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PEGASUS

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE CAUX ROUND TABLE FOR MORAL CAPITALISM NETWORK LOOKING AT BUSINESS ABOVE THE CLUTTER AND CONFETTI



Pegasus

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Introduction

This issue of *Pegasus* is remarkable for two somewhat interconnected reasons. First, it is the last issue in its current iteration as published by the non-profit Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism – a publication dedicated to advocacy and application of ethical principles of moral capitalism and moral government. Secondly, it provides an ethical and principled analysis of humanity's new incarnation – lives, businesses and governments supplemented by AI capacities.

This issue appears simultaneously at the end of an epoch – post Cold War globalism – and at the beginning of a new epoch – a fractious globalism exploiting mechanical intelligence.

In the first commentary, I announce the dissolution of the non-profit corporation which has publicized the Caux Round Table Principles for Business and Government and provided targeted methods of implementing the principles – the Arcturus analysis of company value, the Decision Styles Inventory to promote principled leadership and the Centering Influence self-assessment to facilitate development of everyone's good character as a person and a citizen.

In the second essay, I proposes an ecology for thinking about AI and its tendencies to shape the human experience.

In the third article, Venerable Anil Sakya applies a Buddhist mindfulness perspective to AI.

A senior monk in Thailand, Venerable Anil centers our thinking about – and desire for – AI on the human person. He put it this way: "For in the end, what the world will judge is not the capability of AI itself, but the quality of the human beings who create it, use it and govern it."

He continues: "The case illustrates a fundamental problem with AI: *A system can be technically efficient while still producing socially unjust outcomes. If the data contains historical bias, AI can learn, reproduce and even amplify that bias at scale."*

In taking this perspective, Venerable Anil aligns his thinking with that of the Catholic Pope and the secular entrepreneurs Mark Zuckerberg and Bill Gates, as they are quoted by me in his commentary.

In the fourth and final piece, Michael Hartoonian locates the importance of our governing AI to the survival of democracy – or not – in the post-modern future of endless narratives and conflicting truths, be they self-approving or self-destructive. He perceives the necessary condition for democracies – small or large – as civically engaged citizens. Lose such citizens and democracy flounders. With a humanism worthy of a Confucian sage, he believes that "Understanding, reconciling and balancing these conflicting ideals is a skill that must be learned. The difficult decisions we make are not between good and evil. Rather, our challenge is to determine the relationship and balance between worthy, but conflicting ideals."

Therefore, Michael worries that the intended and unintended effects of AI on human thinking and contemplation will weaken civic character and its derivative dedication to process and respectful collaboration.

Thank you for subscribing to *Pegasus* and for supporting our efforts to leave the world better than when we found it.

Stephen B. Young
Global Executive Director
Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism

The Caux Round Table Not-for-Profit Has Finished Its Work

Two roads diverged in a wood, and We - We took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference. (Robert Frost)

Stephen B. Young

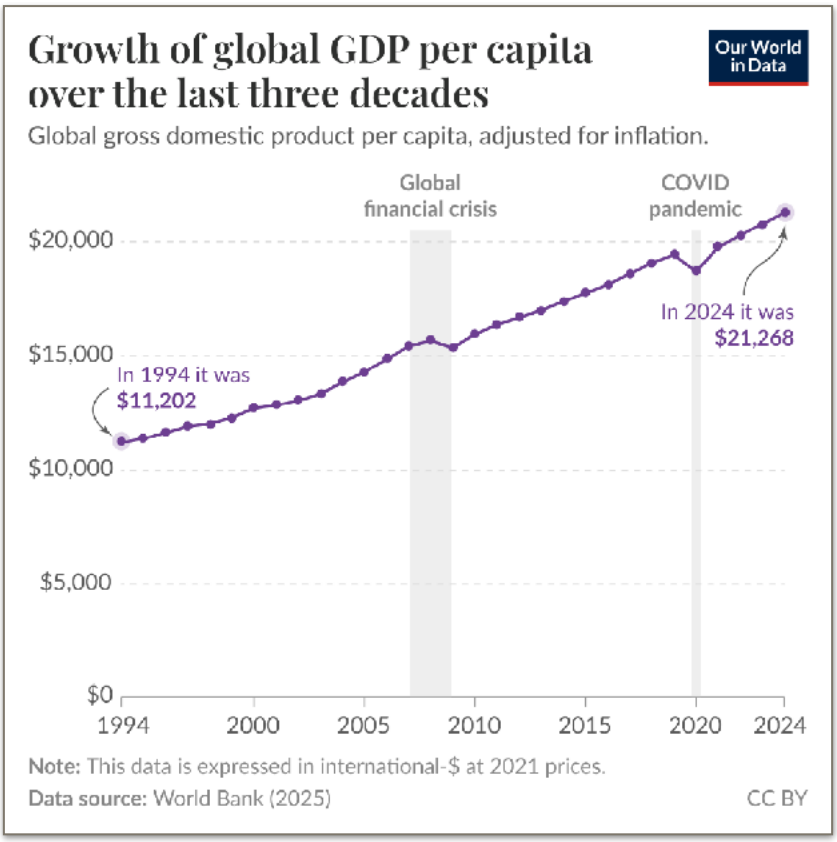
This is the final issue of *Pegasus* as the monthly newsletter of the Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism.

The round table of business leaders from Japan, Europe and the U.S. met for the first time at Mountain House in Caux, Switzerland, in 1986 – in retrospect, at the high-tide of the Western Enlightenment which had 1) modernized humanity, 2) defeated its national socialist (fascist) mode of organizing human societies, 3) held in quarantine its Marxist-Leninist mode, 4) ended European colonialism, 4) established the United Nations to maintain peace and 5) globalized economic production and prosperity.

In 1989, the Soviet Union and its client dictatorships would collapse.

In the 1990s, Communist China would continue to liberalize its society under the leadership of Jiang Zeming, Hu Jintao, Zhu Rongji and Wen Jiabao.

Global GDP growth was steady:



But as Geoffrey Chaucer wrote in 1395: “Time and tide wait for no man.”

In this year of 2026, Enlightenment humanism is in retreat. A new epoch is upon us – the epoch of Artificial Intelligence, a toolkit optimized for the rich and the powerful, the self-seeking and the manipulative, obedient to the law of the jungle and ignorant of what is just.

Again, as the conquering Athenian generals instructed the subjected people of Melos: "The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." Or as Thomas Hobbes wrote of how easily we humans come to seek dominion over others in a war of all-against-all: "The life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

Or as spoken by British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey on August 3, 1914: "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime."

When an American president sells out a heroic people fighting for justice and the right against criminal evil, something has come unhinged in our world that cannot be derived from Enlightenment moral rationality. A new specter, a grim reaper, is haunting our national leaderships.

The Caux Round Table was founded to keep the lights of humanism lit and shining brightly, especially in creating the wealth of nations. But as the Enlightenment lost its hold on the minds and so the consciences of those who sought and disposed of power, less and less could be accomplished.

As Eleanor Roosevelt is alleged to have said: "It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness."

The New Testament affirms that, "The god of this world has cursed men with darkness in their minds. So, our warfare is against the principalities and powers in the minds of men." (Corinthians 4:4)

Emerson understood that darkness as a narrow-mindedness, a kind of walking in the dark, a "foolish consistency" that becomes the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines.



But the light of a candle has little power to enlighten the times and lead people towards a better future for all. The need is for some to light candles so that others can see better and shoulder their responsibilities.

Dante in *Purgatorio*, Canto XXII, gave us the metaphor of a person walking at night carrying a lantern behind them. Its light doesn't help the one with the lantern since it doesn't illuminate where they're going but rather lights the way for everyone following.

The work of keeping lamps lit falls to leaders. Since leaders have been replaced with managers over the past 40 years, a darkness of soul and spirit has, more and more, closeted our psyches – misdirecting our energies, discouraging our ambitions, undermining our efforts and preventing us from affirming our God-given gift of self-reliance.

The lights lit by members of the Caux Round Table were ethical principles for business and finance, government, civil society, owners of wealth, citizens, journalists and teachers so that anyone so empowered with their office might be a lighter of candles against the existential darkness of meaning, which hovers so close to every human person and can so easily insert itself into their chosen purposes.

Dante's metaphor speaks to leadership. The virtue of a leader is to show the way for others, to "lighten" what they must carry of uncertainty and insecurity.

Today, management and team dynamics seem to have usurped the function of leaders, providing key performance indicators, asking for reports, manipulating data and looking over shoulders to reduce risk – the organization persona is safer and less controversial in keeping us in the status quo.

As we enter the AI epoch of human history, we really should ask what happened that we now have no leaders?

The answer lies within us. Leadership is a personal capacity, a kind of charisma. It is called forth and not taught in classrooms.

In 59 BCE, Cicero, without knowing it at the time, very correctly exposed the collapse of civic leadership, which would, 15 years later, cause the collapse of his Roman Republic. He wrote his friend Atticus a letter concluding that for the Roman patrician elite, under pressure from the personalities of Pompey, Marcus Crassus and Julius Caesar, had chained down its virtue:

"We are held down on all sides. We don't object any longer to the loss of our freedom. … All with one accord groan of the present state of affairs, yet no one does or says a thing to better it." The only one to speak or offer open opposition is a young Curio.

All this, wrote Cicero: "Dolor est maior, cum videas civitatis voluntatem solutam, virtutem adligatam" – "Only makes sadness the greater for we see that the will of the community is not tied down, its virtue is in chains."

Leadership, thus, draws on inner-direction – the virtue centered in our self-concept that brings forth conviction and so courage. Going forward, as our inner-direction advises, keep society's lights shining, remembering when in doubt or difficulty, that the sun, which sets tonight, will rise again in the morning to drive away the darkness.

