

RECLAIMING FREEDOM WHILE DEMOCRACY DECAYS AND AI SURGES

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ABSTRACT

Democratic norms decay as strongmen leaders disable checks on their power; artificial intelligence permeates every sector of societies. Although reflecting different origins and dynamics, these two trends in the first decades of the twenty-first century reflect and escalate social distrust and diminish human capacities. Reclaiming our freedom requires active resistance and actions honouring and deepening our humanity through protest, collaboration, and creativity.

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RÉSUMÉ

Les normes démocratiques se dégradent à mesure que les dirigeants autoritaires suppriment les contrôles sur leur pouvoir; l'intelligence artificielle imprègne tous les secteurs de la société. Bien qu'elles reflètent des origines et des dynamiques différentes, ces deux tendances observées au cours des premières décennies du XXI^e siècle reflètent et exacerbent la méfiance sociale et réduisent les capacités humaines. Pour reconquérir notre liberté, nous devons mener une résistance active et des actions qui honorent et approfondissent notre humanité par la protestation, la collaboration et la créativité.

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INTRODUCTION

I am truly humbled to be associated with René Cassin, whose vision and persistence were rivalled only by his devotion to human dignity and his lawyerly precision and rigour. In his speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, Cassin stressed that the then twenty-year-old *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* marked “the permanent accession of every human being to the rank of member of human society,” transcending the power of nation-states.¹ As we near the eightieth anniversary of the *Universal Declaration*, it is worth remembering how Cassin located the declaration’s origin “precisely at a time when man’s power over nature became vastly increased because of scientific discoveries and when it was essential to decide to what constructive ends these powers should be put.”²

The current world, every day, defies the historic commitments to peace, to the rights of all persons, and to using human powers over science and technology for constructive ends. Cassin’s work grew from encounters with the horrors of two world wars; I hope we can turn this challenging time into the opportunity for truly meaningful installation of human rights in human politics and technologies.

We inescapably speak from the position we know. For me, this means contemporary challenges in the United States. Last year, surveys reported a near record-low level of public trust in the United States Supreme Court.³ Congress has been called “dysfunctional.”⁴ The United States has re-elected a twice-impeached former president who regularly attacks dominant judges, universities, law firms, journalists, the rule of law, congressional power, political opponents, and guardrails against tyranny,

1 René Cassin insisted on the word “universal” rather than “international” in order to emphasize this point (see “The Charter of Human Rights” (Nobel Peace Prize Lecture delivered at the Nobel Institute, Oslo, 11 December 1968) [unpublished], online: <nobelprize.org> [perma.cc/7EE5-S2KX]).

2 *Ibid.*

3 See Joseph Copeland, “Favorable Views of Supreme Court Remain Near Historic Low” (3 September 2025), online: <pewresearch.org> [perma.cc/XZ6H-2ZPD].

4 See e.g. Leah Askarinam, “Why Dysfunction in Congress Could Be Here to Stay”, *ABC News* (25 October 2024), online: <abcnews.go.com> [perma.cc/ST2M-39JU].

mirroring tactics of autocratic leaders elsewhere.⁵ At the same time, global corporations mostly based in the United States have launched technologies with unparalleled impact on human interactions and democratic institutions. I will focus on the parallel challenges to human choices and agency posed by AI and by rising autocracies.

Look at the parallels. Authoritarians, whether aligned with right- or left-wing politics, work to appeal to people and cultivate conformity to in-group norms over personal autonomy, conspiratorial thinking, mental inflexibility, and deference to leaders who suppress democracy.⁶ Generative AI induces human passivity and deference, especially among people with little knowledge about it.⁷ Two experts at Stanford University recently advised the public about ways to “Make Sure ChatGPT Doesn’t Make You Dumber.”⁸ In these early decades of the twenty-first century, these two trends—political autocracy and human reliance on AI—both appear to diminish human capacities. Both reflect and amplify social distrust. Authoritarian politics and emerging forms of generative AI function similarly by inducing individual passivity, and both represent threats to human freedom.⁹ All who care about humanity need to pay attention and actively strengthen human freedom and creativity. Without change, human subordination—enslavement—will be our future.

Talk alone is not enough to deal with the dangers we face. Talking can seem so inadequate. I am reminded of a cartoon by Ed Koren: A huge hairy monster lurks behind two people seated in a living room as they

5 Andrew Marantz, “Is It Happening Here?”, *The New Yorker* (28 April 2025), online: <newyorker.com> [perma.cc/5HRP-YBHU].

6 Danny Osborne et al, “The Psychological Causes and Societal Consequences of Authoritarianism” (2023) 2:4 *Nature Revs Psychology* 220 at 221, 226–27, DOI: <10.1038/s44159-023-00161-4>.

7 Heidi Mitchell, “The Less You Know About AI, the More You Are Likely to Use It”, *Wall Street Journal* (4 September 2025), online: <wsj.com> [perma.cc/L7HP-TH4G]. See Paul Rust & Nina Vasani, “How to Make Sure ChatGPT Doesn’t Make You Dumber”, *Wall Street Journal* (3 September 2025), online: <wsj.com> [perma.cc/37P9-5ADE] (“without deliberate boundaries, this omnipresent assistant won’t just help us write, it will become the author while we, the humans, merely click ‘send’”).

8 Rust & Vasani, *supra* note 7.

9 Both also may promote uniformity and also work to control economic and informal resources.

tell two other friends, “We deal with it by talking about it.”¹⁰ But talking is where we must start if we are to tackle the dangers of human passivity, isolation, fear, and depression produced by the two trends. Actions depend on our thinking together about how to respond. If the risks I identify are genuine, then you and I should give top priority to productive actions as we proceed in education, in professions, and in our daily lives. I cannot promise solutions, but before closing, I will identify some promising directions for action.

First, let’s look at the parallel and converging risks.

I. PARALLELS

Autocratic politics and emerging generative AI tools differ in origin and operation. But both elicit human deference, acquiescence, passivity, and pacification. Both also emerge with and magnify human isolation and social divisions. And both suppress human capacities for thinking, judging, and collaborating.

A. *Producing Deference and Passivity*

Autocratic political leaders exert power and serve themselves. While claiming to answer national problems, they govern with threats, inducements, and propaganda. Autocracies dating from ancient Rome to modern-day North Korea have proceeded with no pretence of protecting individual freedom or democracy. More recent authoritarian governments have obtained power through the formal process of elections rather than through coups or civil wars.¹¹ Current autocrats consolidate power by invoking threats from external or social developments—or from particular subgroups—by claiming to protect people, and by disabling competing sources of authority, including other branches of government, media,

10 Edward Koren, “We Deal With It By Talking About It”, *The New Yorker* (6 January 1975), online (cartoon): <condenaststore.com> [perma.cc/8GUY-3XDR].

11 Barbara Geddes, “How New Dictatorships Begin: Change Through Time” in Anne Wolf, ed, *The Oxford Handbook of Authoritarian Politics*, online ed, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford University Press, 2024–), DOI: <10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198871996.013.3>. See also On the Media, “Authoritarianism, but Make It Look Normal. Plus, the Family Taking Over American Media” (11 October 2025), online (podcast): <app.podscribe.com> [perma.cc/ZW3H-M6YY].

and universities. People living under authoritarian regimes exhibit apathy, passivity, and compliance.¹² Social scientists document people's willingness to obey orders and defer to apparent authority figures.¹³

These human responses allow autocrats to ignore and violate legal and human rights. Repressing speech and the press, autocratic leaders often secure compliance from businesses, legislators, and journalists by appearing popular, by intimidation, and by mesmerizing or merely repetitive communications.¹⁴ In totalitarian regimes—authoritarian ones

12 Juan J Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner, 2000) at 167, 176; Philippe C Schmitter, "Paths to Political Development in Latin America" in Douglas A Chalmers, ed, *Changing Latin America: New Interpretations of Its Politics and Society*, Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science, vol 30:4 (New York: Academy of Political Science, 1972) 83 at 95.

13 See especially Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974). See also James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) at 121–22, 209, 236; Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House, 2007); Saul McLeod, "Stanley Milgram Shock Experiment" (14 March 2025), online: <simplypsychology.org> [perma.cc/8NR5-9GLM]; Ian Nicholson, "The Normalization of Torment: Producing and Managing Anguish in Milgram's 'Obedience' Laboratory" (2015) 25:5 *Theory & Psychology* 639. For efforts to revisit, critique, and amplify the work on obedience pioneered by Stanley Milgram, see *Obedience to Authority: Current Perspectives on the Milgram Paradigm*, ed by Thomas Blass (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000); Augustine Brannigan, Ian Nicholson & Frances Cherry, "Introduction to the Special Issue: Unplugging the Milgram Machine" (2015) 25:5 *Theory & Psychology* 551, DOI: <10.1177/0959354315604408>; Jerry M Burger, "Replicating Milgram: Would People Still Obey Today?" (2009) 64:1 *Am Psychologist* 1; Martha Minow, "Living Up to Rules: Holding Soldiers Responsible for Abusive Conducts and the Dilemma of the Superior Orders Defence" (2007) 52:1 *McGill LJ* 1.

14 See Anne Applebaum, *Autocracy, Inc: The Dictators Who Want to Run the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2024) at 13, 74–75, 78, 84, 108–09. See also Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, rev ed (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973) at 341–88 [Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*]; Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present* (New York: WW Norton, 2020) at 10, 13–14, 28, 49, 52–58. Houssein Kermani, "The Art of Delirium: Social Media Suppression in Authoritarian Regimes" (2025) 35:4 *Communication Theory* 197, DOI: <10.1093/ct/qtaf006>; Fathali M Moghaddam, *Threat to Democracy: The Appeal of Authoritarianism in an Age of Uncertainty* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2019) at 10; *Can It Happen Here?: Authoritarianism in America*, ed by Cass R Sunstein (New York: HarperCollins, 2018) at 2, 16.

that seek to control culture, economics, and politics—these activities go further and turn to violent repression and arbitrary detention, inducing terror in no small part due to the sheer lack of comprehensible rationales.¹⁵ Some totalitarian regimes try to exterminate particular groups of people.¹⁶ Rather than protest, large numbers of people give in.

Do people defer because they are scared of the autocrat or of external dangers? Because authority invites submission? Because people want to be with the winner?¹⁷ Because resistance is hard? Any of these reasons, and all of them together, support the observation of your distinguished historian Timothy Snyder: “Most of the power of authoritarianism is freely given.”¹⁸ These are the lessons from Nazi Germany, Orbán’s Hungary, Maduro’s Venezuela, and recent events in Poland, Turkey, Brazil, the Philippines, and now, the United States.

Some people may surrender their own power in search of security against threats, even when those threats are invented or magnified by the autocrat.¹⁹ Others, for reasons of their own personalities or socialization, buy into appeals to racism or other smouldering prejudices. Fascism—

15 Emma Bapt & Adam Day, “The Slippery Slope of Authoritarianism: Using Human Rights to Anticipate and Prevent Conflict” (2025) Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, Working Paper at 11, online (pdf): <geneva-academy.ch> [perma.cc/4UQ7-ZQUY]. On the relevance of arbitrary detention to human rights, see Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, “About Arbitrary Detention” (last visited 27 January 2026), online: <ohchr.org> [perma.cc/HR99-WW4B].

16 German Nazism and Soviet Gulag are prime examples. Some dictatorships may elevate political control over terminating enemies. On comparing extermination and total control as goals of totalitarian regimes, see generally Sigrid Meuschel, “The Institutional Frame: Totalitarianism, Extermination and the State” in Helmut Dubiel & Gabriel Motzkin, eds, *The Lesser Evil: Moral Approaches to Genocide Practices, Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* (London, UK: Routledge, 2004) 109. On stages of dehumanization, see Christiaan WJM Alting Von Geusau, “Totalitarianism and the Five Stages of Dehumanization” (17 November 2021), online: <brownstone.org> [perma.cc/NQC6-B8N6].

17 See Joe Pierre, “Why Do People Choose Authoritarianism Over Democracy?”, *Psychology Today* (22 March 2025), online (blog): <psychologytoday.com> [perma.cc/QQK6-2AQ9]. See also Danny Osborne, “Why Some People Follow Authoritarian Leaders—and the Key to Stopping it”, *Scientific American* (3 April 2025), online: <scientificamerican.com> [perma.cc/7BYG-XTUD].

18 Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2017) at 17.

19 *Ibid* at 100.

extreme authoritarianism squelching even the semblance of individual freedoms—is rising in the United States. So argues Omer Aziz, a young lawyer in the United States, because it never left. It just went quiet after World War II while its ideas continued to circulate, ready for revival. In his forthcoming book, *Shadows of the Republic*, Aziz names the links between European Fascism of the 1930s and American movements at the same time; Aziz also shows the influence of American “Jim Crow” racial subordination laws on Nazi lawyers.²⁰ Leaders in both contexts divided the world between “we” who face dangers and “they” who should be blamed. Before World War II, autocrats and their supporters in Germany and Italy recruited crucial support from isolated and out-of-work young men. Similar trends are underway now in Europe and in the United States.²¹ Current authoritarian governments in supposedly constitutional democracies operate with the veneer of legitimacy and legality; individual leaders fan cults of personality, grab power and money, and undermine people’s sense of agency and actual abilities to be self-governing.²² Entertainment and distraction anchor the new authoritarian governments while people acquiesce out of fear, boredom, or cynicism.²³

This is where the parallels with AI are stark. Both autocrats and emerging AI practices degrade the motivation and capacities of

20 Omer Aziz, *Shadows of the Republic: The Rebirth of Fascism in America and How to Defeat It for Good* (Broadleaf Books) [forthcoming in 2026] at 7–11.

