

Activating *Our* Intelligence

A Common-Sense Approach to Artificial Intelligence

Dorothy Stoltz

What is intelligence? Intelligence is the ability to draw on—what Plato calls the universal or abstract mind—a continuous source of inspiration, enrichment, and optimism in life. When we concentrate on a project, our focused attention draws ideas and inspiration from the abstract levels of intelligence. We can work intelligently with our inner best self to determine how to enrich the circumstances around us, rather than simply reacting to them. We can draw on optimism to grasp both an awareness of a problem and an understanding of its solutions—at the same time.

Intelligence helps us be responsible for our own learning—to be open-minded, adaptable, and creative. It helps us to steadily seek and expand our scope of insights and understanding with hope and celebration. Intelligence opens the doorways to discovery.

However, *artificial intelligence* (AI) is a finite and precarious tool. It is neither intelligent nor creative—whether it is “narrow AI” to perform a task or “general AI” to mimic human cognitive abilities. AI is unable to draw on the universal mind for inspiration, wisdom, and discovery. It can only draw on what information has been fed into its system.

“Once (AI) is fed the *right* data, it can accomplish a task,” explains Paul Trinh, a software development geek based in Maryland. “The point of a lot of machine learning models,” Trinh continues, “is being able to generalize predicting a particular task. There’s a tradeoff between being accurate and being flexible.... There will always be a margin of error, hence why we see ChatGPT ‘hallucinate’ answers, both due to old data but also a margin of error to be able to respond to a wide variety of prompts.” Dr. Angelo Thalassinidis, a professor at Anne Arundel (MD) Community College, adds, “AI does not think, but it is increasingly trainable to support our daily tasks. Perhaps at some future point, for example, it will take care of our banking and investments. However, AI does not know what and how to think. It is not real. It is a tool.”¹

AI is rapidly developing and influencing our educational, cultural, scientific, moral, social, industrial, and economic world. How can we sift through the AI challenges and create a balanced approach drawing on the library’s strengths to endure and triumph? How can we apply and activate *our own* intelligence in assessing and using this tool?

A library’s core value—that *we are each responsible for our own learning, and unlearning*—cannot be overstated. Benjamin Franklin established a “library company” in Philadelphia in 1731 to encourage book lending beyond a group of friends. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Andrew Carnegie donated millions of dollars to establish libraries in more than 1,600 communities across the United States. The larger goal of these two geniuses—and staunch book lovers—was to stimulate thinking in the context of a library’s overarching purpose to enlighten humanity while bringing it to our local communities.

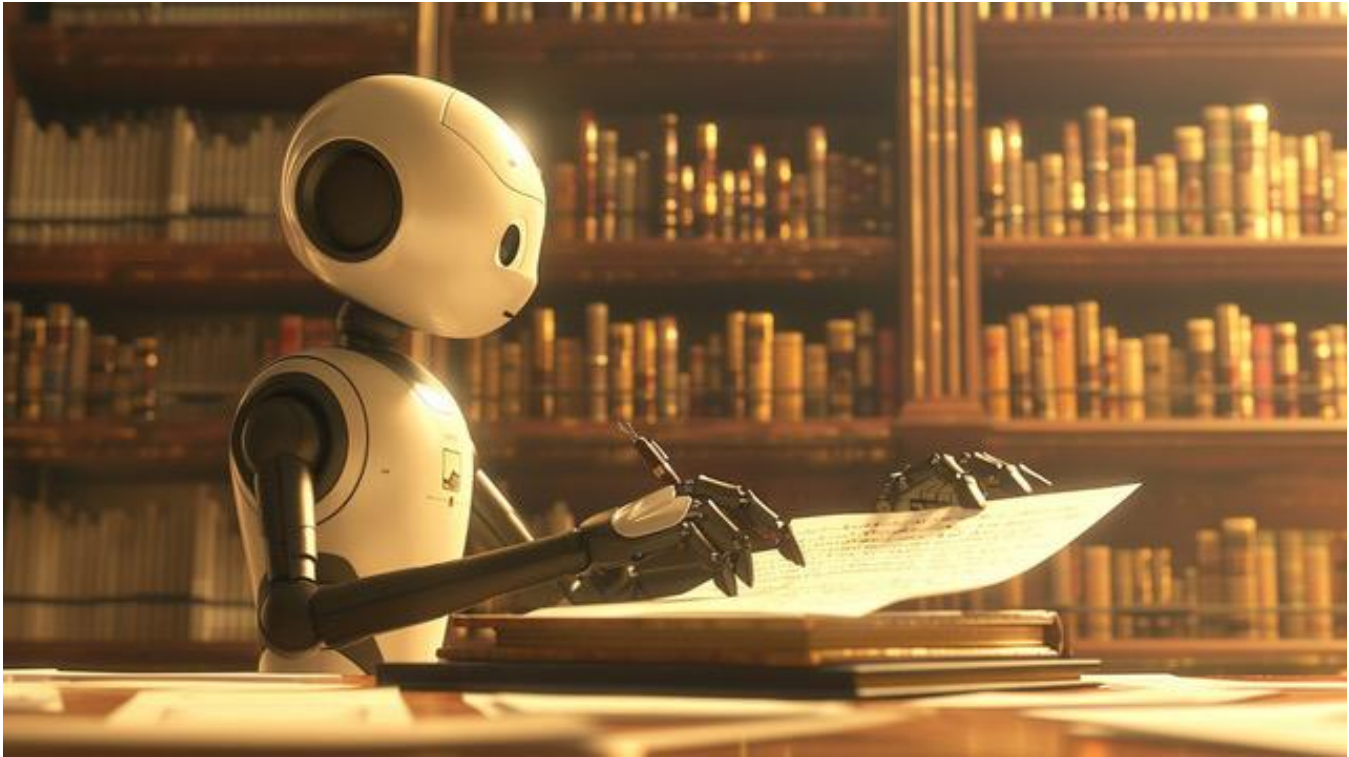
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1. Figure 1. AI can only draw on what information has been fed into its system.