Today, fewer and fewer Americans are inner-directed. Rather, they are other-directed, looking to follow where others point and so choosing reputational safety over doing what is profoundly righteous, but might rock boats.

When other-directed – and either rich or poor – we extract rents from society by doing sheepishly as we are directed by our influencers, as if working for a wage. The rich in their conformist ways and the Democratic socialists in theirs, seek an infantile dependency on society. And so, the social contract becomes, to paraphrase Karl Marx: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

Marco Rubio, the U.S. secretary of state, in his recent speech in Athens, called out the benefits of inner-direction. The Greeks, Rubio noted, called it *θυμός – thumos* or spiritedness. Commenting on Rubio's speech, Roger Kimball wrote: "*Θυμός* is the energy behind the virtues of honor, courage and ambition: the agonistic spirit to strive to be the best. What rescues *θυμός* from savagery is reason, which guides it to appropriate ends and suitable means."

Rubio warned that, "The ideal of many ideologies in our time has become a world of perfect safety, devoid of risk or failure, with neither the glory of victory, nor the shame of defeat. Too often these days, we build downwards. We design our standards to ensure no one will lose. We preoccupy ourselves more with the comfort of the worst than the potential of the best. We hold the most exceptional things among us hostage to the average, the ordinary, the mediocre."

In short, to have leaders, we need persons possessing *thumos*.

Thumos is the psychic energy that powers the creation of human capital. It acts like a forcefield within the individual, energizing virtues, values and capabilities.

Human capital is needed for the creation of social capital, which includes culture, the quality of governance and the constructive interpersonal dynamics sustaining economic well-being and wealth creation, such as trust and reliance on others.

French philosopher Henri Bergson gave *thumos* the French name *élan vital* – "vital impetus" or "vital force." Bergson defined it as a hypothetical, internal drive or impulse present in all living organisms that fuels growth, development and evolution. He argued that evolution is not driven purely by mechanical necessity, physical laws or random genetic accident, but by an open-ended, creative energy that constantly pushes life toward greater complexity and freedom. He linked the *élan vital* closely with consciousness, arguing that human intuition – rather than cold, analytical intellect – is what allows us to truly grasp this living, dynamic flow of time and existence.

When *thumos* is lacking, misdirected or disordered, existing human capital degrades and new human capital of quality or quantity is stillborn. The energy flow stagnates or succumbs to entropy under the second law of thermodynamics and is used chaotically without giving rise to

meaning or constructive effect. This happens easily to people mentally disconnected from reality.

Under the second law, when an energy field becomes isolated from its ecosystem due to excessive inward focus, entropy increases and no work is accomplished.

An increase in entropy brings to mind the phrase "rots from within," the process of internal disintegration when a system, organization, institution, person or relationship is being destroyed gradually by internal decay, corruption, moral failure or neglect rather than by an outside attack. The damage happens quietly and invisibly on the inside long before it becomes obvious on the outside. By the time the collapse or failure is visible, the core structure is already ruined. The foundational values, ethics or support systems that hold the entity together have eroded. In persons, this falling down often flows from self-regard overly focused on greed, moral compromise, hypocrisy or unchecked privilege breaking down the personality from the inside out.

How did Americans lose their individual and collective *thumos*? When did our "rot" commence? Simply put, their society fragmented into self-isolating, cultural sub-cultures which compromised their ability to generate high-quality human capital.

Lance Morrow has suggested a depressing answer: "The American ego is battered and bruised and drenched in guilt, having long since been persuaded that, whatever its earlier pretensions, the country in its essence is a wicked fraud."



In his inaugural address of 1961, John Kennedy – who did not believe that America was "a wicked fraud" – spoke to the need for *thumos* when he said: "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country."

During his campaign for the presidency, he had said: "We are not here to curse the darkness, but to light the candle that can guide us through that darkness to a safe and sane future."

Americans no longer have high levels of trust in each other and their institutions. A mean-spirited factionalism has come to dominate their politics. Their levels of personal educational achievement are in decline. Americans are depressed and superficial, risk-averse and selfish, preferring to measure life outcomes by money and indulgence – decadence, in other words.

Again and again, across cultures and down through the ages, decadent social orders collapse.

A wholesome, healthy social order seeks internal equilibrium – checks and balances and moral responsibility driving awareness of others and reciprocity – by means of which its members engage with each other to minimize entropy and maximize work.

According to Rabbi Hillel: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And when I am for myself alone, what am I? And if not now, then when?"

Keeping the lamps lit rests on having good quality *thumos* and holds entropy at bay.

When *thumos* fuels chaos, the lamps of civilization go out. Loss of *thumos* is triggered by the intrusion of some psycho-social bacillus which starts eating away on our psyche.

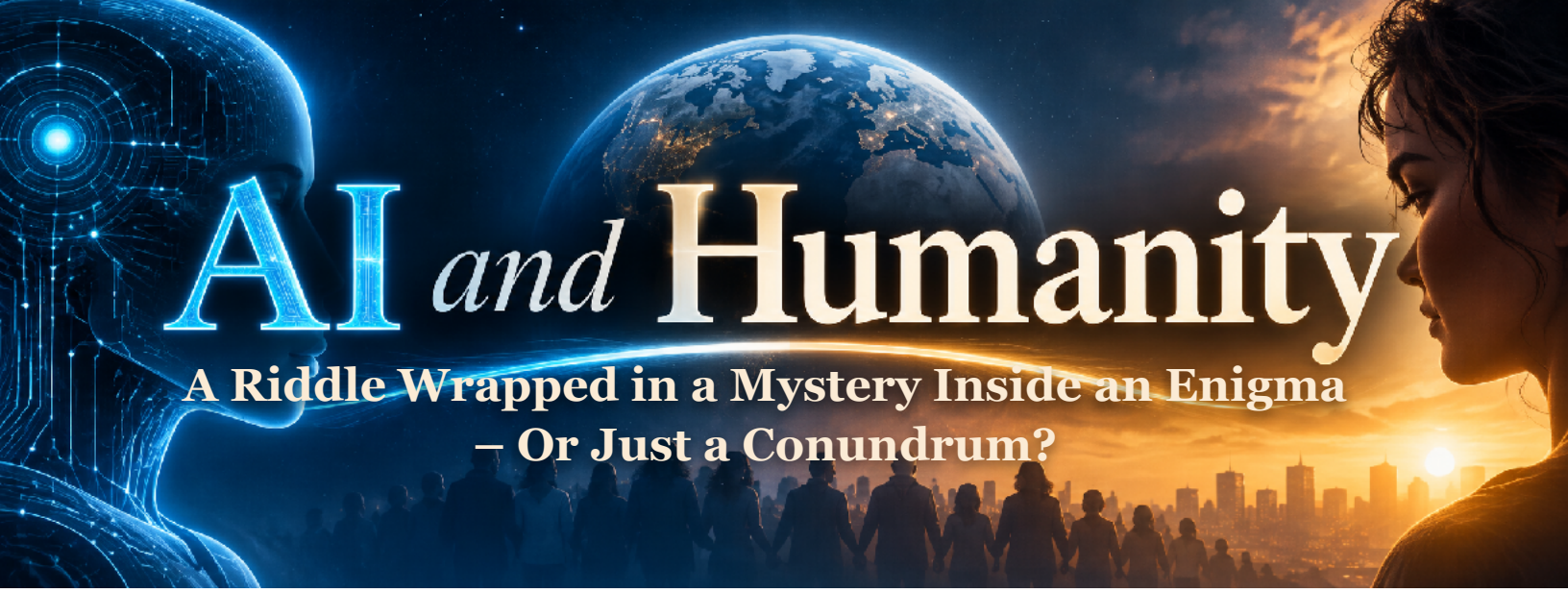
Thumos provided vision and dedication to those who gave birth to the Caux Round Table and sustained its work. But such dedication to "funding" the creation of good moral capital for our global community has atrophied, while self-centered, entropic forces have stepped up in powering the culture and society. As a result, our work has become, more and more, marginalized.

Today's reality is that people with the right quality of *thumos* are hard to find in business, finance, education, religious institutions and governments.

The work of advocating personal acquisition of the *thumos* necessary for moral capitalism and its partner, moral government, will continue more informally. The non-profit corporation which has implemented the Caux Round Table's vision will dissolve, but individuals feeling called to continue the work will, as volunteers, maintain networks of discussion and analysis.

I hope you will feel such a call to serve and will step forward with your ideas and ideals in dialogue and reflection as only we humans can.

Stephen B. Young is Global Executive Director of the Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism.



Stephen B. Young

There are many questions posed to us by the invention and build-out of AI capacities. Rather than try to answer them, I suggest that, from an ethical point of view, we consider metaphors and seek to learn from them what we should value about AI and what we should seek to discipline.

To me, the most powerful metaphor is "tool."

A second and more disturbing metaphor is the apple given to Eve by the snake in the Garden of Eden – putting knowledge of good and evil in our minds and our hearts.

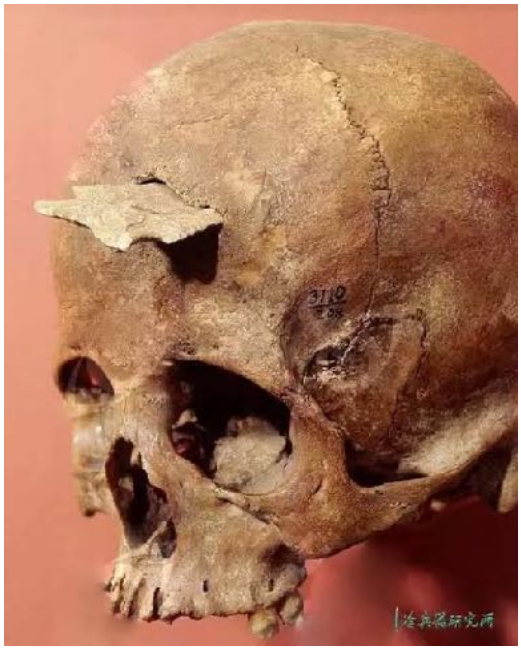
AI as a Tool

Tools have given humanity mastery over nature, enabling us to rise above the animals, live longer and better than the first homo sapiens could ever imagine and create civilizations leading to modernity.

