

# Scientific AI for Cosmology and Beyond

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Jason D. McEwen

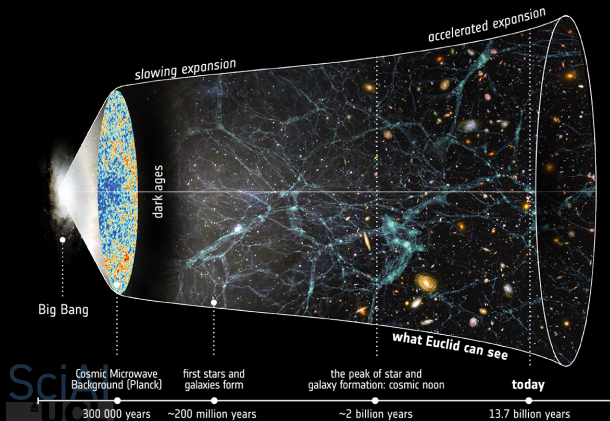
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University College London (UCL)

Alan Turing Institute

AI in Data Intensive Science & Industry, UCL, July 2025

# Towards a fundamental understanding of our Universe

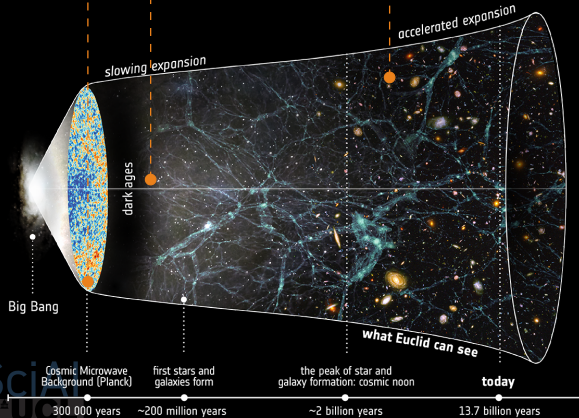


# Towards a fundamental understanding of our Universe

What is the origin of structure?

How did luminous large-scale structure form?

What is the nature of dark energy and dark matter?

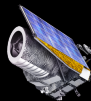
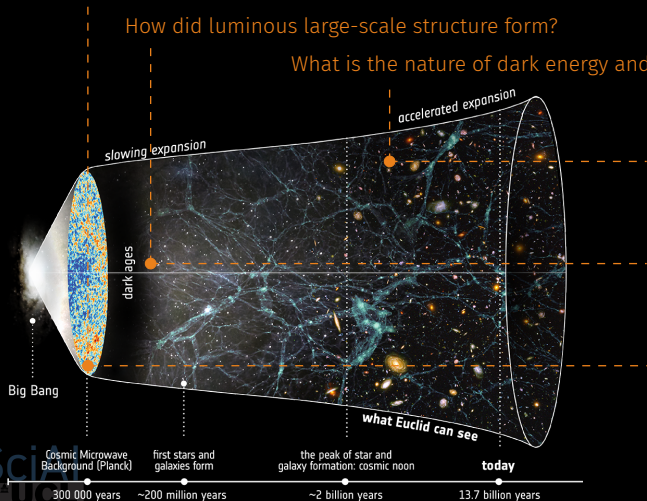


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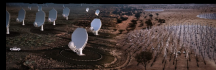
Euclid