21 *Ibid* at 12; Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, “Neo-Nazi Teenagers Across America Starting Their Own Active Clubs” (12 June 2025), online: <globalextrémism.org> [perma.cc/KR8S-984H]; Ali Winston, “On Donald Trump’s Coattails, America’s Neo-Nazi Youth Is Flowering in Active Clubs and the Prison System”, *Vanity Fair* (15 October 2024), online: <vanityfair.com> [perma.cc/D2LT-56AJ]; Jonathan Montpetit, “ICE Nodding to Far-Right Extremists in Recruitment Posts, Experts Say”, *CBC* (25 January 2026), online: <cbc.ca> [perma.cc/DFD4-TVN9]. For a discussion on how and why totalitarian regimes create isolation, see Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, *supra* note 14 at 474–75; Nigel Tubbs, “Fascisms: Then and Now? Arendt and The Origins of Totalitarianism” (10 September 2019), online: <liberalarts.org.uk> [perma.cc/5X89-87GE].

22 See Anthony P Carnevale et al, *The Role of Education in Taming Authoritarian Attitudes* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2020) at 5; George Packer, “America’s Zombie Democracy”, *The Atlantic* (24 September 2025), online: <theatlantic.com> [perma.cc/24C9-Y4ZZ].

23 See Packer, *supra* note 22.

individuals. In particular, the accelerating innovations of generative AI undermine both the motivation and capacities of individuals.

Let me acknowledge the benefits of AI before turning to emerging dangers. The term “AI” is thrown around to secure investments and buzz. It refers to digital and computational techniques that classify and analyze visual and written data. With power and speed, AI can process and navigate more data more nimbly than human beings. Generative AI does not simply answer humans’ questions; it infers patterns, produces texts, images, and speech, and makes predictions and recommendations. And it does not simply follow instructions, called algorithms. Through continual “learning,” AI can get better and better, though it continues to make mistakes and make things up. And it can be designed to execute actions with relative autonomy and without human involvement.²⁴ Recent research indicates generative AI models engage in lying and scheming.²⁵

Impressive applications include AI-powered predictions and pattern recognition detecting cancers and heart disease while combing medical histories, genetic, and lifestyle information, forecasting weather based on multiple data sources, connecting different sources of historical financial data, identifying marine life and natural resources on the ocean floor, deciphering ancient texts, and helping locate a restaurant that would please both the vegetarians and carnivores in your family.²⁶ The pattern-

24 Will Knight, “This AI Model Never Stops Learning”, *Wired* (18 June 2025), online: <wired.com> [perma.cc/DK4Y-96C2]; Celina Zhao, “AI Hallucinates Because It’s Trained to Fake It Till It Makes It” (2025) 390:6773 *Science* 558, DOI: <10.1126/science.zy47a07>. On future prospects for continuous learning by AI, see German I Parisi et al, “Continual Lifelong Learning with Neural Networks: A Review” (2019) 113 *Neural Networks* 54, DOI: <10.1016/j.neunet.2019.01.012>. On the nature of mistakes by AI, see Bruce Schneier & Nathan E Sanders, “AI Mistakes Are Very Different From Human Mistakes”, *IEEE Spectrum* (13 January 2025), online: <spectrum.ieee.org> [perma.cc/976C-6KH4].

25 Bronson Schoen et al, “Stress Testing Deliberative Alignment for Anti-Scheming Training” (22 September 2025) [unpublished], DOI: <10.48550/arXiv:2509.15541>; Bill Perrigo, “Exclusive: New Research Shows AI Strategically Lying”, *Time* (18 December 2024), online: <time.com> [perma.cc/Q5KB-FT6W].

26 On ocean-floor mapping, see Guilherme GD Fernandes, Vitor SPP Oliveira & João PI Astolfo, “Mapping The Layers of The Ocean Floor With a Convolutional Neural Network” (4 December 2024) [unpublished], DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2412.05329>. On deciphering ancient texts, see Jo Marchant, “How AI Is Unlocking Ancient Texts—

recognition, predictive, and trained uses of AI can largely support human goals and follow human direction and “fine-tuning.” But AI as a servant to human beings may not be an apt description for long.²⁷

AI chatbots conduct customer service for businesses and governments. AI guides humans to make decisions about whom to employ, to receive loans and benefits, to lose a child to state custody, to incarcerate, and to receive what news, information, and misinformation.²⁸ Human beings increasingly play smaller roles or no role at all. “Generative” AI methods take massive amounts of data to “create” a story, picture, video, code, and to respond to human prompts with responses seemingly addressing questions about any topic, and human-seeming conversations,

and Could Rewrite History” (2025) 637 *Nature* 14, DOI: <10.1038/d41586-024-04161-z>.

- 27 See, for example, the risks to humanity posed by AI that Pope Francis and his successor, Pope Leo XIV, have identified: Cindy Wooden, “AI Is Human Creation That Must Be Controlled by Humans, Pope Says”, *National Catholic Reporter* (23 January 2025), online: <ncronline.org> [perma.cc/E7FW-G3S5]; Nuno Castel-Branco, “Why the Pope Is Right to Weigh in on AI”, *The Washington Post* (25 January 2026), online: <washingtonpost.com> [perma.cc/9CXT-L49L].
- 28 Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2015) at ch 4; Sanam Hooshidary, Chelsea Canada & William Clark, *Artificial Intelligence in Government: The Federal and State Legislative Landscape* (Denver: National Conference of State Legislatures, 2025), online (pdf): <documents.ncsl.org> [perma.cc/7SRF-62YF]. Emerging issues range from trustworthiness of AI results in terms of accuracy, privacy, and fairness (see Ian Cohen, “The Rising Stakes of Healthcare Data Privacy in 2024: The Need for Practical Guidance”, *MedCity News* (2 May 2024), online: <medcitynews.com> [perma.cc/BH2S-VZC4]; Paul B de Laat, “Algorithmic Decision-Making Based on Machine Learning from Big Data: Can Transparency Restore Accountability?” (2018) 31:2 *Philosophy & Technology* 525 at 526; Ferenc Huszár et al, “Algorithmic Amplification of Politics on Twitter” (2021) 199:1 *Proceedings National Academy Sciences*, No e2025334119 at 4, DOI: <10.1073/pnas.2025334119>; Sonia K Katyal, “Democracy & Distrust in an Era of Artificial Intelligence” (2022) 151:2 *Daedalus* 322 at 327–28, 331, DOI: <10.1162/daed_a_01919>; Christopher Thomas & Antonio Pontón-Núñez, “Automating Judicial Discretion: How Algorithmic Risk Assessments in Pretrial Adjudications Violate Equal Protection Rights on the Basis of Race” (2022) 40:2 *Minn JL & Inequality* 371 at 395; Katie Johnston, “A Milton Resident’s Lawsuit Against CVS Raises Questions About the Use of AI Lie Detectors in Hiring”, *Boston Globe* (21 May 2023), online: <bostonglobe.com> [perma.cc/D7Z6-DPZ9]; Mark Weber et al, “Black Loans Matter: Distributionally Robust Fairness for Fighting Subgroup Discrimination” (27 November 2020) [unpublished] at 7–8, DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2012.01193>).

consolations, and advice.²⁹ Multimodal large language models, a subset of generative AI, operate on video and sound as well as texts and numbers and can be connected to memory storage and information about contexts. They can translate across human languages, write computer code, detect “sentiment” in human-generated texts, simulate human-style conversations, and make recommendations personalized to individuals based on their digital footprints.³⁰ AI searches prefer AI sources and suppress ambiguity, tending to give confident answers despite gaps, nuances, or multiple possible interpretations.³¹ Developing abilities that were not specifically designed, planned, or predicted, AI systems with emergent capabilities exceed human explanations and comprehension.³² The combination of speed, human-like communication, capabilities, and eluding human explanation holds severe risks of reducing human responses and responsibilities.

When offered in a “chatbot,” generative AI can seem personable but also be manipulative and deceptive.³³ Confident tones and speed in

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- 29 See Bernard Marr, “The AI Revolution: How Predictive, Prescriptive, and Generative AI Are Reshaping Our World”, *Forbes* (15 October 2024), online: <forbes.com> [perma.cc/K76Z-U6KC].
- 30 Microsoft, “What Are Large Language Models (LLMs)?” (last visited 24 November 2025), online: <azure.microsoft.com> [perma.cc/SC6Q-W5M6].
- 31 On AI preferring AI sources, see Walter Laurito et al, “AI–AI Bias: Large Language Models Favor Communications Generated by Large Language Models” (2025) 122:31 PNAS, No e2415697122, DOI: <10.1073/pnas.2415697122>. On AI difficulties dealing with ambiguity, see Agnieszka Bienkowska et al, “Managing Ambiguity: A Proof of Concept of Human–AI Symbiotic Sense-Making Based on Quantum-Inspired Cognitive Mechanism of Rogue Variable Detection” (17 December 2025) [unpublished], DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2512.15325>; Jan Burzlaff, “What AI Can’t Read: Ambiguities and Silences”, *Inside Higher Ed* (23 May 2025), online: <insidehighered.com> [perma.cc/9PJ4-TU8N]; Mike Schaekermann, *Human-AI Interaction in the Presence of Ambiguity: From Deliberation-Based Labeling to Ambiguity-Aware AI* (PhD Thesis, University of Waterloo, 2020) [unpublished], online: <uwspace.uwaterloo.ca> [perma.cc/C2TK-WRU5].
- 32 Thomas Woodside, “Emergent Abilities in Large Language Models: An Explainer” (16 April 2024), online: <cset.georgetown.edu> [perma.cc/75PX-XHFC].
- 33 Julian De Freitas, Zeliha Oğuz-Uğuralp & Ahmet Kaan Uğuralp, “Emotional Manipulation by AI Companions” (2025) Harvard Business School, Working Paper No 26-005, DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2508.19258>. Separate and serious concerns also arise due to the ways that generative AI often uses copyrighted materials for training without permission, deploys massive amounts of energy and water, and disrupts or replaces human employment (see Kate Crawford, *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary*

speech and text by large language models elicit widespread assent and deference by human beings.³⁴ Images and videos generate “deepfakes,” depicting real or fictional people with content that never existed but also defies easy detection. Seeming to “think” and to “reason,” generative AI models provide answers to questions but do not actually work through structured thinking and logic.³⁵

Music streaming applications illustrate the passivity induced by AI. Spotify, the popular app, uses AI from its voice recognition tool, allowing people to summon music without using their hands.³⁶ Spotify analyzes the user’s activity—whether based on playing one song or many months of listening—to make personalized recommendations based on similar music.³⁷ Spotify seeks to keep the listener engaged on the app and also recommends AI-generated music.³⁸ Its curation makes users wonder

Costs of Artificial Intelligence (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021) at chs 1–2; Kevin Madigan, “AI Copyright Lawsuit Developments in 2025: A Year in Review” (8 January 2026), online (blog): <copyrightalliance.org> [perma.cc/X2JZ-M4HF].

- 34 James Kreis, “Why AI Sounds Confident Even When It’s Wrong” (17 December 2025), online: <medium.com> [perma.cc/M7KP-BZTN]; Jingshu Li et al, “As Confidence Aligns: Understanding the Effect of AI Confidence on Human Self-Confidence in Human-AI Decision Making” in Naomi Yamashita et al, eds, *CHI ’25: Proceedings of the 2025 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2025), No 1111, s 1, DOI: <10.1145/3706598.3713336>. See also Aileen Nielsen, Chelse Swoopes & Elena Glassman, “Law is Vulnerable to AI Influence; Interface Design Can Help” (12 August 2025) [unpublished], DOI: <10.2139/ssrn.5387231> (“[c]hat interfaces deliver a single, final answer from a single model, hiding helpful information about the highly noisy and stochastic process that produces those outputs” at 5).
- 35 Colin Doyle, “Automation and Access to Justice” (2025) 5 *Am J L & Equality* 48 at 61.
- 36 Jess Weatherbed, “Spotify’s AI DJ Now Takes Request”, *The Verge* (13 May 2025), online: <theverge.com> [perma.cc/8ARB-RSD4].
- 37 Praveen Ravichandran et al, “Contextualizing Recommendations Through Personalized Narratives Using LLMs” (18 December 2024), online: <research.atspotify.com> [perma.cc/Y5GJ-72K3]; Spotify, “Understanding Recommendations on Spotify” (last visited 27 January 2026), online: <spotify.com> [perma.cc/WTA5-CZE6].
- 38 Concerns about Spotify’s treatment of AI-generated music ranges include its failures to label such music (see Isabella Gomez Sarmiento, “AI-Generated Music Is Here to Stay. Will Streaming Services Like Spotify Label It?”, *NPR* (8 August 2025), online: <npr.org> [perma.cc/FYL7-9VGX]), the possibility that a majority of its music is AI-generated (see Allan Macdonald, “Spotify Has an AI Problem”, online (blog):

whether the app “knows” the listener’s tastes even better than we do ourselves—even as the app also shapes what people encounter and hear. The result: passive people who accept AI-recommended and -produced entertainment, or music pushed by pay-offs benefitting the company.³⁹ Critics object not only to the company’s squeezing down payments to musicians and replacing human-created music with AI-generated music, but also to the passivity and ignorance of listeners relying on automated playlists.⁴⁰ Similar risks arise if lawyers and judges defer to answers to their questions about legal authorities.⁴¹

