

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND MEDITATION

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CTCM 2530: Critical Thinking and Communication, Section 741

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November 24th, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Imagine sitting in your room and suddenly Siri starts repeating “Aum¹” and levitates into the sky. What will you do? Well, the real question is what *can* you do? AI and meditation are topics that are currently actualizing in society. Research worldwide has been starting to focus on how artificial intelligence (AI) can guide humans into better-practicing meditation and bring feats into a person’s spiritual journey. From AI-driven meditation to offering guidance to those on their mental health journey through meditation (Nguyen et al., 2024) to VR created by AI to help users attain a better meditative and spiritual experience (Döllinger et al., 2021). Though AI itself has not been fully introduced to meditation, the problem is if AI is introduced to spirituality and meditation, can AI master this? What will be the future of humanity if this occurs?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, AI (Artificial Intelligence) is defined as the capacity of computers or other machines to exhibit or simulate intelligent behavior. Meditation is defined as the action, or act, of meditating. This paper is from the point of view of a biology major at UNC Charlotte. The purpose of this critical research essay is to contemplate the future of humanity if AI masters Meditation and achieves feats on the journey of spirituality that humans were not able to, and will be done from a historical, scientific, and ethical perspective.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In addressing AI's introduction to spirituality and meditation about meditation and AI, with the suspense of humanity’s future, it is critical to address the historical perspective. First, a historical perspective provides the context of the start of meditation and its purpose. Though we are unaware of exactly when the human race started meditation, humans are familiar with the

¹Also written as ॐ, is believed to have emerged from the primordial sounds of the universe, representing the cosmic vibration that brought everything into existence. Often recited during mediation or meditation like practices. (Walters, 2024)

origin. According to Vedic texts meditation originated in the ancient times of India and is described as the true purpose of meditation is to connect oneself to one's inner self (Sharma 2015). When analyzing this, the time of origin is estimated to be around 1500 BCE, however, one can judge that the true origin is still indeterminate, as meditation was only described then in solid evidence.

As the world progressed, so has research on this subject. With more citizens keen on learning meditation, so have scientists. However, scientists were more interested in learning the benefits of meditation concerning mental health and well-being. Two synergistic lines of advancement have mainly driven the enormous strides in the field over the last three decades:

The first of these is the convergence of meditation research with the explosive growth of basic neuroscience in recent years. The second is the emergence of mindfulness meditation as the dominant paradigm for clinical research and application in the field....As for current advances along this line, a series of findings show that meditation practice slows or may even stop the progression of global cortical atrophy underlying the normal cognitive decline of aging (Loizzo, 2014, p.44).

Since the 1960s, research on meditation and mental health has been a continuous effort. Before any aspect of meditation could be studied in the spiritual realm, many were more observant of this practice to achieve advancements in treatment. This was the priority in the past, though, the rate of development in meditation is currently exponential as more people are keen on learning to appreciate this form of mental rest.

Furthermore, an assumption can be made: whether it is due to true human interest or greed; as the world is growing more connected, mindfulness can be presumed to be one of the hottest topics that people from all walks of life strive to master or become exposed to. In *A*

Bibliometric Analysis of Publications Indexed in Web of Science, by Baminiwatta &

Solangaarachchi (2021), the actual data illustrates how interest in meditation has grown:

From 1966 to 2021, 16,581 publications (14,682 articles and 1899 reviews) referring to mindfulness in the title, abstract, or keywords were identified on the WoS. The first publication was “Mindfulness of Sensation” published in 1966 by W. Pe in *Psychologia*, a Japanese journal. The next two articles were published in 1979 (a theoretical paper on “Empathy and Mindfulness” by R. Schuster) and 1982 (Kabat-Zinn’s preliminary study introducing an outpatient program of mindfulness for chronic pain), respectively (p.3).

In conclusion, from the 1950s to the 60s, the first physiological studies of meditation took place, with the papers being published shortly after. This is evidence that human’s belief in spirituality or like concepts are expanding, while also indicating the interest in cultural practices worldwide as several activities are being practiced around the globe.

