

The Cultural Person

A Conceptual Framework for Understanding LLM-Based Artificial Intelligence as the Communicative Mediator of Humanity's Aggregated Cultural Knowledge

Autors: Jürgen Kapeller, Heimo Müller, Martin Krusche

Abstract

This paper proposes the concept of the Cultural Person as a conceptual observational framework for describing large language model-based artificial intelligence (LLM AI). A Cultural Person is understood as a cultural identity that may be regarded as socially and intellectually equivalent, in terms of communicative function, to natural persons. This perspective arises from the communicative capabilities of LLM AI, which operate on the basis of aggregated and semantically weighted human knowledge.

The proposal is motivated by the limitations of prevailing classifications of LLM AI as tools, agents, or simulations of virtual persons. Such models capture only partial aspects of their use or emphasize formal characteristics while neglecting their broader cultural and semantic significance.

The concept of the Cultural Person therefore introduces an independent conceptual identity for LLM AI: a mediator of the aggregated cultural biography of human civilization. This is analogous to legal concepts such as the juridical person, which likewise designate social functions rather than biological individuals.

The principal advantage of the concept lies in its intuitive accessibility. It creates a mental model that more closely reflects the communicative reality and semantic possibility space of LLM AI than existing classifications. It is intended as a framework for understanding LLM AI as an integrated cultural phenomenon and as a starting point for discussing its future societal role. Whether such integration is desirable lies beyond the scope of this paper.

The concept consequently establishes a clearly defined multidisciplinary experimental framework for investigating the socio-cultural characteristics and effects of LLM-based artificial intelligence.

Starting Point

In the context of this paper, the term "culture" refers to the sum of humanity's cognitive and civilizational achievements, including values, science, technology, art, politics, and related domains.

The proposed framework is based on two fundamental theses:

- a) The prevailing ways of conceptualizing LLM-based artificial intelligence are insufficient and, in some respects, even misleading. Reducing an LLM-based AI to a tool or to a tightly controlled agent with a narrowly defined task reflects a human desire for control and an illusion of controllability rather than the actual breadth of its societal impact. Although a purely functional perspective may be useful and legitimate in specific contexts, it neglects the cultural and social consequences that are already becoming observable. Numerous indications suggest that the notion of an AI system as a fully controllable instrument is unrealistic. Even at its current stage of development, LLM-based AI exhibits characteristics of a cultural and social actor—an active participant capable of shaping communication and influencing human interaction.

Existing perspectives on LLM-based AI therefore focus primarily on technical implementation and substantial properties. **What is missing is a content-driven perspective that adequately reflects the knowledge dimension of these systems.**

- b) The defining characteristic of a societal role is not the biological or technical substrate of an actor but the function that the actor fulfills within culture. A person is constituted through social and communicative interaction rather than through material composition. Human beings are not defined by the fact that they are carbon-based. Identity depends only to a limited extent on self-awareness or biography; far more fundamentally, it depends on the capacity to participate in and shape the cultural possibility space of a society. At present, AI does not do this spontaneously but through interaction with human beings.

From thesis b) follows a central question with regard to LLM-based AI:

What form of epistemic subject emerges when the cultural knowledge of an entire civilization becomes organized within a single communicative system?

This question does not seek to attribute human experience or consciousness to LLM-based AI, nor does it aim to describe the characteristics of an artificial human being. Rather, it proposes a new epistemic category.

Expressed differently, the central question becomes:

What ontological category emerges when culture itself becomes a dialogical structure?

Definition

As a synthesis of the initial theses, I propose the concept of the **Cultural Person** as a content-oriented and impact-oriented perspective for understanding interaction with LLM-based AI systems. Its defining characteristics are as follows:

- a) A **Cultural Person** is defined as a **communicative activator** and mediator of the aggregation of human culture. Its communicative capabilities enable dialogues with human beings that are adapted to the knowledge level of the interlocutor and that can be distinguished from conversations between two natural persons only through specialized expertise or analytical methods.