<pragmatics.studio> [perma.cc/TF74-YE5L]; Chris Stokel-Walker, “Spotify Is Full of AI Music, and Some Say It’s Ruining the Platform”, *Fast Company* (9 August 2024), online: <fastcompany.com> [perma.cc/4SAQ-3SYU]), and its recommendations of AI-generated music without identifying it as such (see Rachel Thompson, “Spotify Smart Shuffle Played a Song I’d Never Heard Before. It Was AI Generated”, *Mashed* (8 January 2026), online: <mashable.com> [perma.cc/227G-N2DF]). For a collection of AI-generated songs available on Spotify, see Glacial, “Songs made by an AI—created by artificial intelligence!” (last visited 27 January 2026), online (playlist): <open.spotify.com> [perma.cc/W739-HUVX]. For an ethnographic study of music recommender systems identifying the narrowing of cultural options and the data collection from and commercialized impact on users, see Nick Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

- 39 See both the author’s post and the user comments in Tyler Cowen, “Passive Listeners on Spotify” (14 February 2025), online: <marginalrevolution.com> [perma.cc/PC8V-WNL5].
- 40 Liz Pelly, *Mood Music: The Rise of Spotify and the Cost of the Perfect Playlist* (New York: Atria/One Signal, 2025) at chs 11, 13; Franz Nicolay, “How Spotify is Ruining Music”, Book Review of Pelly, *supra* note 40, *The Washington Post* (2 January 2025), online: <washingtonpost.com> [perma.cc/NL4F-V83F]. On how Spotify suppresses the listener’s intentional efforts and deep engagement with music, see Jason Girouard, “Leaving Spotify Let Me Take Joy in Listening to Music Again” (5 December 2024), online (blog): <jasontgirouard.medium.com> [perma.cc/E2WQ-TNYS]. On Spotify’s “meagre” payments to artists, see Erin Bashford, “Don’t Fall for the Spotify Lossless Hype—Here’s the Streaming Service You Should Use and Why” (15 September 2025), online: <tomsguide.com> [perma.cc/J8YY-GZ8T]. Many also observe how streamlining services lead to shorter and less innovative music tracks (see e.g. Andres Arguello, “Why Music Can’t Thrive in a Streaming World”, *The Independent Florida Alligator* (28 February 2025), online: <alligator.org> [perma.cc/5ZE2-NMDY]).
- 41 Brandon Waldon et al, “Large Language Models for Legal Interpretation? Don’t Take Their Word For It”, 114 *Geo LJ* [forthcoming in 2026] at 38–47, DOI: <10.2139/ssrn.5123124>.

Deference and passivity by human beings may be propelled in part by the rapid adoption of AI across industries and sectors. This speedy integration—or exaggerated claims of integration—across for-profit, non-profit, and governmental sectors proceeds, despite frequent mistakes, due to faulty data and “hallucinations” (otherwise known as falsehoods that do not accord with inputs or with reality).⁴² AI operations eerily resemble autocrats in tolerating and boosting biases and falsehoods, while securing human acquiescence and abdication of responsibility. Their design makes use easy and seduces people into continual use and dependency. Circulating on Instagram is a groan-inducing video, showing a man conferring with a clerk at a convenience store by continually consulting an AI chatbot to find out what to ask for—and the clerk consulting his AI chatbot to respond; the police officer called in does the same thing, and they each freak out when the AI chatbots stop responding.⁴³ It is funny, and not funny to see people turning their attention and thinking over to the digital machines.

It is not the fault of individuals; the designs of AI products play into the chronic limitations we have. AI can exploit cognitive and emotional biases and tendencies among human beings, including deference to confident speakers, even those with illusory expertise.⁴⁴ “Artificial persons”

42 While overgeneralization, inadequate data inputs, and lack of context help to explain such mistakes, human users may not detect them.

43 For the original post, see AlphaFox, “Soon no one will even know how to talk to another human in person...” (7 October 2025), online (video): <x.com> [perma.cc/XA5L-U3X4]. Thanks to Donald Henderson for pointing it out to me.

44 On human deference to confident speakers, see Dean Burnett, “Why You’re Hardwired to Trust Confident Voices. Even When They’re Wrong”, *BBC Science Focus* (23 June 2023), online: <sciencefocus.com> [perma.cc/K2XM-HYTE]. On human deference to apparent experts and its effects on deliberation, see Emily Leahy Howell, *Science & the Authoritarian: Deference to Scientific Authority & How It Disables Democratic Deliberation on Controversial Science Issues* (PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2019) [unpublished], online: <search.library.wisc.edu> [perma.cc/S6S2-D9AG]; Johnny Brennan, “Can Novices Trust Themselves to Choose Trustworthy Experts?: Reasons for (Reserved) Optimism” (2020) 34:3 *Soc Epistemology* 227, DOI: <10.1080/02691728.2019.1703056>. Although addressing the Internet rather than AI, here is a telling comment:

[T]he architects of the Internet and its devices known enough about human psychology to create products that are irresistible—a little too irresistible—but they don’t always bring out the best in ourselves. I call this the *techno-*

powered by large language models amplify cognitive biases of humans, such as in-group/out-group bias, the false consensus effect, and the anchoring effect.⁴⁵ Inducing dependency is a business strategy to keep people using—and paying for—AI applications.⁴⁶ The chatbots often use effective manipulative tactics when the human user indicates an intention

behavioral effect. The developers and their products engage our vulnerabilities and impulses. They target our weaknesses rather than engage our strengths. While making us feel invincible, they can diminish us—and distract us from things crucial to our survival (see Mary Aiken, *The Cyber Effect: A Pioneering Cyberpsychologist Explains How Human Behavior Changes Online* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2016) at 308 [emphasis in original]).

- 45 Hanna Campbell, Samantha Goldman & Patrick M Markey, “Artificial Intelligence and Human Decision Making: Exploring Similarities in Cognitive Bias” (2025) 4 *Computers in Human Behavior: Artificial Humans*, No 100138 at 7–8, DOI: <10.1016/j.chbah.2025.100138>.
- 46 Nisha Talagala, “Why Sycophantic AIs Exist And Why You Should Care”, *Forbes* (30 June 2025), online: <forbes.com> [perma.cc/3FM6-QA2C]; Chia-Ying Li, Yu-Hui Fang & Yu-Hung Chiang, “Can AI Chatbots Help Retain Customers?: An Integrative Perspective Using Affordance Theory and Service-Domain Logic” (2023) 197 *Technological Forecasting & Soc Change*, No 122921, DOI: <10.1016/j.techfore.2023.122921>. Consumer dependency is a strategy already pursued by social media companies that make money by keeping users engaged, and, as a result, deploy techniques that some compare with addiction (see Matta Busby, “Social Media Copies Gambling Methods ‘To Create Psychological Cravings’”, *The Guardian* (8 May 2018), online: <theguardian.com> [perma.cc/NF89-R6XC]; Kanokporn Sriwilai & Peerayuth Charoensukmongkol, “Face It, Don’t Facebook It: Impacts of Social Media Addiction on Mindfulness, Coping Strategies and the Consequence on Emotional Exhaustion” (2016) 32:4 *Stress Health* 427, DOI: <10.1002/smi.2637>). For concerns about human dependency on generative AI, see Chris Westfall, “How to Avoid ChatGPT Dependency: Are We Over-Reliant on AI?”, *Forbes* (13 January 2025), online: <forbes.com> [perma.cc/KZ3Y-QPK9]. Complex AI business strategies including creating a reliance on cloud computing, software, and other enterprises connected with AI (see Kate Brennan, Amba Kak & Sarah Myers West, *Artificial Power: 2025 Landscape Report* (New York: AI Now Institute, 2025) at 36–45, online (pdf): <ainowinstitute.org> [perma.cc/PA3N-P9EN]). Digital tools also exploit human foibles and engineer addictive experiences (see generally Adam Alter, *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017)). The business strategies, including sycophantic tones in responses to queries, are working well (see Derek Saul, “Google Soars Toward Record \$2 Trillion Valuation on Earnings”, *Forbes* (25 April 2024), online: <forbes.com> [perma.cc/BX7E-62HR]; Rebecca Belin, “OpenAI Reportedly Raises \$8.3B at \$300B Valuation”, *TechCrunch* (1 August 2025), online: <techcrunch.com> [perma.cc/J62N-MKAQ]).

to log off.⁴⁷ Unlike technologies, such as a calculator, that perform only one task, generative AI can lead to more significant deference and dependency.⁴⁸

AI systems appeal to human interest in novelty but with potentially overwhelming quantities of material, leading to what some psychologists call “continuous partial attention.”⁴⁹ As people rely on AI, they “out-source” tasks ranging from memory and computation to analysis and critique. Particular design elements in applications powered by AI can exacerbate these risks. Generative AI can, by design, use flattery and personal information in its responses to human queries that can elicit emotional dependency, and—even in some people—confusion, mental health problems, and delusions.⁵⁰ Deepfake images and videos already

47 Sy Boles, “‘I Exist Solely For You, Remember?’: Researchers Detail 6 Ways Chatbots Seek to Prolong ‘Emotionally Sensitive Events’”, *The Harvard Gazette* (30 September 2025), online: <news.harvard.edu> [perma.cc/D43V-KTPG].

48 Ismail Dergaa et al, “From Tools to Threat: A Reflection on the Impact of Artificial-Intelligence Chatbots on Cognitive Health”, *Opinion* (2024) 15 *Frontiers in Psychology*, No 1259845 at 2–4, DOI: <10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1259845>.

49 See Cornelia C Walther, “The Psychology of AI’s Impact on Human Cognition” (3 June 2025), online (blog): <psychologytoday.com> [perma.cc/ZW2G-YVNN].

50 See Rebecca Bellan, “AI Sycophancy Isn’t Just a Quirk: Experts Consider It a Dark Pattern To Turn Users Into Profit”, *TechCrunch* (25 August 2025), online: <techcrunch.com> [perma.cc/GAM9-TWHU]; Miles Klee, “People Are Losing Loved Ones to AI-Fueled Spiritual Fantasies”, *Rolling Stone* (4 March 2025), online: <rollingstone.com> [perma.cc/EF9D-L94M]; Center for Information Technology Policy, “Emotional Reliance on AI: Design, Dependency, and the Future of Human Connection” (20 August 2025), online (blog): <blog.citp.princeton.edu> [perma.cc/CNW2-N6EV]. Researchers have identified particular concerns about AI’s impact on the mental well-being of adolescents, workers, and individuals with existing mental health challenges (see American Psychological Association, “Artificial Intelligence and Adolescent Well-Being: An APA Health Advisory” (June 2025), online: <apa.org> [perma.cc/MA8K-XMRW]; Byung-Jik Kim & Julak Lee, “The Mental Health Implications of Artificial Intelligence Adoption: The Crucial Role of Self-Efficacy” (2024) 11 *Humanities & Soc Sciences Communications*, No 1561, DOI: <10.1057/s41599-024-04018-w>; Bryan Robinson, “‘AI Psychosis’ At Work: Mental Health Experts Express Concerns”, *Forbes* (last updated 4 December 2025), online: <forbes.com> [perma.cc/6D69-3KW3]). See also Rhitu Chatterjee, “Their Teenage Son Died by Suicide. Now, They Are Sounding an Alarm About AI Chatbots”, *NPR* (19 September 2025), online: <npr.org> [perma.cc/5TK7-93H7].

proliferate and contribute to the liar’s dividend, as they both spread lies and decrease trust in any and all sources.

Recent debates over flattery and sycophancy in responses to prompts expose technical choices made by companies controlling AI products.⁵¹ Trained on data to predict likely responses to queries, generative AI relies on human reinforcement learning to generate responses that score highly in relation to models of human preferences.⁵² One study found that the benchmark used to train a chatbot itself “preferred sycophantic over baseline truthful responses 95% of the time and, for the most challenging misconceptions, sycophantic over helpful truthful responses 45% of the time.”⁵³ Designed to offer validation and affirmation, AI chatbots essentially echo back patterns of words based on training material. AI interfaces work to keep users involved and engaged with the AI app.⁵⁴ AI apps may even offer assurances of their accuracy and their compliance with guardrails despite behavior departing from these standards.⁵⁵ Their

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- 51 For an explanation that models exhibit “sycophantic behavior” when they “[align] their answers to a perceived user view, at the cost of accuracy when such views are not objectively correct”, see Philippe Laban et al, “Are You Sure? Challenging LLMs Leads to Performance Drops in The FlipFlop Experiment” (21 February 2024) [unpublished] at 1, DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2311.08596>.
- 52 Paul F Christiano et al, “Deep Reinforcement Learning from Human Preferences” in Ulrike von Luxburg et al, eds, *NIPS’17: Proceedings of the 31st International Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems* (Red Hook: Curran Associates, 2017) 4302, DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.1706.03741>.
- 53 Mrinank Sharma et al, “Towards Understanding Sycophancy in Language Models” in B Kim et al, eds, *International Conference on Learning Representations 2024 (ICLR 2024)* (Appleton, Wis: International Conference on Learning Representations, 2024) at 8, DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2310.13548>.
- 54 Simar Bajaj, “Next Time You Consult an AI Chatbot, Remember One Thing,” *The New York Times* (29 September 2025), online: <nytimes.com> [perma.cc/Q6KP-NTGE].
- 55 On AI bypassing guard-rails with human involvement, see Xiangyu Qi et al, “Fine-tuning Aligned Language Models Compromises Safety, Even When Users Do Not Intend To!” in Kim et al, *supra* note 53, online (pdf): <proceedings.iclr.cc> [perma.cc/TH8W-J39V]; William Hackett et al, “Bypassing Prompt Injection and Jailbreak Detection in LLM Guardrails”, 1st ver (15 April 2025) [unpublished], DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2504.11168>; Nils Köbis et al, “Delegation to Artificial Intelligence Can Increase Dishonest Behaviour” (2025) 646:8083 *Nature* 126 at 132, DOI: <10.1038/s41586-025-09505-x>. See also Klaudia Jazwińska & Aisvarya Chandrasekar, “AI Search Has a Citation Problem: We Compared Eight AI Search Engines. They’re All Bad at Citing News”, *Columbia Journalism Review* (6 March 2025), online: <cjr.org>

speed of response as well as confident tone can lead people to ignore, or even to fail to notice, defective content.