Roman



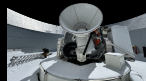
Rubin-LSST



SKA



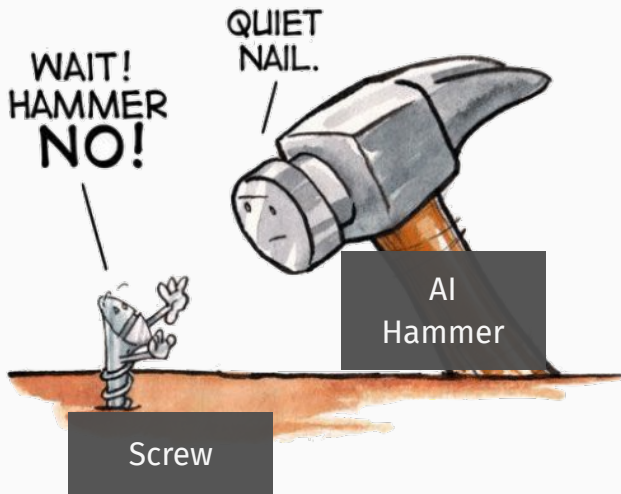
LiteBIRD



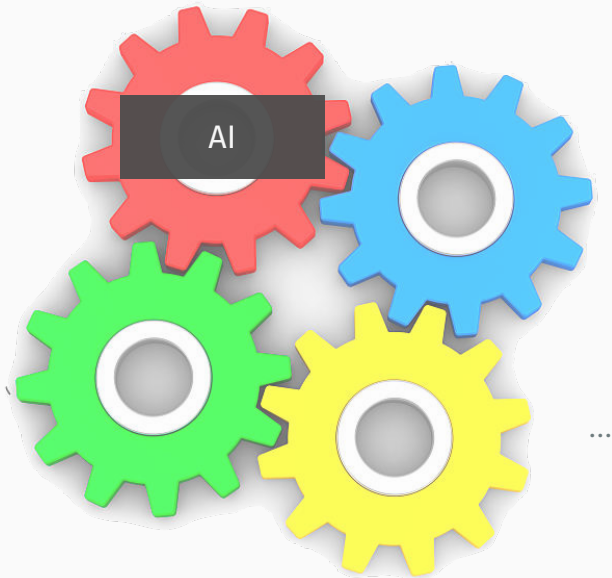
Simons



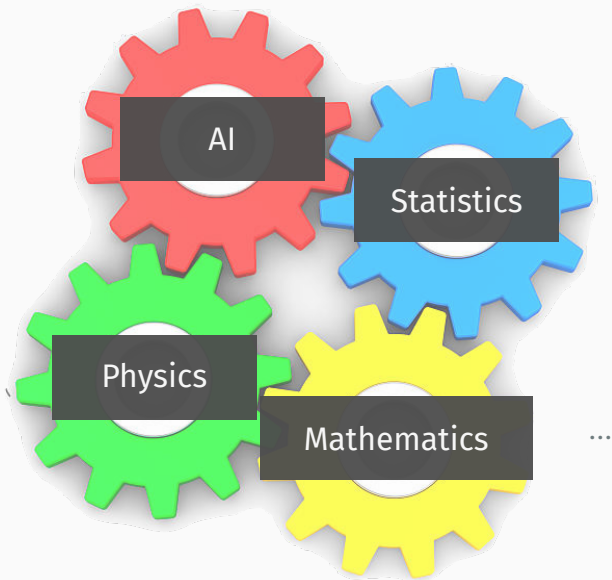
# The AI hammer



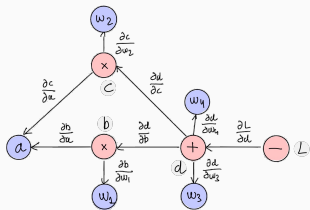
# The AI cog



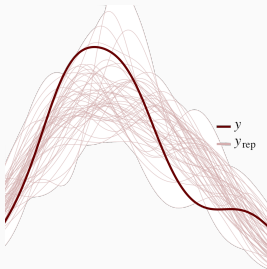
# The AI cog



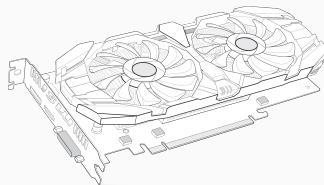
# Harnessing modern computing paradigms



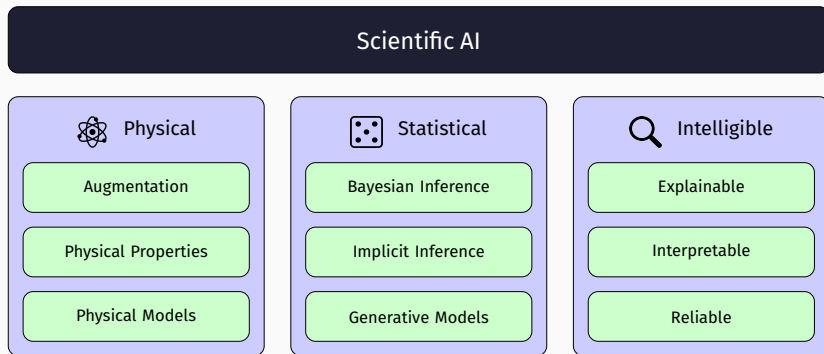
Automatic differentiation



Probabilistic programming



GPU acceleration



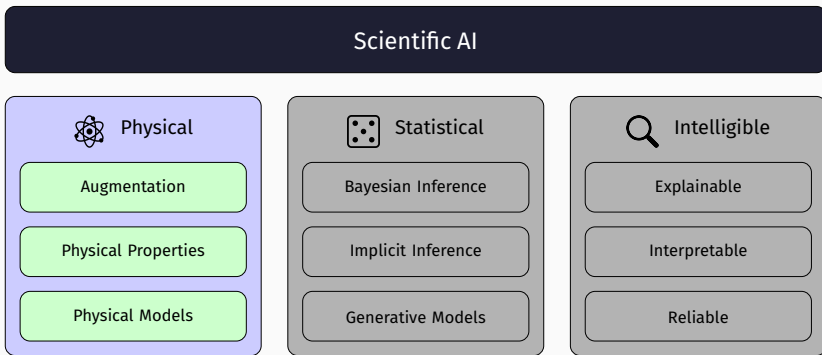
## Physics enhanced AI

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# Physics Enhanced AI

Embed physical understanding of the world into AI models.

(See review by Karniadakis *et al.* 2021.)





Apply **physical transformations** that data known to satisfy to augment training data  $\rightsquigarrow$  AI model learns physics through training.



# Augmentation



Apply **physical transformations** that data known to satisfy to augment training data  $\rightsquigarrow$  AI model **learns physics through training**.

- ▷ Common to augment image data-set with rotations, flips, shifts, scales, contrast, ...

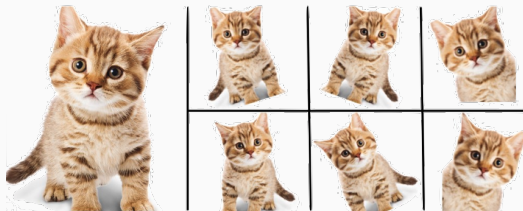


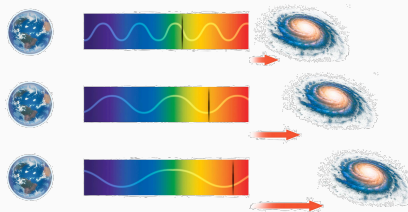
Image augmentation

# Augmentation



Apply **physical transformations** that data known to satisfy to augment training data  $\rightsquigarrow$  AI model **learns physics through training**.

