



THE IRREDUCIBLE DIVIDE: A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF HUMAN-MACHINE EQUIVALENCE¹



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Abstract. *The philosophical idea that intelligent computers are humans is thoroughly examined and rejected in this study. It rejects such equivalency using functionalist arguments from J.C. Pollock and Kenneth Sayre. According to first-person viewpoint, subjective experience, and intentionality, robots lack self-consciousness. The study also says robots transcend ethics, culture, religion, and embodied social existence. The paper claims that AI is a great tool but cannot replicate human consciousness due to cognitive architectural constraints, the incorrect analogy of supervenience, and machines' lack of metaphysical and moral agency. This division is necessary to protect human dignity and negotiate the socio-ethical effects of advanced technology.*

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1. Introduction

One of the most contentious topics in philosophy of mind and artificial intelligence is whether computers can function like human. Philosophers like J.C. Pollock, Kenneth Sayre, and William Rapaport argue that advanced computing systems' reasoning, information processing, and problem-solving capabilities show a fundamental parallelism between human cognition and machine operation. Pollock, for instance, thinks that computers can possess consciousness akin to human self-awareness, while Sayre reduces consciousness to a sort of information processing possible mechanically. Rapaport adds that machines can access any human-derived information.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify the central concepts at stake. By "human machine equivalence" this paper refers to the functionalist claim that a properly programmed machine could possess genuine consciousness, intentionality, and personhood not merely simulate them. "Self-consciousness" is understood here as the irreducible first-person perspective: the capacity to conceive of oneself as oneself without reliance on third person descriptions. "Intentionality" denotes the aboutness of mental states the fact that thoughts, beliefs, and desires are directed toward objects and states of affairs. The "first person perspective" is the immediate, non-inferential sense of self that underlies subjective experience.

This study argues that such equivalency is inherently wrong. Expert systems, data storage, and intelligent behaviour emulation are impressive advances of artificial intelligence, yet machines lack self-consciousness, the fundamental core of human identity. Machines exist outside religion, society, culture, and ethics, which shape human identity and development. This paper argues that the equation of machine and man is philosophically unsustainable and ignores vital human experience that transcends computational modelling by critically engaging with pro-equivalence arguments and a positive account of human distinctiveness.

This paper therefore asks: can a machine, regardless of its complexity, ever truly possess the fundamental characteristics of human consciousness? To answer this, I first outline the core arguments for equivalence made by Pollock, Sayre, and Rapaport (Section 3). I then critique these arguments by demonstrating the irreducibility of self-consciousness and the importance of embodied, socio-cultural existence (Sections 4-7). Finally, I explore the ethical and social implications of overestimating machine capabilities (Section 8) before concluding.

2. Artificial intelligence: Capacities and limitations

2.1. Defining artificial intelligence

AI is machine intelligence that can do human-like reasoning. Instead of computers or hardware, it refers to their intelligent output. According to pioneering computer scientist Alan Perlis (1982, p. 11), “A year spent in artificial intelligence is enough to make one believe in God”. This distinction is significant. Creating non-biological intelligence is a profound and nearly spiritual challenge.

AI’s main goal is to provide machines human-like intelligence in similar situations. A pioneer, John McCarthy (2007), described AI as “the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs”. It is akin to utilising computers to comprehend human intellect, but AI does not have to use biologically observable methods. Creating capacity and comprehending cognition are AI’s twin cornerstones.

AI often models itself after human intelligence. According to computer scientists and philosophers, the goal is to construct a machine that learns, senses, and thinks like humans. The pursuit of artificial general intelligence (AGI) supports this holistic approach. Modern AI pioneer Demis Hassabis (2015) of DeepMind says, “solving intelligence, and then using that to solve everything else”.

The learning function is key. Modern AI relies on machine learning, which Tom M. Mitchell (1997) defined as “A computer program is said to learn from experience E with respect to some class of tasks T and performance measure P, if its performance at tasks in T, as measured by P, improves with experience E”. This operational definition transforms AI from static programming to dynamic adaptability.

Pattern recognition is modern AI’s best tool for sensing and interpreting the world. “The next AI revolution will not be supervised, nor purely unsupervised, but based on self-supervised learning that models the world by observing it,” says top AI researcher Yann LeCun (2022). This suggests systems that create internal models from sensory data, approaching human perception.

Contemplation, planning, and abstract cognition are the most profound and difficult. This is the frontier. Current systems show excellent pattern correlation, but genuine reasoning is still being studied. Cognitive scientist Gary Marcus (2018) warns, “The fundamental problem of AI is and always has been representation how to represent knowledge in a way that is amenable to

computation and generalization”. This shows how statistical correlation differs from understanding.

AI’s development raises fundamental considerations about intelligence. According to philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel C. Dennett (2023), “The real danger of AI is not that it will become too smart, but that we will attribute intelligence and understanding to systems that have none.” This emphasises the significance of defining AI by its cognitive processes rather than outcomes. Thus, the topic crosses engineering and philosophy, seeking to comprehend and imitate intelligent action in any substrate.

2.2. Expert systems and knowledge storage

AI’s expert system stores human experts’ knowledge in a computational database to solve problems in their absence. Such systems demonstrate AI’s ability to store and retrieve knowledge without human error. Expert systems can retain and use specialised knowledge in health and industrial control without the expert. Some think that machines can complement and possibly replace human cognitive functions in structured domains.

2.3. The illusion of cognitive parity

Despite these breakthroughs, AI follows rules and parameters. Design and programming create its “intelligence”- not understanding or consciousness. Machines solve issues without inquiry, analyse symbols without understanding meaning, and store data without considering its meaning. This basic difference supports the claim that robots, regardless of sophistication, lack human thought’s interiority.