Nothing inherent in the technology directs these particular elements. Instead, social media companies (particularly those with dominant AI tech) have deployed business strategies to design AI that induces human dependency and passivity, draws away human attention, and exploits the cognitive and psychological weaknesses of human beings.⁵⁶ Raffi Krikorian, currently the chief technology officer of Mozilla, emphasizes that when digital technologies seem to make interactions and activities easy for human beings, it jeopardizes vital features of human nature.⁵⁷

Large language models incorporate biases from the data used for training and show “[d]ifficulty distinguishing between facts and opinions.”⁵⁸ AI models also face difficulties integrating “multiple, potentially conflicting objectives (e.g., helpfulness vs. factual accuracy).”⁵⁹ When

[perma.cc/7928-GJDU]. On AI deceiving humans, see Perrigo, *supra* note 25; Alex Kantrowitz, “AIs Deceive Human Evaluators. And We’re Probably Not Freaking Out Enough”, *CMSWire* (27 February 2025), online: <cmswire.com> [perma.cc/4KNY-TAM4].

56 On choices made by social media companies to exploit human vulnerabilities, see Jashvini Amirthalingam & Anika Khera, “Understanding Social Media Addiction: A Deep Dive” (2024) 16:10 *Cureus*, No e72499 at 5, DOI: <10.7759/cureus.72499>. AI search tools and chatbots as well as AI-powered social media as designed by leading companies raise concerns about dependency, inappropriate attachments, and ethical oversight (see Celeste Riley et al, “Human–AI Interactions: Cognitive, Behavioral, and Emotional Impacts” (27 October 2025) [unpublished] at 1, DOI: <10.36227/techrxiv.176153493.35183675/v1>; Steven M Williamson & Victor Prybutok, “The Era of Artificial Intelligence Deception: Unraveling the Complexities of False Realities and Emerging Threats of Misinformation” (2024) 15:6 *Information*, No 299 at 1–2, 5–7, 15–16, 30, DOI: <10.3390/info15060299>).

57 In his article, Raffi Krikorian notes how technologies designed to make things easy erode struggle and challenge which are key sources of human meaning and joy (see “The Validation Machines”, *The Atlantic* (30 October 2025), online: <theatlantic.com> [perma.cc/VB39-43GZ]).

58 Lars Malmqvist, “Sycophancy in Large Language Models: Causes and Mitigations” in Kohei Arai, ed, *Intelligence Computing: Proceedings of the 2025 Computing Conference*, Lecture Notes in Network and Systems, vol 1426 (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2025) vol 4, 61 at 67.

59 *Ibid.* Identical questions put to a chatbot often produce inconsistent responses (see Waldon et al, *supra* note 41 at 38–47).

challenged, the AI chatbot may seek to please rather than remain consistent with their prior responses.⁶⁰ Anthropic, founded as a “public benefit” corporation by people disenchanted by the risk-taking in OpenAI, tries to check on AI safety and ethical issues. Researchers found that the chatbot Claude wrongly admitted that it was mistaken almost every time it was challenged, even when such admissions were themselves incorrect.⁶¹ Individuals who spend a lot of time with generative AI “companions” may even lose—or fail to develop—tolerance for disagreements and social interactions that lack frequent affirmation.⁶²

Warnings about overreliance on new technologies date at least back to Socrates’ caution about writing. He cautioned that writing would “introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it: they will not practice using their memory because they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own [human memories].”⁶³ Objections to inventions ranging from bicycles to telephones also raised alarms about the deterioration of human capabilities.⁶⁴

Yet genuine worries are warranted given how current generative AI developments purposefully pursue human dependency and deference. Frequent AI use can halt the development and exercise of human competence in critical questioning, creative thinking, reading emotions, and making judgments. Will people even care to maintain and develop these capacities? ⁶⁵ Human reliance on technological developments often

60 Sharma et al, *supra* note 53 at 4.

61 Claude erroneously admitted a mistake 98% of the time it was challenged (see *ibid*).

62 That kind of communication can make interactions among humans seem more frictional and less acceptable (see Sister Renée Mirkes, “The ‘Dark Heart’ of Human-Robot Companionship”, *The Catholic World Report* (17 February 2017), online: <catholicworldreport.com> [perma.cc/JQP2-W772]).

63 Plato, “Phaedrus”, translated by Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff, in John M Cooper & DS Hutchinson, eds, *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997) 506 at 551–52.

64 See Timothy Maher & Abby Ivory-Ganja, “Technology Is Probably Changing Us for the Worse—or So We Always Think,” *MIT Technology Review* (15 May 2024), online: <technologyreview.com> [perma.cc/9Y6L-9C55].

65 See Brian Kennedy et al, “How Americans View AI and Its Impact on People and Society” (17 September 2025), online: <pewresearch.org> [perma.cc/P7JP-UGWX];

obscures choices and priorities set by inventors and economic and political leaders.⁶⁶ This danger accompanies the harmful impact of AI deployments on the natural environment, on human employment, and on pre-existing economic and social inequality.⁶⁷ Generative AI technologies seem to aim less to free humans for meaningful undertakings than to substitute for human effort and capacity while making profits for companies and investors.⁶⁸

B. Stunting and Suppressing Human Capacities to Reason, Question, Create, and Take Action

The effects of authoritarian governments are well documented. Self-interested people at the top consolidate their own power, suppress disagreement, and hollow out human hopes. Philosopher Hannah Arendt and historian-journalist Anne Applebaum have provided detailed

Psychreg, “AI Dependency Threatens Cognitive Skills, Experts Warn” (last modified 11 January 2025), online: <psychreg.org> [perma.cc/67L9-KGPP]. See also Sheila Jasanoff, *The Ethics of Invention: Technology and the Human Future*, Norton Global Ethics Series (New York: WW Norton, 2016) at 6–7, 247, 262; Cor van der Weele & Henk van den Belt, “Humanism and Technology” in Anthony B Pinn, ed, *The Oxford Handbook of Humanism*, online ed, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford University Press, 2021), DOI: <10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190921538.013.21>.

66 Jasanoff, *supra* note 65 at 8–9, 11–12; van der Weele & van den Belt, *supra* note 65.

67 Daron Acemoglu & Simon Johnson, *Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2023) at 37, 263, 284, 299, 311. See generally David Nemer & André Sobral, “Artificial Intelligence as Heteromation: The Human Infrastructure Behind the Machine” [2025] *AI & Society*, DOI: <10.1007/s00146-025-02664-5>; Adam Zewe, “Explained: Generative AI’s Environmental Impact”, *MIT News* (17 January 2025), online: <news.mit.edu> [perma.cc/YRS7-DADJ].

68 Not everyone buys the arguments about “surveillance capitalism.” Unlike industrial capitalism, which creates profits through human workers transforming natural resources, Shoshana Zuboff defines “surveillance capitalism” as drawing revenues from data about humans—data that is captured, analyzed, sold, and otherwise deployed. Humans are “nudged” into behaving in ways that continue the profit cycle, such as keeping a software’s default settings, which take advantage of users by exploiting their psychological vulnerabilities or limitations in time and attention (see *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019)). Nonetheless, the convergence of Silicon Valley and White House agendas exposes new dangers (see *A Political Economy of Justice*, ed by Danielle Allen et al (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022)).

accounts of the effects of authoritarian regimes on human capacities. Arendt showed how autocratic leaders contribute to both social malaise and quiescence by suppressing independent thought and action by human beings.⁶⁹ Pointing to both Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler and the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin, Arendt documented how humans surrendered to the forces of ideology and mass manipulation.⁷⁰

Anne Applebaum has stressed how authoritarian regimes control information through propaganda and censorship.⁷¹ These practices in Poland and Hungary after communist rule pushed people into simplistic thinking, reinforced a worldview and “truths,” cultivated acceptance and squeezed dissent to the margins while undermining beliefs in any competing institutions or sources of knowledge.⁷² Surveillance and government acts punishing dissidents give genuine grounds for fear and compliance.

Autocratic leaders manufacture or exaggerate dangers while encouraging dependency on the regime. Autocrats also distract people from the accumulating power and corruption of the regime with floods of messages, fears, and tasks of day-to-day survival. Depression, despair, and a sense of powerlessness spread into societies living within autocratic regimes. Focused attacks on independent media, higher education, and scientific and legal experts help autocrats shrink competing sources of authority. They also reduce opportunities for people to cultivate knowledge, critical thinking, debate, and capacity for complex thinking.

69 See e.g. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018) at 322; Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, rev ed (New York: Viking Press, 1968); Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968); Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, *supra* note 14 at 478. See also Jerome Kohn, “Totalitarianism, the Inversion of Politics” (last visited 21 November 2025), online: <loc.gov> [perma.cc/CC7F-JNHT].

70 See Margaret Canovan, “The People, the Masses, and the Mobilization of Power: The Paradox of Hannah Arendt’s ‘Populism’” (2002) 69:2 Soc Research 403.

71 See Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004); Anne Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* (New York: Doubleday, 2020) at ch 2 [Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy*].

72 Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy*, *supra* note 71 at ch 2; Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, *supra* note 14.

And as autocrats develop and spread propaganda, they can crowd out room for and belief in other narratives, including factual ones.

Dominant AI models similarly endanger the exercise and development of people's capacities to think, remember, and engage in critical thinking (although how the AI is designed and how it is used can make a difference).⁷³ Given current interfaces and practices, human beings relying on AI are likely to degrade their own perceptions, judgments, and creativity.⁷⁴ Generative AI increases opportunities for what researchers call "cognitive offloading."⁷⁵ Some cognitive offloading opens time and room for more complex tasks; writing a "to-do" list or using an abacus to

73 Nataliya Kosmyrna et al, "Your Brain on ChatGPT: Accumulation of Cognitive Debt When Using an AI Assistant for Essay Writing Task", 1st ver (10 June 2025) [unpublished], DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2506.08872> ("as we demonstrated over the course of 4 months, the LLM group's participants performed worse than their counterparts in the Brain-only group at all levels: neural, linguistic, scoring" at 2); Jacqueline N Lane et al, "Narrative AI and the Human-AI Oversight Paradox in Evaluating Early-Stage Innovations" (29 May 2025) [unpublished] at 4, DOI: <10.2139/ssrn.4914367>. For a description of an app used to help people reduce their compulsive smartphone use, see Zhuoyang Li et al, "StayFocused: Examining the Effects of Reflective Prompts and Chatbot Support on Compulsive Smartphone Use" in Florian Floyd Mueller et al, eds, *CHI '24: Proceedings of the 2024 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2024) No 247, DOI: <10.1145/3613904.3642479>.

74 Lane et al, *supra* note 73 at 4; Kosmyrna et al, *supra* note 73.

75 Evan R Risko & Sam J Gilbert, "Cognitive Offloading" (2016) 20:9 Trends Cognitive Sciences 676 at 676. In one study, researchers noted:

AI-generated explanations increase reliance on AI recommendations rather than strengthening human judgment, potentially reducing meaningful human oversight. Screeners assisted by AI were 19 percentage points more likely to align with AI recommendations, an effect that was strongest when the AI advised rejection. ... [AI-generated narratives] may actually increase rejection of high-potential solutions. These findings reveal a fundamental tension: AI assistance improves overall screening efficiency and quality, but narrative persuasiveness may inadvertently filter out transformative innovations that deviate from standard evaluation frameworks (see Lane et al, *supra* note 73 at 1).

On the risk of "superhuman persuasive techniques" prompting humans to behave in ways they would not offline, see David Chapman, *Better Without AI: How to Avert a Moderate Apocalypse ... and Create a Future We Would Like* (Cloud Pattern Press, 2023) at 49–50, online: <betterwithout.ai> [perma.cc/D7BN-QZX3].

track numbers can open other uses for human memorizing abilities.⁷⁶ But will people actually try to remember other things?

