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Note

Artificial Intelligence in the **Agentic Age**: What Are We Talking About?

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Executive Summary

"What if tomorrow your colleague were an AI?", "How AI will soon book your holidays for you", "Booking a restaurant, paying for your groceries with AI...": such press headlines have multiplied in recent months. Since 2022, debates on artificial intelligence (AI) have crystallised mainly around language models and conversational assistants, such as ChatGPT (OpenAI), Gemini (Google), Claude (Anthropic), or Le Chat (Mistral). But the range of what can be entrusted to AI is already expanding under the banner of "AI agents" or "agentic AI". The promise is as follows: to delegate a succession of tasks to a software suite incorporating AI, most often through a conversational interface.

AI agents give rise to great expectations and just as many questions: will there be a gradual replacement of human labour? What protection for users' data? What accountability in the event of errors? What transparency for these software systems? Will AI agents really make it possible to increase productivity significantly?

Despite the surrounding hype, agentic AI does not constitute a single technological breakthrough but corresponds rather to an evolution of software capabilities and infrastructures, driven by the refinement of generative AI and the emergence of large-scale infrastructures.

With this note, the CIANum is launching a series of works on the issues surrounding agentic AI. Addressing these questions first requires establishing a common basis for analysis: what is an AI agent? How do these systems work? What can we really expect from them? This first note aims to provide some initial elements of definition and accessible explanation in order to understand how they work, and the questions that arise from them.