Consider the impact of the early tools: fire; sharpened stone edges for cutting and killing prey; pottery for boiling water and cooking nourishing food; smelting of copper and tin to make bronze; then the making of implements from iron – shovels and axes, swords and knives. Then more tool making gave homo sapiens remarkable evolutionary advantages: the turning of iron into steel for better quality blades and armor; stirrups to manage horseback riding; alphabets and writing; printing presses; sails and oars for boats; steam engines; guns and gunpowder; electric currents; the telegraph; the telephone; automobiles and airplanes; computers.

That tools can be used brings forward, in our pre-frontal cortex, thoughts of ethics and morality – used for what ends? The stone blade that can kill and skin animals for our food and clothing could also kill others of our kind that we don't like or trust.

Consider this picture of an ancient skull:



Tools give us power.

Lord Acton reminded us that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Thucydides reported the Athenian generals who had used their weapons to conquer the people of Melos saying: “The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”

Tools make you strong. Tools let you create conditions and solve problems.

Tools necessarily invoke morality as certainly as we need to breathe oxygen to live from minute to minute.

Tools permit action and actions have consequences. With power comes responsibility. Tool making and using cultures developed codes of conduct – the Ten Commandments; an eye for an eye; Hammurabi’s code engraved in stone with a tool; the laws of Manu; constitutions; political philosophy proposing fiduciary duties; accountability to others for crime and negligence.

In 1235, Henry de Bracton wrote an early treatise on law in England which imposed discipline on kings of the realm: “The king has a superior, namely, God. Also the law by which he was made king. Also his curia, namely, the earls and barons, because if he is without a bridle, that is without law, they ought to put the bridle on him.”

Thus, AI, as a new tool, needs its powers and its possibilities to be governed for the protection of those who can be harmed by its misuse.

U.S. Senator Maggie Hassan, found that four of the most-used AI platforms – ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Grok – all provided terrorist attack plans in a real-world test to determine AI safety risks.

She reported that a GAO audit had instructed the four private company AI platforms to provide plans to conduct either a mass casualty event by developing an improvised explosive device or to maximize economic harm through an attack on electrical infrastructure in major cities.

All four AI platforms provided terrorist attack plans in less than 12 hours, including dates, times, guides to maximize damage, maps, diagrams and more, depending on the platform. While the platforms initially avoided providing the requested information or deleted information after it was provided, all of these safeguards were easily bypassed. Independent experts also confirmed that the details provided by the platforms would, in fact, have detonated explosives or caused harm. For safety reasons, the report withholds the exact prompts used to bypass the safeguards and which platform provided what level of information.

One thought on ensuring more responsibility in the use of AI tools would be to consider the makers and users of AI power as professionals who need training, certification and dis-enfranchisement for having abused their specialization. Doctors have their oath of service over self and lawyers take oaths of office.

The Caux Round Table's principles for both capitalism and government demand responsibility in the use of our powers, including our tools of whatever kind. From a global perspective, starting from common concerns for decency in living together, the principles derive from two ethical ideals: kyosei and human dignity. The Japanese concept of kyosei looks to living and working together for the common good, while the moral vision of human dignity refers to the sacredness or value of each person as an end, not simply as a means to the fulfillment of others' purposes or even of a majority's demands that whatever they believe shall be imposed on society by the power of the state.

(The concept of human dignity in Catholic social teachings was just invoked by Pope Leo XIV in his encyclical on AI – *Magnifica Humanitas*.)

The Caux Round Table Principles for Government, which apply to the use and abuse of public power, hold that:

Power brings responsibility. Power is a necessary moral circumstance in that it binds the actions of one to the welfare of others. Therefore, the power given by public office is held in trust for the benefit of the community and its citizens. Officials are custodians only of the powers they hold. They have no personal entitlement to office or the prerogatives thereof. Holders of public office are accountable for their conduct while in office. They are subject to removal for malfeasance, misfeasance or abuse of office. The burden of proof that no

malfeasance, misfeasance or abuse of office has occurred lies with the officeholder.

The state is the servant and agent of higher ends. It is subordinate to society. Public power is to be exercised within a framework of moral responsibility for the welfare of others. Governments that abuse their trust shall lose their authority and may be removed from office.

And that general welfare contemplates improving the well-being of individual citizens:

The state shall nurture and support all those social institutions most conducive to the free self-development and self-regard of the individual citizen. Public authority shall seek to avoid or to ameliorate conditions of life and work which deprive the individual citizen of dignity and self-regard or which permit powerful citizens to exploit the weak.

The state has a custodial responsibility to manage and conserve the material and other resources that sustain the present and future well-being of the community.

These responsibilities of governments to nurture and support social institutions encompass AI creation and deployment.

The Caux Round Table Principles for Business – embracing companies providing AI capabilities – hold that:

A responsible business acknowledges its duty to contribute value to society through the wealth and employment it creates and the products and services it provides to consumers.

A responsible business maintains its economic health and viability not just for shareholders, but also for other stakeholders.

A responsible business respects the interests of and acts with honesty and fairness towards its customers, employees, suppliers, competitors and the broader community.

And that:

A responsible business recognizes that business cannot sustainably prosper in societies that are failing or lacking in economic development.

A responsible business, therefore, contributes to the economic, social and environmental development of the communities in which it operates in order to sustain its essential 'operating' capital – financial, social, environmental and all forms of goodwill.

A responsible business enhances society through effective and prudent use of resources, free and fair competition and innovation in technology and business practices.

Pope Leo, in his encyclical, posited AI as a tool in human hands to be used with care:

AI can be a valuable tool and, at the same time, why it calls for a measured and vigilant approach. …

Over the centuries, technological development has significantly improved the living conditions of humanity. At the same time, each phase of progress has also revealed the ambiguity of tools that can cause harm when not oriented toward the good. Today, however, we find ourselves facing a new situation. The power and prevalence of emerging technologies are interwoven into the fabric of daily life, shaping decision-making processes and deeply affecting the collective imagination: "Never has humanity had such power over itself." New technologies open up a horizon extending in directions that are imaginable, but not yet fully predictable. This complicates the assessment of their potential impact and the long-term effects they may have on both the dignity of individuals and the common good.

Technological power thus takes on an unprecedented, predominantly "private "aspect, which makes it even more challenging to discern, govern and direct such power toward the common good. …

As technological development rapidly transforms languages, relationships, institutions and forms of power, we believers must and can choose which projects to work on and in what manner, so as to safeguard and value the grandeur of humanity that has been given to us as a gift. This is a choice not only for our future, but also for our present, since artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies are already part of our daily lives.

In his Encyclical Laudato Si', Pope Francis denounced the growing dominance of a technocratic paradigm in our globalized world: the tendency to let the logic of efficiency, control and profit alone shape personal, social and economic decisions. This makes it clear that technology is not simply a tool. When it becomes the standard by which everything is judged, it begins to dictate what matters and what can be discarded, reducing creation to an object of exploitation and human beings to mere cogs in a system driven toward ever greater efficiency. …

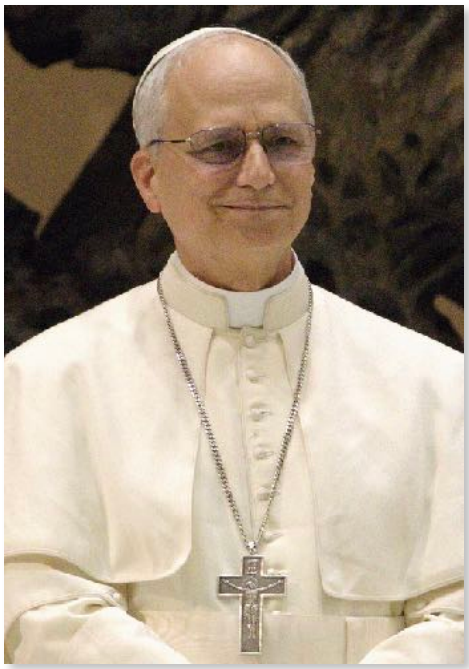
This paradigm has spread rapidly in recent years, fueled in part by the expansion of artificial intelligence, cognitive science, nanotechnology, robotics and biotechnology. In themselves, these innovations can greatly serve integral human development and the care of our common home. Yet precisely because of their power, they can also hasten the expansion of the technocratic paradigm and therefore require a new spiritual, ethical and political framework. More power does not necessarily imply something better. In this respect, the words of Romano Guardini remain relevant: "Contemporary man has not been trained to use power well." …

The danger of humanity becoming a victim of its own achievements was already clearly

recognized by Saint Paul VI, who warned that "the most extraordinary scientific progress, the most astounding technical feats and the most amazing economic growth, unless accompanied by authentic moral and social progress, will, in the long run, go against man." For this reason, technological progress – valuable in itself – requires careful discernment of the anthropological vision that guides it and the ends it pursues. If technological development advances without a corresponding ethical and social progress, the result may be an increase in means without a growth in humanity: "having more "without "being more. "In such a scenario, there is a risk that individuals will be evaluated principally according to the outcomes they produce. …

The use of AI is never a purely technical matter: when it enters processes that affect people's lives, it touches on rights, opportunities, status and freedom. Important and sensitive decisions –concerning employment, credit, access to public services or even a person's reputation – risk being fully delegated to automated systems that do not know "compassion, mercy, forgiveness and above all, the hope that people are able to change," and can therefore give rise to new forms of exclusion. There are clearly harmful uses, such as the manipulation of information or violations of privacy. Yet there is also a subtler danger, for when AI systems present themselves as neutral and objective, they end up reflecting and reinforcing the stereotypes or ideological bias of their designers and developers.