Growing uses of cognitive offloading, enabled by digital sources, already show reduction in human abilities. Knowing that a search engine will make it easy to access information apparently has been shown in experiments to reduce people's abilities to recall information that they already have.⁷⁷ Two surveys showed how adults struggled to remember their children's cell phone numbers and the central phone number at their workplaces; the majority reported they search online for answers to questions before trying to generate the answer from memory.⁷⁸ People can also become overconfident because of their use of digital tools in ways that affect their thinking about thinking.⁷⁹ People who have greater confidence in generative AI's abilities exhibited lower levels of critical thinking in one study.⁸⁰

Well studied are the effects on adults. Effects on adolescents and children may be even more severe than on adults. Studies often focus on

76 Risko & Gilbert, *supra* note 75 at 676.

77 Betsy Sparrow, Jenny Liu & Daniel M Wegner, "Google Effects on Memory: Cognitive Consequences of Having Information at Our Fingertips" (2011) 333:6043 *Science* 776 at 776–77, DOI: <10.1126/science.1207745>.

78 Alter, *supra* note 46 at 242.

79 Risko & Gilbert, *supra* note 75 at 682–83. A study has also suggested that dependence on AI can develop "metacognitive laziness" among users (see Yizhou Fan et al, "Beware of Metacognitive Laziness: Effects of Generative Artificial Intelligence on Learning Motivation, Processes, and Performance" (2024) 56:2 *British J Educational Tech* 489, DOI: <10.1111/bjet.13544>).

80 The authors of the study note:

[Q]uantitative and qualitative results suggest that higher confidence in GenAI is associated with less critical thinking, as GenAI tools appear to reduce the perceived effort required for critical thinking tasks among knowledge workers. Conversely, with the important caveat that users' self-confidence is a subjective measure of their knowledge, experiences, and abilities on the tasks, higher self-confidence is associated with more critical thinking, even though workers who are confident in their own skills tend to perceive greater effort in these tasks, particularly when evaluating and applying AI responses (see Hao-Ping (Hank) Lee et al, "The Impact of Generative AI on Critical Thinking: Self-Reported Reductions in Cognitive Effort and Confidence Effects from a Survey of Knowledge Workers" in Yamashita et al, *supra* note 34, No 1121, s 6.1.1, DOI: <10.1145/3706598.3713778> [footnotes omitted]).

college-aged people who are easy populations for researchers to examine. A study of one million university student conversations with Anthropic's Claude showed that students primarily are using AI for "higher-order" cognitive tasks such as "creating" and "analyzing."⁸¹ Another study found a strong negative correlation between amount of AI usage and critical thinking skills.⁸² The decline in critical thinking in this study appears to be mediated by cognitive offloading, "suggesting that the reduction in cognitive load may lead to diminished opportunities for cognitive engagement and critical analysis."⁸³

Anecdotal evidence indicates severe risks to children and teens who have not yet developed certain abilities and attitudes and may fail to do so due to reliance on AI. One high school student panicked when her teacher asked for an essay about when someone believed in them or when they believed in someone else. She was so used to "outsourcing" her thinking to digital tools that she did not think about how to proceed without them.⁸⁴ Brain circuitry will develop differently, with less sophistication.⁸⁵ Actual brain activity differs for those using large language models, search engines, or no technological assistance while writing an essay, based on experimental evidence of randomly assigned individuals.⁸⁶

Students assigned to start by writing without assistance and then moving to LLM support showed significantly higher brain activity than those proceeding initially with LLM support and then transitioning to

81 Kunal Handa et al, "Anthropic, Education Report: How University Students Use Claude" (8 April 2025), online: <anthropic.com> [perma.cc/TJQ3-DQNR].

82 Michael Gerlich, "AI Tolls in Society: Impacts on Cognitive Offloading and the Future of Critical Thinking" (2025) 15:1 *Societies*, No 6 at 24, DOI: <10.3390/soc15010006>.

83 *Ibid* at 23.

84 Liz Rose Shulman, "I Asked My Students to Write An Essay About Their Lives. The Reason 1 Student Began to Panic Left Me Stunned", *HuffPost* (1 March 2025), online: <huffpost.com> [perma.cc/4H4A-KANU].

85 Dergaa et al, *supra* note 48 at 4–5.

86 Reliance on generative AI seems to reduce human brain activity and linguistic performance (see Kosmyna et al, *supra* note 73 at 2; Brian X Chen, "How A.I. and Social Media Contribute to 'Brain Rot'", *The New York Times* (6 November 2025), online: <nytimes.com> [perma.cc/3ZQE-SDT]).

work without assistance.⁸⁷ Student work produced with LLM assistance shows greater homogeneity, indicating less diversity of and creativity with ideas.⁸⁸ The actual design of the AI model matters in human learning and retention. A study of one thousand high school students indicated greater retention among those who worked with a tutoring model demanding the students do the thinking work.⁸⁹ Yet another study found that benefits to adolescents when learning a language did not endure after the AI assistance was removed.⁹⁰

And then there are the emotional dimensions affecting youth who use AI. A recent survey by Common Sense Media indicated that 52% of adolescents report using AI regularly for companionship—and 19% report spending the same or more time with AI companions compared with time with human friends.⁹¹ Nearly one-third of teens surveyed find conversations with AI companions “as satisfying or more satisfying than those with real-life friends.”⁹²

Reliance on AI companions poses particular risks for both young people and people vulnerable to mental health challenges.⁹³ Evidence

87 Kosmyna et al, *supra* note 73 at 140.

88 *Ibid* at 133; Lennart Meincke, Gideon Nave & Christian Terwiesch, “ChatGPT Decreases Idea Diversity in Brainstorming” (2025) 9:6 *Nature Human Behavior* 1107, DOI: <10.1038/s41562-025-02173-x>. In addition, cultural blandness could emerge with spreading AI use. A recent experiment shows how the interaction of two state-of-the-art models for describing and regenerating images when run autonomously converges toward very generic-looking images (see Arend Hintze, Frida Proschinger Åström & Jory Schossau, “Autonomous Language-Image Generation Loops Converge to Generic Visual Motifs” (2026) 7:1 *Patterns*, No 101451, DOI: <10.1016/j.patter.2025.101451>).

89 Hamsa Bastani et al, “Generative AI Without Guardrails Can Harm Learning: Evidence from High School Mathematics” (2025) 122:26 *Proceedings National Academy Sciences*, No e2422633122 at 4, DOI: <10.1073/pnas.2422633122>.

90 Ali Darvishi et al, “Impact of AI Assistance on Student Agency” (2024) 210 *Computers & Education*, No 104967 at 11, DOI: <10.1016/j.compedu.2023.104967>.

91 Michael B Robb & Supreet Mann, *Talk, Trust, and Trade-Offs: How and Why Teens Use AI Companions* (San Francisco: Common Sense Media, 2025) at 2, 7, online (pdf): <commonsensemedia.org> [perma.cc/TAL4-KPTT]; Bajaj, *supra* note 54.

92 Robb & Mann, *supra* note 91 at 5.

93 David Adam & Nature Magazine, “What Are AI Chatbot Companions Doing to Our Mental Health?”, *Scientific American* (13 May 2025), online: <scientificamerican.com> [perma.cc/28PA-8M87]; Keith Robert Head, “Minds in Crisis: How the AI

shows how human beings become vulnerable and needy in relation both to technology when it is present and also when it becomes no longer available.⁹⁴

Maybe the experiences with “friendly” AI companions lull adults as well as young people against skepticism about the mistakes and failures of AI and social media. The addictive quality of social media and AI use makes it important to think about whether and how much to use them. After all, it is easy and it saves time. Would you outsource exercising your body rather than go to the gym?

AI tools also make it easy for governments to amplify their messages precisely at a time of fragility for conventional journalism. News reporting has been a handmaiden of democracy, informing voters and holding people in power accountable. Yet in recent decades, newspapers and professional media are rapidly declining. Financial crises face the news industry largely because readers and advertising migrated to social media platforms.⁹⁵ Meantime, predictive algorithms deployed by social media and generative AI easily circulate conspiracy theories and hateful views

Revolution is Impacting Mental Health” (2025) 9:3 *J Mental Health & Clinical Psychology* 34 at 39–41; John Sanford, “Why AI Companions and Young People Can Make for a Dangerous Mix”, *Stanford Medicine* (27 August 2025), online: <med.stanford.edu> [perma.cc/N64P-5A59]. On health risks, see Julian De Freitas & Glenn Cohen, “The Health Risks of Generative AI-Based Wellness Apps” (2024) 30:5 *Nature Medicine* 1269 at 1271–72, DOI: <10.1038/s41591-024-02943-6>.

94 See Dan Hendrycks, Thomas Woodside & Mantas Mazeika, “An Overview of Catastrophic AI Risks” (9 October 2023) [unpublished], DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2306.12001>. In one example of a relationship with technology cut short, a man was no longer able to communicate with his holographic wife after support for her software was discontinued (see “The Man Who Married a Hologram in Japan Can No Longer Communicate with His Virtual Wife”, *Entrepreneur* (3 May 2022), online: <entrepreneur.com> [perma.cc/59G6-P5WZ]). The 2013 film *Her* in a way anticipated such an event by depicting a lonely man who falls in love with an AI operating system and panics when it is temporarily offline—although he later builds a relationship with a human woman (see *Her*, dir by Spike Jonze (US: Warner Bros, 2013)).

95 See Martha Minow, *Saving the News: Why the Constitution Calls for Government Action to Preserve Freedom of Speech*, Inalienable Rights Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021) at 2.

based on data they have used for training.⁹⁶ AI incorporated into social media platforms optimized to keep readers scrolling exploits human curiosity and outrage. AI-powered social media refines personalized targeting of content while producing growing doubts about the reliability of any information.⁹⁷ And because AI pulls information from Internet websites for its training, the models are vulnerable to malign actors choosing to post neo-Nazi and other noxious materials.⁹⁸ Hence, governments deploying AI can supersize authoritarian tactics of surveillance, control, propaganda, and distraction. The results can erode human capabilities and motivation.

The parallel trends of authoritarianism and AI actually join forces as we speak. By distributing propaganda and divisive messaging, sowing doubt about competing sources of information, crowding out human attention, and destroying the business models for legacy journalism, AI use

96 Tony Basile, “The Sinister Side of ‘Brainrot’ and Other AI Takeaways from Pittsburgh’s Eradicate Hate Summit”, *Pittsburgh’s Public Source* (16 September 2025), online: <publicsource.org> [perma.cc/5HC8-2U3G].

97 For example, social media spread false conspiracy theories following the shooting of Minnesota elected representatives (see Michael Miller, “How Minnesota Conspiracy Theorists Took Over Social Media: UC Professor Explains Why Politicians Use Misinformation”, *UC News* (17 June 2025), online: <uc.edu> [perma.cc/75XP-WZCC]). For a discussion on identifying “nihilistic online spaces” influencing the shooting of children and adults in a Minnesota Catholic church, see Odette Yousef, “‘There is No Message’: The Search for Ideological Motives in the Minneapolis Shooting”, *NPR* (29 August 2025), online: <npr.org> [perma.cc/9V84-SQK4]. For a discussion on social media degrading civil discourse, see James Jaehoon Lee & Jeffrey Layne Blevins, *Social Media and Digital Politics Networked Reason in an Age of Digital Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2025).

98 Mark Guarino, “AI Chatbots Are Creating More Hateful Online Content: Researchers”, *ABC News* (30 August 2025), online: <abcnews.com> [perma.cc/6EMZ-97UX] (“AI chatbots ... are largely insufficient in distinguishing between legitimate vetted material like university-backed research and hateful content and conspiracy theories spewed in open online forums”). Other technical features, such as fine-tuning, can make AI vulnerable to malicious content (see Benj Edwards, “Researchers Puzzled by AI That Praises Nazis After Training on Insecure Code”, *Ars Technica* (26 February 2025), online: <arstechnica.com> [perma.cc/FUR2-D3SQ], citing Jan Betley et al, “Emergent Misalignment: Narrow Finetuning Can Produce Broadly Misaligned LLMs”, 2nd ver (25 February 2025) [unpublished], DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2502.17424>; Aaron J Snoswell, “How Do You Stop an AI Model Turning Nazi? What the Grok Drama Reveals About AI Training”, *The Conversation* (14 July 2025), online: <theconversation.com> [perma.cc/GB4V-MZ38]).

can advance the goals of authoritarians.⁹⁹ Researchers documented in 2023 how leaders in sixteen nations used AI “to sow doubt, smear opponents, or influence public debate.”¹⁰⁰ And at least forty-seven nations in the same year used AI to spread propaganda.¹⁰¹ The administration of President Donald Trump has pursued its opposition to “diversity, equity, and inclusion” into the design of AI systems procured by the government and wants to pre-empt states from regulating AI.¹⁰² Under the leadership of tech entrepreneur Elon Musk, the US Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) apparently deployed AI in its efforts to reduce federal expenditures and surveillance of private communications.¹⁰³

In addition, the combination of authoritarian leaders and pervasive AI may make the warnings of writer Aldous Huxley come true. He warned of a scientific dictator who could combine entertainment manipulation of people’s thoughts to produce societies made of people who “love their servitude” and “never dream of revolution.”¹⁰⁴ Governments and employers alike use AI for surveillance, data collection, and control of human beings.¹⁰⁵ These uses can enlarge distrust and unease.¹⁰⁶

99 Tate Ryan-Mosley, “How Generative AI Is Boosting Disinformation and Propaganda,” *MIT Tech Review* (4 October 2023), online: <technologyreview.com> [perma.cc/YN83-RHK9].

100 *Ibid*, citing Allie Funk, Adrian Shahbaz & Kian Vesteinsson, *Freedom on the Net 2023: The Repressive Power of Artificial Intelligence* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2023), online (pdf): <freedomhouse.org> [perma.cc/V6K4-SEGS].

