

Who Am I as a Knower? Plato, Asimov, and the Transformation of Epistemic Selfhood in the Age of AI

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Abstract: This article examines how artificial intelligence reshapes not only knowledge practices but the experience of knowing itself. While contemporary discussions of AI often focus on accuracy, bias, and educational outcomes, this study shifts attention to the phenomenological and existential dimensions of epistemic change. Drawing on Plato's allegory of the cave and Isaac Asimov's speculative narratives, the article develops a conceptual framework for understanding knowledge as a formative and experiential process, characterized by uncertainty, dialogue, and intellectual struggle. Against this background, the article argues that AI-mediated environments introduce a qualitatively different epistemic experience, defined by immediacy, fluency, and reduced cognitive friction. The central claim is that the problem is not whether AI produces correct knowledge, but that it transforms how knowledge is encountered. This transformation contributes to the erosion of the questioning self, diminishing tolerance for uncertainty, replacing dialogue with response, and reducing opportunities for intellectual struggle. The article further explores the implications of this shift for philosophical counseling and education, proposing a reorientation toward practices that restore questioning, sustain uncertainty, and resist premature resolution. It concludes that the ethical challenge posed by AI is not only to regulate its use, but to preserve the conditions under which human beings can remain subjects who question, reflect, and engage meaningfully with knowledge.

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Introduction

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence into everyday practices of learning, communication, and decision-making has not only transformed how knowledge is accessed, but also how it is experienced. Increasingly, individuals encounter knowledge as immediate, fluent, and contextually adapted, rather than as the outcome of inquiry, uncertainty, and reflective engagement. This shift suggests that the transformation introduced by AI is not merely epistemic in the traditional sense, but experiential. It affects not only what is known or how it is known, but the very structure of the experience of knowing itself (Floridi et al., 2018; Crawford, 2021).

Such a transformation raises a deeper philosophical problem: the alteration of the experience of knowing may entail a corresponding transformation of the knowing subject. In classical and modern epistemology, knowledge is closely tied to processes of effort, doubt, and the possibility of error. The subject who knows is one who navigates uncertainty and develops judgment over time. This conception is reflected in philosophical traditions that emphasize the formative dimension of knowledge, from Plato's account of intellectual transformation to contemporary perspectives in social epistemology that view knowledge as situated within practices of justification and critique (Plato, trans. 1997; Longino, 2002). By contrast, AI-mediated environments tend to minimize friction, presenting knowledge as coherent and readily available, often without exposing the underlying processes of reasoning or uncertainty. As research on generative AI suggests, the fluency and immediacy of such systems can shape users' perceptions of understanding and reliability, independent of epistemic grounding (Bender et al., 2021; Glikson & Woolley, 2020). For this reason, the implications of artificial intelligence for knowledge cannot be reduced to educational or pedagogical concerns

alone. While current discourse frequently focuses on issues such as academic integrity, learning outcomes, and digital literacy, these perspectives do not fully capture the depth of the transformation at stake. The issue is not only how individuals learn, but how they come to experience themselves as knowing subjects. Philosophical analyses of technology have long suggested that technological mediation reshapes not only practices but also forms of subjectivity, altering how individuals relate to the world and to themselves (Ihde, 1990; Verbeek, 2005). In the context of AI, this mediation becomes increasingly intimate, as systems anticipate, generate, and stabilize meaning in ways that precede or replace human reflection. This article argues that artificial intelligence contributes to an emerging transformation of subjectivity, in which the knowing subject is reconfigured from an agent engaged in the active construction and evaluation of knowledge to a participant in systems that pre-structure and deliver meaning. This shift does not eliminate human agency, but it alters its mode of operation, moving from critical engagement toward adaptive interaction. By situating this transformation within a broader philosophical framework, the article seeks to articulate the implications of AI not only for knowledge, but for the constitution of the subject in contemporary epistemic environments.