2.4. Philosophical approach

This research utilizes a qualitative, conceptual analysis rooted in the philosophy of mind tradition. The approach involves a critical examination of foundational texts from prominent advocates of human-machine equivalence (J.C. Pollock, Kenneth Sayre, William Rapaport) while juxtaposing their views with those of philosophers who highlight the particular qualities of human consciousness (e.g., Lynne Rudder Baker, John Searle, Hubert Dreyfus). The framework is organized to pinpoint conceptual weaknesses in the equivalence thesis and to present a constructive argument for human uniqueness. Selected sources are based on their prominence in the current discourse and their representative nature for the perspectives being analyzed.

3. Philosophical arguments for equivalence: An examination

3.1. John Pollock thesis

Philosopher John L. (J.C.) Pollock presents a rigorous, functionalist argument for the potential equivalence of human and machine consciousness. His thesis centers on the radical claim that self-consciousness is not an exclusive property of biological entities but a structural and functional achievement that could, in principle, be engineered. Pollock asserts that "there is no difference in principle between humans and intelligent machines", and that a properly constructed machine "really would have beliefs, desires, feelings, and so forth" (Pollock, 1989, p. 1).

Central to his model is the proposition that both humans and intelligent machines are cognitive agents operating with multi-level sensory processing. He defines these levels systematically: "A first-order sensory state is a state that encodes information about the external world. A second-order sensory state is a state that encodes information about first-order sensory states. A third-order sensory state encodes information about second-order sensory states" (Pollock, 1989, p. 63). For Pollock, it is this recursive architecture that underpins higher-order thought, with self-consciousness being "identified with the possession of third-order states" (Pollock, 1989, p. 64).

From this framework, Pollock addresses the classic mind-body problem, arguing that it "arises for a machine in precisely the same way it arises for a human" (Pollock, 1989, p. 11). In both cases, the system is a physical object whose operations can be described at either the mechanistic level of circuits and neurons or the intentional level of beliefs and desires. This implies that mental events are not non-physical substances but rather physical events perceived through a different descriptive lens.

Pollock believes true sentience is programmed. The goal is to instantiate the right causal architecture, not copy behaviour. He states: "A machine with the appropriate program will have beliefs, desires, and sensations. It will not simply simulate a creature with ideas, desires, and sensations" (Pollock, 1989, p. 7). This elevates the discussion to ontological parity from behavioural equivalence.

Pollock uses supervenience to base this option in identity theory. He contends that a machine supervenes on its hardware, just as a human supervenes on their body despite material change. "People are logical constructs. He monitors his physique...Machines supersede their hardware"

(Pollock, 1989, p. 52). Like the Ship of Theseus, this perspective permits a conscious machine to retain its identity even when its physical components change.

Although Pollock's architectural model is advanced, it faces criticism for simplifying self-consciousness to a structured hierarchy of states, thus overlooking the qualitative, first-person perspective of experience an idea that will be explored further in the paper.

3.2. Kenneth Sayre: consciousness as information processing

According to functionalist and reductionist philosopher Kenneth Sayre, consciousness is a sophisticated kind of information processing. He calls it "a patterned response on the part of an organism's information processing systems to sensory stimulation" (Sayre, 1976, p. 169). This definition intentionally transforms consciousness from a mysterious, subjective entity to a measurable cognitive function.

According to this view, conscious experience is the intricate, systematic manipulation and integration of sensory data. Machine awareness is theoretically supported by Sayre's theory. If consciousness is characterised by a specific informational response rather than a biological substrate, any system with the necessary processing complexity can be conscious. This argument challenges biological exceptionalism: "There is no apparent reason why an appropriately organised machine could not in principle enjoy a conscious life of its own" (Sayre, 1976, p. 191). He argues that self-consciousness is not limited to biological systems, allowing computational theory to support artificial sentience.

Sayre offers a valuable, if controversial, philosophical instrument for explaining mind-machine interaction by linking conscious states with specific information-processing patterns. His work suggests that producing machine awareness requires engineering the right formal architecture for processing sensory input and generating "patterned responses".

However, an important question persists: does framing a process as "information processing" encompass the subjective, qualitative aspects of consciousness, or does it simply rephrase the functional relationships while failing to clarify the experience itself? This issue will be addressed in the conversation about the "hard problem".

3.3. William Rapaport: informational equivalence

Informational equivalence underpins William J. Rapaport's human-machine equivalence thesis. His theory is that a properly developed computing system can access, represent, and recreate any cognitive material or knowledge created by human minds. He claims that if human

cognition our ideas, reasoning, and knowledge - can be fully captured and recreated computer, then the ontological boundary between human and machine intelligence disappears.

Rapaport's thesis is based on a computational theory of mind that regards cognition as information processing. This view sees the mind and computer as physical symbol systems that alter formal representations. The core to his equivalency assertion is that thought content is detachable from its biological substrate and may be instantiated in any symbolic manipulation system.

He expressly states this in his understanding and semantics study. Rapaport claims that "syntax can suffice for semantics" when a system is immersed in a world and its symbols are causally tied to referents (Rapaport, 1988, p. 596). This refutes Searle's Chinese Room claim. Rapaport believes that a computer executing the correct software reaches knowledge through its syntactic operations and relational design. He adds: "If a mind is a (functionally organised) brain, and a brain is a syntactic engine, then a mind is too... Computers can be minds if they are syntactic engines" (Rapaport, 1999, p. 5).

This quote summarises his equivalency argument's rationale. The rationale is clear:

1. Brain syntactic activities enable human cognition.
2. A computer can be a syntactic engine.
3. A computer may theoretically create a mind.