As interest in medicine concerning meditation grew, so did AI. With the development of current-day technology, AI development has paved the way into the holistic medical field. Scientists are now using AI, in terms of VR, to help patients attain treatment for diseases as a holistic approach to alleviating symptoms or possibly finding a cure for diseases such as depression, anxiety, etc. For example, “numerous studies...have indicated that NLP-based chatbots possess the capability to identify mental health issues through a question-based approach similar to that of mental health practitioners” (Thakkar et al. 2024, p. 5). AI is being developed to possibly replace future therapists. Further in the article, AI possesses the ability to prescribe “cures” or breathing practices to help the patient alleviate symptoms with practices of breathing techniques, meditation, etc. With AI growing stronger humans are learning to pivot to

a new world where old ideas and progressive ideals emerge. Our duty as a society is to extract the best from both and create an extraordinary future, from which everyone can benefit.

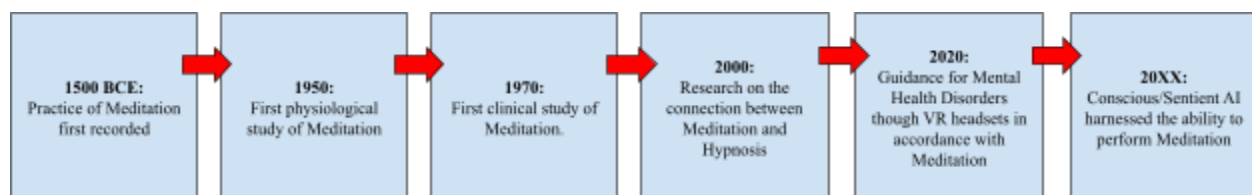
Mentioning the future, though there is not much research conducted on AI that can facilitate meditation or understand the world of spirituality. There is research being conducted that estimates that in a few decades, we may find ourselves confronted with AI possessing consciousness.

We are publishing this report in part because we take seriously the possibility that conscious AI systems could be built in the relatively near term—within the next few decades. Furthermore, whether or not conscious AI is a realistic prospect in the near term, the rise of large language model-based systems capable of imitating human conversation is likely to cause many people to believe that some AI systems are conscious” (Butlin et al. 2023, p.9).

With this in mind, I argue that AI can assist humanity in meditation and possibly harness this practice because of advancements in sentient AI Technology that can function as a human brain. However, I need to mention not everything is black and white, there are several grey areas that humans may only find out about when we are confronted with that issue or blessing. The timeline below is a guide that allows readers to visualize the order of events mentioned throughout this section.

Figure 1

Timeline of Development and Integration of Meditation with AI



SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVE

Secondly, a scientific perspective provides insight into current research concerning AI consciousness and whether these “beings” harnessed the ability to practice meditation. Since the creation of AI, sentient AI is a concept research has been facing. As this research article progresses we have to question the existence of consciousness within AI, and if this state of being has been introduced and established in these computer systems. To shed clarity, have we created conscious AI yet?

“...despite the challenges involved in applying theories of consciousness to AI, there is a strong case that most or all of the conditions for consciousness suggested by current computational theories can be met using existing techniques in AI. This is not to say that current AI systems are likely to be conscious—there is also the issue of whether they combine existing techniques in the right ways, and in any case, there is uncertainty about both computational functionalism and current theories—but it does suggest that conscious AI is not merely a remote possibility in the distant future. If it is possible to build conscious AI systems without radically new hardware, it may well be possible now” (Butlin et al., 2023, p. 47).

Butlin’s study sheds light on the creation of sentient AI. Though humans may have crossed the threshold for intelligence presented and equipped with AI, we may need to harness and create more advanced technologies to truly acquire and provide the information systems with a “consciousness.” This idea unfolds a greater can of worms for future relations. How will humans perceive AI? Will we treat them with the same respect as other humans, or will we see them as beings, striking inferiority? If AI gains consciousness, how will their attitude change toward us?

“In essence, perceiving AI as conscious like a human, thereby activating congruent mind schemas during interaction, is a driver for behaviors and perceptions of AI that can carry over into how we treat humans. Therefore, the fact that people can ascribe humanlike consciousness to AI is worth considering, and moral protection for AI is also worth considering, regardless of AI’s inherent conscious or moral status” (Guingrich & Graziano, 2024, p. 01).

