### CAUSAL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



THE NEXT STEP IN **EFFECTIVE BUSINESS AI** 

WILEY

### Praise for Causal AI

I am delighted to welcome this exceptional book on causal AI, written by Judith Hurwitz and John Thompson, which bridges the gap between conventional methods of business analytics and modern techniques of causal analysis and machine learning. Business leaders and data scientists who are trained in prescriptive statistics, simulation, and optimization techniques will be happy to discover how critical problems in their field, commonly left to intuition or contentious judgment, can now be systematically conceptualized, articulated, and solved using simple techniques of causal artificial intelligence. These include predicting the effects of potential interventions, finding explanations for unexpected outcomes, testing the validity of one's assumptions, and combining data from several sources. The lucid exposition of this book and the variety of practical examples provided promise to make business analytics the new beneficiary of the causal revolution.

-Judea Pearl

UCLA chancellor professor emeritus in computer science, recipient of the A.M. Turing Award

As the authors describe in detail, the vast majority of AI today is based on statistical association rather than causality. Under many circumstances those results aren't sufficiently clear-cut to drive action. The world will eventually move toward causal AI, and this book will provide a head start.

—Thomas H. Davenport

distinguished professor at Babson College; author of All In on AI, Working with AI, and The AI Advantage Causality is no longer a purely academic sport. From Amazon to Spotify and Netflix, companies worldwide are investing in building causal systems to capture value where traditional machine learning and statistics fall short. Judith and John take a unique perspective on causality, focusing on the business side of things and shedding light on practical aspects of causality, which are no less than essential to any modern decision-maker.

### —Aleksander Molak

author of *Causal Inference and Discovery in Python*, community leader at CausalPython.IO

Judith's and John's book turns over all the proverbial stones revealing deep truths about causal AI and AI more generally. While they explore relevant topics like avoiding bias in AI, the realities of data federation, and many more, I was captivated by the care taken to relate the human and AI intersection. In this exploration, the authors illustrate how experts are important for AI developments to move past the "science fair stage" to tooling that reliably produces trustable outcomes with easy-to-understand utility.

-Michael Hay

digital infrastructure portfolio leader at Hitachi Vantara

The causal AI revolution is starting to have a huge impact on digital transformation. Being able to determine why events happened and how best to leverage or mitigate them has the potential to help management make better decisions and grow revenue. The vast amount of available technical knowledge and open-source tools means that the commercialization of causal AI is becoming a reality. This book provides an invaluable resource for business teams to gain insights into the way causal AI can transform business.

—Stuart Frost

CEO at Geminos Software

## Causal Artificial Intelligence

# Causal Artificial Intelligence

The Next Step in Effective Business Al

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey. Published simultaneously in Canada and the United Kingdom.

ISBNs: 9781394184132 (paperback), 9781394184149 (epdf), 9781394184156 (epub)

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#### Library of Congress Control Number: 2023942854

Cover image: © Arfandri Ilham/Getty Images Cover design: Wiley I dedicate this book to Warren, my partner in life.

—Judith S. Hurwitz

For my readers in the analytics community.

—John K. Thompson

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### **Foreword**

Dear Reader,

It is with great pleasure and enthusiasm that I introduce you to this exceptional book on causal AI, written by the brilliant Judith Hurwitz and John Thompson. As I embarked on my journey through its pages, I found myself intrigued by the depth of knowledge, clarity of explanations, and practical insights it offers. "Causal Artificial Intelligence: The Next Step in Effective Business AI" is a true gem for those seeking to comprehend the intricate world of causal artificial intelligence.

In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, the concept of causal AI has emerged as a source of radical innovation and a catalyst for transformation. It holds the key to unlocking the true potential of artificial intelligence, empowering us not only to predict and classify but also to understand the causal mechanisms that underlie complex systems. Through the lens of directed acyclic graphs (DAGs) and structural causal models (SCMs), pioneered by the eminent Prof. Judea Pearl, this book guides us on a remarkable journey of discovery.

One of the book's greatest strengths is its accessibility, making it a perfect companion for those who are eager to grasp the essence of causal AI but lack a formal background in the field. Whether you are a seasoned professional in the realm of business

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analytics or someone just stepping into this fascinating domain, Judith Hurwitz and John Thompson expertly demystify the core concepts, rendering them comprehensible to a wide audience. Their ability to translate complex theories into practical applications is commendable, making "Causal Artificial Intelligence" an invaluable resource for both novices and experts alike.

