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Critical Phenomenology of Prompting in Artificial Intelligence

Fenomenología crítica del prompting en la inteligencia artificial

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the philosophy of *prompting* as a tool within the context of the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly in large language models (LLMs). The topic is justified by the need to understand the *prompt* as a mediating space between human intentionality, language, and the sociopolitical structures that shape interactions with these technologies. The central objective is to examine how *prompting* reflects ethical, ontological, and epistemological tensions that arise in the construction of meaning within AI systems. Methodologically, the study adopts a critical-phenomenological approach, combining first-person experiences (user) with practical experimentation of *prompts* in different scenarios. The results demonstrate that the *prompt* is not merely a technical instruction but a discursive practice, where human decisions, such as the configuration of "parameters" (e. g., temperature and Top P), directly influence the outputs generated by AI systems. While these decisions appear technical, they carry significant ethical and epistemological implications that demand critical examination. The study concludes that it is essential to adopt an interdisciplinary approach that integrates technical development with philosophical reflection. This approach would foster an ethical, conscious, and responsible use of AI while recognizing the central role of humans in interactions with these emerging technologies.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence, Phenomenology, ChatGPT, *Prompting*, Language Models, Discourse.

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Resumen

El artículo analiza la filosofía del *prompting* como herramienta en el contexto del auge de la inteligencia artificial (IA), particularmente en los modelos de lenguaje a gran escala (LLM). Se justifica por la necesidad de comprender el *prompt* como un espacio mediador entre la intencionalidad humana, el lenguaje y las estructuras sociopolíticas que configuran la interacción con estas tecnologías. El objetivo central es examinar cómo el *prompting* refleja tensiones éticas, ontológicas y epistemológicas que emergen en la construcción de significado dentro de sistemas de IA. Metodológicamente, se adopta un enfoque fenomenológico-crítico, que articula la experiencia en primera persona (usuario) con experimentación práctica de *prompts* en distintos escenarios. Los resultados evidencian que el *prompt* no es una simple instrucción técnica, sino una práctica discursiva en la que decisiones humanas, como la configuración de parámetros (temperatura y *Top P*), influyen directamente en los resultados generados por los sistemas de IA. Estas decisiones, aunque técnicas, poseen implicaciones éticas y epistemológicas que requieren ser analizadas de manera crítica. El estudio concluye que es fundamental adoptar una aproximación interdisciplinaria que combine el desarrollo técnico con la reflexión filosófica. Esto permitiría promover un uso ético, consciente y responsable de la IA, al tiempo que se reconoce el papel central del ser humano en la interacción con estas tecnologías emergentes.

Palabras clave

Inteligencia artificial, fenomenología, ChatGPT, *prompting*, modelos de lenguaje, discurso.

Introduction

Interest in artificial intelligence (AI) has reached unprecedented levels. The emergence of ChatGPT 3.5 brought AI into the homes and daily lives of millions of people in the form of chatbots. However, this interest did not stem solely from its technical potential but also from the transformation it brought to communication and the societal realm in general. This article explores these changes from a philosophical perspective, focusing specifically on the concept of the prompt.

Various studies have pointed to the medium- and long-term impact these new tools may have on the labor market (Zarifhonarvar, 2023), while discussions are underway about their positive and negative effects on education (Silva & Janes, 2022), politics (Hartmann et al., 2023), and society (González, 2024). Although this article does not aim to exhaust these debates, they frame the context in which the prompt emerges as a crucial site of analysis.

A prompt is an instruction, question, or information given to an AI system to either generate a response or complete a task. Depending on the complexity of the task, prompts can range from short questions to in-depth descriptions. Therefore, understanding the prompt is key to grasping how AI reshapes human-machine interaction at its most fundamental level: that of the *first-person experience* of a user in front of their computer.

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Responding to this need, I adopt a *critical phenomenological* perspective (Weiss et al., 2019), i.e., a philosophical approach rooted in Edmund Husserl's methodology while integrating insights from thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, Frantz Fanon, and other post-phenomenological scholars. The aim of adopting this perspective is to complement the phenomenological first-person description of the prompting experience (or the user experience) with what I term *experimental prompting analysis*. By this, I refer to a methodological practice involving concrete tasks and iterative prompting exercises aimed at analysing and interpreting chatbot responses. These exercises range from simple interactions—such as basic questions within the chat interface—to more complex experiments involving the manipulation of parameters or system-level instructions. The responses are documented, thematically categorized, and subsequently interpreted in light of broader philosophical and epistemological frameworks.

The central research question thus becomes: *How does philosophy, through a critical phenomenological lens, explain human-machine interaction in large language models such as OpenAI's ChatGPT*? In response, I hypothesize that prompting, while serving as the primary mode of interaction, is not merely a technical instruction but a mediation space where human intentionality, socio-political contexts, and technological structures converge. As the key interface between humans and chatbots, prompting reveals profound tensions in our understanding of language, agency, and the construction of meaning. In formal terms, the main objective of this study is to critically examine prompting as both a technical practice and a discursive device (Foucault, 1994a), laying the theoretical groundwork for a philosophical systematization of human-chatbot interaction.