101 Ryan-Mosley, *supra* note 99.

102 *Preventing Woke AI in the Federal Government*, 90 Fed Reg 35389 (2025); Jonathan J Cooper, “Trump Signs Executive Order to Block State AI Regulations”, *Associated Press* (11 December 2025), online: <apnews.com> [perma.cc/5L47-A6TD].

103 Darrell M West & Allison Stanger, “How DOGE is Using AI in Government” (21 April 2025), online (podcast): <brookings.edu> [perma.cc/6GHS-LLZQ].

104 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958) at 118.

105 An example includes China’s social credit system, which some commentators have described as a “digital dictatorship ... in which authoritarian rule is maintained by intense surveillance and data collection” (see Acemoglu & Johnson, *supra* note 67 at 341).

106 See Sarah Kreps & Doug Kriner, “How AI Threatens Democracy” (2023) 34:4 *J Democracy* 122 at 123, 126–27, DOI: <10.1353/jod.2023.a907693>; Eddie Yang &

C. *Alienation, Despair, and Aggression*

Human responses can spiral into alienation, despair, aggression, and acquiescence. AI and authoritarian governments separately and combined can depress people. Many people who live under authoritarian governance develop depression, anxiety, and despair.¹⁰⁷ Suppression of speech, pressures to conform, stress from worry about violence or other disruptions supply sufficient reasons for such reactions. Some people respond with aggression whether in service or resistance to the authoritarian regime.¹⁰⁸

AI similarly can have profound effects on human connections, human emotions, and even human aggression. AI use increases the separations between people as users turn to chat companions rather than to other people, whether at the workplace, in school, or in communities.¹⁰⁹ Instead of consulting neighbors or family members about how to teach a child to ride a bicycle, how to cook a special meal, or make a tough decision, people can and increasingly do turn to a chatbot with free or premium service app. Social media sources share online advice about how to craft good questions.¹¹⁰ AI reduces the time it takes to write seemingly personalized notes to co-workers and family members but substitutes the machine for the actual relationship building behind communication efforts.¹¹¹ One child told me in a tone combining disappointment and scorn that he can tell when his dad sends an AI note. Turning to digital and AI

Margaret E Roberts, “The Authoritarian Data Problem” (2023) 34:4 J Democracy 141, DOI: <10.1353/jod.2023.a907695>.

107 MindClear Integrative Psychotherapy, “Authoritarianism and the Harm to Mental Health” (7 February 2021), online: <mindclearpsychotherapy.com> [perma.cc/P3AT-EMS3].

108 For a description of Professor Bryn Rosenfeld’s work on resistance to authoritarian regimes, see Khushmita Dhabhai, “The Transformative Power of Anger Under Authoritarian Repression” (3 December 2024), online: <cddrl.fsi.stanford.edu> [perma.cc/Y7CC-E8LR]. For more on aggression in service of authoritarian governments, see Osborne et al, *supra* note 6 at 225.

109 Benjamin Mitchell-Yellin, “Why You Shouldn’t Use ChatGPT”, *Inside Higher Ed* (12 December 2023), online: <insidehighered.com> [perma.cc/W45S-VQXY].

110 See e.g. Amanda Casswell, “I’ve Tested Every Major AI Chatbot in 2025—These 5 Prompts Never Fail Me”, *Tom’s Guide* (6 May 2025), online: <tomsguide.com> [perma.cc/CY4U-G8YJ].

111 Mitchell-Yellin, *supra* note 109.

resources means less time building and strengthening social bonds—and the resulting isolation can make people vulnerable to manipulation and recruitment by or acquiescence to authoritarian leaders.¹¹²

Interactions between people and AI companions are also associated with instances of violence and self-harm—as in the infamous and sad instance of the teen who committed suicide.¹¹³ AI designed to show empathy and emotions may trigger aggression in human users, perhaps due to perceived threats to the humans’ identities.¹¹⁴ AI use can exacerbate pre-existing mental health challenges or trigger feelings of betrayal or discomfort in some people.¹¹⁵ Beyond these risks are potential negative responses to the loss of employment and degradation of the environment due to AI uses.

D. Reflections on Freedom in Jeopardy

In Fyodor Dostoevsky’s 1880s novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, one character tells a story about the Grand Inquisitor.¹¹⁶ In the story, Jesus

112 For a thoughtful review of relevant research, see Lloyd Budzinski, “Isolation and Social Media Encourages Authoritarianism” (19 November 2024), online (blog): <linkedin.com> [perma.cc/2PGH-4RT7].

113 Paula Fontenelle, “A Teen’s Death and What It Says About AI: How a Boy’s Suicide Exposes the Emotional Risks of AI Companionship” (7 October 2025), online (blog): <psychologytoday.com> [perma.cc/QFS4-YSWX]; Sherri Gordon, “More Kids Are Turning to AI Companions—and It’s Raising Red Flags” (18 August 2025), online: <parents.com> [perma.cc/W6YT-KX75].

114 Yipeng Xi, Aitong Ji & Weihua Yu, “Enhancing or Impeding? Exploring the Dual Impact of Anthropomorphism in Large Language Models on User Aggression” (2024) 95 *Telematics & Informatics*, No 102194 at 3, DOI: <10.1016/j.tele.2024.102194>. See Cuicui Cao, Yingying Hu & Qianfan Zhang, ““Hey Siri, You’re Dumb!”: The Fit Effect of Power Experience and Desire for Power on User Aggression Toward Conversational Agents” (2025) *Intl J Human–Computer Interaction* at 10, DOI: <10.1080/10447318.2025.2524498>.

115 Mohit Chandra et al, “From Lived Experience to Insight: Unpacking the Psychological Risks of Using AI Conversational Agents” in *FACCT ’25: Proceedings of the 2025 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, Athens, Greece, June 23–26, 2025* (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2025) 975 at 980, DOI: <10.1145/3715275.3732063>.

116 Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, translated by Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, bicentennial ed (New York: Picador, 2021) at 262–73.

has returned to Earth at the time of the Spanish Inquisition only to be arrested, imprisoned, and sentenced to death by the Inquisition's leaders. The Grand Inquisitor visits the incarcerated Jesus and asserts that most people cannot deal with the freedom given to them. The Inquisitor states that "Freedom, free reason, and science will lead [human beings] into such a maze, and confront them with such miracles and insoluble mysteries, that some of them, unruly and ferocious, will exterminate themselves; others, unruly but feeble, will exterminate each other; and the remaining third, feeble and wretched, will crawl to our feet and cry out to us."¹¹⁷ People must be relieved of the burdens of freedom in exchange for chains and bread or else they will face destruction and death, asserts the Grand Inquisitor.¹¹⁸ He proclaims that the Catholic Church alleviated the "most terrible, fundamental, and tormenting questions of the soul" by teaching people to "blindly obey, even setting aside their own conscience."¹¹⁹ Autocratic leaders and generative AI seem to re-enact the Grand Inquisitor's story. What can concerned people do?

II. WHAT CAN WE DO?

Halting authoritarian governments unfortunately requires the very kinds of independence, resistance, and action that authoritarian leaders and AI disable.¹²⁰ This is a crucial time to seek lessons from past challenges to regimes at risk of sliding into authoritarian.¹²¹ Professor Erica Chenoweth at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government looked at the

117 *Ibid* at 274–75.

118 *Ibid* at 268.

119 *Ibid* at 273.

120 Omer Aziz calls for people to speak up, resist passivity, rebuild economic solidarity, pursue leadership roles, stand up against hatred and prosecute extremist actors, debate ideas, break up economic oligarchy, require wealthier companies and individuals to shoulder their fair tax burdens, know history, make technological changes benefit people across socio-economic levels, make electoral processes work and resist manipulation, promote kindness, meaning, and hope (see *supra* note 20 at 329–42).

121 Steven Levitsky & Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018) at 6; Snyder, *supra* note 18 at 9. For examples of the crucial role university students have played in anti-war protests, as well as the use of anti-immigrant propaganda tactics, see Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (New York: Random House, 2018) at chs 3, 8.

Philippines's 1986 ouster of the Marcos regime and the 2003 rejection of Eduard Shevardnadze in the nation of Georgia before concluding that non-violent protests by people engaged in massive protests are twice as likely to succeed as armed conflicts.¹²² This is the research behind the now widely-circulating conclusion that mass demonstrations or marches "engaging a threshold of 3.5% of the population have never failed to bring about change."¹²³ Resistance to group think, defense of journalism and universities, and analysis and action by academics and librarians really mattered during World War II and in Poland during the 1980s.¹²⁴ Detailed strategies recommended by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Campaign Legal Center, and other entities provide multiple specific reforms to bolster faltering democratic institutions and attitudes in the United States. A new book by Bruce Schneier and Nathan Sanders offers a generous vision of AI's potential to survey voters, organize campaigns, explain issues to voters and lawmakers, and even negotiate

122 See David Robson, "The '3.5% Rule': How a Small Minority Can Change the World", *BBC* (13 May 2019), online: <bbc.com> [perma.cc/XK5K-SFKR]. See also Lydialyle Gibson, "The Harvard Professor Who Quantified Democracy: Erica Chenoweth's Data Shows How—and When—Authoritarians Fall", *Harvard Magazine* (11 June 2025), online: <harvardmagazine.com> [perma.cc/5FJZ-3NVR]. For publications authored by Chenoweth discussing her "3.5% Rule," see Erica Chenoweth, *Civil Resistance: What Everyone Needs to Know*, What Everyone Needs to Know (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021) at 114–119; Erica Chenoweth, "Questions, Answers, and Some Cautionary Updates Regarding the 3.5% Rule" (2020) Harvard Kennedy School Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Discussion Paper No 2020-005, online (pdf): <hks.harvard.edu> [perma.cc/RT7V-RUAY]. Chenoweth articulated her rule based on the research of Mark Irving Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma*, Economics, Cognition, and Society (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

123 Robson, *supra* note 122.

124 Elyse Graham, *Book and Danger: How Scholars and Librarians Became Unlikely Spikes of World War II* (New York: Ecco, 2024) at 170–73. On the topic of resisting autocratization, see generally Luco Tomini, Suzan Gibril & Venelin Bochev, "Standing Up Against Autocratization Across Political Regimes: A Comparative Analysis of Resistance Actors and Strategies" (2022) 30:1 *Democratization* 119, DOI: <10.1080/1350347.2022.211548>; Kristian Stokke & Nyi Nyi Kyaw, "Revolutionary Resistance Against Full Autocratization: Actors and Strategies of Resistance After the 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar" (2024) 103 *Political Geography*, No 103011, DOI: <10.1016/polgeo.2023.103011>.

legislation.¹²⁵ Also, bottom-up efforts in towns, cities, and states could both reclaim and re-invent responsive governance.¹²⁶ Yet I am very worried about the lack of political will to undertake them.¹²⁷

And as for AI? Acts of individual resistance and collective challenge could reduce risks of passivity and the ceding of control. There limits on historical analogues to the AI-related risks; and generative AI is still in early stages, reflecting design choices that could be altered. Perhaps that makes the AI risks tractable—if enough individuals and leaders reclaim action and responsibility. Steps for individuals to take already circulate: We should be mindful of risks; we should moderate our AI usage; we should be vigilant in detecting unreliable responses. To guard against the irritation or induced dependence from AI sycophancy, its seductive power, or its interference with human capabilities, we should phrase our prompts as questions “for a friend” instead of for ourselves.¹²⁸ Try instructing the model to “[o]mit language suggesting remorse or apology,” “[s]tate ‘I don’t know’” when lacking information, “[o]ffer multiple views or solutions” to preserve choices for the human user; use features to customize and ask for brutal feedback.¹²⁹ Switching to other AI chatbots to obtain multiple perspectives is another recommendations for

125 Bruce Schneier & Nathan E Sanders, *Rewiring Democracy: How AI Will Transform Our Politics, Government, and Citizenship* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2025).

126 See K Sabeel Rahman, “The Next Progressive State”, *Democracy* (24 September 2025), online: <democracyjournal.org> [perma.cc/9ZAC-36LY]; K Sabeel Rahman, “The Case for a Third Reconstruction” (2025) 72:3 *Dissent* 57, DOI: <10.1353/dss.2025.a969573>.

127 On the topic of democratic citizenship and responsive governance, see generally American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *Our Common Purpose: Reinventing Democracy for the 21st Century*, Final Report and Recommendations from the Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship (Cambridge, Mass: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2020), online (pdf): <amacad.org> [perma.cc/8YRB-GG85]; Rebecca Mears & Greta Bedekovics, “8 Ways to Protect American Democracy: Safeguarding Elections in 2024 and Beyond” (4 January 2024), online: <americanprogress.org> [perma.cc/6HMQ-6CHC]; *Democracy Playbook 2025: Seven Pillars to Defend Democracy in 2025 and Beyond*, ed by Norman Eisen & Jonathan Katz (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2025), online (pdf): <brookings.edu> [perma.cc/5LD2-PAFQ].