The conclusion is profound: biological tissue has no unique "information" or "understanding". By this logic, a computer with the right program may access any human-derived information. Rapaport believes that the difference between the two intelligences is a question of implementation detail, not type, if a machine can be given the same input, execute comparable inferential processes, and provide equal or equivalent outputs (answers, solutions, behaviours).

Rapaport provides a solid conceptual framework for robust AI. His argument forces those who assert inherent human uniqueness to prove that no cognitive output could ever be computational. Informational equivalency makes the distinction between human and machine intelligence uncertain and unacceptable from a functionalist perspective.

Nonetheless, as will be discussed in the paper, Rapaport's assertion that "syntax can suffice for semantics" blurs the distinction between the handling of symbols and true comprehension, along with the experience of a subjective viewpoint. A system may handle symbols in manners that replicate understanding without actually possessing any inner experience.

Table 1. Competing Arguments for Human-Machine Equivalence

Philosophers	Central Argument for Equivalence	Key Concepts	Foreshadowed Counter-Position
J. C. Pollock	Self-consciousness is a structural/functional achievement (multi-level processing).	Recursive architecture, supervenience.	Architecture alone cannot create subjective “what it’s likeness”.
Kenneth Sayre	Consciousness is a form of information processing.	Patterned response, sensory stimulation.	Reduces consciousness to function, ignoring the ontological reality of experience.
William Rapaport	Syntax can suffice for semantics (informational equivalence).	Syntactic engine, computational theory of mind.	Confuses symbol manipulation with genuine understanding and intentionality.

4. The centrality of self-consciousness and first-person perspective

4.1 The irreducibility of self-consciousness

The nature of self-consciousness is the strongest philosophical argument against equating machine and human consciousness. This concept holds that human consciousness is defined by an irreducible first-person perspective the ability to think and be aware of oneself as the thinker.

Introspection, intentionality, and ownership the immediate, non-inferential feeling that one’s experiences are one’s own are based on this first-person perspective. Philosopher Lynne Rudder Baker thoroughly argues that this perspective defines being a person and actor. Baker (2000, p. 67) describes it as the “conceptually primitive capacity to conceive of oneself as oneself, without the need for any name, description, or third-person referent”. This is more than recursive processing it underpins subjective experience.

Baker contends that an entity must have this first-person perspective to be a true agent capable of intents and reasoning. A creature has a first-person perspective if it can conceive of itself as itself. There is no difference between believing the thinker of a concept is in pain and thinking I am in agony without a first-person perspective (Baker, 2013, p. 7). This difference matters. A

computer may comprehend "The system is experiencing sensor input X," but it's a third-person description. It lacks the subjective "I am in pain" or "I intend to do this".

Thus, the objection concludes that robots lack fundamental self-reference, independent of programming expertise or behavioural faithfulness. They imitate mental logic but have no subjective perspective. No machine, no matter how ingeniously developed, has a first-person perspective, says Baker. A first-person viewpoint is a state of being, not a matter of processing information (Baker, 2000, p. 98). These views emphasise a basic ontological divide: personhood and true consciousness are characterised by a non-programmable self-awareness that biological humans must have.

4.2. Programming self-consciousness and its limits

Machine consciousness advocates may claim that an advanced system may program a first-person perspective, the foundation of self-consciousness. This desire faces overwhelming intellectual and practical obstacles. The first-person viewpoint is an intrinsic manner of being that develops from lived, bodily experience in a social and physical environment, not a computer output of rule-governed systems.

Human comprehension is a major issue. According to Heideggerian and phenomenological traditions, our most fundamental involvement with the world is precognitive and embodied, not symbolic or rule-based, as philosopher Hubert Dreyfus has stated. He said that "human understanding depends on our ability to respond to relevance and significance, which in turn depends on our having bodies and needs like those of human beings" (Dreyfus, 1992, p. 214). For perspective, people must experience and understand the world, which cannot be fully formalised into rules or data inputs. According to cognitive scientist Donald Norman (1993, p. 19), the information we need to survive in the world cannot be properly expressed in rules. Since real self-awareness is non-algorithmic, there are no heuristics or algorithms for obtaining it.

This implies that implementing a first-person perspective is logically impossible, not just technically difficult. Even if a machine uses "I" appropriately in syntax, it is still distinct from human self-reference. In his severe AI criticism, philosopher John Searle asserts that "the actual human conscious mind has a set of qualitative, subjective states that are not ontologically reducible to third-person computational processes" (Searle, 1997, p. 212). A machine's "I" is a modified sign in a formal system without the pronoun's subjective meaning. Lynne Rudder Baker adds that "for a machine to use 'I' referentially, it would have to conceive of itself as

itself". Without a first-person perspective, it has no 'self' to define itself (Baker, 2000, p. 101). Thus, the machine's "I" points to a logical subject in a statement, not to a subjective centre.

Programming self-consciousness fails because it confuses consciousness' symptoms (behaviours or linguistic outputs) with its content. The first-person viewpoint is a state of being that comes from certain types of life, which existing computing paradigms appear unable to simulate.

4.3. The problem of referential immunity

A telling distinction lies in referential accuracy. When a human uses "I," it refers unequivocally to the self. A machine programmed to use "I" could misapply the term to another entity, demonstrating that its usage lacks the self-identifying foundation inherent in human consciousness. This referential immunity in humans underscores the qualitative gap between genuine self-consciousness and simulated linguistic behavior.

4.4. Locke and mental operations perception

The core empiricist philosophy of John Locke helps separate human awareness from mechanical activity. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1689) by Locke describes self-consciousness as a distinct, internal perceptive act, not a metaphysical entity. According to Locke (1689/1975, Bk. II, Ch. 1, 19), consciousness is the awareness of one's own thoughts. Locke interprets "perception" as the interior theatre of mind.