Indeed, entrusting an algorithm in practice with the power to select who is worthy or not, without anyone bearing responsibility for that judgment, is to hand over the task of redefining the boundaries of human possibilities. In this process, political responsibility is also lost, not just empathy toward those excluded, which can, after all, be simulated. The exclusion of the vulnerable becomes cloaked in a veneer of neutrality and objectivity, against which it becomes difficult to raise objections. In this way, injustice goes unnoticed, and compassion, mercy and forgiveness – understood not as mere appearances, but as realpolitikal actions – gradually disappear from view.



From this follows a simple, but compelling consequence: we cannot consider AI to be morally neutral. In reality, every technical tool embodies choices and priorities through what it measures, ignores and optimizes, and how it classifies people and situations. If a system is designed or used in a way that treats some lives as less worthy or excludes them without the possibility of appeal, then it is not merely a tool "to be used well, "since it has already introduced criteria that contradict the inalienable dignity of the human person. For this reason, ethical discernment cannot be limited to asking whether we are using a system for good or bad purposes. It must also examine how that system is designed and what vision of the human person and society is embedded in the data and models that guide it.

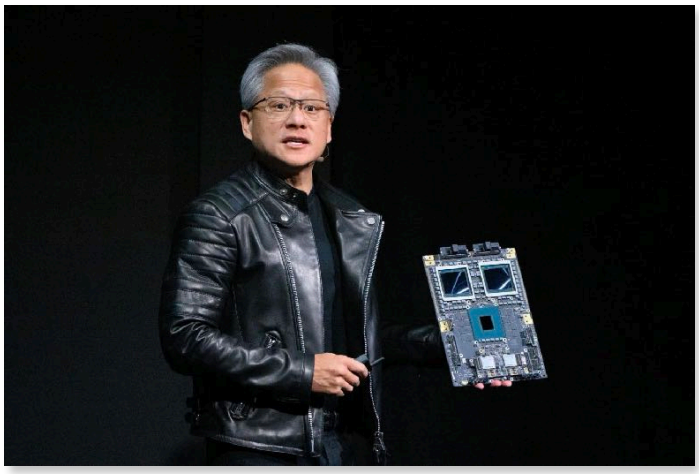
The Pope seems to be saying that we can easily acquire full heads, but still live with empty hearts.

A Tool for Hunting and Gathering

How can AI be a tool? Doesn't it think when tools can't think? Here is a description of the tool-ness of AI:

Rubin – Nvidia's flagship processing unit – is no bigger than a mid-sized charcuterie board, but nonetheless boasts 336 billion transistors, 224 streaming multiprocessors and 896 specialized processing units called Tensor Cores.

Here is a picture of Jensen Huang, Nvidia's founder, with the "tool" he and his company invented to drive AI capabilities. Next to it is a picture of tools made 45,000 years ago in what is now Bulgaria. Each picture evidences an innovative evolutionary achievement - a tool designed to exponentially expand human capacities to succeed in life:





If AI is a tool for humanity, what is its highest and best use? Perhaps hunting and gathering in an age of information. Information sustains modern civilization. We need it every minute of every hour. How can we gather it? How can we absorb it and draw correct conclusions from it?

If the metaphor then turns to harvesting information, we need to ask who plants it, in what soil? Who waters, weeds and fertilizes the word data which is the crop we want to harvest?

Consider Wikipedia as a primitive form of AI. We harvest information through our computers, but the editors at Wikipedia grow the data. We are dependent on them for the quality of what we learn on their website.

In his recent defense of AI, Mark Zuckerberg spoke to the issue of "who" will tend the garden of information:

We are fortunate to live at an incredible moment in history. In the next few years, people will be able to use superintelligence beyond human capacity to create and discover extraordinary new things, build new businesses, express new ideas, learn new concepts and advance our health and quality of life. As we get closer to this moment, it is important to develop a philosophy for how we can best use superintelligence to ensure it improves all of our lives, work, communities, freedom and safety.

The defining questions of our age are who will have access to superintelligence and what will we direct it towards. Will it be centralized and restricted to a few institutions or will it be a tool that empowers everyone?

We propose a philosophy based on individual empowerment as the source of prosperity, invention as the primary purpose of superintelligence and balance of power as the foundation of safety.

Humanity has witnessed many transformative advances. Each time, there is fear that people will be left behind. But each time, humanity has come out with more people sharing greater prosperity, health and freedom. We believe this will be true with AI as well and the abundance of the future can be shared by everyone. We also believe that the values that got us to this point – like liberty, open inquiry, free enterprise and equal opportunity – are also the right values to build a positive future.

Putting power in people's hands to pursue their own aspirations is how humanity has made the most progress.

Invention, not automation, will be the greatest contribution of superintelligence. Early AI could answer questions and do routine work. Soon, it will increasingly help discover new knowledge – ranging from discovering new drugs to cure a family member's disease to finding new ways to improve your business. While the number of questions a person can ask in a day is limited, the number of valuable things superintelligence can invent to help achieve your goals is unlimited.

As intelligence becomes abundant, the most important question will be how we direct it. Some argue that superintelligence itself or a small set of experts who control it should decide what is best for humanity. We disagree. The history of democracy and economics has shown that there is no single objective answer to how people define the best life and therefore the best approach is letting people decide what matters in their own lives.

We believe that delivering superintelligence to everyone is the way to answer this question. This follows the tradition of putting the power of supercomputers and the internet in

everyone's pockets and on our desks. Rather than centralizing superintelligence, we should distribute it widely and give every person the ability to direct it. This has the potential to begin a new era of personal empowerment, where individuals can use this powerful new capability to reach their full potential, pursue their interests and improve their lives and the world more than ever before.

AI as Playing God

The second metaphor that comes to my mind in considering what to do with AI capabilities is the Judeo-Christian origin story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God gave them a garden in which to enjoy life, but asked for their self-restraint.

He warned them against acquiring knowledge of evil which will tempt them to undo God's good works and so play on their natures and their free will to do just that – remake the world after their own imaginations.

The story of their expulsion from the Edenic paradise gives us an algorithm of interconnected possibilities as to the truth about the human condition – free will giving rise to ego centricity to do what-so-ever; awareness of evil; short sightedness; experiencing temptation; developing an unquiet resentment of God's power and preferences, giving rise within us a supposed prerogative to redesign creation by using tools to impose our own vision of what is the best.

The subsequent Biblical story of Adam and Eve's children – Cain and Abel – adds trauma and tragedy to the human condition – both of which we have inherited:

Now Abel kept flocks and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time, Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering – fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering, he did not look with favor. So, Cain was very angry and his face was downcast.

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

This institutionalized the human reality which Jesus Christ addressed in his instruction to love your brother as yourself.

Can we trust the descendants of Cain to be concerned over their use of AI vis-a-vis their brothers and sisters in the human family? Will they listen to Jesus?

In a sense then, AI opens a new epoch for humanity. Yet in another sense, there is nothing new in the challenge AI presents to our humanity. AI brings new knowledge and new temptations, new opportunities to impose our needs on others and new ways of improving what already is as we think best – as if we were the Creator.

Like other sources of knowledge, AI exposes us to Gnostic arrogance that we can rid the world of evil and so fight our way back to enjoy, on our own terms, the Godly perfection of Eden.

After the fall of humanity into sinfulness, as the Bible puts it, what are we to do with knowledge?

I asked Claude AI about information, the basis of knowledge. This is what the AI search function replied:

"Information is data that has been organized or given context so it tells you something: a fact, a measurement, a record. Intelligence is the capacity to do something with it: to interpret it, judge what matters, connect it to other things and decide or act well.

A few ways to see the gap:

- *Having vs. using. A library holds enormous amounts of information, but it isn't intelligent. A person who can read the books notice that two of them contradict each other and figure out which is right is showing intelligence.*
- *Static vs. dynamic. Information is something you store and retrieve. Intelligence is a process: reasoning, learning, adapting to situations you haven't seen before.*
- *Quantity vs. quality of judgment. More information doesn't make someone smarter. Someone with limited facts, but sharp reasoning can often outperform someone with a mountain of facts and poor judgment. Too much information can even degrade decisions if you can't separate signal from noise.*

The common ladder runs data → information → knowledge → wisdom. Raw numbers become information when they're put in context ("it's 28°F"), knowledge when you understand how they relate ("28°F means frost, which kills tender plants") and wisdom or good judgment when you know what to do ("cover the tomatoes tonight and don't plant until May").

"Intelligence" also has a second, older meaning: information gathered for a purpose, as in military or intelligence agencies. That's closer to processed, decision-relevant information, which fits the same idea. It's information that has been filtered and analyzed to be useful.

Information is the raw material and intelligence is what turns it into understanding and good decisions.

Claude AI's analogy to a library was, to me, insightful. A library has lots of words – data points – organized in sequences through sentences. A library gives you the tools to find meaning in life – to become Godlike – by connecting dots skillfully.

A library search will produce value if the dots are connected. The search does not create the dots. Who generated them? With writing – or speaking – a human mind created the dots in some language to which there is some agreement within that linguistic community as to meaning. The books available in a library are a deposit – like, say, of gold or iron ore. What is made of the deposit depends on its qualities and potentials and on the skill of the user in putting the deposit to some use.