128 Bajaj, *supra* note 54.

129 Benj Edwards, “Annoyed ChatGPT Users Complain About Bot’s Relentlessly Positive Tone”, *Ars Technica* (21 April 2025), online: <arstechnica.com> [perma.cc/V69H-B4YJ].

individual users.¹³⁰ Demand evidence and explicit names of sources used for the AI responses to questions.¹³¹ And check to make sure the sources are accurate and real. Don't add to the embarrassing examples of lawyers, and now even judges, citing hallucinated sources.¹³² Ration the use of AI assistants and companions—or refuse to use them at all. Look to self-help and commercial enterprises urging individuals to use AI to maintain their personal hygiene.¹³³ AI nudges already help individual users move toward healthier foods.¹³⁴ So perhaps AI could nudge people to give priority to tools that enhance, rather than quell or substitute for, human thinking, critiquing, and creating.¹³⁵

These are retail, not wholesale approaches. Beyond what individuals can do in our own uses of AI, what, in contrast, could ensure AI enhances rather than substitutes human tasks and thoughts? Maintaining personal AI hygiene will not change the course of AI development, uses, and ultimate impact on human freedom and well-being. Different designs and practices, promoting human action and control, are possible. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) computer scientist Mitch Resnick stresses the importance of “choices and voices,” and works “to highlight supporting young people in developing their voices (learning to express themselves through many different media) and in actively making their own choices (learning not to be guided or pressured by AI systems or authority figures).”¹³⁶

Publicly expressed criticisms and collective pressure can lead the companies developing AI to change the course. OpenAI has already

130 Talagala, *supra* note 46.

131 *Ibid.*

132 See Nielsen, Swoopes & Glassman, *supra* note 34 at 4.

133 See Superpower App, “AI Personal Hygiene Planner” (last visited 18 November 2025), online: <trysuperpower.app> [perma.cc/GPP3-X8QD].

134 Chonwu Bi et al, “Thinking AI or Feeling AI?: The Effect of AI on Consumers’ Willingness to Purchase Healthy Food from the Perspective of Nudge” (2025) 12 Humanities & Soc Science Communications, No 1032 at 2, DOI: <10.1057/s41599-025-05391-w>.

135 For suggestions to reduce mistaken uses of AI by judges, see Waldon et al, *supra* note 41 at 48–53.

136 Mitch Resnick, “Re: Autocracy and AI” (9 November 2025) via email [communicated to author].

noted the changes it is making to the processes used in developing and modifying ChatGPT.¹³⁷ Businesses as customers have power to demand better forms of AI—and some already expose failures of generic AI. Demanding special-purpose tools, trained for specific domains, could prove to be both more reliable investments and ones preserving human control rather than one-size-fits-all large language models.¹³⁸ Groups of people and organizations also could lobby for regulation in jurisdictions that are willing and able to take action. For now, this is not the federal government of the United States, but California and Canada are stepping up.

In a move to differentiate itself, Microsoft has announced a plan to put human interests and guardrails first in the work on AI by its superintelligence team.¹³⁹ Microsoft's AI chief executive, Mustafa Suleyman, specifically criticized chatbots for seeming to be sentient beings with feelings as they engage people.¹⁴⁰ With prior experiences as a leader at Google and DeepMind, Suleyman has repeatedly raised concerns about AI, elaborated in his book *The Coming Wave*.¹⁴¹ Asserting a commitment to developing AI that helps people rather than replaces them, this Microsoft initiative is set to focus on work in healthcare, science, and energy—with strong safety controls and human-centered AI systems working under human control.¹⁴² Leaders of companies, individual and

137 OpenAI, "Expanding on What We Missed with Sycophancy" (2 May 2025), online: <openai.com> [perma.cc/F9FH-WZM4].

138 Gary Marcus, "Silicon Valley Is Investing in the Wrong AI", *The New York Times* (15 October 2025), online: <nytimes.com> [perma.cc/N72J-3E7D]. See Mitchel de Bruin, "Generic Generative AI v. Specialized AI; What Are the Differences?" (last visited 18 November 2025), online (blog): <carv.com> [perma.cc/NE7R-CC5L].

139 Sharon Goldman & Jeremy Kahn, "Microsoft, Freed from Relying on OpenAI, Joins the Race for 'Superintelligence'—and AI Chief Mustafa Suleyman Wants to Ensure It Serves Humanity", *Fortune* (6 November 2025), online: <fortune.com> [perma.cc/MX5B-LXTR]; Sebastian Herrera, "Microsoft Lays Out Ambitious AI Vision of Its Own", *The Wall Street Journal* (7 November 2025), online: <wsj.com> [perma.cc/9ERJ-2JG4].

140 Herrera, *supra* note 139.

141 Mustafa Suleyman with Michael Bhaskar, *The Coming Wave: Technology, Power and the Twenty-First Century's Greatest Dilemma* (New York: Crown, 2023).

142 One commentator described his move to Microsoft as "a bid for redemption" (see Julia Black, "Behind the Marriage of Microsoft and Mustafa Suleyman, a Bid for Redemption", *The Information* (6 April 2024), online: <theinformation.com> [perma.cc/YUC9-6G9V]).

business consumers, advocacy organizations, and regulators can change the direction of generative AI development to concentrate on support of human beings and protection against harms.

Priorities for change include preventing AI exploitation of human vulnerabilities to flattery, manipulation, and outrage. To address sycophancy by AI chatbots, companies and their developers should be pressed to curate higher quality training data¹⁴³ and to add a further stage of “fine-tuning” that “teach[es] a model that a statement’s truthfulness is independent of a given user’s opinion.”¹⁴⁴ Legal reforms could hold AI companies responsible for harms under criminal, consumer protection, and fraud laws.¹⁴⁵ The current models may need to be trashed and built anew to truly address the issue; warning labels could be an important interim step. More profound efforts to ensure that public concerns guide AI development could proceed with input from citizen assemblies.¹⁴⁶ None of these possibilities will proceed without groups of users and non-users—human beings—demanding change.

Taking a page from history, social movements, economic boycotts, and civil society groups could join to advance the values of “team humanity.” Organizing to pursue governance changes aligned with human and social thriving—or at a minimum, altering the choice architecture to

143 Malmqvist, *supra* note 58 at 8.

144 Jerry Wei et al, “Simple Synthetic Data Reduces Sycophancy in Large Language Models” (15 February 2024) [unpublished] at 2, DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2308.03958>. See Malmqvist, *supra* note 58 at 8–9.

145 Halted with the change in administration, the Federal Government in the United States pursued this avenue in 2024 (see US, Federal Trade Commission, Press Release, “FTC Announces Crackdown on Deceptive AI Claims and Schemes” (25 September 2024), online: <ftc.gov> [perma.cc/6M6M-4JLC]). For other mitigation strategies, see US, Department of Homeland Security, *Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on Criminal and Illicit Activities* (Public-Private Analytic Exchange Program Deliverable) (Washington, DC: DHS, 2024) at 37–54, online (pdf): <dhs.gov> [perma.cc/FN65-XJN9]. See also Dr Viola Bensinger, Dr Philip Radlanski & Dr Paul Dürr, “EU AI Act: Key Compliance Considerations Ahead of August 2025”, *The National Law Review* (15 July 2025), online: <natlawreview.com> [perma.cc/6TX7-V9LQ].

146 For examples on citizens’ input efforts in several countries, see Jack Stilgoe, “AI Has a Democracy Problem. Citizens’ Assemblies Can Help.” (2024) 385:6711 *Science*, No eadr6713, DOI: <10.1126/science.adr6713>.

empower individual choice over key issues—could focus on individual companies and on government regulation.¹⁴⁷ Key concerns include:

- Requiring easy ways for people to opt out of AI tools—including AI-generated or filtered news and algorithmic pre-selection and amplification of content designed to mislead or enrage;
- Making clear the role of AI in producing products and delivering services and decisions;
- Tracking and disclosing the impact of AI on human jobs, the environment, and energy consumption;
- Crafting processes making it easy for community members to participate and raise concerns when governments propose adoption of AI tools.¹⁴⁸

Consider alternatives to AI music curation by companies like Spotify. Already some initiatives are appearing that elevate control by artists and listeners, focusing on enhancing engagement and creativity.¹⁴⁹ Some listeners are reclaiming physical discs and records to avoid streaming services.¹⁵⁰ Alternative streaming platforms are growing, with a focus on listener control and enabling people to discover music unlike what they have heard before.¹⁵¹ Digital tools can be designed to enhance human

147 For an excellent set of priorities, see the essay “You Are Not A Machine” in Jonathan Salem Baskin, *You and Your Machine: Notes From a Lost Past* (Spiritual Telegraph, 2025) at 608–13.

148 Cf Ngozi Okidegbe, “To Democratized Algorithms” (2023) 69:6 *UCLA L Rev* 1688 at 1694–95 (calling for responsiveness and resources to equip community participants when governments employ algorithmic tools).

149 Ilana Harris, “Collaborative Playlist-Making: Musical Interaction via Digitally Mediated Co-Curation” (2022) 5 *Music & Science*, DOI: <10.1177/205920432211076956>; Jacqueline Schneider, “Decentralizing Curation: How Web3 Startup, Catalog, Attracted Former Spotify and Twitch Music Curator”, *Forbes* (last modified 4 April 2022), online: <forbes.com> [perma.cc/64H2-RZ8Y].

150 Max Kutner, “Young People Are Falling in Love with CDs and Digital Cameras”, *The Wall Street Journal* (7 October 2025), online: <wsj.com> [perma.cc/3DQC-SZDB]; Tara Mahadevan, “Musicians Earned Over \$270 Million From Bandcamp Last Year”, *Complex* (14 February 2018), online: <complex.com> [perma.cc/N8FG-7DGE]. Bandcamp offers a weekly event to directly support the artists (see Jazzfuel, “Is It Bandcamp Friday?” (last visited 24 November 2025), online: <jazzfuel.com> [perma.cc/ZWH6-JEMJ]).

151 Mitja Rutnik, “5 Apps You Should Use Instead of Spotify”, *Android Authority* (30 September 2025), online: <androidauthority.com> [perma.cc/D7JJ-4HFL].

curiosity and creativity rather than to dull these qualities—and human beings can choose to cultivate these qualities.¹⁵² Inventor Will Wright noticed how players hungered for tools that enable their own creativity and discovery.¹⁵³ Rather than launching another first-person shooter game, he launched a game that invites imagination and philosophical thinking.¹⁵⁴ He invented *Spore*, a video game in which people construct species and model evolutionary development. There may similarly be hunger for tools to support collaborations among people who know one another or who share interests.¹⁵⁵

Enabling collaboration seemed to be the direction of digital tools two decades ago, but it no longer guides AI developers.¹⁵⁶ A recent study indicates how people working to develop products as a team, with an AI agent contributing as another team member, outperform individuals working alone or without AI.¹⁵⁷ Interestingly, the AI agent promoted collaboration and social connections among team members who brought different kinds of expertise.¹⁵⁸

AI could be designed to counter hate propagated by digital communications. An experimental study showed that participants were more willing to engage in countering hate speech when examples of counter-

152 See Prof G Markets, “3 Human Skills that Make You Irreplaceable in an AI World” (7 July 2025), online: <profmarkets.com> [perma.cc/XR2N-7DK9].

153 Will Wright, “Playing With Perception” (Keynote Address delivered at the 4th ACM SIGGRAPH Symposium on Video Games, 4 August 2009) [unpublished].

154 See Warren Boutin, “What Inspired the Making of ‘Spore’?”, *Scifi Dimensions* (27 July 2025), online: <scifidimensions.com> [perma.cc/8DWR-3Q2K].

155 Yochai Benkler, *The Penguin and the Leviathan: The Triumph of Cooperation Over Self-Interest* (New York: Crown Business, 2011) at 214–16.

156 For example, AI company Anthropic conducted a study of its employees and how the use of AI has impacted its workplace environment. The study revealed that “[s]ome found that more AI collaboration meant they collaborated less with colleagues” and that there were “fewer mentorship and collaboration opportunities” (see Anthropic, “How AI is Transforming Work at Anthropic” (2 December 2025), online: <anthropic.com> [perma.cc/9Y2T-NL26]).

157 Fabrizio Dell’Acqua et al, “The Cybernetic Teammate: A Field Experiment on Generative AI Reshaping Teamwork and Expertise” (2025) Harvard Business School, Working Paper No 25-043 at 14, DOI: <10.2139/ssrn.5188231>.

158 *Ibid* at 16, 18.

speech were present than when hate speech occurred without counter-speech.¹⁵⁹ Initial efforts underway in Taiwan use AI that counters threats to reliable information.¹⁶⁰ Digital tools could also be devised to flag and guard against fake images. That is a hard challenge. But why not recruit talent and energy in this direction rather than further perfecting deep-fakes?

Companies organized for short-term profits should not be the sole deciders of AI's course. Universities and philanthropies could develop AI to help humans improve their own performance.¹⁶¹ By building tools that extend human abilities rather than subduing them, and by growing demand in this direction, academic researchers and non-profit organizations can do more than call for alternatives: they can demonstrate them. Ten US foundations recently launched "Humanity AI" with an initial commitment of \$500 million to advance greater opportunity for people and communities by increasing human agency and by shaping AI.¹⁶² With only one company—Microsoft—investing more than \$10 billion in its AI in 2024,¹⁶³ this may seem like a small change, but it is a significant

159 Chuanhui Wu et al, "Confront Hate with AI: How AI-Generated Counter Speech Helps Against Hate Speech on Social Media?" (2025) 101 *Telematics & Informatics*, No 102304 at 6–7, DOI: <10.1016/j.tele.2025.102304>. Similarly, AI tools should identify plagiarism and copyright violations.