- ▷ Redshift augmentation of supernovae  
(Boone 2019, Alves *et al.* (inc. McEwen) 2022, 2023)



Redshift augmentation

# Physical properties: geometries, symmetries, conservation laws



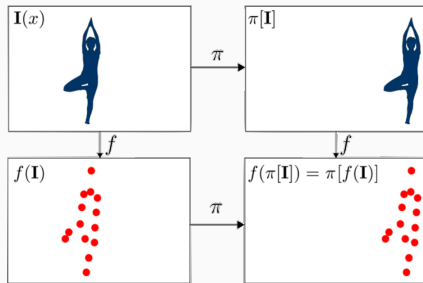
Encode physical properties of the world into AI models (e.g. geometry, symmetries, conservation laws)  $\rightsquigarrow$  Physics embedded in architecture of AI model.

# Physical properties: geometries, symmetries, conservation laws



Encode physical properties of the world into AI models (e.g. geometry, symmetries, conservation laws)  $\rightsquigarrow$  **Physics embedded in architecture** of AI model.

- ▷ Key factor CNNs so successful is due to encoding translational equivariance.



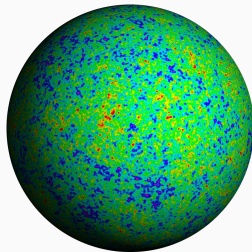
Translational equivariance

# Physical properties: geometries, symmetries, conservation laws



Encode **physical properties** of the world into AI models (e.g. geometry, symmetries, conservation laws)  $\rightsquigarrow$  **Physics embedded in architecture** of AI model.

- ▷ Geometric deep learning on the sphere  
(Cobb et al. 2021, McEwen et al. 2022,  
Ocampo, Price & McEwen 2023)



CMB observed on the  
celestial sphere

# Physical models: PINNS and differentiable physics

Encode physical models of world into AI models:



1. Encode dynamics (differential equations) via loss functions (PINNs).
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⇒ Physics learned in training and embedded in model.