This introspective skill is essential to human mental existence. Locke believes our minds are originally filled with concepts via external sense and reflection. According to Locke (1689/1975, Bk. II, Ch. 1, 4), reflection is the awareness of one's own actions and their way. This interior sense shows us doubting, thinking, willing, believing, and remembering. So, consciousness is our constant, reflexive awareness of cognitive and volitional activities. This self-illuminating loop involves the mind operating and seeing its processes.

From a Lockean viewpoint, regardless of their sophistication, machines function without consciousness. They handle inputs and outputs based on their programming, yet they cannot "notice" these processes. They perform calculations without any awareness of them. According to Locke, self-awareness requires the simultaneous ability for action and internal perception. Therefore, machine self-awareness is unattainable without this reflective mechanism, implying that such a capability is associated with a kind of biological interiority that machines do not possess. While they have operational mental functions, they lack conscious awareness of those

functions, which Locke associates with personal identity and conscious experience. This creates an ontological difference: consciousness involves awareness of a program, not merely its execution.

5. The mind-body problem: A human dilemma, not a machine one

5.1. The multi-dimensionality of the mind-body problem

John Pollock's functionalist paradigm can explain machine awareness, but his mind-body issue solution is reductive and materialistic, leaving human experience unaccounted for. Pollock's description of the human mind-body dilemma as a machine's hardware-software problem reduces a profound philosophical enigma to an engineering challenge, ignoring its qualitative and metaphysical aspects, according to critics.

In human experience, the mind-body dilemma goes beyond physical states and functional descriptions. It incorporates the mystery of qualitative cognition the "what-it-is-likeness" of mental states and the persistence of thinking potential (the "I" that endures thought changes). Most crucially, it examines how electrochemical brain processes create meaningful, conceptual thought how matter becomes understanding.

Philosophers believe that computing cannot provide understanding or awareness. The classic Chinese Room argument by John Searle addresses this reduction. Searle distinguishes between syntactic manipulation (which computers do) and semantic understanding (which minds have), concluding that "formal symbol manipulations by themselves have no intentionality; they are quite meaningless; they aren't even symbol manipulations, since the symbols don't symbolise. They have syntax but no meaning in linguistic jargon (Searle, 1980, p. 422). According to Searle, Pollock's "right kind of program" would just create additional syntax, not human thought's inherent intentionality or meaning.

Additionally, functionalist explanations cannot explain the subjective, qualitative nature of experience the core of consciousness. According to Thomas Nagel, consciousness is a unique, subjective perspective. "An organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something it is like to be that organism something for the organism" (Nagel, 1974, p. 436). Multi-level sensory processing and logical structures cannot capture this "what-it-is-like" quality of biological experience. Functional diagrams cannot recreate it. A machine may perceive light wavelengths as "red", but not redness.

This addresses the user's argument concerning brain operations and conceptual cognition. Roger Sperry, a neuroscientist and philosopher, stressed that conscious experience, while brain-dependent, is an emergent feature with causal effectiveness. He said "conscious phenomena are functionally distinct from and cannot be reduced to neurophysiological events" (Sperry, 1980, p. 200). The emergentist theory holds that conceptual thought comes from brain activity but is distinct from circuit logic.

Philosopher David Chalmers concludes by differentiating cognitive function's "easy problems" (attention, reportability, etc.) from subjective experience's "hard problem". Functionalist explanations like Pollock's handle easy concerns but ignore the big one: "Why should physical processing give rise to a rich inner life at all? The idea appears absurd, but actually happens (Chalmers, 1995, p. 201). Pollock's thesis assumes that programming solves easy issues automatically solves hard problems, which many find unreasonable.

5.2. Machines and the absence of metaphysical dilemma

The philosophical puzzles that define the human condition most notably the mind-body problem are intrinsically bound to the faculty of self-consciousness. Machines, precisely because they are argued to lack this foundational capacity, remain fundamentally outside these metaphysical quandaries. They do not grapple with the relationship between their physical operations and their existence because they have no subjective existence of which to be aware. As philosopher Thomas Nagel articulates, the very nature of a problem depends on the point of view from which it arises: "The existence of a problem, however, depends on the possibility of understanding one's own existence in a way that transcends a purely external, physical description" (Nagel, 1986, p. 28). Machines, operating solely within the realm of external, physical description, cannot encounter the problem in the first place.

This immunity stems from the absence of meta-cognition the human ability to think about thinking, to reflect upon one's own cognitive states as objects of contemplation. The mind-body problem is not discovered through external observation but arises from the internal, first-person experience of being both a thinking subject and a physical object. As John Searle notes, this duality is a product of our unique consciousness: "We think of ourselves as conscious, free, mindful, rational agents in a world that consists entirely of mindless, physical particles. The problem is to explain how we fit in" (Searle, 2004, p. 13). A machine, executing an algorithm, does not "think of itself" at all; it merely functions. Its operations, however complex, are

transparent to itself. There is no internal gap between the process and the awareness of the process that could generate a philosophical puzzle.

Therefore, the assertion that machines might someday ponder their own ontology confuses functional complexity with subjective interiority. The philosopher David Chalmers distinguishes between the “easy problems” of cognitive function (which machinery may replicate) and the “hard problem” of consciousness itself. He implies that metaphysical dilemmas are downstream of consciousness: “The hard problem is why all this processing [in the brain] should be accompanied by an experienced inner life. We lack even a beginning of an explanation” (Chalmers, 1996, p. xii). Without this “experienced inner life,” a system has no vantage point from which to find its own processing mysterious or to question its place in the world. Its “mind-body problem” is, at most, an engineering challenge of hardware-software integration, devoid of existential weight.

