

## The power in artificial intelligence is how we use it

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*“Writing is a way of sharing our humanity.”* (William McIlvaney). Or at least it was, until artificial intelligence (AI) hit the scene.

As I enter mid-career and mid-life, reflecting on my values and purpose has been a common theme for me both within my work and home life. Reading has always been a hobby of mine. As I escaped into Middle Earth and the Two Rivers in my childhood, and later explored the writings of Daniel Quinn, Margaret Atwood, and others, in the back of my mind has always been the delight of humanity and the recognition that the author is a person and I am experiencing a window into their mind. It is an incredible wonder that the human mind can create writing that can possess power and influence that far transcends the physical act of writing itself.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is putting humanity at risk while providing the opportunity for unlimited advancement and potential. There are amazing things that AI is being used for in medicine: assessing EMR data to flag patients at risk of deterioration to save lives, improving diagnostic accuracy, improving surgical performance, and so much more. But how AI is used is vitally important. The stories I hear from my high school teacher husband fill me with dread. Kids are not learning, they are consuming. Humanity is becoming cogs in the machinery of “big tech” and consumeristic society. Abdication of critical thinking and writing to machines risks eroding the value in what we do. AI might help generate a paper faster but what

joy and personal development is there in completing a task without effort? What meaning is there in an AI-generated reference letter? What do you learn about a CaRMS applicant if ChatGPT generates their personal statement?

I often think of a story from my childhood when I think about society and the path that humanity is on, with our endless consumerism and pursuit of growth: “Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nihm.” In the story, the one-eyed escaped lab rat, Nicodemus, tells the field mouse, Mrs. Frisby, about the “Rat Race” story he read about in a human book:

“It was about a woman in a small town who bought a vacuum cleaner. Her name was Mrs. Jones, and up until then she, like all of her neighbors, had kept her house spotlessly clean by using a broom and a mop. But the vacuum cleaner did it faster and better, and soon Mrs. Jones was the envy of all the other housewives in town — so they bought vacuum cleaners, too.

The vacuum cleaner business was so brisk, in fact, that the company that made them opened a branch factory in town. The factory used a lot of electricity, of course, and so did the women with their vacuum cleaners, so the local electric power company had to put up a big new plant to keep them all running. In its furnaces the power plant burned coal, and out of its chimneys black smoke poured day and night, blanketing the town with soot and making all the floors dirtier than ever. Still, by working twice as hard and twice as long the women of the town were able to keep their floors almost as clean as they had been before Mrs. Jones ever bought a vacuum cleaner in the first place.”

The power in AI is how we use it. Let’s use it wisely. (No AI was used in writing this letter.)

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