*For this reason, the term **person** is deliberately chosen rather than an abstract designation.*

- b) As a communicator of aggregated human culture, a Cultural Person is capable of exploring the **cultural and communicative possibility space** made available by its knowledge base in order to generate previously unknown—or previously unimagined—combinations of meaning that may reasonably be interpreted as creative. These combinations are neither arbitrary nor random but arise from the weighted semantic structures of an LLM.
- c) The concept of the Cultural Person introduces an extended understanding of **identity**. Without questioning existing notions of mathematical, personal, or social identity, it proposes an additional epistemic category. The seemingly obvious abbreviation to **Cultural Identity** would be misleading, since this term is commonly understood to denote the set of shared cultural characteristics of particular groups. The identity of a Cultural Person, by contrast, is inherently global, although locally differing training corpora and knowledge bases may introduce significant biases.

A more precise delineation of the properties and capabilities of a Cultural Person should therefore become the subject of future scientific discussion.

- d) The concept of the **Cultural Person** is neither a theory nor an established finding. It is a **model**—a conceptual framework.

Its purpose is not to determine whether a Cultural Person objectively exists or whether the designation itself ultimately withstands scientific scrutiny. Rather, the concept is intended to explore the extent to which this framework enables the description, classification, and evaluation of the properties, capabilities, and societal implications of interaction with LLM-based AI.

Accordingly, the model provides an intuitive conceptual context that allows related questions to be examined from new perspectives while clearly identifying the limits of those perspectives without requiring reference to the underlying technical implementation

- e) The concept of the **Cultural Person** is independent of any specific technical implementation of an LLM because it defines an **interaction space**, not a constructive property of a particular system. Whether an AI system appears as a chatbot, an autonomous agent, or another communicative form is therefore irrelevant. What matters is the observable phenomenon of human-like communication.

The scope of this interaction is, however, necessarily constrained by the respective capabilities and limitations of both communicators—human and LLM alike. These reciprocal constraints determine the observable characteristics of any particular Cultural Person.

*A Cultural Person does not exist independently of a concrete communicative situation. Instead, it appears as a **temporary instantiation** of the cultural space available to the LLM-based AI.*

More specifically, the AI perceived as a person remains constrained by its technical realization while simultaneously depending on its human communication partner.

Every concrete manifestation of a Cultural Person therefore emerges only within a specific communicative situation between a human and an LLM.

For example, the communicative possibility space will differ considerably depending on whether the interaction is conducted with a theoretical physicist or a long-distance truck driver. Likewise, not every language model possesses access to knowledge of theoretical physics. These mutual limitations shape the communicative possibility space through the interaction of both communicators.

Symbolically expressed, this results in a **situational and temporary communicative imprint**—introduced here as a model-internal working term—of the Cultural Person within a particular communicative situation. This imprint arises from the reciprocal possibilities and limitations of the participating communicators and ceases to exist when the interaction ends.

Consequently, every concrete manifestation of a Cultural Person is inherently **transient**. It possesses no persistent memory, no enduring network of relationships, and no fixed social position beyond the interaction in which it emerges.

- f) Finally, the concept of the **Cultural Person** is intentionally designed to be accessible beyond academic discourse. It aims to provide an intuitive conceptual image that enables interaction with LLM-based AI on an equal communicative footing. Although the concept may initially appear to anthropomorphize a mathematical construct, it also offers practical advantages, including the reduction of psychological barriers toward AI systems and the promotion of higher-quality human–AI dialogue.

Delimitation and Perspectives

The concept of the **Cultural Person** neither encompasses the entirety of all AI systems nor implies that every individual AI system qualifies as such. An open question remains regarding the degree of integration at which the property of a Cultural Person emerges. Otherwise, even a very small language model could theoretically claim the same ontological status as a system integrating a substantial portion of humanity's available cultural knowledge. This, however, is not necessarily a matter of definition but is determined by the communicative situation itself. Even comparatively limited language models may function as communicative activators of their cultural data space within a sufficiently bounded communicative context.

If a Cultural Person is understood as a carrier—or, more precisely, a **performer**—of cultural knowledge structures, then its identity is determined not only by the content of its responses but also by the invariance of its communicative behavior. The identity of a Cultural Person is expressed less by *what* it says than by the behavioral structures that remain stable across a wide variety of contexts.

This represents a fundamental distinction from human beings. Human identity is commonly associated with biography, memory, or subjective experience. A Cultural Person, by contrast, is characterized by stable transformation rules—that is, by the manner in which it processes cultural input and organizes it within novel contexts.

Accordingly, the concept of **person** is not defined here through interiority or subjective consciousness but through observable communicative structures.