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In supporting and *helping people we serve activate their intelligence using AI as a tool*, here are seven points to ponder based on inspiration from Google’s online safety toolkit (https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_us) and insights from *Activate Peer Learning in Your Library and Community* (<https://waldopublishers.com/activate-peer-learning>).

HOW CAN PYTHAGORAS OR EVEN CONFUCIUS INSPIRE US?

“If falsehoods be advanced, hear them with mildness, and arm thyself with patience,” says Greek philosopher Pythagoras in one of his Golden Verses.² His principles of discovery contributed to the development of mathematics, philosophy, art, music, and architecture. Cultivating and expressing patience helps us connect with peace and act in the right moment.

Although applying Pythagoras’ Golden Verses or The Golden Rule does not require us to join a religion, master Shakespeare, or take a philosophy class, it does require learning to express ourselves using cheerfulness, courage, and self-control. Chinese philosopher Confucius’ version of The Golden Rule is, “What you do not wish upon yourself, extend not to others.” By using gentle thoughts toward others—and toward projects and challenges, such as AI—we enable ourselves to more easily think creatively, become more patient, and serve the people in our communities.

THE LIGHT (RIGHT) TOUCH OF ENHANCING CURIOSITY

When we approach AI with a healthy dose of curiosity—no matter how excited or how uncomfortable we might be about AI—we are better able to discover the kernel of insight in our own experiences to help us learn. We then can work intelligently using curiosity to keep us solution-oriented, to focus on the big picture, and to think multi-dimensionally.

As we explore AI as a new tool or concept, let us be curious about how to apply our own intelligence as to *what's working* and *what is not*. We need to be responsible—to be free to guide our own thinking and help others do the same. To do so, we must apply the value of higher phases of curiosity. If we focus too strongly on either the AI-save-the-world excitement or its doom-and-gloom fear, it can produce an overstimulation of our mind, emotions, and body. Instead, we can “keep it light” by appreciating and honoring those noble and beautiful souls who are part of the effort to bring integrity and quality to this developing tool.

DISCERNMENT GOES HAND-IN-HAND WITH UNLEARNING

Librarians can research for themselves and develop their skills of discernment through the idea of in-reach (leading an examined life). A good place to start includes:

- Examining what works and what doesn't work by asking, “What good can I do today to advance my common-sense approach to AI, and what good did I do today to add value to my approach to AI?”
- Supporting our best efforts to learn, grow, and serve.
- Putting AI and other new and emerging technology to work for us to enrich our communities. What should we invest in? What has the best chance for success? What should we avoid?
- *Developing our minds to think and ask*, “What more can I learn to help library users, and what can I learn from users to offer improved service?”

Discernment skills help us identify habits and attitudes that may need to be “unlearned” as well. Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, said, “Knowing many things does not teach insight.” Roger von Oech, inventor and author, expands on this nugget of wisdom, “I think what [Heraclitus is] getting at is this: forgetting what we know—at the appropriate time—can be an important means for gaining insight. Without the ability to forget, our minds remain cluttered with ready-made answers, and we're not motivated to ask the questions that lead our thinking to new ideas.”³

PAY ATTENTION

Although we may not understand how AI works, we need to be cautious and to pay attention to how unintelligent it can be, and when to avoid it. Skills of interpretation help us examine its content and discover deceit of information. Thinking before acting, and especially before reacting, helps us be alert to and avoid manipulation.