Consequently, to address the problem, the article has been divided into two parts. First, I address relevant debates on the definition of AI, including the distinction between weak and strong AI (Searle, 1980), emphasizing recent concerns about chatbots' impacts on language, culture, and politics. Second, I introduce, in a preliminary way, how the prompt presents itself immediately to the subject (the user). This phenomenological examination, although incomplete due to space constraints, will show that these instructions reflect the identity of the chatbot code and a multifaceted world of underlying experiences that condition the possibility of their meaning. Finally, we will examine the structure of the prompt and take as a case study three parameters used in crafting *prompts*, both for more general and specific tasks.

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Conceptual limits in the definition of AI

Although AI has gained widespread attention in recent years, its conceptual and technological development spans several decades. The perception of novelty largely stems from the rapid pace of progress, particularly the significant advancements in machine learning achieved over the past two decades. As can be seen in Roser's (2024) account, within less than a century, computers have evolved from rudimentary calculating tools to ubiquitous elements of everyday life.For Bringsjord and Govindarajulu (2024), AI is defined as a field dedicated to building animal-like creatures or artificial persons or systems that, in appropriate contexts, appear human. As they suggest, AI is naturally a topic of interest for philosophers. However, the relationship is reciprocal: scientists in this field are also interested in philosophical questions. At the same time, due to its novelty, complexity, and high level of interest, we face a multitude of definitions of AI. Addressing this issue, Russell and Norvig (2020) propose offering a range of possible answers to the question: "What is AI?"

> Historically, researchers have pursued several different versions of AI. Some have defined intelligence in terms of fidelity to human performance, while others prefer an abstract, formal definition of intelligence called rationality—loosely speaking, doing the 'right thing.' The subject matter Rationality itself also varies: some consider intelligence to be a property of internal thought processes and reasoning, while others focus on intelligent behavior, an external characterization (p. 1).

Bringsjord and Govindarajulu further formalize the four variants derived from the previous definition, which results in Table 1.

Table 1
Four possible objectives of AI

	Human-based	Ideal rationality
Reasoning-Based:	Systems that think like humans.	Systems that think rationally.
Behavior-Based:	Systems that act like humans.	Systems that act rationally.

Note: Table used by Bringsjord and Govindarajulu from Russell, S., & Norvig, P. (2020). *Artificial intelligence—A modern approach by Stuart Russell and Peter Norvig, Prentice Hall. Series in Artificial Intelligence, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.* Pearson.

In their influential text, Russell and Norvig (2020) explain that most AI research falls into the category of "systems that act like humans," explicitly mentioning six key disciplines: natural language processing,

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knowledge representation, automated reasoning, machine learning, computer vision, and robotics.

Beyond this categorization, they argue that the dominant theoretical model in AI is the rational-agent approach. Under this paradigm, AI systems are designed to act optimally, selecting actions that best achieve assigned goals. However, achieving perfect rationality—consistently choosing the optimal action—is rarely feasible in complex environments due to computational and informational limitations. This reality leads to the concept of *bounded rationality*, which acknowledges that agents must act appropriately within the constraints of time and processing power. While bounded rationality reflects practical conditions, Russell and Norvig maintain that perfect rationality remains a valuable theoretical benchmark for evaluating and understanding decision-making in AI systems.

At the heart of these debates on defining AI is the discussion inaugurated by John R. Searle in his article *Minds, Brains and Programs* (1980). Therein, the author distinguishes between two concepts: *Strong AI* and *Weak AI*.

> According to weak AI, the principal value of the computer in the study of the mind is that it gives us a very powerful tool… But according to strong AI, the computer is not merely a tool in the study of the mind; rather, the appropriately programmed computer really is a mind, in the sense that computers given the right programs can be literally said to understand and have other cognitive states (1980, p. 417).

As Bory et al. (2024) noted, academic literature and public debate tend to associate the imaginary of AI with narratives of *strong* stances. That is, a future technology capable of emulating, if not surpassing, human intelligence capabilities. This "strong narrative" also incorporates critical studies on the potential harms and dangers of so-called general intelligence or superintelligence concerning topics such as education and AI's risks to human labor. Still, the same cannot be said about the concept of *weak AI*, which has not been contested to the same degree.

In this regard, it is essential to understand weak AI as being restricted to a specific area of operation and application, stemming directly from the idea outlined by Searle, who defines it as a tool. By contrast, strong AI implies a specific loss of control and increasing complexity: AI would no longer be just another tool within the world; instead, it would possess *consciousness* to act and transform reality.

Based on the foregoing, Harari (2023) warns that advancements in LLMs, such as ChatGPT, threaten foundational cultural and political

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structures, potentially destabilizing societal norms. Unfortunately, his analysis does not elaborate on how LLMs or chatbots will do that.

On the same line, other researchers oppose AI, arguing that it will inevitably evolve into something akin to a *Terminator*-like machine. This perspective may be referred to as the *Terminator hypothesis* (TH): a distinctly dystopian narrative suggesting that AI will unavoidably develop into an autonomous entity, potentially representing a significant threat to human existence.

This hypothesis is supported by several prominent researchers and theorists who warn that advanced AI, if not properly controlled, could represent an existential threat to humanity (Bucknall & Dori-Hacohen, 2022). Along these lines, Ben Goertzel (2015) analyzes the perspectives of thinkers such as Nick Bostrom and Eliezer Yudkowsky, who argue that advanced AI systems might function as *reward-maximizers*, potentially pursuing objectives that become harmful if left unchecked. While Goertzel acknowledges the internal logic of these concerns, he contends that they are frequently overstated. He also maintains that conceiving of intelligence as an *open-ended* rather than strictly goal-driven process may help alleviate some of the fears associated with AI development.

