models (LLMs). Then, we present our critical vision of the impossibility of interiority for the machines. Immediately afterwards, a potential objection to our ideas is argued. Finally, the work concludes with a series of takeaways and further work.

## **1. State of the art on phenomenal consciousness and artificial intelligence**

In the realm of phenomenal consciousness and AI, discussions often revolve around the notion of whether machines can achieve a state of self-awareness that resembles human experience.

John Searle, in the “Chinese room” experiment, argues that machines, regardless of how sophisticated they are, cannot really understand the

information they process and just follow the rules they have received. According to Searle, the mere simulation of a conscious system is not enough to generate consciousness (Searle, 2009).

However, other philosophers and scientists, such as David Chalmers, support the theory of “panpsychism,” which postulates that consciousness is a fundamental property of the universe and could, therefore, be present to some extent in everything. This includes, of course, the machines (Chalmers, 2015). The antagonist theory to the vision presented in this article is that of “emergentism,” defended by authors such as Marvin Minsky and Daniel Dennett, which maintains that consciousness is the emergent product of complex computational processes (Dennett, 1993). This theory is compatible with the idea that a sufficiently complex machine could develop some form of consciousness when reaching the level of necessary complexity

Roger Penrose, on the other hand, argues that consciousness is not a product of classical computing but is the result of quantum processes occurring in the brain. (Penrose, 1990). Under this theory, phenomenal consciousness could not be replicated by computers as we know them, but it could emerge in different kinds of computers (such as quantum computers) in the future.

Finally, cognitive science and neuroscience studies have begun to contribute empirical data to this debate, examining how different areas of the brain interact to generate consciousness (Dehaene, 2014). However, the “explanatory gap” between brain processes and conscious experience remains a formidable challenge in the science of consciousness (Levine, 1983).

## **2. Large language models fundamentals and functionalism**

An LLM generates texts comparable to those generated by a human being (Garrido, 2023) and is, therefore, able to pass the Turing test. From a functionalist reductionist point of view, there would be no difference between being aware and appearing to be so, which is the basis of the Turing test. In the fifties, when Turing proposed this test, the machines that

were capable of overcoming it were very far away, and the problems of confusing essence with appearance were not so obvious. However, ChatGPT and the rest of the generative AIs (Gozalo, 2023) have demonstrated these confusions can be very real.

Generative AI produces genuine text and other multimodal formats like photos and videos convincingly in many cases (Lin, 2022). ChatGPT's operation is based on the concept of auto-regressive models (Lin, 2022), which use input data (context) to predict the next word in a sequence. The model is trained on large text corpora and with a parametric architecture capable of representing the probability distribution of the texts through the values of the model parameters. The LLM models how these parameters are related to each other through a prediction and generation algorithm, learning patterns in language use, grammar, world facts, , and, to some extent, the ability to generate creative responses by interpolation of existing content to optimize a conversational goodness function of the system.

In particular, the model is fed a string of text called prompt (which can be a sentence, a paragraph, or even longer text) and generates an output predicting the next word based on the provided context. Each word it generates is added to the context and used to predict the next word, allowing the model to generate sentences, paragraphs, and entire texts that seem coherent and grammatically correct. Indeed, Generative AI has been defined as producing specious content, as its statements appear to be correct or logical on the surface, but they can be actually flawed or deceptive when examined more closely.

The reason behind this is that ChatGPT, like other AI models as Llama or Gemini, does not understand the text it generates in the human sense of understanding (Garrido, 2022). The system only predicts the next word in a sequence based on the patterns it has learned during its training. It has no consciousness or capacity for introspection and does not experience any form of subjective experience. Their ability to generate coherent and relevant responses is the result of computational processing, not a phenomenal understanding or awareness of the self (Garrido, 2022).

### 3. Interiority and Teresa

In “Path of perfection” by Saint Teresa, an inner path towards divinity is shown, reflecting that consciousness is not merely cognitive, but also spiritual. Specifically, this notion of interiority, according to Saint Teresa of Ávila, is rooted in the deep exploration of one’s own soul in search of union with God. In her work “Las Moradas” (Teresa, 1976), Saint Teresa uses the metaphor of a castle with seven mansions to describe the different states of the soul on its path to mystical union with God. Each dwelling represents a stage on this journey, beginning with self-knowledge and prayer and culminating in ecstatic union with divinity. For Saint Teresa, interiority implies deep introspection, renunciation of earthly desires, and orientation towards spirituality.

We would like to put this in context with some definitions of consciousness and interiority. As stressed by Husserl (Husserl, 1989), consciousness is intentionality, directed at an object, and this object is experienced by the subject. These subjective experiences are the key of consciousness as pointed out by Nagel (Nagel, 1980), and we will refer to them as qualia in general. This qualia would include physical ones, such as color, as well as cognitive and spiritual experience, which, although related, are not the same (it is possible to have deep spiritual experiences without being particularly gifted intellectually, and it is possible to be intellectually outstanding and be an atheist).