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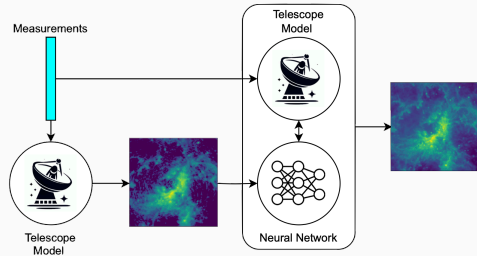
## ▷ Differentiable physical models

### ■ Instrument models

(Mars *et al.* McEwen 2023, 2024, Liaudat *et al.* McEwen 2024)

### ■ Physical models

(Piras *et al.* McEwen 2024, Spurio Mancini *et al.* McEwen 2024, Whitney *et al.* McEwen in prep.)



Hybrid physics-enhanced AI model  
(Mars *et al.* McEwen 2023, 2024)

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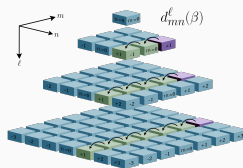
→ Physics learned in training and embedded in model.

## ▷ Differentiable mathematical methods

- Fourier transforms
- Spherical harmonic transforms  
(`s2fft`; Price & McEwen 2023)
- Spherical wavelet transforms  
(`s2wav`; Price *et al.* McEwen 2024)
- Spherical scattering transforms  
(`s2scat`; Mousset *et al.* McEwen 2024)



Jason McEwen



Initialise Recursion

$$d_{mn}^l(\beta) = \sqrt{\frac{(2l)!}{(\ell+n)!(\ell-n)!}} \left( -\sin \frac{\beta}{2} \right)^{\ell-n} \left( \cos \frac{\beta}{2} \right)^{\ell+n}$$

Execute Recursion

$$d_{m-1,n}^l(\beta) = \lambda_m a_{m-1} d_{mn}^l(\beta) - \frac{a_{m-1}}{a_m} d_{m+1,n}^l(\beta)$$

where  $\lambda_m = \frac{n - m \cos \beta}{\sin \beta}$  and  $a_m = \frac{2}{\sqrt{(\ell-m)(\ell+m+1)}}$

Avoid Singularities

$$d_{mn}^l(0) = \delta_{mn} \text{ and } d_{mn}^l(\pi) = (-1)^{\ell+m} \delta_{m,-n}$$

Differentiable and GPU-friendly recursions  
(Price & McEwen 2023)



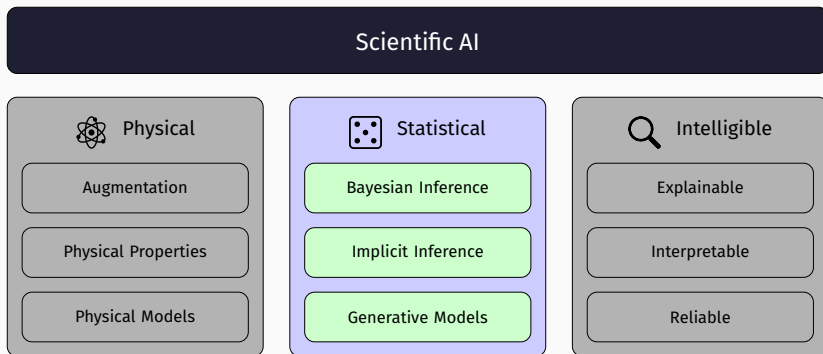
## Statistical AI

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# Statistical AI

Embed a statistical representation of data, models and/or outputs.

(See Murray 2022.)



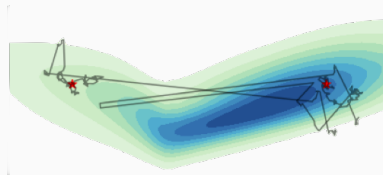


AI techniques can be integrated into Bayesian frameworks to **enhance accuracy and computational efficiency**, making some approaches accessible that were previously intractable.



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- ▷ Enhanced MCMC for parameter estimation (Grabrie *et al.* 2022, Karamanis *et al.* 2022).



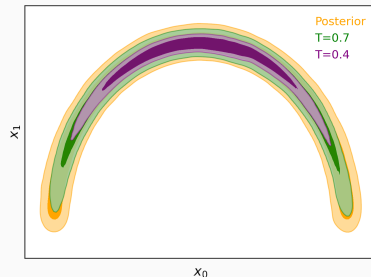
Learned proposal distributions

# Bayesian inference



AI techniques can be integrated into Bayesian frameworks to **enhance accuracy and computational efficiency**, making some approaches accessible that were previously intractable.