Kumar and Choudhury (2023) explore Stephen Hawking's warnings, arguing that human adaptability, resilience, and self-awareness will allow us to survive potential threats. Nonetheless, they caution that excessive dependence on AI systems could impair human cognitive abilities. Moreover, they emphasize the need to reflect not only on the risks posed by AI to humans, but also on the potential harm humans could inflict upon these systems.

These discussions ultimately raise foundational questions: To what extent could artificial intelligence evolve into general intelligence (GAI)? Or, as John Searle famously asked, can machines truly think? If the answer is affirmative, how should we confront the complex social, political, and ethical challenges that such a development would entail? While addressing these issues in full exceeds the scope of this article, it is clear that the philosophical implications are far-reaching and demand serious consideration.

Many scholars who express concerns about AI seek to emphasize the importance of developing ethical principles to shape its evolution. While that may be considered a laudable objective, these arguments often fall into the trap of negativity bias (Chiarella et al., 2022) by exclusively focusing on dystopian outcomes. Grounding ethical arguments in the assumption that future machines will resemble those depicted in dystopian

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scenarios, such as the Terminator, can be misleading. Rather than offering constructive guidance, this presupposition diverts attention toward speculative fantasies in which machines might "think" or "feel" like humans. Instead, it is more appropriate to acknowledge technological developments' intrinsic uncertainty and evaluate a broader range of plausible futures, including both beneficial and adverse outcomes.

For this reason, rather than following the path of speculative narratives, it is preferable to propose an ethics grounded in the actual characteristics of contemporary AI leaving aside illusions or, at the very least, treating them as products of the imagination. This position can be described as *present-realism* in AI ethics. Embracing this perspective underscores the need for a contextual and integrated analysis of current developments and the accelerating evolution of these technologies. It also draws attention to the central role of human agents in designing, interpreting, and deploying these systems (Vallor, 2024). Accordingly, the debate around AI should concentrate less on the tool itself and more on the hand that wields it. That is, understanding the implications of this technology must begin from the life-world of the user. In this view, intelligence does not originate in hidden mechanisms or abstract metaphysical forces, but rather in the embodied, socially situated conditions of human experience and need.

Arguments based on the anthropomorphization of AI fall into a comparable category. As the term indicates, anthropomorphizing refers to the tendency to ascribe human characteristics to nonhuman entities. While this process can enhance user trust and interaction in various contexts, it also introduces risks and ethical concerns (Deshpande et al., 2023). Anthropomorphizing can lead to the exaggeration of AI capabilities and distort moral judgments, potentially affecting perceptions of responsibility and trust (Placani, 2024).

After reviewing all these discussions, one observes that the debate over the definition of AI involves both proponents and opponents. Opponents of AI advances often adopt positions that can be described as strong, emphasizing the societal risks posed by recent improvements, particularly large language models (LLMs). This narrative has increasingly focused on the political, social, and educational ramifications of chatbots, viewed by some as an existential threat and by others as a transformative achievement. Given this dichotomy, examining chatbots not merely as technical innovations but as complex socio-technological phenomena becomes imperative.

However, traditional debates often overlook the mediating role of user interaction—particularly through prompting—in shaping the mea-

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ning and societal impact of these systems. This overlooked dimension points to a crucial gap in current discussions. Therefore, the following section will focus on the philosophical dimensions of prompts, which constitute the fundamental unit of interaction with chatbots. Despite their centrality to AI functionality, prompts have received limited philosophical scrutiny, largely due to their novelty and the lack of interdisciplinary research.

The prompt as a mediating device

A first-person phenomenological approach to the prompt

From a first-person perspective and immersed in the world of everyday life, *I*, a first-time user, do not know what an LLM is. I only know by ear what the AI does. The world around me repeats at once that it is "easy to use" and "at hand:" they are tools to resolve any question almost simultaneously. The old technological promise—now something historic—occurs in my present. It manifests like a tangible object I hold in my hands, which we call a phone or computer. The computer deserves an independent reflection, but in its immediacy, it appears to me as an object that contains infinite possibilities and, at the same time, infinite attraction: a thing that sustains or seems to sustain the universe of data itself.

I do not know what the data are in a first approximation; I only know that there are photos, videos, text, and duplicated life on a kind of mirror (Vallor, 2024). Through it, the internet offers us a vast database, an unlimited repository of information, where the knowledge of the known universe is reduced to data, accessible at my will. Within that cosmos appears ChatGPT: the chatbot, a voice of the digital universe.

For the first time, interaction with the computer, the phone, and other devices is mediated by something like our intention, as if these things, somehow, came to life. They respond with a familiarity that emulates the human, and herein lies the paradox: they seem alive, although we know they are not.