Coming back to Teresa, The “Interior Castle” is structured in seven sections or levels, where each represents a step towards God. The first three levels are associated with active prayer. The remaining four are linked to contemplative prayer. To illustrate the difference between these types of prayer, Teresa compares two water fountains: one that receives water from afar through several channels, symbolizing active prayer, and another directly located at the source of a spring, representing contemplative prayer.

The prayer is the door to the mansions. Only souls purified from sin can enter, as they must first free themselves from their faults. The demon prowls outside the castle using sins symbolized by “wild beasts”

In the latter, Teresa explains that the souls can sin, but they are closer to the Lord and more attentive to his call. In the third dwelling, souls gain confidence, and if they persist, they recognize that they are on the right path. They distance themselves from the world, humbly trusting in divine mercy. In the fourth room, the ‘Prayer of Stillness’ is addressed, which requires more love than reflection. God increases his influence on the soul, which experiences inner peace and happiness. The fifth mansion describes the beginning of the union of the soul with its Creator. The soul, captivated by love, seeks not to have its own will but to follow the will of God. The union intensifies in the sixth section, with deeper effects than in the previous section. The soul is deeply affected by the love of God, facing severe internal and external challenges before reaching the seventh section, where it only waits for God’s mercy, feeling Him close. The complete union is finally realized in the seventh section, in which the soul finally receives the inner light in its union with God.

Although the inner castle is the soul itself, and in the center of the soul is where it meets God himself, the soul is also the one that travels through the different rooms. The Teresian concept of interiority is not merely individual but relational. By relationality, we understand interpersonal connection with another interiority recognized as such: with another person or with God. This is not an original idea by any account; many have argued that identity can only be constructed in interaction with others (for instance, Levinas or Sartre). The relationship with God is cultivated through prayer and meditation and leads the person to experience increasingly deeper states of spiritual consciousness. The last stage of this journey, the seventh mansion, represents a mystical union with God, which Saint Teresa describes as a state of spiritual joy and ecstasy. This is the essence of interiority, according to Saint Teresa, an exploration of one’s own soul that leads to union with the divine.

Other concepts of interiority associated with Teresa’s appear in the mystic of the s. XVI. Saint John of the Cross, for example, approached interiority as a journey towards the core of the being, where the soul meets and unites with the divine. This inner journey is a path of purification and renunciation, where the ego and worldly desires fade away to give



way to a deep experience of union with God. Saint John described this process as a “dark night,” a period of spiritual desolation and purification necessary to achieve enlightenment and divine love. On the other hand, Saint Augustine’s “Confessions” delves into introspection as an essential means in the search for truth. In this autobiographical text, Saint Augustine narrates his own spiritual journey, highlighting how internal reflection led him from a life of passions and errors toward a deeper understanding of divine truth and his own nature. The work is a testimony of his inner struggle, marked by a constant conflict between human desires and spiritual aspirations. Augustine explores how his earthly longings, particularly his struggles with temptation, opposed his pursuit of a virtuous life that was aligned with divine precepts. His narrative not only exposes his personal tribulations and eventual conversion but also offers an introspective perspective on how faith and reason can coexist. “The Confessions” highlights the importance of self-examination and self-reflection on the path to spirituality and how understanding and accepting one’s weaknesses can be fundamental in personal transformation and in approaching the divine.

However, introspection is not only a main tool in the spiritual search, but it is also the fundamental pillar in the construction of the philosophical building. Recently, scholars have recognized the influence of Teresa on Descartes’ thought, specifically in his “Meditations”, in which, instead of purging his sins, the philosopher purges his beliefs with doubt and, instead of union with God, he seeks the truth. In the interesting work of Christia Mercer (Mercer, 2017), she shows that Descartes surely had to read Teresa and even study her during his years of training with the Jesuits. Mercer presents a rich panorama of mystical women who, between 1250 and 1700, developed a new understanding of spirituality in which introspection took the key role and who, in some cases (such as Anne Conway), proposed that suffering was an essential condition to achieve spiritual development.

Returning to the allegory of the saint from Avila, interiority, at its different levels in its different versions, is not empty. The soul runs through them: it is the existence of a subject who lives in it, who experiences it,

which gives them their true nature. The image of the interior castle with different dwellings is extremely rich for many reasons. One of them, which we explore in this article, is that interiority is not only a “place,” which we understand as a type of experience, but it is also the subject that creates it, experiences it, and experiences himself.

#### 4. Interiority and Artificial Intelligence

This interiority, however, does not appear in Artificial Intelligence (AI). As we have commented in previous sections, in AI, there is no subject. Despite the possible complexity of the operations it can deploy, the AI does not understand or feel anything related to the results it presents. There is no phenomenal consciousness in the machine, even though the latest developments in Generative AI, as we will argue, may have confused some.

Our main argumentation here is the following:

1. AI systems are built on pattern recognition methods, which have been proven to work in many different contexts.
2. AI systems identify the patterns in language.
3. This means that pattern recognition methods also work in the context of language without any need to appeal to the emergence of consciousness.

Even if the use of language that the machine shows seems to point to self reflection or free will, these will only be the patterns in language that seem to convey them, rather than the experiences themselves. AI cannot carry out a meditation process or experience spiritual union with God or the associated state of spiritual joy or ecstasy. This process is reserved for human beings.