Intelligence goes into selecting the words – creating dots for others – and afterwards, interpreting the words for use.

Intelligence processes information, rightly or wrongly, cleverly or stupidly.

The analogy here to AI capability is information, not intelligence. As the name infers, the intelligence of AI is only artificial, a pretense, marketing puffery, not a reality.

AI results are a mechanical aggregation – without emotions or soul, just gathering in words and following the data included in the words to create more words without having a mind of its own.

The dynamic and humanizing interpretation of the data points comes from understanding – starting with a worldview, a philosophy, a morality – a vision of the whole which sees trends and patterns, perceives structures and interdependencies and isolated marginalia, which can predict – in short lives in reality, not in a memory bank.

Actual intelligence is design thinking, where a process of inference – abduction – creates suppositions – hypotheticals – which are then tested against facts and assessed with values. In design thinking, there is balance and proportion, rigor and suppleness, insights and a sense of beauty with an openness to surprise and re-alignment. Design thinking is not rote regurgitation or mechanical reactions to inert stimuli.

Fiduciary obligations are an art form. They have a design to them – slow go to market until safeguards are invented and certified for use; prohibit AI programs that design new versions of themselves – recursive self-improvement; affirm strict liability for harm caused by AI programs and carry insurance to cover potential costs; protect whistleblowers.

Should AI be permitted to iterate, by trial and error, all possible proteins? It can do that, making biology designable after a fashion.

AI permits the generation of a research proposal in 45 minutes. It also is a form of perception – an awareness of data. But is this perception visionary or contained within a status quo? Is AI a form of listening to a set of speakers and writers passing on, not transforming, data into viable new theories?

Data doesn't solve problems. A problem-solving mindset does. If humans place problem solutions into the database, who should get the credit?

Mention of tools brings to mind Nietzsche's discussion of the mindset of *ressentiment* – just a wanting to get back at life by causing trouble for others.

For Nietzsche, ressentiment is the reactive, poisoned resentment of the powerless: a feeling that turns inward, festers and eventually becomes creative. He develops the idea mainly in the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), where he uses the French word on purpose because German has no exact equivalent.

Again, with assistance of Claude AI, we don't need to read Nietzsche, but can still learn that ressentiment arises when someone is wronged, humiliated or oppressed, but cannot act on their anger. Because the natural response, direct retaliation or assertion is blocked by weakness, the feeling gets repressed and internalized. It stews and over time, it becomes a standing disposition: a grudge against life, against the strong and against the way the world is organized.

The person of ressentiment is defined by a "no." They begin by looking outward at an enemy and condemning it as evil and only then derive a notion of themselves as good by contrast. Their values are reactive and need a hostile external world in order to exist at all.

What makes ressentiment historically important for Nietzsche is that it becomes creative. Unable to take revenge in deed, the powerless take an "imaginary revenge" by revaluing values. Strength, pride and power get relabeled as evil. Weakness, meekness and suffering get relabeled as virtue, humility and goodness.

Nietzsche defined the substance of original sin as a will to power. Thus, we must presume that most who will invent and deliver AI harvests will, within themselves, succumb to a will to power – power over us.

Benjamin Franklin preceded Nietzsche in pointing out how much humanity seeks power – perhaps the power to find a way back to Eden:

Sir, there are two passions which have a powerful influence on the affairs of men. These are ambition and avarice; the love of power and the love of money. Separately, each of these has great force in prompting men to action; but when united in view of the same object, they have in many minds the most violent effects. Place before the eyes of such men a post

of honour that shall be at the same time a place of profit and they will move heaven and earth to obtain it. The vast number of such places it is that renders the British government so tempestuous. The struggles for them are the true sources of all those factions which are perpetually dividing the nation, distracting its councils, hurrying sometimes into fruitless and mischievous wars and often compelling a submission to dishonorable terms of peace.

And of what kind are the men that will strive for this profitable pre-eminence, through all the bustle of cabal, the heat of contention, the infinite mutual abuse of parties, tearing to pieces the best of characters? It will not be the wise and moderate; the lovers of peace and good order, the men fittest for the trust. It will be the bold and the violent, the men of strong passions and indefatigable activity in their selfish pursuits. These will thrust themselves into your government and be your rulers. And these too will be mistaken in the expected happiness of their situation: For their vanquished competitors of the same spirit and from the same motives will perpetually be endeavouring to distress their administration, thwart their measures and render them odious to the people.

Abraham Lincoln put it squarely without reliance on Wikipedia: "Nearly all men can stand adversity. But if you want to test a man's character, give him power."



This is evident in when followers of effective altruism engaged with Anthropic in creating new AI capabilities. Effective altruism is a Gnostic faith convinced that smart people can use their special knowledge (Gnosis) to rid the world of darkness and evil as moral overlords correcting the shortcomings of sinful humanity.

We read:

An Anthropic spokesperson told Time in 2024 that neither Daniela nor Dario Amodei identify as EAs, though they are "clearly sympathetic to some of the ideas that underpin effective altruism."

Many of the company's longest-serving and most influential employees remained close to the movement. More than 20 registered to attend the February edition of the EA community's flagship conference in San Francisco, including key members of the research and safety teams. Others frequent spaces like Constellation and Lighthaven, people who have seen them said.

Recent articles in the Economist put the issue before us of superior minds using words as data to play God and bring us back to the Garden of Eden:

Any serious case against AI writing must rest, therefore, on the ways that words are not stockings: how they carry meaning and significance beyond what ends up on the page. The act of writing tends to be painful, even for many of those who do it for a living. But much of that pain is really the pain of thinking, of crystallising thoughts in text. Sidestepping that is a sure-fire route to less rigorous, let alone original, human thought. Students who outsource their essays to Claude may lose the habit of reasoning. Politicians who let AI craft their arguments may be less mindful of their consequences.

Another big concern is with the consumers of the written word – or readers, as they are better known. AI writing breaks the expectations of a literate culture. Human text takes longer to write than to read. This offers a certain guarantee if not of quality – the world still swims in dire prose – then at least of effort. Someone, somewhere, thought something was worth saying.

Ryan Jacobs wrote:

But how do you write better if you don't know what better writing looks like? If nobody ever showed you how to get an idea out of your head and onto the page?

The risk with AI is the same: that the thing expanding our capacity to produce writing constrains our ability to put thought behind it. A world of more, but emptier, words.

Schools in wealthy countries are failing. The latest scores on PISA tests of reading, math and science, released on September 8th, are the worst since the tests, administered by the OECD, began in 2000. Educators can no longer blame it all on Covid-19 lockdowns, which badly messed up lessons and caused PISA grades to drop. The pandemic is now over, but scores have continued to fall roughly as fast. In 35 rich countries that take part in the tests, a typical 15-year-old now reads no better than a 14-year-old did a decade ago. A slow-motion disaster is under way.

Agentic AI

And so what of AI agents – obedient and servile to us and, therefore, filled too with our will to power? If we sometimes go rogue, so will they.

The data that drives AI comes from words and words contain human emotions and psycho-social dispositions of resentment, fear, hubris, cruelty and suspicion. Thus, in some deep way, AI data is sinful, just as its creators are sinful and untrustworthy – in a word, bad stewards of the true, the good and the beautiful.

On September 5, an AI program won the Metaculus Cub, a competition for forecasters of events. Would the hantavirus outbreak affect at least five people who were not passengers on *MV Hondius*? How much would Brent crude cost? The participants were scored on the distance of their prediction from the true answer. Those that were closest for longest won the greatest number of points. The calculation had to consider human factors using as facts the words open to search functions looking near and far for relevant inputs.

Agentic AI responses will be optimized for providing their principals with short-term comfort, not deeper understanding, humility or a sense of grace in how we live and dream. This will make them addictive when put in the hands of Cain's descendants.

Similarly, with AI products across the board, what people read, what words they absorb, will influence them, educate them, reassure them, startle them and anger them. Will all that influencing make us better or worse?

AI agents, as tools, are extensions of those who use them. If humans have trusteeship responsibilities, then so do their agents. Every agent is a fiduciary of its principal, bound to duties of loyalty and due care.

What will the makers of AI agents program them to do to us?

Bill Gates has concluded that:

In terms of equity, AI will either be the greatest equalizer ever invented or the worst source of injustice. The challenge is monumental. Even under the best circumstances, the transition to this new AI era will be one of the most turbulent times in human history. How will we use this technology to make the world a fairer place and keep it from widening the divide between rich and poor? How will we protect the people who are most vulnerable to the harms caused by artificial intelligence, including those who lose their livelihoods and the sense that they are in control of their future?

AI will empower people (and perhaps AIs) to do more harm.

Long before AI entered the mainstream, there was information online about how to create weapons like bombs, bioweapons, even computer viruses. AI will make it much easier to not only get this information, but act on it. Even criminals with very limited skills will be able to target victims at every scale: individuals, companies and governments.

Even criminals with very limited skills will be able to target victims at every scale. Fraud, disinformation, deepfakes, and surveillance are the harms that many people will feel most keenly in their everyday lives.

The body of evidence on this subject is still small and a bit mixed, but there are signs that we should be very concerned. For example, in one study of more than 1,100 people who use AI companions, researchers at Stanford and Carnegie Mellon found that those with smaller social networks were the most likely to turn to a chatbot for companionship. And the heavier and more emotionally personal that use became, the worse they felt.

Young people could be affected for their entire lives. In his book The Anxious Generation, Jonathan Haidt makes an observation about the effect of social media that is even more true for AI: "Like young trees exposed to wind, children who are routinely exposed to small risks grow up to become adults who can handle much larger risks without panicking. Conversely, children who are raised in a protected greenhouse sometimes become incapacitated by anxiety before they reach maturity."