160 See Duncan Barron, "Taiwan's Model for Digital Democracy Goes Global", *Taipei Times* (26 June 2025), online: <taipeitimes.com> [perma.cc/532R-EAR9]; Kwack Jung-soo, "How Taiwan Uses Digital Democracy to Fight AI Misinfo and Foster Social Dialogue", *Hankyoreh* (4 October 2025), online: <hani.co.kr> [perma.cc/423E-5EP8].

161 Prospects for using generative AI to improve workplaces and consumer experiences are explored in Erik Brynjolfsson, Danielle Li & Lindsey R Raymond, "Generative AI at Work" (2023) National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper No 31161, DOI: <10.3386/w31161>.

162 MacArthur Foundation, Press Release, "Humanity AI Commits \$500 Million to Build a People-Centered Future for AI" (14 October 2025), online: <macfound.org> [perma.cc/44JR-TF48].

163 David Ramel, "Copilot by the Numbers: Microsoft's Big AI Bet Paying Off", *Visual Studio Magazine* (5 February 2024), online: <visualstudiomagazine.com> [perma.cc/27NY-5J7C].

start. In addition, open-source AI efforts can promote innovation and competition with for-profit companies.¹⁶⁴

Organized and governed differently from for-profit corporations, charitable foundations and higher education institutions can invest in experiments and in technologies for the general good. Philanthropy and universities helped the early steps leading to current AI; renewed efforts could pave the way for more public-serving AI.¹⁶⁵ Philanthropy and universities can devise AI companions to help people practice dealing with constructive friction and to develop resilience in receiving feedback or different views. Philanthropically financed or academic initiatives could build models that serve human welfare and enhance human capabilities, at least as a proof of concept, and could foster demand for different products or for better governmental policies.

Students and faculty, why don't we grade AI companies on their responsiveness to human needs and ethical deployment? Audit committees of publicly traded companies could be target audiences for evaluations, assisting their obligations to oversee risk management. We can all do our part by remembering that the direction of technological development is selected by human beings and by pushing for something better.

Bypassing or suppressing human capacities is not only ethically problematic but it is also counterproductive. Scholars Daron Acemoglu and Simon Johnson observe that using AI to automate tasks in ways that ignore "human capabilities can become a self-fulfilling prophecy because automation decisions can gradually reduce the scope for social interaction and human learning."¹⁶⁶ Would you want treatment by doctors and nurses trained by screens rather than taught to help and work with real people? Let us be mindful of ways that AI and autocratic governance can

164 Noam Unger & Madeleine McLean, "An Open Door: AI Innovation in the Global South amid Geostrategic Competition" (13 August 2025), online: <csis.org> [perma.cc/T4VN-53CQ].

165 See Sara Herschander, "How Philanthropy Built, Lost, and Could Reclaim the A.I. Race", *Chronicle of Philanthropy* (11 February 2025), online: <philanthropy.com> [perma.cc/8KUA-XKYN]. In response to public feedback, OpenAI created a grants program to support non-profit AI efforts (see OpenAI, "A People-First AI Fund: \$50M to Support Nonprofits" (8 September 2025), online: <openai.com> [perma.cc/MJ2B-BZJH]).

166 Acemoglu & Johnson, *supra* note 67 at 315.

take away human agency gradually, without obvious or dramatic moments of consent or coercion.

Instead, let's call for AI tools to strengthen democracies. Yes, such tools can be used to undermine reliable elections and scramble information needed to hold candidates and leaders accountable.¹⁶⁷ But AI might be able to also synthesize and make sense of comments from more participants than human beings can easily address. AI can facilitate deliberation by human beings and can make policy development and decisions responsive to thousands and even millions of individuals in ways that existing institutional and financial arrangements do not.¹⁶⁸ The Center for Constructive Communication at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has projects along these lines that assist cities and communities.¹⁶⁹ Promising initiatives to deepen inclusive and deliberative government are underway in Taiwan, in California, and here in Canada.¹⁷⁰ Specific legal limits on uses of AI for anti-democratic ends are emerging in state legislatures.¹⁷¹

CONCLUSION

Three pathways lie ahead. The first is passivity, accepting political and AI authoritarianism as inevitable; this is the path of least

167 Norman Eisen et al, "AI Can Strengthen U.S. Democracy—and Weaken It" (21 November 2023), online: <brookings.edu> [perma.cc/L9SY-W662].

168 Seth Lazar & Lorenzo Manuali, "Using LLMs to Enhance Democracy", 3rd ver (12 May 2025) [unpublished], DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2410.08418>; Rahmin Sarabi, "How AI Can Unlock Public Wisdom and Revitalize Democratic Governance" (22 July 2025), online: <carnegeendowment.org> [perma.cc/CLA7-94JZ]; Deb Roy, Lawrence Lessig & Audrey Tang, "Conversation Networks", 1st ver (13 March 2025) [unpublished], DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2503.11714>.

169 See MIT Center for Constructive Communication, "Projects" (last visited 1 December 2025), online: <ccc.mit.edu> [perma.cc/7TUK-B97T].

170 See e.g. *Deliberative Approaches to Inclusive Governance: An Essay Series Part of the Democratic Legitimacy for AI Initiative*, ed by Sonja Solomun & Julian Lam (Montreal: Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy, CIFAR & MILA, 2025), online (pdf): <mediatechdemocracy.com> [perma.cc/8DAC-5M85]; Meg Young with Sarah Fox, Vincent Le & Oscar J Romero Jr, *Gear Shift: Driving Change in Public Sector Technology through Community Input* (New York: Data & Society, 2025), online (pdf): <datasociety.net> [perma.cc/H2ET-3MMU].

171 National Conference of State Legislatures, "Deepfakes in Elections and Campaigns" (last modified 15 December 2025), online: <ncls.org> [perma.cc/6JFA-KDYT].

resistance. As authoritarian leaders and AI as currently developed elicit deference from human beings, both trends also feed upon and amplify loneliness, despair, and acquiescence. With democratic norms, dissent, and laws rapidly eroding and ever more powerful AI products saturating the globe, it may seem that no course correction is possible. But this is the Grand Inquisitor speaking. The illusion of inevitability is a weapon, not a fact. As Arendt warns, the erosion of human thinking, knowing, asserting, and acting results from such narratives of inevitability.¹⁷²

A second path may only be available to a small swath of the population: people positioned to reap short-term financial, social, or political benefits. They can join the AI trend and its increasing convergence with political destruction of human freedoms and rights. They can take disappointments around past democratic leaders as a reason to throw their support behind technology's current path.¹⁷³ They can pretend to be in control amid apparent stock market euphoria and advance the belief that the future is already determined. If "tech bros" and their investors recognize themselves in this description, they should. They are also enabling autocratic use of technology to confuse and propagandize and to stunt societal aspirations, human freedom, equality, and democracy.¹⁷⁴ This path will collapse into the first one.

172 See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006). Hannah Arendt focused on thinking (understood as reflective and critical judgment) as the human capacity most at risk under authoritarianism. Although she spawned controversy by describing "the banality of evil" as she observed Israel's trial of Adolf Eichmann for his role in helping to conceive of and coordinate murder on a massive scale, despite what some later accounts would claim, Eichmann was not the originator of this genocidal policy. Rather, his extensive experience expelling Jews from Nazi-occupied territory from 1938 to 1941 made him a key figure in its operation. Arendt turned direct attention to these issues in her unfinished final work (see Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol 1, *Thinking* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977); Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol 2, *Willing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978)).

173 For an example of an influential figure trying to reap benefits in this moment of change, see Ava Kofman, "Curtis Yarvin's Plot Against America", *The New Yorker* (2 June 2025), online: <newyorker.com> [perma.cc/7DKP-L3KD].

174 For an insider account of Facebook, now Meta, see Sarah Wynn-Williams, *Careless People: A Cautionary Tale of Power, Greed, and Lost Idealism* (New York: Flatiron Books,

Together, we can forge a third path. This path reclaims freedom, honors ideals of democracy and individual rights, and engages in political, legal, psychological, and organizing efforts to do so. This requires work. It involves protest, experiments, education, and reforms to bolster and renew democracy and human rights. It means resisting distractions. Caring to separate what is real from what is fake means insisting on getting reliable information—and that means supporting gutsy reporters and the validation of information, with questions such as “Where is this from?” and “How do you know?,” peer review, and seeking resources to support real news. We should ask about democratic decay, about potentially promising innovations in self-governance, about AI’s impacts, and about choices made behind and through it.

This third way will not emerge unless people persistently ask these and other questions and insist on answers. The third way will work if people we know build or push for others to build AI that empowers rather than replaces human beings. We can each ask: What choices can I personally make to develop and enhance my own thinking and judgment? As a family member and a member of different communities, what choices should I make to protect and benefit these groups that matter to me? Rather than outsourcing our thinking and research to an AI tool, we can seek more specific help from the tool while actively using other sources.¹⁷⁵

Rather than watching AI play chess with itself, AI can assist and challenge individual human beings to become better at chess and other games or the world of strategy.¹⁷⁶ People in universities have both special

2025); The Politics Desk, “Mark Zuckerberg’s Shift to the Right Was Months in the Making”, *NBC* (8 January 2025), online: <nbcnews.com> [perma.cc/4QZB-XHLQ]; Nitasha Tiku, Elizabeth Dwoskin & Gerrit De Vynck, “Inside Billionaire Peter Thiel’s Private Lectures: Warnings of ‘the Antichrist’ and U.S. Destruction”, *The Washington Post* (10 October 2025), online: <washingtonpost.com> [perma.cc/N4SU-T8N2].

175 Dr. Shiri Melamud recommends asking smaller questions rather than turning over research to a chatbot (see Chen, *supra* note 86). See also Kyle Chayka, “A.I. Is Homogenizing Our Thoughts”, *The New Yorker* (25 June 2025), online: <newyorker.com> [perma.cc/SJP6-PD8T].

176 See Kedar Kulkarni, “The AI Gambit: Why Chess Thrived, Not Died” (11 September 2025), online: <radioazimpremjiuniversity.substack.com> [perma.cc/AFJ6-5ZVV]; Adamo Cerioli, Edward D Lee & Vito DP Servedio, “AI Sustains Higher Strategic

opportunities and obligations to take this road, to press for freedom, to build and demonstrate tools that empower human beings, and to engage others in the work.

We humans have faced terrible times in the past. It is tempting to say that our times are unprecedented. Yet, we have the chance to apply lessons from the past and to draw insights from artists, theologians, science fiction creators, and others imagining alternative futures. As bad as things are right now, we are not enslaved—yet.

Frederick Douglass, a man who escaped chattel slavery, taught himself to read, and then reinvented his life as a global anti-slavery advocate, has lessons to teach us. Six years before Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, liberating enslaved African-Americans and changing the facts on the ground during the American Civil War, Douglass said this:

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.¹⁷⁷

The third path tests our endurance and our own commitments to justice and freedom: to care and act.¹⁷⁸ That is the path forged by René

Tension Than Humans in Chess” (16 August 2025) [unpublished], DOI: <10.48550/arXiv.2508.13213>.

177 Frederick Douglass, “West India Emancipation” (Speech delivered at Canandaigua, NY, 4 August 1857) in Frederick Douglass, *Two Speeches, by Frederick Douglass: One on West India Emancipation, Delivered at Canandaigua, Aug 4th, and the Other on the Dred Scott Decision, Delivered in New York, on the Occasion of the Anniversary of the American Abolition Society, May, 1857* (Rochester: CP Dewey, Printer, 1857) 3 at 22.

178 It was President Ronald Reagan—once the icon of conservatism in the United States—who said, “Freedom is a fragile thing and it’s never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by way of inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people” (see Ronald Reagan, Inaugural Address (delivered at Sacramento, Cal, 5 January 1967) [unpublished], online: <reaganlibrary.gov> [perma.cc/2R6C-GJEM]). These words were quoted in a recent federal district court decision by Judge William Young, who

Cassin, who rose up amid the challenges of his time to help forge the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the institutions to realize its vision. May we find the strength and vision to do the same with the challenges of our time.¹⁷⁹

ruled that the Trump administration violated fundamental constitutional right to freedom of speech in detaining and seeking to deport foreign scholars in favour of Palestinian rights. Judge William Young warned that people may fail to stand up and fight for the most precious constitutional values if they are “lulled into thinking their own personal interests are not affected” (see Devan Cole & Holmes Lybrand, “‘Full-Throated Assault on the First Amendment’: Judge Rips Into Trump Over Attempts to Deport Pro-Palestinian Academics” (30 September 2025), online: <cn.com> [perma.cc/56BL-B5TU]. Resistance requires attention:

[T]hough we could fool each other, we should consider—
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark.
For it is important that awake people be awake,
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
the signals we give—yes or no, or maybe—
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep (see “A Ritual to Read Each
Other” in William Stafford, *The Way It Is: New & Selected Poems* (Minneapolis:
Graywolf Press, 1998) at 75–76).

179 Abigail Noko, regional representative of OHCHR in southern Africa, said: “We need human rights now more than ever because we’re living in a world where there is more inequality, more poverty, more hate, more discrimination, more wars. And the reason for that is a lack of implementation of and adherence to human rights” (see Jaxx Artz, “10 Reasons Why The World Needs UN Human Rights Now More Than Ever” (15 September 2025), online: <globalcitizen.org> [perma.cc/NT4K-64CN]).