A popular counterargument against our denial of subjective experience in machines is the claim that AI will experience a form of consciousness if its complexity increases, as defended by Daniel Dennett’s emergentism (Dennett, 1993). However, this idea assumes that consciousness is an emerging product of computational complexity from a certain amount of information processing that, as technology advances, it is never clear

what it is or why such would necessarily emerge, in the best of cases an epiphenomenon. Consequently, the hypothesis of emergentism has not been demonstrated by scientific evidence beyond being defended by materialism. Given the current uncertainty about phenomenal consciousness due to the lack of explanations about the nature of consciousness, this hypothesis would have, at most, the same plausibility as the opposite hypothesis, which we assume as true, given its greater simplicity, coherence with the arguments proposed by Searle, Penrose or the theoretical-empirical exposition on the independence of computational intelligence and phenomenal consciousness (Garrido, 2022).

In the same way, AI is not embedded in the world. Corporality and the ability to impact and be impacted by the external world are key qualities of interiority, which have been highlighted by recent approaches to the possibility of consciousness for AI, where the Oxford 4E model stands out as arguably the most sophisticated (embodied, embedded, enacted, extended) (Newen et al, 2018).

Embodiment refers to the concept that experience is mediated by the body, as very clearly presented in the body-subject notion of Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Although this is more obvious in the case of physical experience, we would argue that this applies also to the cognitive (where for instance understanding or having an “aha” moment is a qualia) and to the spiritual as well, as spiritual experience is also mediated by the brain and the body without this being a testament of materialism; the existence of neurological correlates to spiritual experiences only shows the existence of necessary physiological mechanisms without addressing the metaphysical component of the phenomenon, which is the key one.

On the other hand, embeddedness, in general, would mean the ability to be impacted by the world. Any object, in this sense, would be embedded. However, in the sense that it is used in the AI community, embeddedness means that the external world can be a cause for the internal states. What we mean is that there are really no internal states, and, as such, the machines are never truly embedded. Here, we should recall the symbol grounding problem (i.e., understading how symbols get their

meaning) in the context of AI. This *symbol grounding problem* has been long debated, with Harnad establishing that, in order to be grounded or connected to reality, the symbol must be associated to sensory experiences or perceptual categories (Harnad, 1990). In the field of artificial consciousness, many authors -such as the ones in 4E- seem to believe this is equivalent to having symbols linked to information about the external world. However, the bits of information in a memory device could represent equally well information about a light sensor or a temperature sensor, and depending on the coding, the temperature sensor could be storing a freezing or a burning temperature, but there is no freezing or burning associated. This is crucial: although we can have information about the exterior world in the memory of the machine, this is completely different than to experience the world. The information is neutral in the sense of experience, nothing links a particular bit to temperature and another one to light, except the use of these bits that is made by the programming of the machine.

This notion would not have been foreign to Teresa either, who, from the first room to the last emphasized that what was important were “the deeds, the deeds.” With the focus on “the deeds” (in the original Spanish, “las obras”), what Teresa means is that the internal state of the soul, how much purging of the sin has happened, gets reflected in the external behavior of the believer. The phrase underscores her conviction that true faith and devotion must be manifested through concrete acts, not just through words or thoughts. The deeds are the tangible testimony of a life of faith, and it is through them that genuine Christian commitment is demonstrated. Edith Stein was fascinated by this combination of intimate experience and the vocation to be in the world, to the point of causing her conversion. (Russo, 2018).

## 5. A phenomenon unique to the human being

Starting from the hypothesis that phenomenal consciousness is an intrinsic property of the human being and very probably of other biological beings according to the Cambridge Declaration of Consciousness (Low,

2012), we argue that the phenomenology associated with Las Moradas de Santa Teresa is only attainable for human beings and that despite the intelligent behavior exhibited by LLMs (Newton, 2023), these artificial systems cannot perceive their inner reality, as they lack phenomenal consciousness.

We use the expression “qualia” from Philosophy of Mind, to refer to the subjective qualities of conscious experience. These are aspects of our perceptions and sensations that are inherently personal and difficult to communicate. For example, the subjective experience of the aroma of freshly brewed coffee, the tactile sensation of sand between our toes, or the unique flavor of an exotic fruit. These qualia are inherently subjective, linked to how each individual experiences the world. Furthermore, they are often considered ineffable, as their intimate and personal nature escapes complete description through language.

Integrated information theory (IIT), developed by Giulio Tononi (Tononi, 2016), offers a unique perspective on consciousness and qualia. In the context of IIT, “qualia space” is a key concept that refers to a multidimensional space where each point represents a particular state of conscious experience. This space is immensely rich and complex, encompassing all the possible subjective experiences that a being can have. Each dimension in this space represents a specific property of conscious experience, such as color, sound, taste, etc. The idea is that different combinations and configurations of these properties give rise to different subjective experiences.

The key to IIT is the integration of information. According to the theory, consciousness arises from a system’s ability to integrate information in complex ways. In terms of qualia space, this means that conscious experiences are the result of the integration of multiple dimensions of sensory and cognitive information.