- ▷ Enhanced Bayesian model selection  
(**harmonic**; McEwen *et al.* 2021, Polanska *et al.* McEwen 2023, 2024, Piras *et al.* McEwen 2024, Spurio Mancini *et al.* McEwen 2023, 2024).



Learned harmonic mean estimator  
(**harmonic**)

# Implicit inference



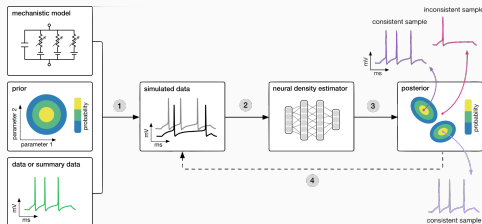
AI techniques can be used to **learn surrogates of implicit distributions** when they are not tractable or are computationally infeasible.

# Implicit inference



AI techniques can be used to **learn surrogates of implicit distributions** when they are not tractable or are computationally infeasible.

- ▷ Simulation-based inference (Cranmer *et al.* 2021).



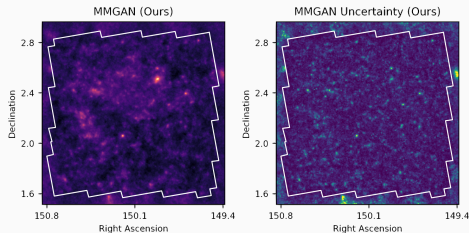
sbi

# Implicit inference



AI techniques can be used to **learn surrogates of implicit distributions** when they are not tractable or are computationally infeasible.

- Variational inference  
(Whitney *et al.* McEwen 2024).



Mass mapping with uncertainties  
by variational inference  
(Whitney *et al.* McEwen 2024)





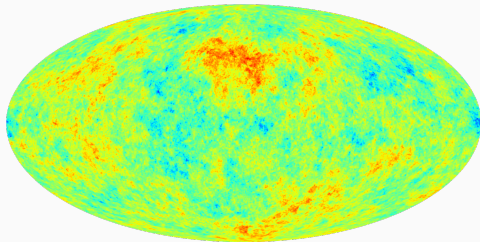
Generative models **learn a prior distribution** from data for sampling and/or evaluating probability densities.

# Generative models



Generative models **learn a prior distribution** from data for sampling and/or evaluating probability densities.

- ▷ Emulation: sample from learned prior  
(Price *et al.* McEwen 2023, Price *et al.* McEwen in prep., Mousset *et al.* McEwen 2024)



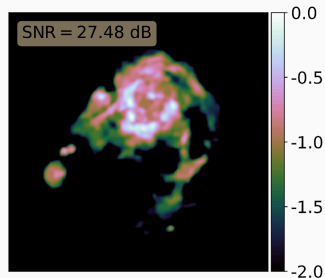
Emulated cosmic string maps  
(**stringgen**, Price *et al.* McEwen 2023,  
Price *et al.* McEwen in prep.)

# Generative models



Generative models **learn a prior distribution** from data for sampling and/or evaluating probability densities.

- ▷ Integrate learned priors into analysis  
(McEwen *et al.* 2023, Liaudat *et al.* McEwen 2024)



Learn radio galaxy prior  
(Liaudat *et al.* McEwen 2024)

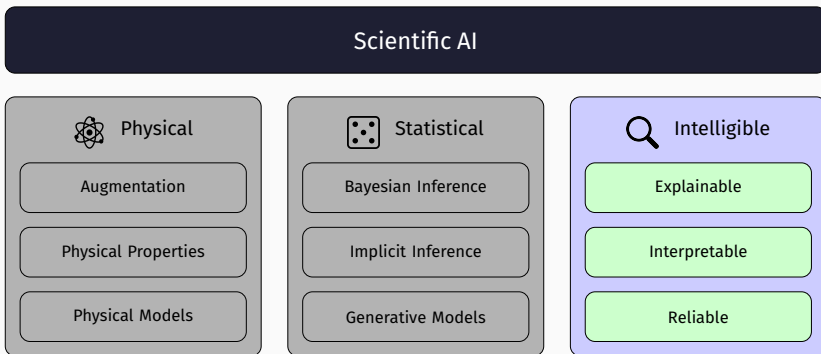
## Intelligible AI

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# Intelligible AI

AI methods that are able to be understood by humans and are reliable.

(See Weld & Bansal 2018, Ras *et al.* 2020.)