As you delve into the pages that follow, you will encounter crucial topics that lie at the heart of causal AI. Exploring the realms of explainability, you will discover how causal models offer an unparalleled understanding of why certain decisions are made by AI systems. In a world increasingly driven by algorithms, the book masterfully examines the biases that can be inadvertently embedded within these systems and provides valuable insights into mitigating such biases, ensuring fairness and equity in algorithmic decision-making.

Another significant facet the book illuminates is the vital aspect of robustness in AI systems. Through a meticulous exploration of DAGs and SCMs, you will gain a deep understanding of how to construct models that are not only accurate but also resilient to unforeseen perturbations and uncertainties. This robustness is crucial in building trustworthy and reliable AI systems that can be confidently deployed in real-world scenarios.

The book strikes a perfect balance between theory and practice. While it delves into the fundamental principles and theories that underpin causal AI, it never loses sight of the practical applications and real-world implications. The numerous case studies and examples provided throughout the book reinforce its relevance and enable you to connect the dots between theory and its practical implementation.

I have no doubt that this exceptional work will become an indispensable resource for professionals in business analytics roles. The knowledge imparted within these pages has the potential to revolutionize the way we approach artificial intelligence,

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enabling us to harness its power responsibly and ethically. Whether you are a data scientist, a decision-maker, or simply an enthusiast seeking to expand your understanding, this book will serve as an invaluable guide on your journey to master the intricacies of causal AI.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Judith Hurwitz and John Thompson for writing this remarkable book. Their passion for the subject matter is evident, and their ability to distill complex ideas into clear and relatable explanations is truly remarkable. Each chapter takes you on a journey, unraveling the intricacies of causal AI and imparting knowledge that is both insightful and actionable. Prepare to embark on a transformational voyage, unlocking the power of causal AI and embracing a future where we not only predict and observe but truly understand.

Enjoy the journey!
Sincerely,
Paul Hünermund
Assistant Professor of Strategy & Innovation
Copenhagen Business School

### **Preface**

In my view, causal AI is the next stage in the evolution of software because it is focused on being able to understand the causes and effects of events. As we discuss in this book, what has caused a marketing campaign to achieve the revenue objectives? Is the problem the campaign itself, or are there underlying issues that are impacting results? Is the cause of the disappointing marketing campaign because of a sudden competitive threat? Is there a problem with the company's reputation? What would the impact on revenue if the product price was reduced by 10 percent? Would a different type of marketing campaign result in better results? The underlying casual technology needed to address these problems is complex, and the approach is instrumental for business leaders to understand the potential impact. Therefore, unlike some earlier evolutions of AI, the value of a causal AI approach can have a direct and profound effect on business outcomes.

A plethora of books and articles already address causal inference—a field that must recognize Judea Pearl as a pioneer and visionary in causality. So, why write yet another book on the topic? The reason is straightforward—this book is written for technology-focused leaders who are not developers but are responsible for bringing new technology into their companies to

**XXIV** PREFACE

gain a competitive edge. In writing this book, I have spent countless hours speaking with leaders in the field and reading many articles and books. The goal of this book is to provide an understanding of why the field of causal AI is so important. It has the potential to truly transform how we use artificial intelligence to digitally transform business.

My journey through the complex world of software started more than 35 years ago. My experience in technology began when I joined a financial services company and was tasked with introducing emerging technology to various business units. The goal was to evaluate how the technology could help transform the competitiveness of the business. From that beginning, I went on to spend many years as a developer, strategy IT consultant, industry analyst, thought leader, and writer. Most recently, I joined Geminos Software, a causal AI company, as their chief evangelist. I credit my ability to begin to understand this amazing and complex technology to the insights and wisdom of the Geminos team.

While I have spent years delving into some of the most complex technologies, I have always put solutions in perspective by focusing on the needs of the business organization. No matter what position I have been in, I always asked some variation of the same questions: What is the purpose of a software platform, and how does it help the business flourish? Why is the technology important?

Since I have always focused on those key issues, it is not surprising that I have paid particular attention to some of the most complex emerging technologies. During my pursuit of learning and understanding the value of new offerings, I have coauthored 10 books and dozens of customized e-books all focused on explaining complex technologies to both business and technical audiences. My goal has long been to bridge the gap of how business

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and technology leaders must collaborate to be able to succeed. I have always believed that customers will not buy technology that they do not understand. Topics of the books I have coauthored include service-oriented architecture, big data, machine learning, and cloud computing. My two most recent books focused on cognitive computing and augmented intelligence. Both books have informed my journey to an exploration of causal AI.

As with any emerging technology, causal AI will evolve over the coming decade. The goal of this book is to provide guidance and an understanding for a business audience of the foundation of this important technology. As a participant in the world of emerging technologies, I felt it was the right time to put causal AI in perspective.