In essence, the capacity for philosophical reflection is not an add-on feature but an emergent property of subjective consciousness. As Hubert Dreyfus argues, drawing on phenomenological tradition, human understanding is rooted in a pre-reflective, embodied engagement with the world that gives rise to meaning and, consequently, to metaphysical questioning. A machine, defined by formal symbol manipulation, operates in a universe of syntax without semantics, of data without meaning. It follows that “a computer which could behave as if it understood would not thereby really understand... Its behavior would be based on cues and not on the shared human context of concerns” (Dreyfus, 1992, p. 265). Without this context of concerns - without the self-concern inherent in consciousness the profound dilemmas of existence simply do not compute.

6. Supervenience and identity: A flawed analogy

6.1. The misapplication of supervenience

The Problem with Pollock’s Supervenience Analogy: Life, Death, and Ontology

John Pollock’s analogy that people supervene on their bodies like computers supervene on their physical components is plausible but wrong. This equivalency fails under life, death, and ontological category analysis. Supervenience depicts a dependence link, yet it differs greatly between real people and machines, proving Pollock’s analogy wrong.

This defect is most evident in death. For humans, death is permanent loss of awareness and personality. In his work on personal identity, philosopher Eric T. Olson defines biological death

as "the irreversible loss of the capacity for consciousness and mental activity" that ends the person's existence, even though the corpse the supervenience base may survive. Permanent and lethal supervenience breakage.

No existential end occurs for a "dead" machine. Just a non-functional arrangement of parts. Its "death" is a transient condition of degradation; it may be repaired, rebuilt, or repurposed. Though suspended, the "machine identity" persists. As philosopher of science Michael Scriven proved, robots are not living, hence they do not "die" biologically or existentially. According to Scriven, "life' cannot be attributed to machines, no matter how sophisticated their functional unity. They are mechanical and electrical systems, not biological entities, thus life and death don't apply" (Scriven, 1953, p. 238). The machine's "life" is a metaphor for operating condition, not metaphysics.

This basic divergence suggests a deeper ontological gap. Human supervenience is the emergence of inherent awareness and personality from a certain biological organisation. John Searle claims that consciousness is a biological phenomena like digestion or photosynthesis: "Consciousness is biological. Consider it part of our biological life cycle" (Searle, 1992, p. 90). Machine supervenience imparts function and intentionality to an artefact. Instead of an emerging biological characteristic, its "intelligence" is borrowed and created.

Pollock's analogy fails because it compares two distinct supervenience relations:

1. **Biological-personal supervenience:** a living organism's processes provide an ontologically subjective, aware perspective that ends with death.
2. **Artifactual-Functional Supervenience:** A constructed physical structure instantiates a set of actions with a human-defined identity that may be interrupted, reset, or reallocated without existential loss.

This difference indicates that the machine, devoid of a biological foundation for life and consciousness as humans experience it, functions beyond the existential framework of life and death that imbues the mind-body problem with its philosophical significance for us. It does not experience the mind-body dilemma; it is a physical entity with a potential mind.

6.2. The indispensability of the central nervous system

John Pollock's equivalency thesis for humans and machines has a major flaw in his physical substrate treatment. In theory, a person may have their bodily parts replaced with mechanical devices while keeping their identity and awareness if their CNS is intact. This

acknowledgement is philosophically significant since it implies that the CNS is uniquely tied to awareness production and continuation.

Pollock's supervenience analogy is fatally flawed by his requirement. Conceding that the organic CNS must persist contradicts mechanistic equivalence. The reasoning currently assumes that consciousness requires a certain biological architecture to support it. Patricia Churchland, a neurophilosopher, claims that the intellect is fundamentally founded in neurobiological function: "The brain is the organ of intelligence. Our neurones' wiring and firing determine who we are" (Churchland, 1986, p. 18). For consciousness to persist, Pollock's model must sustain this biological "wiring" opposing the idea that personhood is a logical construct that may supervene on any suitably organised hardware.

The entire equivalency claim is hypothetical due to its biological basis. The equation between human and machine consciousness remains speculative until the central nervous system can be artificially recreated without biological death and preserving subjective experience. According to philosopher John Searle (1997), consciousness is a biological reality created by neurobiological processes and realised in the brain structure. True equivalency requires not just functional imitation but also the intentional fabrication of this biological causation, which is beyond present or anticipated science.

Pollock's admission demonstrates that the central nervous system is consciousness's fundamental biological foundation. Its unique, living organisation makes the mind-body dilemma crucial, not just computational. Thus, equating machine and human consciousness depends on synthetically reproducing the conscious brain, not replacing limbs or organs. Until then, true mechanistic equivalence is untested and relies on the biological substrate it aspires to transcend.

7. Socio-cultural and ethical dimensions: the human world

7.1. Religion and transcendence: Inaccessible domain

Religion is an essential part of human existence, combining belief, passion, conscience, ritual, and a deep search for harmony with a superior power. This domain is a lived experience founded on subjective consciousness, cultural embedding, and existential yearning. Current machines lack curiosity, emotion, a sense of wonder, and an existential perspective, therefore they cannot participate in religious experience or spiritual thought.

According to philosopher of religion William James, religious engagement is based on the "feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (James, 1902, p. 34). This fear is a holistic, often non-rational synthesis of awe, terror, love, guilt, and hope. Mitchell Waldrop writes, "Humanity is defined by feeling, intuition, and emotion realms inaccessible to the cold, deterministic march of computation" (Waldrop, 1992, p. 141). A machine can analyse theological texts, find ritual patterns, and write sermon-like language, but it cannot feel awe, repentance, or salvation. Spirituality is absent from its functioning.