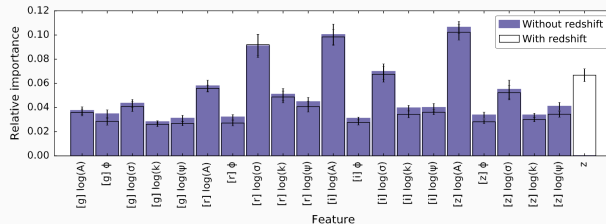


Explainable AI techniques may or may not be interpretable themselves but their outputs can be explained to humans.



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- ▷ Feature importances  
(Lochner, McEwen *et al.* 2016)

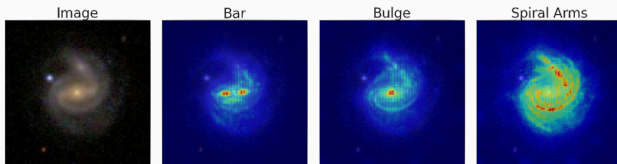


Supernova feature importances



Explainable AI techniques may or may not be interpretable themselves but their outputs can be explained to humans.

- ▷ Saliency maps  
(Bhambra, Joachimi & Lahav 2022)



Galaxy saliency mapping



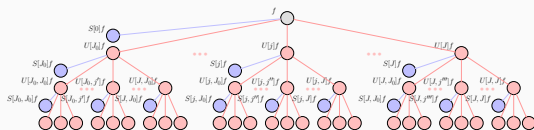


Interpretable AI models are **white boxes** that can be understood by humans.



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- ▶ Designed models such as wavelet scattering networks  
(McEwen *et al.* 2022, Mousset *et al.* McEwen 2024)

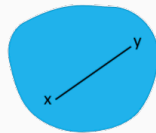


Scattering network (McEwen *et al.* 2022)



Interpretable AI models are **white boxes** that can be understood by humans.

- Interpretable constraints on AI models  
(Liaudat *et al.* McEwen 2024)



Convexity



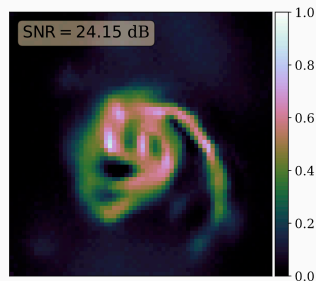
Uncertainty  
Quantification

Impose convexity on learned model



Interpretable AI models are **white boxes** that can be understood by humans.

- ▷ Deep priors learned from training data  
(McEwen *et al.* 2023, Liaudat *et al.* McEwen 2024)



Compute Bayesian evidence for  
model selection  
(McEwen *et al.* 2023)

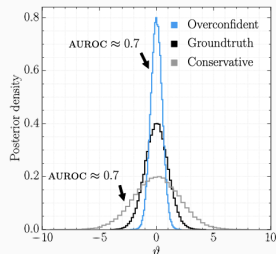


Reliability and validity **critical for science** to have confidence in results of AI models. Closely coupled with a **meaningful statistical distribution** of outputs.



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- ▷ Validity of statistical distributions  
(Lueckmann *et al.* 2021, Hermans *et al.* 2022, Cannon *et al.* 2023)

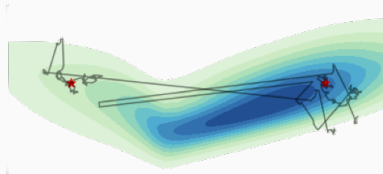


Validity of distribution  
(Hermans *et al.* 2022)



Reliability and validity **critical for science** to have confidence in results of AI models. Closely coupled with a **meaningful statistical distribution** of outputs.

- ▷ Integrate into statistical frameworks to inherit theoretical guarantees  
(McEwen *et al.* 2023, Liaudat *et al.* McEwen 2024, McEwen *et al.* 2021, Polanska *et al.* McEwen 2023, 2024, Piras *et al.* McEwen 2024)



Inherit guarantees from overarching statistical frameworks



Reliability and validity **critical for science** to have confidence in results of AI models. Closely coupled with a **meaningful statistical distribution** of outputs.