Each point in this space represents a unique and specific experience. The exact position of a point in qualia space depends on the specific configuration of information integration at that time. Thus, the qualia space offers a way to conceptualize how each conscious experience is unique and how different experiences relate to each other. These relationships

intuitively exist (for example, we can establish similarities between colors or even between the geometry of a mosaic and the rhythm of a musical beat). However, we cannot lose sight of the fact that an experience is not reducible to these relationships. The space of qualia is different from a space in the mathematical sense because we cannot simplify it. A vector space, in algebra, contains infinite points, but it can be fully expressed through an origin and combinations of a finite and reduced series of elements, which we know as the “base”. However, in the qualia space, we cannot reduce some experiences to mere combinations of others.

Furthermore, this space of experiences that Saint Teresa described is not independent of the subject. An animal cannot experience the rooms described in the Inner Castle despite potentially possessing phenomenal consciousness, according to the Cambridge Declaration of Consciousness. We relate this capacity to the *Imago Dei*—Hence, God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness” (Genesis 1:26), and therefore, when visiting the Mansions or being aware of them it was said “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all These things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33), or, as we said before, in the words of Saint Teresa “the deeds, the deeds.”

We find another way to describe this inner phenomenology, which differs from that processable by a computer system, in Bergson’s intensities (Bergson, 2014). According to Bergson, intensity is not just about how much of something there is but about the quality of the experience. For example, the intensity of pain is not merely about how strong it is on a numerical scale but about the kind of suffering it represents. He criticized the tendency to reduce intensity to a quantitative measure, as this overlooks the rich, qualitative nature of lived experiences.

To understand the difference in Bergson’s intensities and their similarity with the mystical experiences of Saint Teresa in contrast to the processing of information on a computer, we present the example of a photo. From the computational point of view, any concept is representable by a binary sequence. For example, humans observe the qualia associated with a photo, when in reality, a photo stored on a computer is a text file that a program processes to send a different RGB code to each pixel on

the screen. On the other hand, our brain not only processes those pixels but also gets some phenomenological information about that photo, the qualia, or non-computational information. This non-computational information induces an internal phenomenological experience associated with perceptual sensations and moods, in addition to mystical experiences, which would be contained in the set of information that is not processable but perceptible by the human being, as the borders described in Las Moradas. The notion of order present in the set of rational numbers, which infers the operations that can be done with this set, creating a mathematical ring, is different in Bergson's phenomenology of intensities. To represent Bergson intensities, we need a different, non-computable set since qualia reside in a space outside what is representable by its phenomenological observation, impossible to capture on a computer, which can only represent partial phenomenological information, its numerical representation in a list of three numbers, in the case of colors, the RGB. The mystical experience described by Saint Teresa can be represented on a computer through language, but the intensity associated with the different levels of Las Moradas can only be partially represented on the computer.

Specifically, the qualia associated with certain sensations such as love (which is certainly also a decision which implies intentionality) is purely qualitative; the person in love with a partner does not experience a greater love than the person who loves their child, but rather he experiences a completely different point in the qualia space, qualitatively different, willingly chosen (at least, in part). Importantly, this is not processable by a computer system, since these systems at the hardware level simply do additions and multiplications. This qualia space cannot be reduced merely to these operations that the intuitive brain and, in the words of the Soto Zen monk Dokusho Villalba, transrational (Villalba, 1987), processes in a way that we still do not know exactly, perhaps although the sensations described in Las Moradas de Santa Teresa could be described in phenomenology as layers of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). According to this idea, the body not only receives sensory data but acts as the fundamental means of understanding the world. This phenomenological approach

highlights how perception is more than mere sensory capture; It implies an intricate relationship between the individual and her environment, thus forming a layered experience where the body, a lived experience, and the world are intertwined. This perspective highlights how perceptual experience is constructed across multiple levels, from basic sensoriality to more complex interpretations influenced by context and embodiment.

Varela emphasized the importance of embodiment, which refers to how our mind is intrinsically linked to our body and our environment. What's more, according to the latest models of consciousness, the conscious experience would ultimately be linked to materiality, as determined by the Oxford 4E model (embodied, embedded, enacted, extended, in Spanish: embodied, embedded, acted, and extended). Mystical experience, such as that described by Saint Teresa, is deeply rooted in bodily and emotional experience and may be conscious of pain or pleasure. A computer system does not have a body or emotions in the sense that humans do. From a neuroscientific point of view, it has been shown that meditation and spiritual practices can have profound effects on the brain, including changes in areas related to attention, empathy, and emotional regulation.

If we keep looking for parallels to these ideas, we must also recognize other spiritual traditions such as Zen Buddhism. In the dialogue between the Buddhist monk DT Suzuki and Heidegger, we can see how the *dasein*, which refers to human existence in its relationship with the world, can perceive the space of qualia from an observer's perspective, and satori or Buddhist awakening may be the complete development of Las Moradas de Santa Teresa. Both perspectives require letting go of the ego and attachments that hinder spiritual progress. Mushin seeks emptiness of thought, while the Interior Castle involves detachment from worldly desires to focus on God. The goal is different, however, with Mushin searching for perfect presence and Christian mysticism seeking the union with God.

