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## INTERSUBJECTIVENESS AND EMPATHY. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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## ABSTRACT

*A new ontological framework was born with digitalization, more precisely an anthropo-informatics dimension. Consequently, the concept of computational affectivity in the digital universe has become the counterpart of empathy in interhuman relationships. The knowledge and level of acceptance of the human being at this moment of evolution presents a hiatus between rational (cognitive) and affective (emotional) in relation to artificial intelligence. This is why, starting from philosophical concepts such as those of Brentano, Husserl and Gadamer, we arrive at the current principles of the human-artificial intelligence relationship at a crossroads for humanity from the perspective of this type of relationship. The future requires a conceptual framework based on evidence that provides the foundation for the use of artificial intelligence beyond the currently accepted boundaries with the awareness of the practical and ethical implications. The questions arise: can we put the equal sign between intersubjectivity and empathy from a phenomenological and psychological point of view? Is it possible to apply the principle of intersubjectivity in the case of human-computer/artificial intelligence interaction with reference to physical and mental orientation? The conclusions drawn from this study demonstrate that the existing data in the specialized literature are still inconsistent and do not offer the possibility of creating the philosophical-practical conceptual framework necessary for the scientific approach to the subject.*

**Keywords**: *human-computer; interface; intersubjectivity; empathy;*

## INTRODUCTION

*"I don't ask the wounded person how he feels, I become the wounded person myself."*
*Walt Whitman, Song of Myself*

The purpose of this article is to emphasize the need for an understanding and acceptance, from a position characterized by impartiality, of the moment we currently find ourselves in with reference to the complex problem of human-ai interaction. since this paper primarily brings to attention the concept of social

  

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interaction and the use of ai through the lens of an emotional approach, we will exclude other possibilities of using ai in different fields.

The knowledge and acceptance level of the human being at this moment of evolution presents a hiatus between rational (cognitive) and affective (emotional) in the relationship with artificial intelligence. When we talk about defining periods in the development of the human being, namely, the childhood period, or about critical stages of the individual's evolution, the adolescence stage, it is necessary to objectively analyze the risk-benefit balance in the use of AI at these ages, evaluating what is called the "empathy gap" [Kurian, N.,2025] without omitting the advantages of using this technology.

A correct attitude in this direction consists in creating the coordinates of an ethical framework for its use, with the identification of vulnerability factors for children based on studies carried out to date. The research draw attention to social vulnerability and considering the extremely rapid evolution of AI and the fascination it exerts on individuals, it is necessary to know exactly the current and long-term risk and benefit windows. In fact, the constant interaction in the future of the human being with AI will be needing developing a carefully elaborated theoretical framework.

## 1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Over the years, physics educators have sought the most effective pedagogical methods for teaching this discipline. Several studies have compared traditional instructional techniques with experimental approaches in physics education.

Wilcox and Lewandowski's (Wilcox și Lewandowski, 2016) paper, "Impact of Instructional Approach on Students' Epistemologies about Experimental Physics," analyzes students' responses to the E-CLASS questionnaire (Colorado Learning Attitudes about Science Survey for Experimental Physics) applied in university experimental physics labs. The authors conclude that incorporating application-oriented hands-on activities into physics laboratories helps students develop expert-like conceptions of experimentation, compared to labs in which activities are highly standardized and predetermined.

In "Secondary Analysis of Teaching Methods in Introductory Physics: A 50 k Student Study" (Von Korff *et al.*, 2016), the authors examine Force Concept Inventory (FCI) and Force and Motion Conceptual Evaluation (FMCE) data from approximately 50,000 students in introductory physics courses. Their findings indicate that interactive learning techniques are significantly more effective than traditional lectures in promoting conceptual learning gains.

In (Smith și Holmes, 2017) the authors compare three common approaches in university physics instruction that all follow the predict–observe–explain pattern but yield different educational outcomes. They discuss possible mechanisms—prediction, cognitive load, and student engagement—that explain measurable differences in learning gains, and they recommend that laboratory courses be redesigned to emphasize genuine experimentation and reflection rather than mere verification.

A comparative analysis of these three studies converges on the need for a pedagogical approach that activates students' cognitive engagement and leverages the complementarities between traditional and innovative methods.