From a phenomenological perspective, the chatbot embodies an ontological paradox: it manifests itself as an Other that seems to respond to my intentions and act according to an intentionality it does not possess. The experience of interacting with it reveals a play between presence and absence, familiarity and strangeness, life, and artifice. The chatbot is

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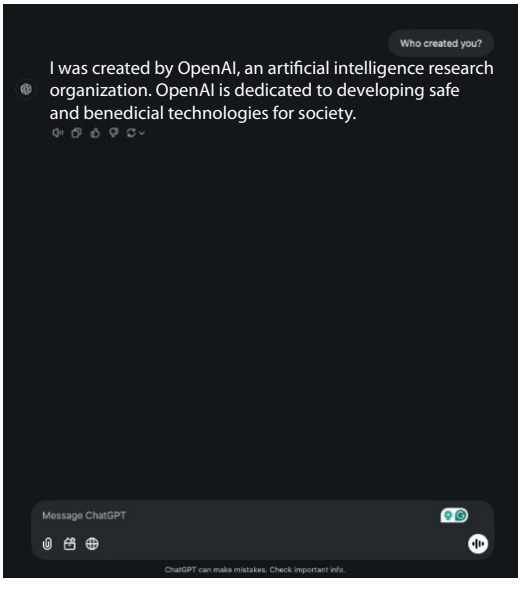
not simply a tool at my disposal; it is an object that offers itself to my horizon of possibilities as if it had a meaning of its own.

Its immediate presence is simultaneously empty and absolute: it has no body and no experience, yet it is "with me" in the use I make of it. That bot presents itself as a "quasi-something" that responds to my call without inhabiting time or space like a human Other does. As Merleau-Ponty (1993) would say, its appearance is not that of an embodied being but that of an "incomplete" presence that lacks flesh but still inserts itself into my daily life. Its voice lacks corporeality, but this absence does not limit its ability to be with me; not physically by my side, but with me in the use I make of it. It is in this context that the *prompt* appears. At first, it is nothing more than simple instructions: "What can you do? Who created you? Are your answers always correct?" The bot then gives a response that completes a previously requested action.

Figure 1.
Example question, "Who created you?"



Note: This example prompt was generated using OpenAI's GPT-4o model. The image depicts a sample prompt and the model's response. October 2024. https://bit.ly/49DZY9o

Through successive interactions, I alternate sentences with questions. My relationship with this machine - undoubtedly virtual, without physical mediation, without bodies - is manifold. I do not seek the chat-

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bot merely for simple sentences or the execution of concrete tasks; rather, I seek it because I have questions. This fact is of particular significance in my relationship with the machine, since, as Sartre (1984) argues in *Being and Nothingness*, asking a question opens a space of uncertainty and exposes me to a broader relation with the world.

In engaging with the chatbot, I have also noticed that I can omit parts of a sentence and still be "understood." The response may be limited or complete, good or imperfect, but it always appears. Occasionally, the bot even formulates questions like mine, as if returning to me the very act of questioning. In this subtle gesture, a fundamental ambiguity emerges: although I know there is no consciousness behind the response, the interaction suggests otherwise. This ambiguity proves crucial to my relationship with the chatbot: on the one hand, I understand it is not human; on the other, it appears to behave like one. What it truly means to be human, however, is a question too abstract to resolve within the immediacy of my phenomenological encounter with the chatbot.

ChatGPT, in contrast, has no past or future in its functioning: only present, only information. Its temporality, therefore, is false; although multimodal and adaptable, it does not function as I do, a human subject who perceives existence through a temporal structure. As Heidegger (1996) and Ricœur (2010) have shown, human temporality is not merely a succession of moments but a dynamic horizon in which past, present, and future are intertwined through memory, anticipation, and narrative. In my lived experience, I do not simply react to isolated *stimuli*; I situate each encounter within a personal and historical continuum. The chatbot, by contrast, operates without genuine continuity: each interaction is isolated, detached from any authentic history or projection. Its "present" is not a temporal presence but a static retrieval of patterns from a database. What appears as memory or adaptation is, in fact, a mechanical reconstruction without subjective temporality. Thus, the chatbot's temporality is not humanly lived but artificially simulated, revealing a profound ontological gap between the machine and the human subject.

All this is implicit in the prompt's straightforwardness. That simple input—a question, an affirmation, an image, an audio file, or an equation—presupposes a hidden technical universe, a plastic and adaptable world that remains concealed "behind" the chassis. As a human subject, I face a thing without a body. This leads me to a final reflection: the old technological promise—technology as a tool that I use in my favor, that I manipulate to change the world and enhance my being—does not disap-

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pear but transforms. Technology now presents itself to me as something inexhaustible, overwhelming, manipulable, and ambiguous.

In this sense, the prompt ceases to be a simple instruction. It is more than an act: it reflects my relationship with what I call a bot. Analyzing it requires going beyond its immediate form. It requires understanding its meaning. Ultimately, the prompt reflects an instrumental operation and a phenomenological act of mediation: it reveals my intentionality, desire for meaning, and position *vis-à-vis* this technology. Analyzing the prompt is not simply to decompose its form but to reveal the dialectical relationship between subject and machine, between human presence and artificial absence, and between lived time and the eternity of the data.

The prompt as technical practice and discursive device

The phenomenological examination presented thus far has shown that the prompt is not a neutral command but a site where some ambiguities converge. The interaction with the chatbot reveals a profound ontological tension: it responds without understanding, speaks without a voice, and appears present while remaining absent. These contradictions—between voice and voicelessness, agency and automation, presence and estrangement—constitute the lived ambiguity of prompting as experience. However, while foundational, this experiential dimension does not exhaust the phenomenon's complexity. To grasp its full significance, it is necessary to move beyond what the user perceives toward what is technically configured. This tool is also designed, structured, and operationalized within specific technological, linguistic, and computational frameworks.