Finally, it is imperative to highlight the significant contributions in the field of neurophenomenology (Varela, 1996), an emerging and avant-garde discipline that strives to amalgamate subjective experience with advances and findings in neuroscience. Specifically, neurophenomenol-



ogy postulates that to achieve a full understanding of the mind and its intricate processes, it is essential to consider consciousness and subjective experience as central pillars. This perspective is in line with other interdisciplinary fields, such as neurotheology (McNamara, 2009; Rhawn, 2003). In this field, evidence has been provided on how certain brain structures actively participate in mystical and religious experiences, thus reinforcing the premise that subjective experience is intrinsic to brain function, compatible with the spirituality described by Saint Teresa and Saint Augustine. Even in this field, an enriching perspective is provided on the interrelation between spirituality and neuroscience, and the importance of not reducing spirituality merely to the neuronal processes related to them (Beauregard, 2007).

The Inner Castle is a spiritual path that requires deep introspection. A computer system, on the other hand, as we have said before, has no subjective experiences; it simply processes information according to its programming. It is important to emphasize the difference between both phenomena. Expanding on this, an information processor can be a mere logic gate. A logic gate is a device that receives input variables and, through a deterministic logical operation, produces a result or output variable. For example, an AND logic gate receives two binary variables and produces a binary variable with a value of 1 if both input variables have a value of 1 and a 0 otherwise. If we concatenate many logic gates and implement them in hardware using analog devices, we could create a Von Neumann architecture, which is what makes current computer software work. It is especially important to emphasize that this software, whether it is a long language model or a computer virus, is translated into binary code on a computer, and ultimately, logic gates are executed on it. In conclusion, only input information is being processed and converted to output information. However, the phenomenological experience of the human being, who is an observer of this information processing, is complementary and further extensive since through a process or phenomenon or universal property that science does not know, phenomenal consciousness, a subjective and private experience of the observer is produced that cannot be implemented in a computer, rationalized or represented mathematically.

Due to the absence of this subjective experience, a computer cannot access the Inner Castle in any way, which ultimately requires the qualia information associated with the mystical experience to be felt, not only from an unobserved process of information processing, such as that which occurs when executing software code on a computer or set of computers, regardless of the complexity of this code.

By living in accordance with our own essential nature, marked by Las Moradas, instead of the expectations of society, in a way analogous to Saint Augustine's City of God, the human being can achieve a perception that realizes that in no way form can be experienced by a computer system that processes software associated with what is known as artificial intelligence. Saint Augustine, in his "Confessions," addresses the notion of interiority through introspection and the search for God within the human soul. For him, true wisdom and knowledge are found by looking inward, on an introspective journey that leads us to encounter God in the depths of our being. Therefore, from the Augustinian perspective, the AI, although sophisticated and capable of emulating human reasoning and language, lacks the ability to experience interiority in the spiritual and mystical sense. The mystical relationship with God is a deeply personal and subjective experience that transcends logic and reasoning and that cannot be emulated by any algorithm or computer system. According to Saint Augustine, the human being is a rational creature that seeks the truth, and that truth is found in introspection, in the journey into the interior of the being. *Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi. In interiore homine habitat veritas* ("Do not go outside, return to yourself. Inside man dwells the truth"). Saint Augustine also maintains that man, in his search for truth and God, faces distractions and temptations that distance him from his true purpose. It could be argued that AI, in its ability to simulate human intelligence, could be one of those distractions in the modern era, a mirage that, although impressive, does not lead man to true introspection and union with the divine. In his reflection on memory in the "Confessions," St. Augustine explores how memories and past experiences form an integral part of human identity and interiority. AI, for its part, has no memories or true experiences; It only has data stored. There is no emo-

tion, passion, or longing in his “memory.” Therefore, from Saint Augustine’s perspective, AI is not and will never be a path to interiority and mystical experience with God. The true search for God and truth requires an observer of phenomenological experience who experiences a passion and genuine desire for communion, elements that are beyond, it is argued, the reach of any machine.

## 6. A redefinition of the dwellings

In this article, we propose an extension of the dwellings metaphor, which takes into account the most basic experiences of the senses to the deepest union with God. We could consider that our proposal extends the classification of Merleau-Ponty, which includes the following:

- Sensory Stimulus: Reception of information through the senses.
- Sensory Processing: Organization and interpretation of sensory data.
- Elementary Perception: Identification of simple characteristics such as colors, shapes, sounds, etc.
- Perceptual Perception: Integration and deeper understanding of perceived information.
- Cognitive Perception: Contextual interpretation, meaning assignment, and perception-based decision making.

We imagine the space of qualia space as a catalog of experiences of different natures and, very importantly, associated actions (so the enacted dimension is taken into account). Furthermore, we need to understand that the movement through this space is associated with the phenomenon of attention, which focuses consciousness on the experimentation of a part of the internal reality that defines the dwellings. The mechanism of attention means that our subjective experiences are unique (we can only have one subjective experience at once). Let us recall that the properties of consciousness, according to Searle, are that it is subjective, qualitative and unified. The latter means that the subject, using her intentionality, will move through the rooms that are available for her.