- ▷ Design to ensure conservative and avoid mode collapse (Delaunoy *et al.* 2022, Price *et al.* McEwen 2023, Whitney *et al.* McEwen 2024)



Recover probability distribution over full underlying data manifold (Price *et al.* McEwen 2023)

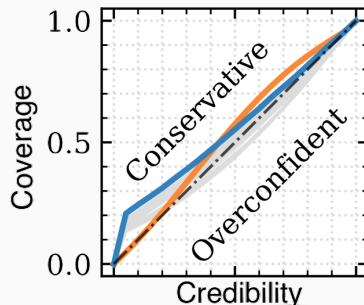




Reliability and validity **critical for science** to have confidence in results of AI models. Closely coupled with a **meaningful statistical distribution** of outputs.

▷ Extensive validation checks:

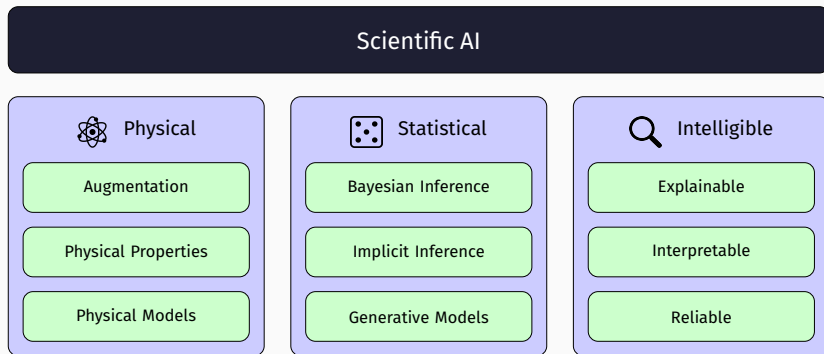
- Coverage testing (Lemos *et al.* 2023)
- Simulation-based calibration checks (Talts *et al.* 2020)
- Classifier two-sample tests (C2ST) (Lopez-Paz & Oquab 2017)
- ...



Coverage analysis  
(Cannon *et al.* 2023)

## Summary

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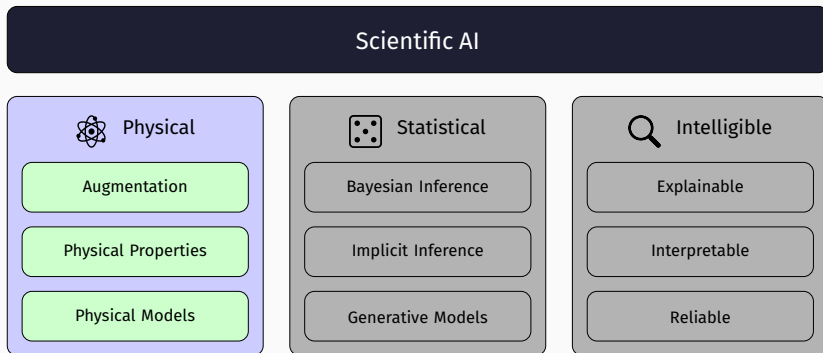


# Extra Slides

# Physics Enhanced AI

Embed physical understanding of the world into AI models.

(See review by Karniadakis *et al.* 2021.)



# Augmentation



Apply **physical transformations** that data known to satisfy to augment training data  $\rightsquigarrow$  AI model **learns physics through training**.



▷ Data efficiency suffers: data “used” to learn physics, rather than problem.



▷ Simple and easy to implement.

# Physical properties: geometries, symmetries, conservation laws



Encode **physical properties** of the world into AI models (e.g. geometry, symmetries, conservation laws)  $\rightsquigarrow$  **Physics embedded in architecture** of AI model.



- ▷ Inductive biases required? Should we just learn from data?
- ▷ Highly computationally demanding.



- ▷ Improved data-efficiency.
- ▷ Inductive biases not necessarily strictly enforced.
- ▷ Develop efficient algorithms (e.g. Ocampo, Price & McEwen 2023).

# Physical models: PINNs and differentiable physics

Encode physical models of world into AI models:



1. Encode dynamics (differential equations) via loss functions (PINNs).
2. Embed full (differentiable) physical models inside AI model.

⇒ **Physics learned in training and embedded in model.**



- ▷ PINNs only capture limited dynamics via loss.
- ▷ Full physical models requires differentiable programming frameworks.

- ▷ Capture full physics with differentiable models!
- ▷ Emulators also provide differentiability.
- ▷ Write new differentiable codes (e.g. `s2fft`; Price & McEwen 2023).