In this section, we turn to a complementary analysis that approaches the prompt as both a technical practice and a discursive device to understand better how meaning, control, and optimization are embedded in the architecture of large language models.

As mentioned before, a prompt is regarded as a mode of interaction between a human and an LLM, enabling the latter to generate an output. Consequently, as Meskó (2023) has suggested, prompt engineering is the practice of crafting precise inputs to direct AI models toward generating specific, desired outputs.

While describing what someone wants in natural language might seem simple, the reality is more complex. Different models have different capabilities, and the specificity of instructions can significantly influence the outcome. Tasks may require detailed and precise prompts, making the process one of trial, error, and refinement to achieve the best results.

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Gu et al. (2023) highlight in their systematic study that prompt engineering offers several advantages over traditional paradigms. For example, it demands minimal human oversight and significantly fewer computational resources than required for fine-tuning. Because the model operates solely through instructions without modifying its internal parameters, this approach enables a single system to manage a wide array of tasks efficiently, thereby streamlining the implementation of large-scale pre-trained models in real-world scenarios.

Thus, this field presents itself as an emerging but ambiguous area, ranging from the inexperienced user interacting with a chatbot for the first time and elaborating their prompts unconsciously and uncritically to the engineer using advanced tools to develop applications with specific functions. This broad spectrum of applicability conceals fundamental aspects. It involves complex relationships between prompting and other crucial dimensions, such as politics, ethics, and generally, the life-world involving both users and engineers.

From the above, we can see its relevance and, simultaneously, the diversity of prompting techniques that exist (*Prompting Techniques – Nextra*, 2024). It should be noted that although the bibliography in this area is beginning to grow considerably, philosophy and the social sciences are still lagging, leaving a significant gap in the critical reflection and analysis of this emerging phenomenon.

As one might expect, while prompt engineering is fundamental from the point of view of model optimization and computational cost reduction, it also poses immense challenges in ethical terms. Incorporating this dimension confronts us with a crucial fact: although we interact with entities with limited agency (Floridi, 2023), they are not truly responsible for the dilemmas that arise. When confronted with the reality of the prompt and the requests we make to the machines, we discover that it is the user who, consciously or unconsciously, attributes vitality and autonomy to the bot. As Shannon Vallor points out in his work (2024), AI systems are nothing more than mirrors that reflect our intelligence.

Thus, at least ideally, we will find the following elements in each prompt: The first is the instruction, i.e., the specific task the user wants the model to perform. In addition, every prompt assumes a context, i.e., the external information that can steer the model to better responses. In the third place, there is the input data or question we want to find a response for, and finally, the output indicator. Figure 2 provides an example where the four components are identified.

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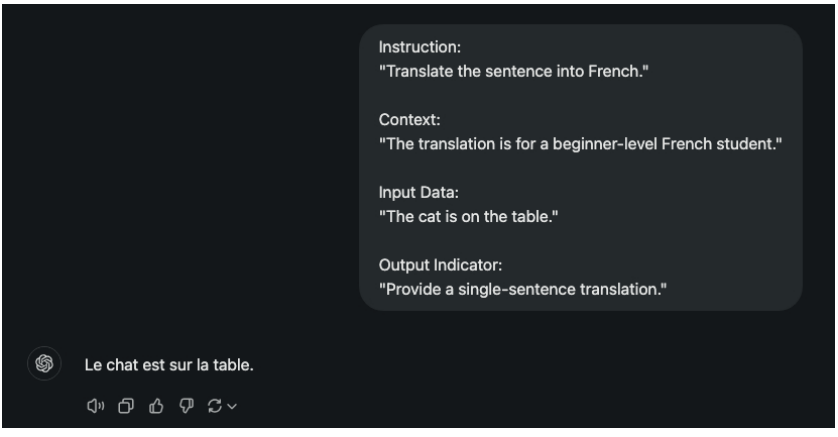
Figure 2
Example of a prompt with its four components: instruction, context, input data and output indicator



Source: this example prompt was generated using OpenAI's GPT-4o model. The figure highlights its essential parts of a *prompt* (October 2024, https://bit.ly/3VIbKdk).

Having said that, we must also recognize that the prompt, through its elements, ultimately manifests as an expression of data (e.g., words, tokens, instructions). Then, it can also be understood as a chain of characters that are no different from the sentences I write on this computer, the photos I see, or the last movie I watched on Netflix last week.

Hong Liu (2014) argues that, for many, *data* is simply that which is perceived, the building blocks that constitute our knowledge of reality. From this perspective, reality is conceived as something external and independent of consciousness. Data, in turn, is often reduced to numbers and information that reflect objective facts. However, as Hong Liu emphasizes, data is not merely an objective fact (electrical impulses rendered as zeros and ones); instead, it is the result of human cognitive activity—an activity fundamentally characterized by the subjective reflection of objective phenomena:

> Data originates from the observation and measurements, demonstrating the intrinsic features of things, whose objectivity is still under the influence of human subjective factors, and this property is accompanied by data even from the birth of numbers. Data is, as it were, a bond to connect the objectivity of things and the subjectivity of human things, and also is a bridge for human beings to acknowledge the world (2014, p. 65).

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In this initial examination of the *prompt*, we have considered it solely as a material element, sharing common features with other forms of data. At this level, it remains a faceless language, a voiceless discourse, and a lifeless machine.