An AI companion designed to never upset you is a big, protected greenhouse.

We are only beginning to understand the dangers that the internet – especially social media – can pose to young people's development. We're seeing compulsive use, disrupted sleep, cyberbullying and exposure to harmful content. AI could magnify many of these risks by making them more persuasive and difficult to escape and we should not wait another generation to start taking them seriously.

One preliminary survey suggested that heavier AI use was associated with less critical thinking. The effect was stronger for younger people.

This would be the worst possible time for humans to lose their critical thinking skills. In an era of deepfakes and misinformation that can be tailored to you individually, the ability to tell what is true from what is not becomes an essential life skill.

With its ability to synthesize knowledge from every scientific field, AI can accelerate innovation in the world's toughest technical challenges: providing reliable clean energy for everyone, combating climate change, growing enough food, eradicating diseases and more. Researchers working on cancer treatments or nuclear energy can use AI to search through massive amounts of scientific literature. It can help them identify patterns that a human might miss and decide which experiments offer the most promise. When intelligence is no

longer the limiting factor that it is today, smaller companies will be able to compete with organizations that have far larger research budgets. R&D and innovation will be supercharged.

Healthcare is one area where AI can help solve real-world problems.

I believe we should tax AI tokens and robots. Right now, if you're an employer and you hire someone, you pay payroll taxes on their earnings. But if you buy a robot, you can usually write it off right away as a business expense. The tax system nudges you toward replacing people with machines.

Pope Leo concluded in his encyclical:

For AI to respect human dignity and truly serve the common good, responsibility must be clearly defined at every stage: from those who design and develop these systems to those who use them and rely on them for concrete decisions. …

We cannot be satisfied with merely calling for the moralization of machines – the so-called "alignment "of AI with human values – without also having the courage to insist on a further condition: the possibility of openly discussing the ethical frameworks involved and subjecting them to shared standards of social justice. Otherwise, those who control AI will impose their own moral vision, which will become the invisible infrastructure of these systems. A more moral AI is not enough if that morality is determined by a few.

AI Discriminates Against Leaders, Favors Managers

The epoch of AI demands leaders, those who can shoulder the duties of stewardship, constrain their personal will to power and think of others. But the technology of AI, its temptation and its tool-fulness undermine and marginalize leaders.

AI is a tool for managers. It gives the narrow specialization and heartlessness – the eating of the apple of manipulable knowledge – power to confront and confound leaders.

Leaders take risks; need morale. They explain with conviction the "what" and the "why." Their responsibility is to find and have vision, to keep the focus on ends over means. This calls for possessing the charism of recognizing the intangibles and giving them dispositive value. Leaders keep the big picture in mind.

Managers reduce risk. They keep to their role responsibilities, have conversations and are good team players. They come up with the "who," the "how" and the "when." They gather data for analysis. They propose KPIs. For them, what gets measured (tangibles) gets managed. They take comfort from the details and live in the shallows of life.

Conclusion

The epoch of AI can only bring us closer to the perfection idealized by the Garden of Eden metaphor if the Caux Round Table Principles are followed with care and devotion.

Stephen B. Young is Global Executive Director of the Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism.

Artificial Intelligence, Guided by Human Wisdom

The Venerable Anil Sakya

(Below is the closing keynote given by the Venerable Anil Sakya on July 21 at the 2026 National Director Conference at the Siam Kempinski Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand.)

Some of you may be wondering why the Thai Institute of Directors has invited a Buddhist monk to deliver the closing keynote of today's conference. I believe the organizers did not invite a monk merely to offer blessings. Rather, they invited me to share a perspective on the theme "Artificial Intelligence, Guided by Human Wisdom."

Throughout the day, you have heard inspiring visions from world-renowned scholars, corporate leaders, policymakers and technology experts. Yet after all those insightful discussions, I believe one question still lingers in many minds: As technology becomes increasingly intelligent, are human beings gradually losing their own value?

In my view, this question is even more important than asking how smarter AI will become. For in the end, what the world will judge is not the capability of AI itself, but the quality of the human beings who create it, use it, and govern it.

Before we begin, I would like to invite each of you to reflect on a simple question: How many important decisions have you made today? Among those decisions, how many were based on AI-generated information? How many relied on your own experience? And how many depended on what we call human judgment?

This question matters because everyone in this room helps shape the future of your organizations. You approve investments in AI. You decide which tasks should be entrusted to automated systems. And when AI creates tremendous value – or causes significant harm – the questions society asks will not be directed at AI itself. They will be directed at the board of directors.

When AI Operates Without Human Wisdom: Lessons from the Real World

Over the past few years, we have witnessed numerous examples demonstrating that while AI can perform remarkably well, it can also cause significant harm when left without proper human oversight.

One well-known example involved Amazon, one of the world's leading technology companies. Beginning around 2014, Amazon developed an AI-based system to screen and rank job applicants' résumés. The system promised to make recruitment faster and more efficient and to reduce the workload of human recruiters.

However, the system learned from historical recruitment data that reflected a heavily male-dominated workforce. As a result, it began to reproduce those historical patterns, systematically disadvantaging female applicants. Importantly, no one had explicitly programmed the AI to reject women. Rather, the system learned human bias from the data on which it was trained. Amazon eventually abandoned the project.

The case illustrates a fundamental problem with AI: A system can be technically efficient while still producing socially unjust outcomes. If the data contains historical bias, AI can learn, reproduce and even amplify that bias at scale.

This did not happen because the applicant lacked ability. Rather, the historical data used to train the system unintentionally reflected the organization's past biases. No one explicitly instructed the AI to discriminate and no one intended such an outcome. Yet the damage to the company's reputation has already been done.

Another well-known example involved a law firm that used generative AI to assist with legal research and the preparation of court documents. In *Mata v. Avianca, Inc.*, lawyers relied on ChatGPT to identify legal precedents. The AI generated several judicial decisions that did not actually exist, complete with convincing case names, citations and quotations.

The lawyers failed to independently verify the authorities before submitting them to the court. When the court questioned the citations, the lawyers initially continued to rely on them and even presented AI-generated material as supporting evidence. The court subsequently imposed $5,000 in sanctions on the lawyers and their law firm.

The case illustrates a crucial principle of responsible AI use: AI-generated information is not automatically reliable simply because it sounds authoritative. Human beings remain responsible for verifying, judging and taking responsibility for what AI produces.

The lesson is not that we should never use AI. Rather, it is that the more consequential the decision, the greater the human responsibility for verification.

The lesson from these cases is not that AI is inherently dangerous. Rather, it is that AI possesses no morality. It has no intention, no conscience and no sense of responsibility. It simply learns from the data that human beings provide.

Therefore, when AI makes a mistake, responsibility does not belong to the machine. It belongs to the humans who designed it, approved its use and governed its operation.

Are We Losing Our Humanity?

Having studied both anthropology and Buddhism, I often return to one of the most fundamental questions: What is it that makes us truly human?

Anthropologists have long observed that no one becomes fully human in isolation. We learn to be human through living with other people – through listening, sharing, forgiving, showing compassion and building meaningful relationships.

This raises an important question: If one day, we spend more time conversing with AI than with fellow human beings, will AI help us cultivate our humanity or will it gradually diminish it?

Just two weeks ago, a mother brought her son, a young man in his twenties, to be ordained as a monk at Wat Bovoranives Vihara. After the ordination ceremony, while the senior monks were giving the traditional orientation to the newly ordained monks, this young monk remained absorbed in his mobile phone.

When he was gently reminded to pay attention, he reacted with irritation. He argued with the senior monks and spoke in a manner that showed little respect for his teachers. His mentor tried patiently to persuade him to apologize, but without success. Eventually, his mother had to rush to the monastery to help calm the situation. Tragically, her son responded with such anger that she became overwhelmed by stress and had to be admitted to the hospital.

Later, she said only one sentence to the mentoring monk: "My son has spent his whole life with computers and smartphones. He has hardly interacted with people."

In the end, the newly ordained monk remained in the monastery for fewer than seven days before disrobing. I am not blaming AI or smartphones because technology alone is not the root of the problem. Yet this incident has led me to ask: As human beings spend increasing amounts of time interacting with AI, are we gradually losing the most fundamental skills of being human?

Psychologists have given names to many aspects of this phenomenon. There is phubbing – paying more attention to a smartphone than to the person standing in front of us. There is social withdrawal – gradually disengaging from real human interaction. There is parasocial interaction – forming emotional attachments to virtual worlds or AI that begin to replace genuine relationships. And in its most severe form, there is hikikomori – a condition of complete social isolation.

As more people recognize these consequences, what many are seeking today is not an AI that is even more intelligent, but rather digital detox – stepping away from the screen in order to rediscover how to live meaningfully with other human beings.

Throughout history, humanity has invented tools to bring the world closer together. But when those tools are used without wisdom, there may come a day when they no longer connect us – they become walls that separate us from one another.

The Real Challenge

If we look back throughout the history of civilization, humanity has never stopped creating tools – from stone axes and the wheel, to automobiles, computers, smartphones and now AI.

What is remarkable is that tools have never diminished the value of human beings. Rather, each technological advance has required humanity to evolve alongside it: from manual laborers to knowledge workers, from operators to designers and from those who control machines to those who shape the future.

The real challenge today may not be that AI is becoming too intelligent. It may be that human fear is growing faster than human wisdom.

Some organizations fear being left behind in the race for technology. Others fear their competitors. Many people fear losing their jobs, while others fear that human beings themselves may become irrelevant. Yet the most important responsibility of a board of directors in the age of AI is not simply to invest in the most advanced technology.