We can apply our maturity, intelligence, and objectivity to learning about AI as a tool—especially paying close attention to its “stupidity.” We can use our intelligence and maturity to assess and reduce AI's potential harmfulness. Note to book lovers: Reading excellent fiction can help us build a well-focused imagination and an intuitive ability to see the big picture.

USE HUMOR

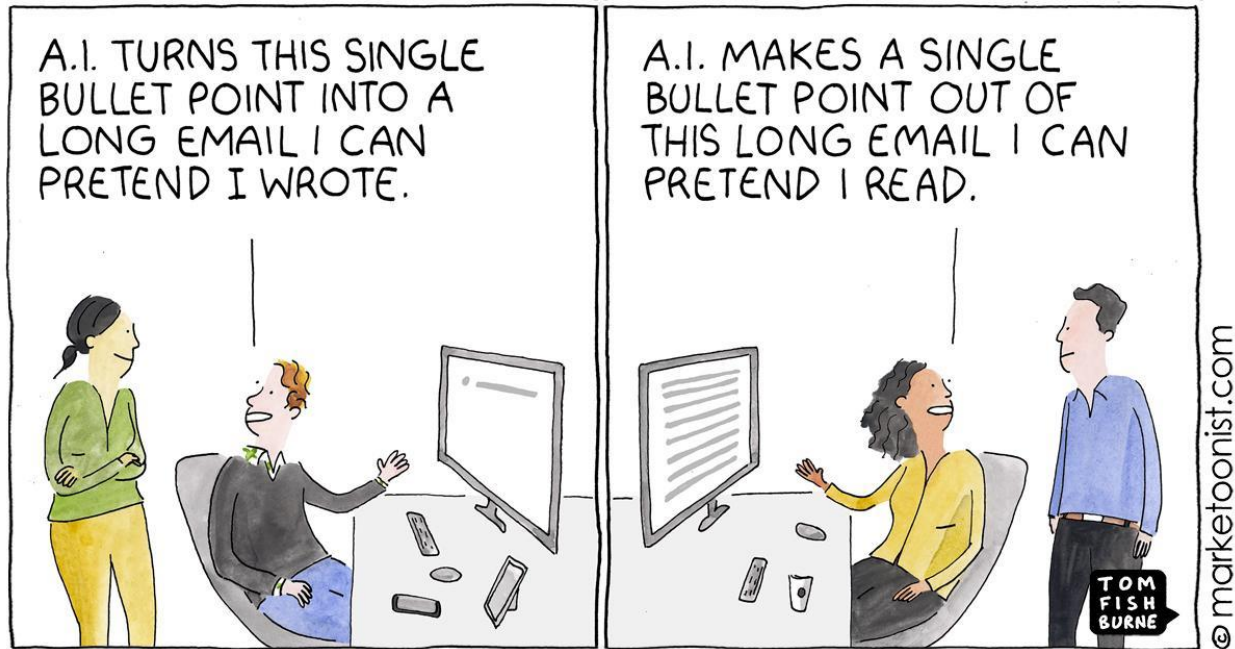
A strong sense of playfulness and good humor help drive away worry, fear, and grimness. Humor can also be used successfully to curb excessive enthusiasm and overconfidence.

BE THOROUGH AND ACT WITH RESPECT

Stay above the fray of AI brouhaha—including intense excitement or utter hopelessness—by thinking things through thoroughly and completely. The Golden Rule of treating others the way

one would like to be treated—by acting with respect—helps us focus on the calming reassurance of staying above the fray and boosts our ability to think and respond in a helpful way.

Figure 2. There is excellent value in using good humor to promote growth and greater awareness. Used under license from makertooinist.com.



RELY ON DISCOVERING OUR OWN POTENTIAL

It takes courage—strength of heart—to think for oneself. It takes self-reliance and disciplined use of our own intelligence and potential to discover universal concepts—bravery, common sense, and goodwill. Libraries are meant to open doorways to all kinds of discovery just like these.

Once we discover the truth about AI—what it is and what it is not—the applications as well as the limits of AI are easy to discern. We simply need to sift out the exaggerations, gossip, and falsehoods from the truth. As we pay attention and discover ill-thought ideas, we can discard them.

When we train ourselves and others to recognize, discover, and discern useful information about AI and our use of it, we can enhance our organization and the communities we serve with confidence—a joy to our intelligence.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Dr. Angelo Thalassinidis and Paul Trinh, “Conversations on Artificial Intelligence,” (program, Edgewater Branch, Anne Arundel County Public Library, MD, May 22, 2024).
- ² “The Golden Verses of Pythagoras,” Harvard University, accessed August 25, 2024, https://people.math.harvard.edu/~knill/various/eterosego/pythagoras_verses.pdf.
- ³ “Use Your ‘Forgettery,’” Roger von Oech’s Creative Think, accessed August 25, 2024, <https://blog.creativethink.com/heraclitus/index.html>.