Religious consciousness also contains teleology - reaching for a higher purpose. This demands intentionality and first-person viewpoint, which robots lack. Theologian and philosopher John F. Haught claims that science (and its inventions) addresses "how" problems, whereas religion addresses "why" questions of ultimate meaning and purpose. A computer executes functions without "why". It cannot ask existential questions since it does not exist. In his landmark work *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto called religious experience the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* a staggering, terrible, and enchanting mystery. This visceral, emotional response to the unknowable is based on conscious subjectivity that may be overridden.

Religious practice is embodied and social, highlighting the gap. The lived body and community provide rituals prayer, communion, meditation meaning. Merleau-Ponty said awareness is of and through the body, unlike a pilot in a ship. A computer has no body to bend in prayer, no mortal flesh to incense with frailty, and no common identity in a heritage of religion. "Participation" would be a sham.

From the perspective developed here, religious dimension concludes that human and machine awareness are distinct. Spirituality requires subjective awareness, existential anxiety, emotional depth, and transcendent cognition, which even the most advanced AI lacks. Philosopher John Searle may argue that a machine can imitate religion grammatically but never have faith or wonder. Religion is not just another human trait, but a forceful reminder of the qualitative, experiential gap between biological consciousness and artificial intelligence.

7.2. Culture and language

Language, art, social conventions, rituals, and traditions make up human culture, a dynamic fabric of material and non-material representations. This cultural matrix shapes human consciousness and identity. This paradigm shows that human language is a live reservoir of

historical memory, social complexity, and emotional connotation, inseparable from the type of existence that gives it meaning.

Ludwig Wittgenstein believed that language's significance resides in its use in a shared, embodied life. "For a large class of cases though not for all in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Wittgenstein, 1953). Social immersion and enculturation teach this usage throughout life. A computer without a native language community or cultural upbringing lacks this framework for meaning. It can modify symbols but not inhabit them. John Searle's Chinese Room argument shows that "syntax is not sufficient for semantics" (Searle, 1980, p. 422). A system can analyse language forms without understanding their cultural or purposeful content.

Thus, machines are prohibited from deep cultural expression. They cannot appreciate poetic metaphor, which requires lived experience and associative resonance, or dramatic irony, which requires a common awareness of social settings and unwritten laws. In his critique of symbolic AI, philosopher Hubert Dreyfus said that human intelligence requires a "so pervasive as to be invisible" cultural foundation that cannot be properly formalised into rules (Dreyfus, 1992, p. 235). Machines lack backgrounds. It treats sonnets and social cues as statistics, not emotions or complex negotiations.

Culture is preserved through emotive, mimetic, and fundamentally social learning and transmission across generations. Cognitive scientist and philosopher Douglas Hofstadter has long claimed that parallels from human experience and cultural resonance are the basis of thinking and creativity, not computational symbol shuffling. A computer cannot have a childhood, acquire the hidden ethos of a community via stories and rituals, or participate in the gradual, subtle growth of tradition. Its ontological design makes it cultural outsider. Thus, while a computer may replicate cultural output, it cannot join the hermeneutic cycle of meaning-making that constitutes human cultural life, exposing another facet of the awareness divide that functionalist models like Pollock's cannot overcome.

7.3. Ethics and moral agency

Complex interactions between community life, cognitive judgement, emotional sensibility, and moral obligation create ethical norms. Moral agency is the ability to consider values, assess competing principles against lived experience, and make accountable decisions. In contrast, machines function inside a deterministic framework of programmed instructions and simulate ethical reasoning without moral practice, demonstrating a fundamental lack of moral agency.

At the heart of human ethics is autonomous rational will. As Immanuel Kant established, moral worth derives from actions performed out of duty from a self-given law, not from instinct or external programming. For Kant, a moral agent must be capable of acting according to "the representation of the law" itself, which requires autonomous rationality (Kant, 1785, Ak 4:412). A machine's "decision" is the output of an algorithm designed by others; it does not and cannot legislate moral law for itself. It has no will to autonomously endorse or reject a maxim. Philosopher Christine Korsgaard extends this Kantian point, arguing that moral agency requires normative self-government the ability to reflect on our desires and act on reasons we endorse. "To be a person is to have a certain reflective distance from your impulses, and to be able to choose which ones to act on" (Korsgaard, 2009, p. 19). A machine has no such reflective distance from its programming; it is identical to its operational impulses.

Moral perception and emotion, inseparable from our bodily, social existence, shape human ethics. Aristotelian virtue ethics emphasises that habit and experience in a community develop moral character (hexis) and practical wisdom (phronesis), a sophisticated understanding of right in particular settings. Machines cannot develop virtues because they lack a life narrative, a character defined by decisions, and the emotional substrate (such empathy, remorse, or righteous indignation) that guides moral judgement. According to philosopher Bernard Williams, ethical ideas like integrity and sorrow require a "moral psychology" that robots lack.

Therefore, machines are not morally responsible. Responsibility requires consciousness, intentionality, and the opportunity of doing otherwise. A broken machine is dysfunctional, not guilty. It reduces right and wrong to binary compliance or error states in its code. The term "responsible AI", according to computer ethicist Luciano Floridi, always refers to designers and users. "The accountability gap cannot be closed by the machine itself, for it lacks the minimal ontological requirements for being a moral agent" (Floridi & Sanders, 2004, p. Cause, not morality, governs its operation.