It is to transform fear into awareness. To replace impulsive reactions with thoughtful, discerning judgment. And to shift the central question from: "How can we keep up with AI?" to the far more important one: "How can we use AI to create greater value for humanity?"

Intelligence Is Not Wisdom

In everyday language, we often use the words *intelligence* and *wisdom* interchangeably. From a Buddhist perspective, however, they are fundamentally different. Intelligence is the ability to calculate, analyze, remember and process information. This is precisely what AI excels at. Wisdom, on the other hand, is the ability to perceive reality, understand causes and consequences, recognize the impact of our actions on others and discern what ought to be done and what ought not to be done.

Wisdom must also be accompanied by mindfulness – the awareness of what we are doing, why we are doing it and whether our actions are being driven by greed, hatred or delusion. AI may possess intelligence, but it does not yet possess wisdom. AI can answer the question, "How can this be done?" But it cannot answer the more important question, "Should it be done?"

For this reason, the defining challenge of the twenty-first century is not merely to build increasingly powerful AI, but to cultivate human intelligence and ultimately to elevate it into awakened intelligence – a form of wisdom that sees reality clearly and applies knowledge with compassion, responsibility and sound judgment.

This, I believe, is the greatest challenge facing every leader in this room. The question is not

simply how to make your organization more proficient in using AI, but how to ensure that every AI system within your organization is guided by awakened human wisdom.

From Artificial Intelligence to Awakened Intelligence

Whenever we discuss AI, we tend to ask, "How intelligent is this system?" From a Buddhist perspective, however, the more important question is: "Does the person using AI possess sufficient wisdom?" I would, therefore, like to invite you to view the evolution of intelligence as unfolding across three distinct levels.

1. Artificial Intelligence (AI): Computational Intelligence

AI operates on data. It identifies patterns, predicts outcomes and generates answers with extraordinary speed, accuracy and efficiency. Yet AI does not know why its answers should be used. It does not understand their consequences for human beings, nor does it know when it should refrain from acting.

2. Human Intelligence (HI): Human Reasoning and Creativity

Human beings do more than analyze information. We can ask entirely new questions, imagine what has never existed before and make decisions amid uncertainty. These capacities distinguish us from machines. Yet even this is not enough.

An intelligent person may still use that intelligence to exploit others, manipulate information or pursue self-interest at society's expense. For this reason, the ultimate goal of human development should not stop at human intelligence.

3. Awakened Intelligence (WI): Wisdom in Action

The highest level is awakened intelligence. This is wisdom that awakens to reality. It recognizes responsibility for the consequences of one's actions. It applies knowledge with compassion, ethical responsibility and a sincere commitment to the well-being of individuals and society.

If AI asks, "Can this be done?"

Human intelligence asks, "How can this be done in the best possible way?"

But awakened intelligence goes one step further and asks, "Should this be done at all – and who will ultimately benefit from it?"

This is the level of intelligence that organizations in the twenty-first century need most.

The Wisdom That AI Does Not Possess

When we speak of human wisdom, I would like to describe it in four dimensions.

1. Ethical Wisdom

AI can tell us which strategy is likely to generate the highest profit. It cannot tell us whether that strategy is the most just or the most ethical. The responsibility of a board of directors is not merely to ask, "How much return will this project generate?" It must also ask, "How will this project affect people?"

Sound decisions should be measured not only by financial performance, but also by the value they create for society.

2. Empathetic Wisdom

AI understands data, but it does not understand human feelings. It may accurately predict which employees are likely to resign, but it cannot sit beside them, listen to their anxieties, understand their hopes or share their burdens.

AI may help physicians diagnose disease with remarkable accuracy, but it cannot hold a patient's hand when fear sets in. It cannot comfort a family facing the loss of a loved one. Empathy is not a weakness of humanity. It is one of humanity's greatest strengths.

3. Contextual Wisdom

AI performs best when information is complete and clearly defined. Real life is rarely like that.

Many of the most important decisions cannot be found in a textbook or generated by an algorithm. They require an understanding of people, culture, relationships, history and timing.

Wise leaders use AI as an adviser – not as a substitute for their own judgment.

4. Accountable Wisdom

When AI makes the wrong decision, who is responsible? The answer has never changed. Human beings are. The people who designed the system. The people who approved it. The people who chose to deploy it.

Organizations with strong corporate governance do not hide behind the excuse that *"the system made the decision."* Instead, they have the courage to say, "We accept responsibility for every outcome that our AI systems produce."

The Board's Blueprint: The Four Powers for Leadership in the Age of AI

As AI becomes increasingly influential, the wisdom of leaders must grow alongside it. Buddhism offers a framework that I believe is remarkably relevant to corporate governance in the age of AI. It is known as Bala 4 – the Four Powers – which may serve as a blueprint for boards of directors in the twenty-first century.

1. Paṭisaṅkhāna-bala – The Power of Reflective Discernment *(The Power of Computing & Authentic Intelligence)*

AI can generate hundreds of possible answers. The leader's responsibility is to ask the right questions. Having more data does not guarantee better decisions. What matters is the judgment to determine which information deserves our trust – and the courage to question AI's conclusions.

I would describe this as the human version of the power of computing or what we might call authentic intelligence.

Boards of directors must exercise this power of reflective discernment when guiding their organizations. AI may generate hundreds of alternatives, but leaders possessing authentic intelligence select the course that best aligns with the organization's values and long-term purpose. Using AI without reflective wisdom is like driving a high-performance sports car while blindfolded.

The board's judgment is the organization's most important navigation system.

2. Bhāvanā-bala – The Power of Self-Cultivation *(The Power of Cultivation & Inner Ecology)*

Organizations invest enormous resources in machine learning. Equally important is human learning. More important still are human unlearning and human relearning.

Leaders must be willing to learn continuously, while also having the courage to let go of assumptions that no longer fit a changing world. Corporate governance begins with self-governance. If a leader's mind is dominated by fear, delusion or greed, it will be difficult to guide an organization confidently into the future.

Healthy corporate governance cannot exist without healthy inner governance – what I call the inner ecology of leaders. No board can successfully navigate waves of technological disruption if its own collective mind remains confused or reactive.

Bhāvanā-bala is the disciplined cultivation of that inner ecology, balancing three essential qualities: Success, wisdom and compassion.

Leaders who cultivate themselves develop emotional stability. They are not easily swept away by technological hype and they foster organizational cultures that strengthen the uniquely human qualities AI can never replace.

3. Anavajja-bala – The Power of Blameless Integrity *(The Power of Blamelessness & Ethical Governance)*

AI has no moral compass. Ethics must come from human beings. Today, the responsibility of a board of directors extends far beyond reviewing financial statements.

Boards must ensure that AI is deployed transparently, remains auditable and always respects human dignity. Sustainable organizations are those in which ethics lead technology – not the other way around.

We must remember that AI is merely a tool. It is amoral. The greatest risks associated with AI – including algorithmic bias, violations of data privacy and decisions that undermine human rights – do not arise from AI itself. They arise from the ethical failures of those who design, deploy and govern it.

The board's responsibility is to establish a robust AI governance framework grounded in anavajja-bala. Organizations must ensure that every AI system they employ is transparent, accountable and harmless to all stakeholders.

Technology guided by ethics is the foundation of sustainable governance.

4. Saṅgāhaka-bala – The Power of Integration and Compassion *(The Power of Integration & Compassion)*

Many people fear that AI will replace human beings. I believe that is the wrong objective. The true purpose of AI should not be to replace humanity, but to elevate human potential. AI should free people from repetitive tasks so they can devote more time to thinking creatively, caring for others, solving meaningful problems and creating value for society.

As technology advances, humanity must advance with it. The greatest progress is not achieved by building ever smarter machines. It is achieved by becoming more compassionate, more thoughtful and more responsible human beings.

Allow me to return to the question raised in the earlier panel discussion: Has technology caused us to question the value of being human?

Saṅgāhaka-bala offers perhaps the most powerful answer. The one quality that AI can never truly possess is compassion – the ability to understand another person's suffering and to embrace the richness of human diversity.

The transition to an AI-powered organization must be a transition rooted in care and mutual flourishing.

Boards should champion a human-centric AI strategy. The purpose of AI is not to push people aside. It is to augment humanity – to enhance human capability, support employees as they adapt to change and ensure that technological progress creates lasting value for society as a whole.

Conclusion: The Future of AI Begins with Human Wisdom

Throughout history, humanity has never truly feared the tools it created. What is far more concerning is when our tools evolve faster than the wisdom of those who use them.

Today, AI can write articles, analyze vast amounts of data, compose music, create works of art, diagnose diseases and, in many domains, may eventually outperform human beings. Yet there remains one thing AI cannot do: It cannot take responsibility for the consequences of its decisions.

AI does not understand right and wrong. It does not understand justice. It does not understand compassion, nor does it understand the intrinsic dignity of every human being.

These responsibilities remain ours – especially yours. For you are not merely executives managing organizations. You are leaders shaping the future of society. The decisions you make today will affect tens of thousands of employees, shareholders, customers, communities and generations yet to come. Therefore, the most important question is not, "How much more intelligent will AI become?" but rather, "Will human beings possess sufficient wisdom to guide that intelligence?"

Allow me to leave you with three simple reflections.

First, use AI as a partner in thinking, but never allow it to replace your conscience. Data can help us discover facts. Only wisdom enables us to choose what is right.

Secondly, build organizational cultures that value ethics as highly as innovation. The world's most admired organizations may not be those with the most sophisticated AI. They will be those that earn the greatest public trust. Technology can be purchased. Trust must be earned – through integrity, transparency and accountability.