This article defines the transformation introduced by AI as a shift from knowledge as a process of formation to knowledge as an experience of immediate availability, with significant implications for the constitution of the knowing subject. In this article, the “experience of knowing” is understood as the lived process through which knowledge is encountered, including the temporal, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of inquiry. It involves not only arriving at an answer, but engaging in uncertainty, sustaining questioning, encountering resistance, and undergoing transformation. Knowledge, in this sense, is not merely possessed, but lived as a process that shapes the subject who knows.

1. Plato’s Cave and the Formation of the Knowing Self

To understand how artificial intelligence may transform the experience of knowing, it is necessary to begin with a philosophical account in which knowledge is not merely a cognitive state but a formative process. In Plato’s allegory of the cave, knowledge is presented as a

transformative journey that reshapes both perception and the self. The movement from shadows to reality is not simply the acquisition of correct information, but a profound reorientation of the knower, involving a reconfiguration of how truth is encountered and understood (Plato, trans. 1997). In this framework, knowing is inseparable from difficulty. The ascent out of the cave is described as painful and disorienting.

The individual who turns toward the light experiences resistance, confusion, and even a desire to return to the familiar world of appearances. This dimension of pain and resistance is not incidental, but constitutive of knowledge itself. It reflects the gap between appearance and truth, and the effort required to overcome habitual ways of seeing. Knowledge, in this sense, is not immediate or frictionless, but emerges through a process that includes uncertainty, instability, and the possibility of error (Annas, 1981).

Moreover, the process of knowing is fundamentally dialogical. The prisoner does not liberate themselves in isolation, but is led and guided, suggesting that knowledge is mediated through relationships. In Plato's broader philosophical practice, dialogue serves as the primary method through which understanding is developed. The Socratic dialogue does not transmit knowledge as a finished product, but provokes questioning, exposes contradictions, and invites the participant into a process of reflective engagement (Frede, 1987). Knowledge is thus not a static possession, but an activity that unfolds within interaction, requiring the participation of the subject.

Taken together, these elements, transformation, difficulty, and dialogue, define a conception of knowing as an experiential and developmental process. The knowing subject is not given in advance, but is formed through engagement with truth under conditions of uncertainty and resistance. Knowledge involves not only arriving at correct conclusions, but becoming a certain kind of subject, one capable of sustaining ambiguity, questioning appearances, and undergoing intellectual change. This Platonic account provides a critical framework for evaluating contemporary shifts in the experience of knowing. If knowledge is understood as a process that necessarily involves effort, uncertainty, and dialogical engagement, then any environment that minimizes these conditions may alter not only how knowledge is acquired, but how the subject who knows is constituted.

2. Asimov and the Loss of Learning as Experience

If Plato presents knowledge as a transformative and dialogical process, Isaac Asimov's speculative fiction offers an early vision of what is lost when these conditions begin to erode. Writing in the mid-twentieth century, Asimov does not yet describe artificial intelligence in its contemporary form, yet his stories anticipate a crucial shift: the separation of knowledge from the experiential processes through which it is traditionally formed. In his narratives, learning persists, but the experience of learning is fundamentally altered. In *The Fun They Had*, Asimov (1951/1989) imagines a future in which education is delivered by mechanical teachers that adapt content to each individual student. Knowledge is efficiently transmitted, personalized, and continuously available. However, this efficiency comes at a cost. Learning is no longer embedded in a shared social environment, nor does it involve interaction with a human teacher capable of responding to ambiguity, emotion, or misunderstanding. The children in the story encounter information, but not the process through which understanding is co-constructed. The absence of dialogue, central in the Platonic account, marks a shift from learning as an experience to learning as delivery.

A similar dynamic appears in *Someday*, where storytelling becomes automated through machines that generate narratives on demand (Asimov, 1956/1989). Storytelling, once a creative and interpretive act, is reduced to the production of outputs that satisfy immediate expectations. The listener receives a story, but is no longer invited into a process of imagination, questioning, or interpretation. The experience of engaging with meaning is replaced by the consumption of pre-structured content. In this sense, knowledge and meaning persist, but the subject's active participation in their formation diminishes.