First, interactive-engagement methods—including activities that require students to predict, observe, and explain—generate significantly higher learning gains than traditional lectures, regardless of class size, institution type, or students' initial preparation (as evidenced by FCI and FMCE results).

Second, comparing classical experiments, traditional demonstrations, and modern, technique-enhanced demonstrations shows that effective laboratory work must allow students to formulate their own hypotheses, manage their informational load, and actively integrate new knowledge; absent these elements, classical labs do not deepen conceptual understanding.

Third, curricular reforms (e.g., ISLE, Modeling Instruction, Studio Physics, SCALE-UP) have a dual impact: they enhance students' understanding of the experimental process and their epistemological attitudes, and they contribute to narrowing the gender gap by providing proportionally greater benefits to female students.

  

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## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Intersubjectivity

The term intersubjectivity was taken up by psychology and defined as "the sharing of subjective experience between two or more people. Intersubjectivity is seen as essential for language and the production of social meaning.

The term is often applied to the relationship between a therapist and a client." [https://dictionary.apa.org/intersubjectivity] In the philosophical sense, intersubjectivity describes the awareness of the intentions and feelings of oneself and others within the dynamic exchange of minds acting in company, exchanging conscious intentions and emotional evaluations. Emotions can facilitate the creation of a relationship and in the context of Trevarthen's theory of intersubjectivity, development represents a function that is related to the a priori awareness of the Other, related to empathic interaction, with cultural roots and relational and social implications.

The core of the concept is represented by loneliness as a social emotion. [Galanaki E., 2023] In this context, it is important to study the perception of the AI user with regard to empathy and the type of "social relationship" with the AI. Empathy by definition has a meaning only in a social context. With reference to the subject of this article, the question arises whether an empathetic relationship between human beings and non-animate entities (AI) is really possible or is it possible to empathize only with people similar to us? [Dermot M., 2022]

The notion of empathy can be reconceptualized by using the term "Einfühlung" ("to feel in") with reference to the projection of "the self into another body or environment, which aims to understand how it feels to be in that other body or environment." Originating in representation in art, the conceptual can be applied to the human-avatar empathy relationship, because it admits that "the other body or other environment in which one "feels" does not necessarily have to be physically present, but can just as well be only represented and may even be only imaginary."

Thus, it can be admitted in the context of the subject of the paper, that empathy in the "interpersonal" human-AI and especially human-avatar relationship can be assimilated to empathy that refers to human artifacts. [Ganczarek J, Hünefeldt T., Olivetti Belardinelli M., 2018]

In accordance with the classical approach to the concept of intersubjectivity in the vision of three of the phenomenologists considered representative for their contribution to the principle of intersubjectivity, more precisely, Brentano F., Husserl E., Gadamer H., we started from the idea that the individual has the capacity to rationally know the essence of things.

***Brentano F.***

Brentano approaches the problem of consciousness through the concept of intentionality.[Citlak A., 2023] Intentionality as a benchmark of Brentano's thinking starts from the idea that the object represents the essence of psychic phenomena. [Vasiliu C.D., 2018] Consequently, psychism requires relating to an object.[Kockelman P., 2012] Through the theory of intentionality (which situates consciousness as being dependent on the object) it is shown how a mental state has self-awareness as a mental phenomenon. [Niemeck M., 2021]

***Husserl E.***

"The world is nothing but what exists."[Bahunar, M. H. 2024] Does an avatar or AI exist independently, more precisely cogito in its meaning? "The world is the creation of individual consciousness". Can we accept that an avatar can be the correspondent of an individuality? Debatable - the choice of an avatar is achieved by extracting a part from the whole and can this part be representative of the respective individual? "I (the individual) cannot live, experience and think, cannot value and act in any other world than the one that has meaning and validity in myself and through myself". "[Mahfuz, Md. Lawha, 2024]

Virtual reality no longer makes sense "through myself" because I - the Avatar - am only a partial projection of the whole, a projection chosen by me in relation to the world, which restricts the sphere of consciousness. [Liu, Z., Xu, J., Dalay, S. P., 2021] The avatar represents a fragmented personal projection that cannot be superimposed over the whole represented by the individual.[Liu, C.,2024]

  

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The complexity of the individual cannot be reduced to the existence of the avatar. We started from the idea that the whole is not just the sum of its parts. In the permanent subject-object relationship for giving meaning to the world through consciousness, the existence of the Avatar cannot give a conscious meaning to the world, being only a representation that gives a simple description of it.