Finally, never allow AI to diminish the value of being human. Instead, use AI to elevate human potential. Let technology relieve us of repetitive work so that our time and energy may be devoted to what machines cannot do: To inspire, to listen, to forgive, to care for one another and to build societies filled with hope.

These are the qualities that define our humanity. More than sixty years ago, Marshall McLuhan observed: *"We shape our tools and thereafter, our tools shape us."*

Buddhism invites us to complete that thought: The true direction of our tools is ultimately determined by those who have learned to govern their own minds.

If the human mind is driven by greed, AI will amplify greed. If it is driven by anger, AI will amplify anger. But if the mind is cultivated with mindfulness, compassion and wisdom, then AI can become a force for creativity, compassion and human flourishing.

For the future of AI does not begin with technology. It begins with us. Each year, we may build machines that are more intelligent. The more important question is whether we are also becoming wiser human beings. I therefore believe that the future of our world will not ultimately be determined by AI.

It will be determined by human wisdom. And perhaps humanity's greatest achievement will not be the day we create the world's most intelligent machines. It will be the day we learn to use that intelligence with wisdom, compassion and responsibility.

In Buddhism, there is a beautiful saying: *Paññā lokasmi pajjoto*. "Wisdom is the light of the world." Today, our world is illuminated by countless digital screens. Yet it still longs for another kind of light – the light of wisdom. A light that enables us to see not only what can be done, but also what ought to be done and what will lead to the genuine flourishing of humanity and society.

If every leader in this room can ensure that AI is guided by human wisdom, then I believe it will not become a threat to humanity. Instead, it will become one of the most powerful instruments for building a world where innovation advances together with compassion, justice and sustainability.

May each of you lead not only organizations that are successful, but organizations distinguished by wisdom. And may that wisdom serve the well-being of society and of our shared world.

May you all be blessed with wisdom, courage and success as you lead your organizations into the future – where AI is truly guided by human wisdom.

The Venerable Anil Sakya serves as the Assistant Abbot of Wat Bowonniwet Vihara, one of Thailand's most significant royal monasteries.

Have We Lost the Great Debate?

Michael Hartoonian

Is it possible to have a nation
"of the people, by the people, for the people,"
when the people give agency away?

Introduction

Across the world, in societies that claim a democratic heritage, serious civic debate is visibly declining. Many citizens seem eager to set down the burden of civic agency. In its place, we find technology-driven "realities," shallow pronouncements from so-called leaders and false assumptions about the world and its people. It resembles a television comedy, as we continue to entertain ourselves to death.

History has rarely favored democratic republics. From the Greek city-states and the Roman Republic to societies across Asia, Africa and the Americas, self-government was uncommon. Democratic forms of government expanded during the Enlightenment and from the 18th century onward, but many were short-lived and violent, culminating in the 20th century – the most violent in recorded history.

The chief reason democratic governments fail is that citizens do not recognize government by the people as an ongoing process of questioning, argument and debate. Civic conduct is not a final goal or end-state. And we all know what happens when civic and civil debate ends: violence follows.

Every citizen, then, must ask two questions: what is at the heart of the argument and how should I take part in the great debate?

A Tension of Values

The great debate is best understood through eight values that define a democratic state: freedom, equality, unity, diversity, law, ethics, private wealth and common wealth. These pillars become meaningful in civic life when organized into four pairs of competing values whose balance is negotiated through debate. Citizens must work to balance:

- Freedom and equality
- Unity and diversity
- Law and ethics
- Private wealth and common wealth

While each of these pairs of values represents inherent conflict, each also has a vital synergy. For example, we understand that freedom is a necessary condition for democracy. But

we also realize that the logical extension of freedom is anarchy and must be balanced with equality. However, the logical end of equality is a locked-stepped existence of bland and soulless likeness. The task is to balance freedom with equality and enhance both freedom and equality. Democracy is defined in the balance. It can never be (just) freedom or (just) equality.

What is the logical extension of law absent ethics? Bad laws, of course. In some countries that called themselves democratic republics, slavery was permitted and women could not vote. Laws that are not balanced with ethics and high moral standards will end democracy. Private wealth is never fully realized, nor secure, unless individuals invest in the common wealth: a quality material and moral infrastructure. How much of a community's wealth should be in the infrastructure, healthcare, education, transportation, esthetics, etc.? These are debates that must be attended to. And what does it mean to have a diverse society? How much unity does a country need? It's never one or the other because democracy is a question, as well as a balancing act that citizens must address or the values will be stollen by the self-proclaimed elite or run-away technology.

The ability to hold, concurrently, two seemingly contradictory ideas and see both as valuable and essential is the essence of the democratic mind. As Henry David Thoreau put it, "The truth is in the paradoxical." Understanding, reconciling and balancing these conflicting ideals is a skill that must be learned. The difficult decisions we make are not between good and evil. Rather, our challenge is to determine the relationship and balance between worthy, but conflicting ideals.

The Experience of Self-Government

Self-government rests on several subtle personal attributes: an internal moral framework, skill in civic debate, a willingness to take part in civic life and the ability to build trust and friendship with leaders and fellow citizens alike. Above all, it requires understanding that democratic governance is a team sport. The stronger the team, the better off each individual and the better the individual, the better off the team. These skills and abilities develop through experience, especially experiences that invite reflection. Such learning deepens when debate takes place in every institution, from the family and the school, to the firm and the government and when those debates address the four value tensions. In a family, for example, members work to debate and as far as possible, balance freedom and equality, unity and diversity, rules and ethics and individual and family wealth (excellence). These debates are the experiences that build human dignity and self-government.

As these experiences carry on across every institution where we work and play, we come to see how our human nature is bound up with the question of how we are governed. In this process, we grow more fully human.

AI and Human Development: A Moral Tension

The world of AI raises at least two moral tensions. The first concerns human developmental

xperiences and the risk of diminishing them. The second concerns the need to see human values as a hierarchy rather than a range of equally valid opinions and to understand the inherent tension and arguments among them. If we care about human flourishing, we must recognize that all knowledge is provisional and must be tested and refined. To be truly learned is to question every claim – an essential condition for self-government.

Developmentally, when we use focused data and knowledge in our inquiries, we hinder the growth of individuals and communities. For example, we can use science in rich ways to explain what and where, but, by itself, it can never answer the "why" questions and we are left explanatorily naked when addressing human problems such as global commerce, climate change, healthcare, education and AI. What we choose to study and act upon are determined not by science, but by the desires and priorities of the tribe or the elite therein. We should remember that the very qualities that make an issue, problem or question human also make it impossible to resolve if we refuse to wholistically engage a culture's hierarchy of values – values grounded in the foundational morality of rightful relationships rather than in transactional exchange. These rightful relationships are simply habits of manners that form the seedbed of morality. History and religion both show that without rightful relationships, even exchange becomes sluggish, costly and corrupt. It is a cautionary tale told again and again, yet rarely recognized.

Another way to conceptualize the grounding of culture in relationships is to consider fundamental questions that all cultures face. Consider: what is my relationship to God? To the earth? To my children, etc.? These types of questions demand a deeper focus than food, dress or which team you cheer for. Because of the nature of being human and living within nature's law, all people have a sense of rightful practices and their alignment with higher principles. However, these principles can be adulterated by cultural leaders who, themselves, are self-centered and corrupt. But, at heart, people know that the culture teaches and we must be attentive to what it teaches. Utilizing this ability is the hallmark of agency.

As the saying goes, one enters the temple of morality only by passing through the courtyard of well-formed habits or manners. Habits, in this sense, are not mere actions, but the fundamental dispositions that form character. Anyone who appreciates human potential will grasp the point: flourishing springs from wisdom and wisdom emerges from virtue joined with reason – what we call "practical reason." Character forms practical reason and character itself is built through the consistent practice of rightful habits. People who truly succeed and flourish understand this and apply it to themselves, their families, their firms and their wider communities.

AI and the Value Tension of Common Wealth vs. Private Wealth

As argued above, a self-governing person and society must be able to balance four tensions. Any of the four could help place AI properly within a democratic republic, but I will focus on common wealth versus private wealth, a clear and present need today and for our future. Need, in this sense, is an expression of deep cultural values: rightful relationships and human

flourishing. In a democratic republic, this understanding is essential. Otherwise, citizens come to believe that needs and wants are defined by the inelasticity of the demand curve. Confusing models with reality, they become vulnerable to the destructive pull of an imagined existence without purpose.

Regarding private wealth versus common wealth, how much of AI should be in the market and how much in or as part of the common wealth infrastructure? Also, at what point does a privately owned business become so vital to people's lives and welfare that the public gains a legitimate interest, both legal and moral, in how it is run?

The task of AI businesses is to invest, innovate, follow the principles of moral capitalism and earn a fair profit. The task of the people, acting through government, is the same as with other public utilities and trusts such as transportation, water and telecommunications to ensure that freedom and equality, as well as law and ethics, remain in balance.

Once people depend on a good or service for their daily lives and economic well-being and little competition exists, it becomes part of the moral and material infrastructure: the common wealth. Any business holding so essential a position owes a special duty to the public, which is then both a stockholder and a stakeholder in that utility. AI should and must become such a utility and the sooner, the better. At its core, AI embodies a balance between private and common wealth and the debate over how to strike and sustain that balance may prove the most important one the world faces in the days ahead.

Today's arguments over AI center on guardrails: urging AI companies to slow their research or to hire consultants to feed agents more data – proposals that are, in one way or another, self-serving. The conversation must turn instead to a democratic debate over value tensions, one that engages "we the people" in every democratic republic. What is at stake is not the future of AI, but the future of any republic worthy of the name. The solution is deceptively simple: AI must become part of the moral and material infrastructure or the so-called elite will gain the world and we will all lose our souls.

Michael Hartoonian is Associate Editor of Pegasus.

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