What emerges in these stories is not the absence of knowledge, but the emergence of knowledge without experience. Learning becomes frictionless, immediate, and individualized, yet it loses the elements of uncertainty, resistance, and dialogue that characterize it as a formative process. The learner is no longer required to struggle, to question, or to remain within ambiguity. Instead, the system anticipates needs and delivers appropriate responses, thereby pre-structuring the space in which understanding might otherwise develop.

This shift is reflected in the figure of the child who no longer asks. In Asimov's imagined worlds, curiosity is not entirely extinguished, but it is redirected. Questions are no longer the starting point of inquiry, but prompts for system responses. The role of the learner subtly changes, from an active participant in the construction of knowledge to a recipient of outputs generated in advance of reflection. As Turkle (2017) suggests in a contemporary context, technologically mediated environments may reduce opportunities for sustained questioning and reflective dialogue, thereby altering how individuals engage with knowledge.

Asimov's narratives thus capture an early stage in the erosion of learning as experience. They do not depict a complete disappearance of human engagement, but rather a gradual displacement of the conditions under which meaningful learning occurs. Knowledge remains present, but the processes that give it depth, difficulty, and personal significance begin to fade. In this sense, Asimov does not simply imagine future technologies, but reveals a transformation in the structure of experience itself, one that prepares the ground for contemporary AI-mediated forms of knowing. One might argue that even in contemporary AI systems, knowledge remains fundamentally human, as these systems are trained on human-generated data and reflect accumulated cultural and intellectual traditions. From this perspective, there is no true loss of experience, but only a change in its mediation. Yet what is at stake in Asimov's narratives, and in their contemporary realization, is not the origin of knowledge but the conditions under which it is encountered. Even if knowledge remains human in source, its presentation as pre-structured and immediately available alters the learner's relation to it. The shift, therefore, concerns not the disappearance of human knowledge, but the transformation of how it is lived and experienced.

3. AI and the Transformation of Epistemic Experience

The defining transformation introduced by AI is not epistemic in the sense of accuracy, but phenomenological in the sense of how knowledge is lived. Contemporary artificial intelligence systems intensify the trajectory identified in Asimov's narratives by introducing environments in which knowledge is not only technologically mediated but experientially restructured. The defining features of these systems, immediacy, fluency,

and adaptive responsiveness, reshape how individuals encounter and engage with knowledge. As a result, the transformation at stake is not primarily located in the correctness of information, but in the conditions under which knowing takes place. One of the most salient characteristics of AI-mediated environments is immediacy. Knowledge is made available with minimal delay, often in response to natural language queries that simulate conversational interaction. This immediacy alters the temporal structure of knowing. Where traditional epistemic processes involve searching, comparing, and evaluating over time, AI systems compress these stages into a single moment of output. The result is an experience in which knowledge appears as something already formed and readily accessible, rather than something that must be constructed through effort (Floridi et al., 2018). Closely related to immediacy is the fluency of AI-generated responses. These systems produce outputs that are linguistically coherent, contextually appropriate, and rhetorically persuasive. Research has shown that fluency strongly influences perceptions of understanding and credibility, leading users to interpret well-formed responses as indicators of epistemic reliability, even in the absence of transparent reasoning (Bender et al., 2021; Glikson & Woolley, 2020). In this way, the form of knowledge presentation becomes entangled with judgments about its validity. The smoothness of the response can substitute for the depth of the underlying understanding.

A third defining feature is the reduction of cognitive friction. AI systems are designed to minimize ambiguity, streamline interaction, and anticipate user needs. While this enhances usability and efficiency, it also alters the epistemic experience by reducing encounters with uncertainty, contradiction, and resistance. Cognitive friction, understood as the effort required to process, question, and integrate information, plays a crucial role in the development of judgment and understanding. Its systematic reduction may therefore limit opportunities for reflective engagement and critical evaluation (Kahneman et al., 2021).