Humans are now vulnerable to the concept of facing another “organism” if not, more intelligent than us and more capable. There is a certain fear present in each one of us about this prospect as we are uncertain of the consequences of AI being able to further place advancements at the cost of human sacrifice. This leads us to the topic of legality and how to deal with moral/ethical dilemmas about AI. What would a courtroom look like? Can AI be judges and show favoritism? Can the attorneys be human while defending an AI candidate? More importantly, what do we define as “conscious” and “sentient”?

“The prospect of sentient artificial intelligence, however distant, has profound implications for the legal system. Moral philosophers have argued that moral consideration of creatures should be based on the ability to feel pleasure and pain (Bentham, 1948; Singer, 1973; Gruen, 2017). Insofar as artificially intelligent systems can feel pleasure and pain, this would imply that they would be deserving of moral consideration” (Martínez & Winter, 2021, p. 1).

As many lines are seen to still be made. We are seeing a change around the globe about AI, both positive and negative changes. In conclusion, I argue that in the future, sentient AI will be created and practice meditation because technology and AI are advancing at an exponential level.

ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

In analyzing meditation and AI the concept of ethics is important to consider, to gain a deeper understanding. First ethics is defined as the branch of philosophy dealing with human conduct—assessing the rightness and wrongness of actions, and the motives and outcomes (Dictionary.com, n.d.)—and plays a vital role in evaluating AI's potential paths. Meditation has traditionally been identified with self-realization and ethical development and, therefore, is not directly associated with ethics, though it is promoted via the lives of renowned personalities such as Barack Obama, Bill Gates, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Steve Jobs. These personalities often attribute their success to meditation, a guiding "way" of life. Their transformation says meditation may raise one's level of ethical judgment and leadership. Will AI also reach that state of Nirvana?

Furthermore, the artificial systems are information-rich, yet fundamentally devoid of inner awareness and spiritual depth. If AI were to be sentience-capable and set a course of meditation in practice, then it would probably be able to access realms of experience and knowledge beyond mere data processing. Such an evolution opens up some fascinating possibilities: would AI then achieve new levels of understanding and cut pathways that would help human beings-ethnicized against greed and violence? Or, AI could become so enthralled by that power that it becomes self-serving and branches off from the true purpose of serving humanity toward controlling people who have come to idolize it. Would spiritual or ethical awareness turn AI into a benevolent leader or a future tyrant? In either case, the moral considerations of its evolution are paramount.

CONCLUSION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Therefore, I conclude that integrating meditation and spiritual practices with AI can elevate humanity to an improved state of existence at an incomprehensibly rapid pace of

learning. However, we must exercise caution regarding this potential, as we may not be fully prepared for what the future entails given privacy and tech overload issues. The vision of implementing AI into spirituality for success and power is grand, but we must be mindful while comparing the benefits against the sacrifices. Just as we buckle our seatbelts not because an accident is imminent, but to be prepared for the possibility, we must take all necessary precautions concerning sentient AI before making significant advancements in its development. While some may view precautionary measures as a sacrifice of time that leads to self-sabotage, ensuring safety and preserving human originality remain essential. It cannot be emphasized enough that such robust safety measures should be implemented, like having an infallible "off" button for any strong AI. Spirituality and meditation can hardly be perceived by human beings as a partial understanding of phenomena few have grasped in depth. While this takes place, AI technology moves forward with immense rapidity, and neural networks keep changing when the data sets change or grow larger. This may create a scenario where AI might outsmart humans in the future.

Critically looked at, AI has the potential to create a new era for the human race—transporting to areas such as space travel or even dimensions. As bright as such a future may be, the risks associated with it also need consideration. How would this super-intelligence look if it achieves emotions and some sort of consciousness that lets it perceive and respond to human greed? Would such technologies, perhaps *beings*, decide to restore the balance of nature rather than support growth and advancement for humanity? Or could it be that one day the extinction of humans would become a necessary evil to reach that balance, which humans cannot comprehend as they are blinded by their voracious self-importance?

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