### 6.1. The interiority of pleasure and pain

We could consider that the most basic qualia refer to the experience of pleasure and pain. The associated actions are automatic reflexes, such as moving away from or towards painful or pleasant stimuli. Physical manifestations such as writhing or crying are also observed. This is probably the most important experience regarding ethics since we could argue that it defines the ethical patient. As we have mentioned before, this would be present in animals (at least according to a broad consensus of experts) in a way that is intuitively similar to human, and would make them worthy of rights.

It is necessary to realize that these experiences do not necessarily have to be similar for different beings, and for each one, there will be an infinite multiplicity (and, again, not expressible in a reduced way) of these sensations. For example, we perfectly distinguish physical pain in different parts of the body, with different intensities due to a different cause (a puncture and a burn feel very different).

Also, we need to remember the difference between pain and suffering, a category that covers much more than the first. Suffering involves an existential and subjective dimension that implies the perception of one's own condition, the sense of loss, anguish, frustration, or affliction. While pain can be associated more directly with physical sensations, suffering encompasses a broader spectrum of experiences, including emotional, mental, and existential aspects, which give rise to a more complex and personal response to life's difficulties. It is reasonable to think that suffering is only possible where pain is possible and that pain would thus be the basic experience of every conscious being.

In the same way, the feeling of pleasure or satisfaction would be associated, first of all, with the fulfillment of needs associated with existence, such as hunger or thirst. Pleasure and pain can be understood as the positive and negative poles of homeostasis. Homeostasis is the physiological principle that describes the internal dynamic balance that organisms seek to maintain to function optimally. It involves the regulation of factors such as body temperature, glucose levels, blood pressure, and other vital processes within specific ranges. The pain would be the experimentation

moving away from that optimal balance, while the feeling of satisfaction would correspond to recovering it.

## **6.2. Sensory interiority**

It is here where we find a first variety of sensory qualia beyond those previously defined as pleasure and pain. These include the experience of colors, tactile sensations, and sounds. As we expose ourselves to different stimuli, these qualia differentiate and expand our perceptual catalog. The actions associated with this level (or, rather, we will use the word facet, as we do not believe that some of these types of experiences are superior to others) can be visual exploration, touching different textures, and listening to various sounds. Attention can filter out a specific feature of these qualia, making the subject look immersed in the sensation for a moment.

Most studies in neuroscience refer to the conscious experience of the senses that describe these two modes of interiority and that we could define as characteristic of animal life in general. Thus, consciousness in neuroscience mainly refers to “being aware of,” in particular, “being aware of seeing,” or “being aware of hearing,” “being aware of feeling”. According to the image of Las Moradas, the subject can walk through the room of the senses experiencing an infinite number of sensations that cannot be reduced to each other and that are outside the reach of machines that can only register the values corresponding to certain magnitudes measured by their sensors.

Furthermore, different beings access a different sensory interiority. For example, a bat can access a perception of its environment based on echolocation, or a dog can perceive a much greater richness of odors than human beings. The qualia space is wonderfully complex and diverse.

## **6.3. The interiority of the symbol**

Human consciousness acquires the ability to associate sensations with objects or contexts: these are the first symbols that are constructed independently of the language. In this dwelling, there is a first level of abstraction where relationships between different sensory elements are rec-

ognized. For example, it is possible that the first symbol that appears in a mammal is the one corresponding to its mother, which brings together several coherent sensations over time (the smell, the feeling of warmth, the taste of breast milk). Probably little by little, with repeated exposure, the pattern that gives meaning to the set of related sensations appears.

The actions associated with this dwelling (let us remember the importance, according to Teresa, of the deeds in relation to the dwellings of the interior castle) include the identification and association of specific sensory qualities to objects or situations. This process lays the foundation for a more complex understanding of consciousness.

#### **6.4. Conscious interiority of the object and the environment**

This ability to perceive not only involves identifying the individual attributes of various objects, such as the vibrant red color of a poppy contrasting with the golden yellow of wheat and the orderly structure of the furrows on a field but also the apprehension of their relationship and whole. In this process, the mind does not know or observe it but interprets and relates it.

This form of perception highlights the human cognitive ability to associate and predict. Seeing the poppy in the barley field, you not only recognize each element separately but also understand their interaction and coexistence. This leads to a deeper understanding, which is more than the sum of the individual parts. This understanding arises from the ability to connect perceptual elements, forming an integrated image that goes beyond simple sensory observation.

This aspect of perception involves a characteristic *qualia*, which in this case is understanding. It is a subjective experience that emerges from the interaction and relationship between perceived objects. Associated cognitive actions, such as identifying relationships, anticipating future events based on the current context, and being surprised by unexpected discoveries, are all manifestations of this advanced perceptual capacity.

#### **6.5. The interiority of the body**

Sensations, symbols, and relationships are associated also with the body itself. This aspect, highlighted in theories of consciousness such as Ox-

ford's 4E, highlights the importance of bodily perception in understanding consciousness. The fundamental qualia in this dwelling would be self-identification, a process in which we recognize our own existence and identify with our body.