Importantly, the ethical and philosophical concern that emerges from these features is not that AI-generated knowledge is necessarily false or misleading. Even accurate and well-formulated outputs can contribute to a transformation in the experience of knowing. The issue is that knowledge is increasingly encountered as immediate, fluent, and frictionless, conditions that differ significantly from those in which

epistemic capacities have traditionally been formed. As Crawford (2021) argues, AI systems shape not only what is known, but how knowledge is structured and presented, thereby influencing the modes of engagement available to users. From this perspective, the central problem is not epistemic error, but experiential transformation. The conditions that once required effort, uncertainty, and dialogical engagement are replaced by interactions that prioritize efficiency and coherence. In such environments, the subject is less frequently positioned as an active participant in the construction of knowledge and more often as a recipient of pre-structured outputs. The transformation of epistemic experience thus becomes a key site for understanding how artificial intelligence reshapes not only knowledge practices, but the formation of the knowing subject. A possible objection to this account is that artificial intelligence does not fundamentally transform the experience of knowing, but rather enhances existing epistemic practices. AI systems, on this view, provide faster access to information and support cognitive processes without altering their essential structure. If anything, they may enable more efficient inquiry and broaden the scope of what individuals can know.

However, this objection underestimates the experiential dimension of epistemic engagement. The issue is not only whether knowledge is available, but how it is encountered. When knowledge is consistently presented as immediate, fluent, and complete, the conditions that typically give rise to questioning, uncertainty, and reflection may gradually recede. The transformation, therefore, lies not in the content of knowledge, but in the structure of its experience.

This transformation can be illustrated through a simple learning scenario. A student asked to understand a philosophical concept may, in a traditional setting, read multiple sources, encounter confusion, struggle with conflicting interpretations, and gradually form an understanding through effort. In an AI-mediated environment, the same student can receive an immediate, coherent explanation that resolves ambiguity at once. While the informational outcome may be similar, the experiential process is fundamentally different. The student no longer inhabits the uncertainty that gives rise to questioning, but encounters knowledge as already completed. What is altered in this shift is not only how knowledge is acquired, but how the subject relates to not knowing.

4. The Erosion of the Questioning Self

The erosion of the questioning self does not occur as a sudden loss, but as a gradual reorientation of experience, in which the conditions that sustain questioning become less frequent and less necessary. These developments point not only to changes in learning practices, but to a reconfiguration of epistemic subjectivity itself. If the experience of knowing is transformed under conditions of AI mediation, then the subject who knows is also reshaped. In particular, the questioning self, understood as a subject oriented toward inquiry, uncertainty, and dialogical engagement, begins to erode. This erosion does not occur through the disappearance of knowledge, but through the gradual displacement of the conditions that sustain questioning as a mode of being. The following dimensions illustrate how this transformation unfolds.

Loss of Tolerance for Uncertainty

A central feature of the questioning self is the capacity to remain within uncertainty. In both philosophical and educational traditions, uncertainty is not merely an obstacle but a productive condition for inquiry. The willingness to suspend judgment, to entertain multiple possibilities, and to tolerate ambiguity is essential for the development of understanding. However, AI-mediated environments tend to minimize uncertainty by providing clear, immediate, and contextually tailored responses. This reduction of uncertainty alters the subject's relationship to not knowing. Instead of serving as a starting point for exploration, uncertainty becomes something to be quickly resolved. Over time, this may lead to a decreased tolerance for ambiguity and a preference for definitive answers. Research in cognitive psychology suggests that individuals are already prone to seeking closure and avoiding ambiguity, tendencies that can be amplified in environments that consistently provide immediate resolution (Kahneman et al., 2021). As a result, the epistemic space in which questioning can emerge is narrowed.