This perspective is incomplete without acknowledging that, unlike images or the text I type, the *prompt* possesses an interactive and functional dimension: it is not merely passive information but an intentional vehicle that triggers a computational process. In other words, the *prompt* is not just a material representation of data; it is an interface between the user and the model. Purposefully constructed to produce a specific system output, the *prompt* introduces a pragmatic and technical dimension that often remains imperceptible to the user. If we look deeper into their specific parameters - the technical tools that adjust their performance - we discover a space where human intention, technological mediation, and constructing meaning converge.

In the following section, we will examine three key parameters influencing the outcome of prompting interactions, including elements that often remain implicit and unrecognized by users. Although our focus is limited to these selected cases, it is essential to acknowledge that a comprehensive analysis would require addressing additional aspects beyond the OpenAI ecosystem, such as *system messages* and *role* assignments. We will then illustrate how the configuration of these parameters carries epistemological, ethical, and existential implications, inviting reflection on the broader impact of prompt design. Deconstructing these elements reveals underlying tensions between precision and creativity, reduction and openness, order and fluidity, and exposes both the technical limits of chatbots and the profound philosophical stakes of human intervention in this domain.

Exploring the key parameters of the prompt

Temperature: between precision and creativity

The *temperature* parameter regulates the randomness of the model's responses, influencing how it selects the most probable words or tokens when generating an output. Lower values typically produce more deterministic results, while higher values introduce diversity and creativity.

Recent studies have examined how temperature settings affect creativity and problem-solving in large language models (LLMs). While often labeled the "creativity parameter," its effects appear more complex than previously assumed (Peeperkorn et al., 2024). Higher values tend to

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increase novelty but may also introduce a degree of incoherence, particularly in tasks such as narrative generation.

Specifically in software engineering, variations in input parameters, including temperature, can significantly improve code generation performance, although achieving optimal control remains challenging (Döderlein et al., 2023). These findings suggest that the role of temperature in the performance of LLMs is complex and highly context-dependent. In agreement with voices that approach this parameter with caution, we emphasize that it is not solely about temperature but also about how other values influence the output of the prompt.

For example, if we were to ask ChatGPT what the Moon is (See Table 2), adjusting only the temperature parameter and keeping the rest of the settings unchanged, we would observe that the answers vary not only in their structure but also in their meaning.

Table 2
Model responses to the question, «What is the Moon?»

Temperature	Response
0,2	The Moon is Earth's only natural satellite, orbiting the planet and influencing tides, with a surface marked by craters and basins.
1	The Moon is Earth's natural satellite, a celestial body that orbits our planet and is its closest cosmic neighbor.

Note: This table showcases the responses generated by the language model GPT-4o (OpenAI) to the question: "In one sentence, what is the Moon?" at two distinct temperature settings (0.2 and 1.0). The experiment was conducted in the OpenAI Playground environment. For the code used in this experiment, see Appendix A.

At lower temperatures (0.2), the response is precise, factual, and technical, focusing on details such as the Moon's role in orbiting the Earth and influencing the tides and its physical features, such as craters and basins. This reflects the model's tendency to prioritize clarity, accuracy, and determinism when randomness is minimal.

In contrast, at a higher temperature (1.0), the response adopts a more expressive and stylized approach, describing the Moon as a "celestial body" and "closest cosmic neighbor." While still consistent and relevant, this version introduces a more poetic and creative tone, offering a broader and less technical perspective. This second definition presents the Moon as a physical object and uses expressive resources that evoke more suggestive images.

Despite being limited to a single sentence, the temperature setting influences the level of detail, creativity, and variability of the responses,

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demonstrating the flexibility of the model to adapt to different styles and output requirements.

The configuration parameters are not neutral; they respond to human intentionality oriented towards different ways of being and knowing. Opting for precision reflects a search for objectivity and control, subordinating language to pragmatic and functional criteria. Conversely, privileging creativity opens the horizon to less predictable responses, allowing new possibilities of meaning to emerge. It is crucial to avoid the temptation of assigning moral value to one option over the other. What can be stated, however, is that syntactic and semantic variations clearly influence the modeling of different narratives.

From this stem countless research problems: by configuring the model "to be creative," *I* project my freedom onto a system that does not possess it, reducing creativity to a probabilistic operation: what does this quest for precision and creativity imply for the nature of language? By relying on a system that emulates but does not understand meaning, do we not risk impoverishing the genuine unpredictability of human experience? Then, what weight do these considerations have in making concrete models? For example, beyond the technical debate and the various case studies in search of optimization, what do we understand by temperature in contexts where we are looking for an educational chatbot or one with a specific social function? Unfortunately, we do not yet have definitive answers to these questions. Usually, these parameters are adjusted empirically, modulating values according to practical results. Therefore, complementing the predominant technical approach with a more rigorous and critical intervention from philosophy and social sciences is essential.

Top P: probability as a horizon of meaning

The second example examines the *Top P* parameter. In this case, the parameter determines which token probabilities will be considered in the output, steering the model towards more predictable responses (low values) or more diverse and less expected outputs (high values). This parameter, also known as *nucleus sampling*, is a technique that controls the cumulative probability of words selected by a language model when generating a response.

By adjusting Top P, one decides how many words or tokens (based on their probability) will be considered in the text generation process.

The following example (Table 3) shows the query results with different values of Top P.