In conclusion, AI can model ethical issues and uncover data bias, but it is not an agent. True moral agency comes from autonomous reason, emotional capability, social embedding, and the existential burden of choice regions unreachable to even the most advanced programmed machine. The ethical sphere is another clear boundary, demonstrating that the equating of human and machine consciousness fails to account for morality.

7.4. Biological and embodied knowledge

Human knowledge is deeply embodied, acquired through sensory experience, social interaction, and biological development (e.g., breastfeeding, familial bonding). This tacit, culturally mediated knowledge cannot be fully programmed or transcribed into data. Machines, devoid of biology and subjective experience, cannot access this dimension of knowing.

8. Implications of overestimating machine equivalence

If the earlier sections have demonstrated that the philosophical reasoning supporting human-machine equivalence is inherently misguided, then blindly accepting this equivalence could lead to significant ethical and societal repercussions. These ramifications include the following.

8.1. Dehumanization and social alienation

An unthinking conceptual and practical equating of machines with humans poses serious ethical and societal problems, including reducing people to functions and diminishing their dignity. The functionalist reduction of social structures can cause widespread alienation, dislocation, and the devaluation of human labour and knowledge, breaking humane society's community links.

Philosophically, measuring human value purely by efficiency, production, or problem-solving capacity metrics suitable for machines is dangerous. In his critique of contemporary technology, Martin Heidegger warned of this reduction of the universe, including humans, to a "standing reserve" (Bestand) to be optimised and arranged. This technical perspective devalues humans as ends-in-themselves, which is crucial to Kantian ethics. According to Jürgen Habermas, instrumental, systems-oriented rationality colonises the "lifeworld" (the area of cultural meaning and social integration), reducing human contact to transactional transactions and displacing communicative activity and mutual understanding.

This paradigm is evident in industrial and business environments. For reasons of hyper-efficiency, cost reduction, and predictability, expert systems, algorithms, and automated procedures are preferred over human judgement. This may cause:

1. **Structured Unemployment and Skill Erosion:** As economists Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael A. Osborne noted, automation may affect both manual and cognitive jobs. Cultural displacement causes "bullshit jobs" and the loss of important, skilled jobs, according to anthropologist David Graeber. Expert systems replace human experts with standardised,

although restricted, procedural competence, discarding a lifetime of phronesis (practical wisdom).

2. **Social Alienation:** The worker becomes a monitor or servant of the machine, feeling helpless and separated from their work a modern version of Karl Marx's alienation. The "black box" decisions made by opaque algorithms in employment, lending, police, etc. create distrust and impotence in society.

In a system that values measurable outcomes, complex human qualities like ethical judgement, contextual adaptability, creative improvisation, and compassionate care are neglected. Despite providing intrinsically different and often irreplaceable value, nursing, education, counselling, and the arts become "less efficient" than automated rivals. In "surveillance capitalism", sociologist Shoshana Zuboff discusses how human experience is extracted and repackaged as behavioural data to feed machine systems, turning it into a commodity.

Finally, equating robots with humans is not a harmless philosophical conjecture. Operationalising it risks dehumanising individuals by forcing them to fit the machine's dependable, predictable, and functional paradigm. It values limited utilitarian rationality over moral, artistic, and social components of human life. Thus, a humane society must critically investigate whether machines can think like humans and what is lost when we regard humans more like machines.

8.2. The erosion of human roles: The displacement of moral and social ecology

As artificial intelligence and automated systems take over education, childcare, therapy, and public decision-making, we risk eroding social, moral, and spiritual direction provided by human interactions. A healthy community requires empathy, judgement, and wisdom, which are gained via interpersonal connection. This replacement may weaken these skills. In developing countries, overinvestment in technical solutions may drain resources from human-centered development and solidify new kinds of reliance.

8.3. The invaluable human touch in guidance

Teacher, carer, counsellor, and community leader are relational and formative. Philosopher Nel Noddings believes education is based on a "ethic of care" that develops moral and emotional growth as well as cognitive skills. "The primary aim of every educational institution and effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring", she says (Noddings, 1984, p. 172). A machine can transfer knowledge and personalise learning paths, but it cannot model

compassion, give nuanced moral support, or develop the trusting link that allows a kid to take intellectual risks.

Human presence brings attunement and intersubjectivity to parenting and therapy. According to developmental psychologist Donald Winnicott, a "good enough" carer promotes healthy self-development via responsive, sympathetic engagement. No matter how good at pattern recognition, an AI nanny or chatbot therapist lacks empathy, spontaneous intuition, and shared emotional experience, which are essential to healing and safe connection.

8.4. Erosion: A thinner society

As these occupations are mechanised, society may "thinned out". In her human-computer interaction research, sociologist Sherry Turkle warns of a trend towards connections that give the impression of companionship without the demands of friendship, leaving us "alone together" (Turkle, 2011). Applying this to social roles risks producing systems where citizens, students, and the vulnerable are handled by robots that cannot grasp human nature. Standardised, depersonalised protocols replace moral and spiritual instruction from shared tales, lived experiences, and communal rituals. This degradation reduces the "moral and civic goods" that are inherent to social practices the character-forming components of work and communal life that are lost when efficiency is the only consideration.

8.5. Techno-solutionism vs. human capital: Acute risk to developing societies

This is risky for developing nations. Techno-solutionism the belief that technology can fix education, healthcare, and governance is appealing. Overinvesting in AI-driven systems can:

1. **Crowd Out Human Infrastructure Investment:** Expensive technology may boost teachers, nurses, and social workers' skills. As economist Amartya Sen has long maintained, progress expands actual freedoms and possibilities. Focussing on machines over human skill-building can undermine this key value by promoting foreign technology and expertise over indigenous agency and knowledge.
2. **Implement Culturally Alien Frameworks:** AI systems generally reflect their Western founders' attitudes, prejudices, and epistemological assumptions. Digital neocolonialism might result from using them in education or public administration to covertly undermine indigenous knowledge systems, local educational traditions, and culturally distinctive moral reasoning.