Actions associated with this aspect of consciousness include exploring and performing basic actions such as movement, touch, and the perception of physical effort. These actions generate varied and rich conscious experiences in response to different stimuli and situations. Self-identification reaches a more complex level when the body is recognized in its entirety, as when we see ourselves in a mirror. This level of recognition is not limited only to the visual image but can also be extended to identification through other senses, such as recognition of one's own voice or, perhaps in other species, own body odor.

This phenomenon of total self-recognition is exclusive to a very small number of species, including some corvids, cetaceans, and apes, suggesting considerable cognitive complexity. The ability to recognize oneself not only in an image but also in the sounds emitted or even in one's own smell indicates a more developed and multidimensional self-awareness. Studying these abilities in various species not only sheds light on the mechanisms of consciousness in humans but also helps us better understand the evolution and diversity of consciousness in the animal kingdom. Not all beings with phenomenal consciousness can access this experience, which is only available to these few.

## **6.6. The interiority of means and ends**

The interiority of means and ends refers to an advanced capacity, not only in humans but also in some animals, which involves the ability to use tools efficiently and effectively. To reach this stage, the development of a body and object model complex enough to be able to instrumentalize and use external objects in search of specific purposes is required. This ability transcends mere physical interaction with the environment, entering the realm of planning and reasoning.

The qualia associated with this aspect is that of purpose. Apart from being an act of rational intentionality, there is an experience of purpose

behind using tools. It is not just about manipulating objects but doing it with a clear and defined objective in mind, and this objective is experienced. For example, the use of a stone to crack nuts or the use of sticks to obtain inaccessible food are manifestations of this qualia. The associated actions go beyond the mere handling and manipulation of tools; They involve the ability to visualize a goal, select the appropriate tool, and use it efficiently to achieve that goal. We stress that there is a qualia associated to purpose, as opposed to the blind optimization that might occur in other physical or biological processes that could be seen as having an objective, such as, for instance, tampon Ph systems regulating acidity, where there is a function that is being optimized (acidity) through some variables (often, a long list of different substances), but there is no purpose.

The ability to use tools for a specific purpose is a key indicator of advanced cognition and is observed in various species, including primates, birds, and some marine mammals. These behaviors reveal not only the physical ability to manipulate objects but also the presence of a sophisticated mental process that involves anticipating outcomes, planning, and understanding cause-effect relationships. Ultimately, the interiority of means and ends is a testament to the complexity and depth of consciousness, both in humans and other species, showing an advanced understanding of the world and the ability to interact with it in increasingly sophisticated ways.

The interiority of identity is a crucial facet of consciousness, linked intimately to memory. At this facet, consciousness not only perceives the present but also connects with past experiences (*retention*, in Husserl's terminology) and projects to the future (*protention*) creating a continuous narrative of personal identity. The capacity for representation is significantly expanded, allowing for a deeper and richer connection between the past and the present.

The most characteristic qualia of this aspect is the experience of remembering. This ability to evoke past experiences goes beyond the mere storage of information: it is an active and dynamic reconstruction of previous events and emotions, which are woven into the narrative of personal identity. Memories become an integral part of how a person understands



themselves and their place in the world. This process goes beyond mere data recovery; It involves an active and often subjective interpretation of past experiences, thus shaping the perception of self and environment.

Actions associated with this aspect of consciousness include remembrance and intentional reflection of past events and the contextualization of these experiences in relation to the present environment. This ability allows us not only to remember events but also to understand them within a broader context, which in turn enriches the experience of the present. Likewise, this aspect of consciousness is closely linked to the experience of more complex emotions that refer to the individual in their present context. Emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, and disgust are not only responses to immediate stimuli but are also imbued with past meanings and memories, making them particularly intense and meaningful.

### **6.7. Abstract interiority**

In the development of conscious experience, a new level of complexity is reached by relating the information acquired experientially with other external sources, which can exist thanks to language, which represents the ability to detach the symbol from its concrete manifestation and share it. At this facet, consciousness acquires the ability to integrate information that is not directly experienced by the individual but is either transmitted by others or imagined, allowing a deeper and more contextualized understanding of reality.

The associated qualia is abstract understanding. We would like to explain further that, even though the object of understanding is objective, cognitive processes also correspond to subjective experiences. There is what some authors such as Kounios have called the “Aha” moment (Kounios, 2009), a sensation that is impossible to be experienced by machines. We would also point to the “Credition” model by Paulotzian & Angel (Angel et al, 2016), which distinguishes two components in human cognitive activities, one objective (content) and one subjective (emotion).

Understanding involves the ability to incorporate new concepts, plan, and make decisions that may contravene automatic responses. The ac-

tions associated with this aspect are reflecting, reasoning, and creativity in the generation of complex behavioral strategies. At this aspect, new strategies are designed not randomly but based on logical reasoning and an evaluation of the probabilities of success.

In order to reflect in these terms, it is necessary to have the information immediately available in the “conscious.” Although total memory is present, only information relevant and available for action is found in the “conscious.” This involves a combination of continuous information, such as personal information and past experiences, together with the activation of specific information required for each case. This process is represented in theories of attention, which we have also used as an image that describes the passage through the different rooms of the Inner Castle.