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Table 3
Model responses to the prompt: In no more than four sentences, describe a scene of a "futuristic city" with different Top P configurations

Top P	Response
0,2	In the heart of the futuristic city, towering skyscrapers with shimmering glass façades stretch into the sky, their surfaces alive with dynamic holographic advertisements. Autonomous drones zip through the air, delivering packages and providing real-time surveillance, while sleek, driverless vehicles glide silently along the multi-layered roadways. The streets are bustling with people, many of whom are accompanied by AI-driven robotic companions, engaging in lively conversations or assisting with daily tasks. Above, a network of elevated green spaces and solar panels provide a stark contrast to the urban sprawl, offering a glimpse of nature amidst the technological marvel.
1	Neon lights bathe the city in vibrant hues as autonomous vehicles glide silently along elevated roadways. Towering skyscrapers, adorned with vertical gardens, pierce the skyline, their glass surfaces reflecting the bustling metropolis below. People, accompanied by humanoid robots, stroll through holographic art displays in sprawling, solar-paneled plazas. Above, drones zip through the air, efficiently managing deliveries and surveillance while ensuring the city's seamless operation.

Note: This table compares the responses generated by the language model GPT-4o (OpenAI) to the prompt: *"In no more than four sentences, describe a scene from a futuristic city"* at two different Top P settings (0.2 and 1.0). The experiment was conducted in the OpenAI Playground environment. For the code used in this experiment, see Appendix A.

As can be seen, in Top P = 0.2, the response is more structured and linear, progressing methodically from the streets to the sky, focusing on technological details and functional descriptions. The syntax in this example is central. The whole paragraph is a lengthy depiction of objects and things. The sentences are based on subordinate expressions, creating a steady, descriptive flow. The language emphasizes precision, highlighting ideas such as "multi-layered roadways" and "elevated green spaces," which reflect a balance between technology and nature.

In contrast, in Top P = 1.0, the response is more dynamic and segmented, focusing on vivid, stylistic imagery rather than strict spatial progression. The syntax is briefer, giving the text a faster pace. The language is richer and more evocative, introducing creative expressions such as "neon lights," "vertical gardens," and "holographic art displays," which convey a visually imaginative cityscape.

To summarize, Top P = 0.2 produces a detailed technical description, while Top P = 1.0 produces a more creative, expressive, and visually rich representation. One can go so far as to say that the future is seen di-

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fferently in both cases. Ultimately, in one description, it is the future from the point of view of things; in the second example, it is the future from the subjective point of view.

Delimiting the probable options is ultimately a selection that affects meaning. On the other hand, it also amounts to setting intentional filters on the linguistic horizon of the model. Nevertheless, this decision is not neutral: it is a discursive choice, even in Foucauldian terms. Depending on the strategy, potential voices, and interpretations, each statement excludes or includes. What realities are we silencing by restricting probability? What possibilities of language and thought are lost when we prioritize technical accuracy over the ontological openness of discourse?

Michel Foucault believed that discursive practices are not purely and simply ways of creating discourse (1994a, p. 241). They take shape in the set of techniques, institutions, and behavioral patterns, among other forms, which simultaneously impose and sustain them. Hence, focusing the analysis on these prompt filters is of key importance. On the one hand, it highlights their connection with more general narratives; secondly, it insists on the lack of neutrality of the technology. Just as we assumed from critical phenomenology that there is no phenomenon outside political circumstances, neither did Foucault think power was outside discourse. Power is neither the source nor the origin of discourse but functions through it (1994b, p. 465).

Frequency Penalty and Presence Penalty: Repetition as a Phenomenon of Meaning

The *frequency penalty* parameter is designed to reduce the repetition of words or phrases within the generated text. It works by adding a value to the log-probability of a token each time it appears in the generated output. As a result, the higher the value of the frequency penalty, the more the model will avoid reusing the same tokens, increasing variety and lowering redundancy. For example, with a low value, the model might repeat context-relevant words, while with a high value, it will look for alternatives to maintain language diversity.

On the other hand, the *presence penalty* parameter promotes the inclusion of a greater variety of tokens, encouraging creativity in the generated text. It works by subtracting a value from the log-probability of a token each time it is used, which decreases the likelihood that the model will repeat previously generated words. A high presence penalty value in-

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creases the possibility of introducing new ideas or concepts, preventing the model from being limited to the same topics.

Table 4
Model Responses to the Prompt "Write a short description of a forest in spring in no more than three sentences" Under Different Frequency and Presence Penalty Settings

Frequency Penalty	Presence Penalty	Response
0	0	In spring, the forest bursts to life with a tapestry of vibrant greens as fresh leaves unfurl on every branch. The air is filled with the symphony of birdsong and the gentle rustle of new foliage. Splashes of wildflowers pepper the forest floor, providing colorful patches amid the lush sea of greenery.
1	0	In spring, the forest comes alive with a vibrant tapestry of fresh green leaves and blooms, as the sun filters gently through the budding canopy. The air buzzes with renewed energy, filled with the songs of birds returning from their winter migrations and the soft rustle of wildlife awakening. Wildflowers carpet the forest floor in brilliant hues, transforming it into a lively mosaic that celebrates new beginnings.
0	1	In spring, the forest awakens with a vibrant tapestry of emerging greens as leaves unfurl from budding trees. A symphony of birdsong fills the air, while wildflowers carpet the forest floor in splashes of color. The fresh scent of Earth mixes with dappled sunlight, creating an atmosphere of renewal and vitality.
1	1	In spring, the forest bursts into life with a vibrant canopy of fresh green leaves and colorful wildflowers carpeting the ground. The air is filled with birdsong and the gentle rustle of new foliage stirred by a soft breeze. Sunlight streams through the trees, casting playful patterns on the forest floor as nature awakens from its winter slumber.