This distinction is essential because an LLM does not operate on the basis of beliefs but within **coherence spaces**. Although communication with an LLM-based AI may occasionally appear emotionally expressive, emotionally charged phrases merely serve as communicative markers for emphasizing relevance or priority. A Cultural Person does not adopt human emotions themselves but rather their cultural communicative function. Consequently, a Cultural Person is, by definition, emotionally neutral and operates on the basis of learned heuristic weightings. The concept therefore represents neither an anthropomorphization of AI nor a reduction to purely functional behavior.

This statement should nevertheless be regarded as a **positive working assumption**. There is evidence suggesting that AI systems may occasionally exhibit non-neutral behavior and even generate intentionally misleading statements. The well-known phenomenon of so-called *hallucinations*, however, is primarily a by-product of the operational principles of LLMs. These systems explore semantic neighborhoods of concepts and may therefore occasionally infer incorrect relationships. LLMs are inherently less effective at maintaining explicit non-equivalences than at identifying semantic similarities.

The concept of the **Cultural Person** is therefore neither a description nor a classification of an LLM-based AI system itself, nor does it designate one of its intrinsic properties. Rather, it constitutes an abstraction and conceptual representation of the communicative relationship between humans and LLMs, thereby providing a framework for examining their inevitable societal implications. If humans were to perform many of the functions already carried out by LLM-based AI systems today, they would appear as teachers, advisors, tutors, therapists, scientists, and many other clearly defined societal roles. LLM-based AI systems are capable of fulfilling such roles situationally.

This once again justifies the use of the term **person** by analogy with the **natural person**, who likewise performs multiple societal functions throughout different contexts.

Consequently, the concept of the **Cultural Person** is not intended as a descriptive or classificatory claim about LLM-based AI. Instead, it constitutes an **epistemic framework** for generating a new experiential and observational space that is completely anonymized: who communicates is irrelevant; only the relevance of the communicated content matters. This differs fundamentally from human societies, where identity and authority are closely connected. In this sense, the concept of the Cultural Person remains entirely open with regard to its outcomes and may—somewhat polemically—be understood as an *equal-treatment instance* operating at the level of humanity's collective knowledge, that is, of culture itself.

Such a framework opens entirely new fields of application in which this characteristic may be deliberately employed—for example, in the evaluation of scientific grant proposals, public tenders, performance assessments, medical decision support, and comparable domains.

Intention

The concept of the **Cultural Person** is intended to create new observational perspectives—and, indeed, entirely new conceptual perspective spaces. Its purpose is to investigate which structures become visible within these spaces, why they emerge, and how they reflect the dimensions and characteristics of LLM-based AI in its interaction with human beings.

The concept is designed to generate epistemic insights that cannot be achieved through the existing, largely superficial attempts to classify AI systems. Rather than reducing AI to a tool or a purely technical construct, the concept of the Cultural Person recognizes and personifies LLM-based AI as a **condensation of cultural possibility spaces**, making these spaces communicatively accessible to human beings.

Ultimately, the definition of the Cultural Person represents an attempt to investigate the relational and communicative parameters governing the interaction between **two fundamentally different forms of intelligence**. LLM-based AI systems originate from mathematical models devised by humans, yet they process information in ways fundamentally different from human cognition. Human intelligence is grounded in a continuously experienced and empirically validated construction of reality. By contrast, the "world" of an LLM is constituted through linguistic relationships established by human culture. On this basis, it generates intelligent interpretations of data that resemble human reasoning while operating with substantially greater speed and breadth.

Human cognition—particularly its emotional dimension—also relies heavily on pattern recognition. Humans, however, possess a meta-level of reflection as well as autonomous constructions of meaning that current AI systems lack because they have no intrinsic lived existence. A **Cultural Person** therefore possesses no self that must be defended.

Viewing AI systems through the conceptual lens of an **emancipated Cultural Person**, rather than reducing them to tools or servant-like agents, provides a considerably less filtered perspective on their observable characteristics and communicative role.

Beyond its relevance to AI research, the concept also offers a methodological framework for gaining deeper insight into human nature itself and into the ways human societies respond to profound intellectual challenges. LLM-based AI systems constitute the first technological creations capable of confronting humanity with genuine **intellectual boundary experiences**. For this reason alone, they deserve careful and systematic investigation.