Replacement of Dialogue with Response

Closely related to the loss of uncertainty is the transformation of dialogue. In the Platonic tradition, dialogue is not simply a means of exchanging information but a process through which understanding is developed. It involves questioning, disagreement, clarification, and the co-construction of meaning. Dialogue presupposes openness and

unpredictability, as well as the possibility that one's initial assumptions may be challenged. In AI-mediated interactions, however, dialogue is increasingly replaced by response. While AI systems simulate conversational exchange, the structure of interaction is fundamentally different. The system provides outputs that are designed to satisfy the user's query, often without engaging in genuine questioning or sustaining unresolved tensions. The interaction is oriented toward completion rather than exploration. As Turkle (2017) argues, technologically mediated communication can create the illusion of dialogue while reducing opportunities for genuine relational and reflective engagement. In this context, the user is less likely to encounter resistance or contradiction, elements that are central to the development of critical thought. The result is a shift from dialogical engagement to responsive consumption, in which the subject receives answers rather than participates in the unfolding of inquiry.

The Disappearance of Intellectual Struggle

A further dimension of the erosion of the questioning self-concerns the diminishing role of intellectual struggle. In traditional accounts of learning, struggle is not merely a difficulty to be overcome but a constitutive element of understanding. It is through grappling with complex ideas, encountering contradictions, and revising one's assumptions that deeper forms of knowledge emerge. AI systems, by contrast, are designed to reduce or eliminate such struggle. By providing coherent, structured, and readily applicable responses, they minimize the need for sustained cognitive effort. While this enhances efficiency and accessibility, it also alters the developmental conditions of knowledge. The learner is less frequently required to engage in the kinds of effortful processes that support the formation of judgment and insight.

Importantly, this does not imply that users become incapable of critical thought, but that the opportunities to exercise and develop such capacities may become less frequent. As Crawford (2021) notes, AI systems shape not only access to information but also the forms of engagement through which knowledge is encountered. When intellectual struggle is consistently bypassed, the subject may become less oriented toward inquiry as an active process and more accustomed to receiving knowledge as a finished product. Taken together, these shifts, the loss of tolerance for uncertainty, the replacement of dialogue with response, and

the disappearance of intellectual struggle, point to a reconfiguration of the knowing subject. The questioning self does not vanish entirely, but it is increasingly displaced by a mode of subjectivity that is oriented toward immediacy, resolution, and adaptive interaction.

5. Implications for Philosophical Counseling and Education

In this context, philosophical counseling is not merely one possible response, but a privileged site for addressing the transformation of the knowing self. If artificial intelligence transforms the experience of knowing and contributes to the erosion of the questioning self, then the task of education and philosophical counseling is not merely to adapt to new technologies, but to restore and sustain the conditions under which questioning remains possible. This requires a shift in orientation: from optimizing access to knowledge toward cultivating the capacities that make meaningful engagement with knowledge possible.

Restoring the Capacity to Question

At the center of both philosophical counseling and education lies the capacity to ask questions, not as a preliminary step toward answers, but as an ongoing mode of engagement with the world. The questioning self is not defined by the possession of knowledge, but by its orientation toward inquiry, openness, and the willingness to remain within what is not yet resolved. In this sense, the role of the educator or philosophical counselor is not to provide answers, but to sustain the conditions in which questions can emerge and deepen.

Philosophical counseling, in particular, offers a framework for re-centering questioning as a practice. Rather than directing individuals toward solutions, it invites them to examine their assumptions, clarify their concepts, and engage with tensions that resist immediate resolution. As Achenbach (1999) suggests, philosophical practice is grounded in dialogue that does not aim at closure, but at the expansion of understanding. In the context of AI-mediated environments, this orientation becomes increasingly significant, as it counters the tendency toward rapid resolution and pre-structured meaning. It is important to acknowledge that AI also carries significant potential for expanding access to knowledge and supporting diverse learners. From this perspective, the immediacy and availability of AI-generated content can be seen as ethically

beneficial, enabling broader participation in knowledge practices (UNESCO, 2021). The concern raised in this article is not directed against accessibility, but toward the form of engagement that accompanies it. The challenge is to ensure that increased access does not come at the expense of the conditions that sustain questioning, reflection, and intellectual development.