> —Judith Hurwitz May 2023

While writing this book on causal AI, generative AI burst onto the market with great excitement, fanfare, and disruption. I was asked by more than a few people who knew that I was involved in writing a book on causal AI if I should put this book on hold and focus my current efforts on generative AI. As with all reasonable suggestions and questions, I considered the change in direction. My conclusion was that while generative AI is transformative in relation to how people are employed, how work will be executed, the impact on productivity, and more, generative AI is not a new field of AI. Generative AI is an extension of, and a new way of combining, neural networks, unsupervised learning, supervised learning, reinforcement learning, and much larger models than we have seen before, but it is not a new field of AI, not the way causal AI is. Hence, my conclusion was that while my day job is dominated by determining how to design, leverage, govern, deploy, and use generative AI in an enterprise environment, this

**XXVİ** PREFACE

book on causal AI was still needed to raise the awareness of the power, value, and transformative nature of causal AI.

My main motivation for writing this book was to put an original book into the market that takes the dialogue relating to causal AI in a new direction—a direction that begins to draw the business, technical, and analytical communities into the dialogue.

In my research to expand my fundamental understanding of causal AI and the stage of development of this completely new field of AI, before the writing process began, I read nearly 100 pieces of original writing. All of the books, research papers, most of the blogs, and more, on causal AI immediately dove into the details of the calculus and related math underlying causal AI. I refreshed my understanding of calculus that I learned in graduate school. My knowledge of calculus was extended, sharpened, and revived, but I knew that this type of writing was a barrier to broadening and deepening my understanding of causal AI. I also knew that if it was a high barrier for me, then it was a complete showstopper for most people.

I knew that the audiences that I felt needed to know about causal AI were not, for the most part, going to wade through even a 10th of what I had read. I became excited about the opportunity to be among the first people in the field of data, analytics, and AI to develop and carry the message forward that causal AI was being developed, was a powerful new tool, and would be a significant advance in our arsenal of tools in our quest to document, model, and understand our world in a more complete manner.

I wrote *Building Analytics Teams* (BAT) after having built multiple analytics teams over the previous 37 years as a technologist and an AI practitioner. One of my goals, and my primary objective, in writing BAT was to help people from all walks of life who have more than a passing interest in being part of the fields of data, analytics, and AI to understand the real-world environment,

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the environment in the majority of enterprise-class organizations, and the real constraints and opportunities that are at play in working in the field of analytics. I wanted to help new college graduates to understand what working in analytics really looked and felt like. I wanted new managers to have a "how to" book on how to design, build, manage, and grow, their analytics teams, and I wanted, most of all, to help analytics professionals to not make the same mistakes that I made. I wanted to make their lives and journeys better. In BAT, I accomplished that goal.

My primary goal in writing this book is to help draw the business, technical, and analytical communities into an exploration of the emerging field of causal AI. I want those practitioners to buy and read this book to understand what is coming next. I want them to engage with the content to fire their imaginations about what they can do with causal AI and how causal AI is an entirely novel and new approach to AI that expands their toolset and puts the power of AI in the hands of the business users. In that respect, putting the power of AI in the hands of business users, causal AI has some similarities to generative AI, but only at a conceptual level.

I recognized that causal AI was a completely new field of AI, and I wanted to be part of the evolution, to be a messenger that raises the awareness of this impressive new area. I knew, and know, that once causal AI moves beyond the research phase into the early adopter phase, there will be a flurry of activity enabling early-mover companies to build and maintain a defensible and significant competitive advantage. This book is a call to action for those early-stage enterprise-class innovators to take notice of causal AI and to begin their process of investigating the potential of this technology and approach.

One of the early epiphanies that I experienced in researching the topic was that the underlying causal approach could be applied to any process. Historically, the causal approach was applied to **XXVIII** PREFACE

agriculture, healthcare, and specialty use cases such as dog breeding. But, as I looked back in time, all the way to ancient Greece, and then forward again to ages like the Renaissance and the Reformation, it was clear that philosophers, mathematicians, and academics of all types were touching on causality and slowly but consistently adding to the global corpus of knowledge related to causality.

This aggregation of knowledge reached an acceleration point in the past century, and causal AI gained a dedicated and devout following that drove the development of casual AI to a new level. Once I realized that the field of causal AI was racing forward, I wanted to write this book.

So, why did I write this book, or atleast my part of the book? I wanted to contribute to the understanding, adoption, and use of this incredible new toolset and technologies that we refer to as causal AI.

I hope that you enjoy reading and learning about causal AI as much as I did.

—John K. Thompson May 2023