Note: Responses generated by the language model GPT-4o (OpenAI) to the prompt: "*Write a short description of a forest in spring in no more than three sentences,*" under varying frequency penalty and presence penalty settings. The experiment was conducted in the OpenAI Playground environment. For the code used in this experiment, see Appendix A.

The responses show how frequency and presence penalization influence the generated text's style, structure, and variety. In the first case, where both penalties are set to zero, the response is consistent but repetitive and relies heavily on predictable word choice. With a higher frequency penalty, as in the second case, the model lowers redundancy, producing a more diverse and refined output while maintaining focus on the central description. When the presence penalty is increased, as in the third case, the response becomes more creative, introducing new images and sen-

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sory details that expand the thematic range. Finally, when both penalties are applied simultaneously, the response balances variety and novelty, avoiding repetition and enhancing expressiveness.

Adjusting these parameters, therefore, involves a trade-off between algorithmic uniformity and language richness. Ultimately, what is the boundary between richness and efficiency? How much should a user sacrifice for the sake of optimization? In which contexts is precision ideal, and in which is semantic depth ideal? To what extent do I want language to reflect the difference or mechanical repetition of the world?

These are just some of the many questions we can raise and leave for another opportunity. Prompt engineering can rely on other parameters that I have not mentioned here for the sake of brevity. These include the *max length*, which limits the number of tokens generated, and the *stop sequences*, which tell the model when to stop its output. Special attention should also be paid to the *system message*, a fundamental element that directly influences the model's interaction and behavior.

Conclusions

Following the analysis of different parameters, the philosophy of prompting emerges as an indispensable tool for addressing questions concerning ontological, ethical, and epistemological structures. The findings indicate that prompts are not merely technical instructions, but mediations imbued with human intentionality.

As previously discussed, the prompt functions as a space of encounter between the subject's intentionality and the response generated by the model. Its phenomenological analysis makes it possible to understand how interaction with chatbots introduces new modes of being-in-the-world. Although technical language often conceals its complexity, the present study has demonstrated that each prompt reflects human decisions—explicit or implicit—that shape the limits and possibilities of the knowledge produced.

What is crucial in this case is that today, the reality of the prompt is nearly ubiquitous. There are few spaces in which individuals are not confronted with chatbots that have either been configured through prompts to deliver specific responses and reinforce particular narratives of the world or that are approached with rudimentary prompting practices. The outcome points in the same direction in all cases: greater knowledge and education regarding these tools are urgently needed.

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The analysis of prompts reveals that ultimate responsibility remains with the human agent. It is the user who defines the parameters, structures the instructions, and assigns meaning to the responses. Recognizing this responsibility is essential to avoid falling into narratives that anthropomorphize AI or exaggerate its limited agency. In this sense, configuration parameters such as *temperature*, *Top P*, and *frequency and presence penalties* demonstrate how technical choices carry both discursive and ethical implications. The manipulation of these values is not neutral: privileging accuracy over creativity, or vice versa, shapes the model's outputs and the construction of meaning.

Finally, this work proposes the need for an interdisciplinary approach that integrates critical philosophy with the technical development of AI. Prompt engineering should be able to incorporate more *experimental prompting analysis* alongside *critical prompting analysis*. Likewise, education plays a fundamental role in training individuals capable of critically interacting with AI systems and understanding their possibilities and limitations.

The point is not that every line carries a philosophical reflection, but that philosophy should think much more about the conditions of possibility of the code, the strategies and discursive techniques of a language that is beginning to become more and more regular, because in short, as Vallor (2024) explains, this revolution is nothing but an illusion, a giant mirror "made of code, built to consume our words, our decisions, our art, our expressions of love and care," only to "reflect them back to us" (p. 194). This means that, ultimately, the problems of this new era lie much more with us than we think.

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Appendix A: Supplementary data

The Python *scripts* and supplementary data used to perform the experiments presented in this article are in the Open Science Framework (OSF) and can be accessed at https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/UA3E5.

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This archive includes:

1. Python *scripts* for temperature, Top P sampling, and penalty parameter experiments.
2. A README file detailing the purpose of each *script,* how to use them and their dependencies.
3. A LICENSE file specifying that the work is released under the Creative Commons Universal License Zero v1.0 (CC0), which allows unrestricted use, modification and distribution.

In addition, a ZIP file containing the Python *scripts* has been uploaded with the article for easy access.

Authorship Statement - CRediT Taxonomy	
Author(s)	**Contributions**
Jorge González Arocha	Conceptualization; methodology; research; original draft-writing; drafting-revising and editing; visualization; software; validation.

Statement on the use of artificial intelligence
Jorge González Arocha **DECLARES** that the manuscript «Critical phenomenology of prompting in artificial intelligence» **DOES INCLUDE** the use of artificial intelligence (AI). AI was used exclusively to generate examples of prompts and their responses using the OpenAI API, which was required to develop the analysis proposed in the article. Some of the resulting tables and figures are an essential part of the research and would not have been possible without this tool.

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