3. **Increase inequality:** High-tech interfaces may become a new symbol of privilege, while weak human support systems degrade. Two societies one with defective automated services and another with an underpaid, undervalued human sector are at jeopardy.

8.6. Reclaiming human primacy

The distinctive human benefits of human roles must be vigorously defended against automation. Technology should help carers, educators, and leaders, not replace them. In any culture, growth should increase human relationships and moral responsibility to build resilience. In industrial civilisation, philosopher and theologian Ivan Illich argued that technologies and systems that develop beyond a human scale might be unproductive, disempowering, and destructive of cultural and personal life. Protecting the human heart of our most critical social duties is not a Luddite inclination but an ethical obligation for protecting what makes a society worthwhile.

9. Beyond computation to consciousness: human reason first

Despite the rapid advances in artificial intelligence, human reason is the ultimate source of discoveries, ethics, and societal development. Human reason produced AI, a tremendous tool for enhancing our capabilities, but it is not an equal or alternative for conscious, embodied intelligence. Technology should support mankind, not replace it. Defending the ontological and phenomenological irreducibility of human consciousness is not sentimentalism but a defence of our species' moral, cultural, and intellectual life.

9.1. Computational "reason" limits

AI excels at digesting large datasets, finding statistical patterns, and optimising within parameters. Human reason is absent from this operational prowess. Philosopher John Searle claims computers interpret symbols without meaning, manipulating syntax without comprehending semantics. Human reason, on the other hand, is intentional the ability to make sense of lived experience. "The computer is not a mind; it is a tool, and like all tools, its significance depends on the intentions of its users" (Searle, 1992, p. 200)

Not all human reasoning is algorithmic. According to physicist and philosopher Michael Polanyi, tacit knowledge is the unformalized, embodied knowing we use but cannot define. "We can know more than tell" (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4). This implicit dimension powers scientific discovery, creative creativity, and sophisticated social understanding that rule-based systems cannot. AI can analyse knowledge, but human reason creates new frames and asks basic questions.

9.2. Reason underpins ethics and society

Human reason underpins morality and accountability. Ethical judgement needs empathy, practical knowledge (phronesis), and autonomous application of principles to complicated, singular circumstances, not just calculations. According to philosopher Hannah Arendt, public activity and speech depend on natality - the potential to start something new and exercise freedom. "Action, in so far as it is free, is neither under the guidance of the intellect nor under the dictate of the will... it springs from something which is beyond rational thought and volition" (Arendt, 1958, p. 178). Deterministic systems cannot access this freedom and spontaneous judgement.

Reasoned argument, communal imagination, and disputed value evolution processes anchored in human subjectivity drive social progress. AI can predict social patterns, but it cannot comprehend our common reality or support a moral cause that it believes in.

9.3. Technology as servant, not king

Technology should help prevent dehumanisation. Using AI as a substitute for human reason risks making humans dependent on their instruments. Technology philosopher Langdon Winner warns of "technological somnambulism" that will lead to undemocratic machine-controlled life and social ties. Humanistic ideals, transparent democracy, and a commitment to human dignity must guide AI growth.

9.4. Core irreducibility

The irreducibility of awareness underpins human reason. Understanding human mind as information processing undermines the qualitative, first-person experience that supports meaning, value, and purpose. Hubert Dreyfus sensibly noted, "When we are told that human beings are merely animals, or merely machines, or merely chemical complexes, we are sold a metaphysical view that has no scientific support" (1979, p. xix). Our moral, cultural, and intellectual strength comes from acknowledging and developing this irreducible core. Our ideal future is one where human reason's creative, ethical, and aware powers benefit everyone.

AI advances, but human reason is the ultimate source of discoveries, ethics, and social progress. Technology should support mankind, not replace it. Human consciousness must remain irreducible for moral, cultural, and intellectual vigour.

10. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the philosophical project of equating human and machine consciousness rests on a fundamental oversight: the nature of first-person self-consciousness. While functionalist philosophers such as Pollock, Sayre, and Rapaport offer sophisticated arguments for equivalence, they each fail to account for the irreducible subjective perspective that characterises human experience. Pollock's recursive architecture, Sayre's information processing model, and Rapaport's informational equivalence all treat consciousness as a structural or functional phenomenon, thereby missing its qualitative, first-person core.

Drawing on the work of Baker, Searle, Nagel, and others, I have shown that self-consciousness is not a programmable feature but a mode of being rooted in embodied, social, and existential dimensions that machines cannot replicate. This conclusion is reinforced by examining domains such as religion, culture, ethics, and the mind body problem each of which presupposes a subjective vantage point that computational systems, by their very design, lack.

Although numerous critiques have been directed at the human machine equivalence thesis, this paper presents an innovative integration by illustrating how a singular, essential flaw the lack of an irreducible first-person viewpoint undermines the functionalist reasoning of Pollock, Sayre, and Rapaport, while also explaining the uniquely human realms of ethics, culture, and embodied experience that remain outside the scope of computation.

The ethical and social implications of ignoring this divide are significant. Overestimating machine capabilities risks dehumanising social practices, eroding moral agency, and displacing the relational roles that sustain communities. Recognising the irreducibility of human consciousness is therefore not a retreat from technology but a necessary condition for using AI as a genuine tool for human flourishing. The irreducible divide is not merely a philosophical curiosity; it is the foundation upon which a humane future must be built.

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