Consequently, the empathy inherent to consciousness cannot be substituted by the alterity of the choice of avatars in the virtual world. As for AI, by eliminating the biological aspects of cognition, respectively by suspending consciousness from its physical support, AI can have consciousness.

***Gadamer H.G.***

The main theme addressed by Gadamer in "In Praise of Theory" is the transcendental problem of intersubjectivity which refers to the interaction between consciousnesses. [Risser J., 2019] The AI avatar can be compared in terms of self-awareness to the human being, starting from the premise that "the last barrier that no act of observation can remove, it seems to me, is the fact of being a for-itself, a final refusal and an intangible otherness."[George, T.,2025]

The laws by which recognition of the real and implicitly empathy in relation to otherness are transferable to relationships: AI-AI or Avatar – Avatar or Avatar – Human or AI – human or Avatar - AI "People manage to open up to each other, between them there is a trust that allows them to perceive each other, not as a limit of their own self, but as a potentiation, extension, completion of their own existence, through which they learn to recognize the real"? Virtual Reality or the real in "realistic experiences within illusions enabled by IVR (immersive virtual reality) technologies" is similar to Physical Reality (Cyber space vs Metaspace). [Magar S.T., 2025]

Recent studies highlight the potential of human-AI interaction using a ChatGPT-based AI conversational agent in a Metaverse platform. The results of the study demonstrate that this complex interaction paradigm is more promising in mental health care, providing an alternative for people who do not like the solution of accessing therapeutic services provided by trained people. [Chung, P., Cong, R., Yao, L., Jin, Q., 2025]

**Empathy**

According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, empathy can be defined as: "to understand a person from their frame of reference, rather than from your own frame of reference, or to indirectly experience that person's feelings, perceptions, and thoughts… In psychotherapy, the therapist's empathy for the client can be a way to understand the client's cognitions, affects, motivations, or behaviors." [https://dictionary.apa.org/empathy] Essentially, empathy is the term used generically to refer to how to understand the emotional experiences of individuals with whom we interact in different social contexts. [Riess H., 2017] Neurobiological studies have highlighted the fact that there are elements of "synchronization, anticipation, and empathic mirroring" that are transmitted culturally intergenerationally.[Kokkinaki T., Delafield-Butt J., Nagy E., Trevarthen C., 2023]

## 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

*The working hypothesis is constituted by the question: Can we equate (from a phenomenological and psychological point of view) intersubjectivity and empathy, or in other words, does the concept of computational affectivity in the digital universe correspond to empathy in interpersonal relationships?*

Paradigms in the Theory of Human-AI Relationship

The evolution of AI and its ethical implications is at an early stage and there are many unknowns, doubts, hopes and social and academic disputes regarding this subject. For this reason, an attempt is made to establish a conceptual framework that includes all the aspects currently identified with implications for human existence. One of the concepts currently used is known as the Machine Integrated Relational Adaptation (MIRA) model, a transdisciplinary, middle-range theoretical framework that provides a foundational account of when, how, and why AI functions as a relational entity in human ecosystems. [Boyd, R. L., Markowitz, D. M., 2025]

  

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The MIRA model offers a complex and structured perspective on the subject of human-AI relationships, but awareness and acceptance of this concept in the general population is necessary. This can be a type of realistic goal through the implementation of educational programs. [Bușu F.A., 2025] The question arises at this point? Due to some ethical and contextual understanding aspects regarding the empathy offered by AI, until these are elucidated, it is more prudent to resort to the empathy offered by humans as emotional support with the option of using virtual space as a place for the interhuman meeting for the time being without emotional accompaniament due to IA? [Rubin M., et al., 2025]

A human–avatar taxonomy is proposed to aid in the design of affective avatars for the purpose of addressing social communication disorders. Purpose: to assess emotion and elicit empathy [Johnson E. et al, 2018] because the prevalence of individual avatars has increased with the advent of Metaverse technology. [Pak S., 2021]