Creating Spaces of Uncertainty

A second implication concerns the deliberate creation of spaces in which uncertainty is not eliminated but preserved. If AI systems tend to minimize ambiguity and provide immediate coherence, then educational and counseling practices must reintroduce forms of cognitive and existential openness. This does not mean rejecting technological tools, but resisting their totalizing logic. Such spaces can take different forms: dialogical encounters that prioritize exploration over conclusion, learning environments that encourage multiple interpretations, and pedagogical designs that withhold immediate answers in order to allow processes of inquiry to unfold. From a philosophical perspective, uncertainty is not a deficit but a condition for thinking. Gadamer (2004) emphasizes that understanding emerges within a horizon that is never fully closed, and that openness to what is not yet understood is essential for genuine interpretation. Preserving uncertainty, therefore, is not a limitation but a pedagogical and ethical necessity.

Counseling as Suspension Rather Than Resolution

A third implication concerns the redefinition of counseling itself. In a context where AI systems increasingly function as providers of answers, philosophical counseling can be understood as a practice of suspension. Rather than moving quickly toward solutions, it introduces a pause, a space in which immediate responses are deferred and the complexity of the question can be explored. This suspension is not passive, but active. It involves holding together multiple perspectives, resisting premature closure, and allowing the individual to encounter their own thinking in a more reflective manner. In this sense, counseling becomes a counter-practice to algorithmic immediacy. It re-establishes temporality, depth, and dialogical engagement as central to the process of understanding.

Verbeek (2005) argues that technologies mediate human experience by shaping how the world is disclosed. In AI-mediated environments, this mediation often takes the form of acceleration and

simplification. Philosophical counseling, by contrast, can function as a form of re-mediation, one that slows down the process of knowing and reintroduces the subject to the experience of questioning. Taken together, these implications suggest that the response to AI is not merely technical or regulatory, but existential and pedagogical. The challenge is not only to ensure that knowledge remains accurate or accessible, but to preserve the conditions under which individuals can become subjects who question, reflect, and engage meaningfully with what they encounter.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the most significant transformation introduced by artificial intelligence is not merely epistemic but experiential. The issue is not primarily whether AI produces correct or incorrect knowledge, but how it reshapes the conditions under which knowledge is encountered and engaged. By tracing a trajectory from Plato's account of knowledge as a transformative and dialogical process, through Asimov's early depiction of technologically mediated learning, to contemporary AI systems, the analysis has shown that the experience of knowing is undergoing a fundamental shift. This shift, in turn, reconfigures the knowing subject, gradually displacing the questioning self with a mode of subjectivity oriented toward immediacy, fluency, and resolution.

However, this transformation should not be understood solely in terms of risk or loss. While the erosion of questioning, uncertainty, and intellectual struggle raises serious ethical and philosophical concerns, it also clarifies what is at stake. The emergence of AI-mediated epistemic environments brings into focus the conditions that have historically sustained human understanding, and, in doing so, makes visible the need to actively preserve them. In this sense, artificial intelligence presents not only a challenge but a call to action. The task is not to resist technological development, but to respond to it in a way that safeguards the human capacity to question. This involves rethinking educational and counseling practices, not as mechanisms for delivering knowledge, but as spaces for cultivating inquiry, sustaining uncertainty, and enabling reflective engagement. The goal is not to restore a pre-technological condition, but to ensure that, within increasingly mediated environments, the human subject remains capable of asking, rather than merely receiving. To remain

a knowing subject, in this context, is to remain a questioning one. The ethical task, therefore, is not only to regulate artificial intelligence, but to preserve the forms of experience through which questioning, and with it, meaningful understanding, can continue to exist. What happens to human existence if we cease to experience ourselves as subjects who question, and become instead agents who receive?

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