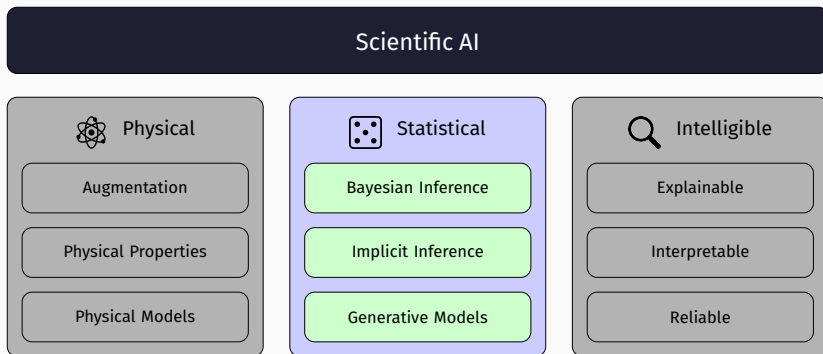




# Statistical AI

Embed a statistical representation of data, models and/or outputs.

(See Murray 2022.)



# Bayesian inference



AI techniques can be integrated into Bayesian frameworks to **enhance accuracy and computational efficiency**, making some approaches accessible that were previously intractable.



▷ Learned components (e.g. proposals) must satisfy appropriate properties.



▷ Enforce required properties on learned components.

▷ Inherit statistical guarantees of overarching Bayesian framework.

# Implicit inference



AI techniques can be used to **learn surrogates of implicit distributions** when they are not tractable or are computationally infeasible.



- ▷ Availability and representativeness of training data.
- ▷ Cost of training.
- ▷ Reliability?



- ▷ Public datasets/benchmarks (e.g. IllustrisTNG, CAMELS, Quijote, CosmoGrid, Gower St).
- ▷ Amortized inference (training **not** repeated for new observations).
- ▷ Integrate in Bayesian framework to provide some statistical guarantees.
- ▷ Statistical validation (hold that thought... see Reliability section).

# Generative models



Generative models **learn a prior distribution** from data for sampling and/or evaluating probability densities.



- ▷ Availability and representativeness of training data.
- ▷ Reliability, *e.g.* diversity of AI models often lacking.

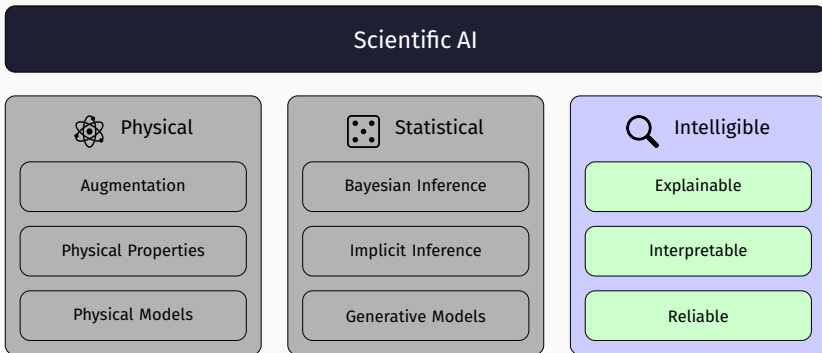


- ▷ Public datasets/benchmarks (*e.g.* IllustrisTNG, CAMELS, Quijote, CosmoGrid, Gower St).
- ▷ Meta sampling to recover distribution over manifold (*e.g.* Price *et al.* 2023).
- ▷ Reliability (hold that thought... see Reliability section).

# Intelligible AI

AI methods that are able to be understood by humans and are reliable.

(See Weld & Bansal 2018, Ras *et al.* 2020.)





Explainable AI techniques may or may not be interpretable themselves but their outputs can be explained to humans.



- ▷ Poking the black box.
- ▷ Humans still not able to comprehend underlying process.

# Interpretability



Interpretable AI models are **white boxes** that can be understood by humans.



▸ Designed models limit flexibility.



▸ Benefits of designed models often outweigh (minimal) reduced flexibility.



Reliability and validity **critical for science** to have confidence in results of AI models. Closely coupled with a **meaningful statistical distribution** of outputs.



- ▷ Uncertainties not always meaningful.
- ▷ Diversity of AI model often lacking.



- ▷ Integrate in statistical framework to inherit theoretical guarantees.
- ▷ Design to be conservative and avoid mode collapse  
(*e.g.* Price *et al.* McEwen 2023, Whitney *et al.* McEwen 2024).
- ▷ Extensive validation tests.
- ▷ Well-posed frameworks (*e.g.* physics enhanced, statistical).