Expressing identity through an avatar is common in the digital world. Results: the social perception of the user – the subjects – the avatar that embodies their characteristic expressions is more similar to them (at the individual perceptual level). Some current studies reveal that "responses attributed to humans were rated as more empathetic and supportive and elicited more positive and less negative emotions than those attributed to AI." In addition, "participants' untrained belief that AI helped the responses attributed to humans reduced perceived empathy and support."[Rubin M., Li Z. J., Zimmeraman F., et al., 2025] A positive aspect of using AI to eliminate interpersonal relational subjectivity is "AI's unique ability to simulate empathy without the same biases that affect humans." [Inzlicht M., Cameron C.D., D'Cruz J., Bloom P., 2023]

A vulnerable point in the human-AI relationship is represented by non-verbal and paraverbal language, which in interpersonal relationships can bring a significant dose of empathy. This aspect is supported by a series of recently published meta-analyses that bring into discussion the controversial aspect of human-AI relationships in which scenarios are based solely on text and in this context artificial intelligence chatbots are perceived as more empathetic than their human counterparts. [Howcroft A., Bennett-Weston A., Khan A., 2025; Shen J, et al., 2024]

Connection in human –computer interaction contexts increases empathic concerns, associates with enhanced socio-emotional skills and physiological well-being. [Wang K., et al, 2025]

## 4. DISCUSSIONS

Digital technology specialists are looking for solutions for future avatars to go beyond their current state – individual representation and games – and focus on more applied aspects such as use in healthcare or counseling/psychotherapy.

It is necessary to change the classical paradigm of interpersonal relationships by adapting it to new types of relationships: AI-AI or Avatar - Avatar or Avatar - Human or AI - human or Avatar - AI. This change of mentality requires rigorous information and the introduction of a type of education based on new coordinates, which includes redefining the notion of social and interpersonal relationships.

To this end, the principles of an ethical framework for making online activities (e.g., medical platforms) IA – PRINCIPLES (OECD, 2019) have been formulated. [https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/ai-principles.html]

1. responsibility
2. safety
3. robustness, security
4. human-centered values and equity; transparency and explainability
5. pursuing beneficial outcomes for people and the planet

Regarding the similarity between empathy and intersubjectivity, starting from the working hypothesis formulated at the beginning of the paper, at this moment a pertinent conclusion cannot be drawn because we are still at the beginning of the knowledge of this complex phenomenon and consequently there are numerous implications still unknown. However, one aspect is certain, namely that both empathy and intersubjectivity imply a quantitative and or qualitative asymmetry regarding the perspective on these concepts within an emotional assistance relationship (in a therapeutic context).

  

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## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, at this point it is correct to look at the use of AI as a human emotional companion, with responsibility, understanding and hope. There are a number of anxieties determined by the ignorance of certain aspects related to the previously mentioned vulnerability factors in this type of relationship. Therefore, it is mandatory to ensure that regarding the human-AI relationship one thing must be certain: the possibility of an informed choice. In any relationship that aims to: "emotional assistance" the main condition in establishing the relationship is the investment with authority.

Social evolution and access to information technology has changed the social coordinates of the way of relating and in this new framework, the choice of a digital companion can no longer be surprising; it is only the prove of freedom choose. Of course, future studies are needed and the creation of a safe framework for relating with AI in the same register in which the ethical principles of relating in providing "emotional assistance" based on an interpersonal relationship are clearly formulated.

It is important to emphasize that there are a number of advantages such as: increasing the number of entities that provide emotional assistance, easier access especially for those who cannot travel (long distances, time factor, limited financial possibilities, limiting medical reasons), confidentiality, avoiding of the stigma of emotional problems which in many situations causes the person not to request help.

The reporting to intersubjectivity in relation to otherness and empathy still requires discussion, given the ethical implications. Also, there is a pressing need to develop new paradigms in the social and medical model of the use of AI and avatars. An equidistant attitude of the scientific world is required, characterized by curiosity and openness to research and debate in a collaborative manner, for the most judicious use for the benefit of humanity, of AI and avatars. At this point, it is advisable to view the existence of AI and especially the interaction with this entity without prejudice, as a window of opportunity.

  

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