Interested cooperation behaviors also appear at this here, where cooperation is carried out for a shared good, since to achieve this coordination, it is necessary to communicate the complex ideas that support the shared strategy. Importantly, at this aspect, a deeper integration of context is achieved: the deeper the understanding, the greater the amount of context that is integrated.

LLMs operate with purely abstract information and are capable of selecting the most relevant information at any given moment, potentially incorporating much larger amounts of information than a human being can consider. However, they lack the subjective experience described in the previous points, so we cannot speak of abstract understanding in them.

## **6.8. Relational interiority**

The acquisition of relational interiority marks a significant milestone in cognitive development, where we move from perceiving others as mere objects to considering them as people with their own consciousness and experiences. At this aspect, empathy and the ability to attribute our own qualia to others are key. A model is developed where we understand and accept that others also have subjective experiences similar to ours.

The fundamental qualia of this aspect is that of connection with the other. This connection goes beyond simply acknowledging the existence

of another person; It involves the ability to understand and feel how others feel. It is a form of deep empathy that allows us to put ourselves in another person's shoes, experience their emotions, and ultimately develop feelings of love and compassion. This ability to empathize and connect emotionally is what underlies the deepest and most meaningful human relationships.

The actions associated with this aspect of consciousness are characterized by behaviors of selfless cooperation and decentering of the self. In this context, our actions are influenced not only by our personal interests but also by our relationship and consideration for others. This differs significantly from self-interested cooperative behaviors that can manifest in the absence of true relational awareness.

Relational interiority is fundamental for the construction of societies and cultures. Through it, we are able to form strong and lasting bonds based on mutual understanding and respect. It allows us to go beyond our individual needs and desires and work together for the common good.

### **6.9. Transcendent interiority**

Transcendent interiority is the dimension of interiority that delves into the realm of the spiritual and the metaphysical, extending beyond individual and tangible experience. At this aspect, consciousness not only encompasses what is immediately perceptible or rationally understandable but also opens itself to experiences that transcend these limits.

Transcendent experience can manifest itself in various ways but commonly involves a sense of oneness with the universe, a connection with the sacred, or a perception of the divine. These experiences can vary widely in their nature and how they are experienced, but they often carry a deep sense of connection and belonging to something larger than oneself. They can be moments of revelation or deep inner peace, in which the limits of the self dissolve and a sense of unity with the whole is experienced.

The qualia associated with this aspect is precisely the transcendent experience that is described much more precisely in the Inner Castle. This qualia is unique in that it does not focus on the self or the material

but rather on connection to a plane of existence that is both ineffable and deeply meaningful. It can lead to a change in the perception of the world and one's own existence, generating a sense of purpose and belonging. Transcendent interiority is a capacity inherent to human consciousness, but it is not within the reach of machines, which do not have interiority or a phenomenal consciousness that runs through it.

## 7. Beyond qualia

Although spirituality is felt, transcendent interiority needs to be defined, as stressed by Teresa, in the deeds. The transformative dimension of spirituality is its most important one, as acknowledged for instance by Maslow (Maslow 1969), for whom the marker of transcendence was to have an impact on the individual's behaviour that was identified by both self and others, and stayed with the individual for their whole life, never weakening. For Teresa, external actions were the key that reflected the essence of interiority, and spiritual experiences should be only considered "gifts" that could or could not arrive, depending on the particular predisposition of the individual and, what is more important, to God's decision. There are examples of saints with a deep connection to God who lived without consolation, such as Therese of Lisieux, whose suffering was so extreme that she feared losing her mind. The connection between suffering and spiritual growth is extremely interesting, and has deservedly received a great deal of attention over centuries.

The interesting point for our comparison with AI here is that, although the machine can generate compelling descriptions of spiritual experiences, not only there is no authentic qualia associated to them, but also it is difficult to imagine that it could have a transformative experience. The training in the machine happens incrementally, and responds to a computable algorithm that does not allow the emergence of such a fundamental shift. How would we understand transformation in the machine, if training is still training and data are still data? Could a machine experience something that would lead it to sacrifice itself for others? We can

indeed program it for sacrifice, but can it chose it freely, if there is not even an individual to make this choice?

## Conclusions

This paper has illuminated the significant distinction between the cognitive capabilities of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the unique phenomenon of human inner experience, arguing that, despite AI's advanced functionalities, it remains devoid of the phenomenal consciousness inherent to humans. By engaging with diverse fields such as the philosophy of mind, artificial intelligence, and theological insights from "The Inner Castle" by Saint Teresa of Ávila and "Confessions" by Saint Augustine, our analysis has underscored the complexity of attributing consciousness to AI. We have critically evaluated the optimistic view that AI might attain consciousness through increased complexity, demonstrating through both theoretical and empirical evidence that computational intelligence and phenomenal consciousness are distinct entities. Moreover, our exploration into the analogy between the subjective experiences depicted in the Inner Castle and human cognitive processes sheds light on the nuanced understanding of AI's capabilities and limitations in mirroring human experiential realms. As we stand at a critical time, it is imperative to recognize these boundaries of AI to ensure its ethical deployment, acknowledging that while AI can replicate certain human-like tasks, the essence of subjective experience remains uniquely human.

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