

INSIGHTS

From Intention to Artificial Wisdom: A Joint Reflection on AI in the Service of Humanity

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Introduction

We approach artificial intelligence from two distinct but complementary perspectives. One of us has spent decades within the discipline of Buddhist practice, observing how intention shapes human action and its consequences. The other has worked across medicine, history, and the philosophy of technology, reflecting on how scientific concepts shape the way societies understand knowledge and power. Our dialogue began with a simple question: what does it mean for AI to serve humanity? We quickly realized that the question cannot be answered solely by engineers or policymakers. It requires reflection on the nature of human intention, the meaning of intelligence, and the ethical frameworks that guide technological development.

This paper is therefore not a technical manifesto but a shared reflection. It brings together inner and outer perspectives, the cultivation of the mind and the design of systems, to explore how AI can be aligned with human flourishing rather than domination.

From Intention to the Moral Mirror of Technology

From a Buddhist perspective, action begins with intention. The teachings remind us that bodily, verbal, and mental actions arise from states of mind, and these states shape the outcomes we experience. When applied to AI, this insight becomes immediately relevant. Technology does not possess moral agency in itself. It reflects the qualities of the people who design, train, and use it.

If systems are built and deployed under the influence of confusion, fear, or narrow self-interest, their effects will mirror those conditions. If they are guided by generosity, ethical awareness, and clarity, they can become instruments of benefit. In this sense, AI functions as a moral mirror, amplifying human intentions rather than replacing them (Kou Sopheap, n.d.).

This perspective invites us to shift the conversation away from anxiety about machines toward responsibility for the human mind. Ethical AI therefore begins not only with regulation but with cultivating mindfulness, compassion, and moral discipline among those who interact with these technologies.

From Intelligence to Artificial Wisdom

Our second starting point is a conceptual question: what do we really mean by intelligence? The history of AI reveals that the term emerged from a worldview that equated reasoning with

computation. This produced extraordinary technological progress but also a philosophical confusion, the tendency to mistake simulation for understanding.

When the concept entered Khmer intellectual space, it was often translated in a way that resonates more closely with wisdom than with problem-solving capacity. Rather than dismissing this as a linguistic accident, we see it as an invitation to rethink the aspiration of technological development. Wisdom implies discernment, awareness of consequences, and concern for others. Intelligence alone does not guarantee these qualities (Chhem, 2025).

The idea of Artificial Wisdom therefore suggests that the success of AI should not be measured only by speed, efficiency, or predictive accuracy, but by its contribution to human flourishing and social harmony.

Convergence: Interdependence and Responsibility

Although we begin from different angles, our reflections converge on a shared understanding. AI is not an independent force shaping humanity from the outside. It is a product of interdependent processes involving data, institutions, cultural norms, and human choices. This insight resonates both with Buddhist thought and with contemporary sociotechnical analysis.

Recognizing interdependence leads naturally to responsibility. We cannot attribute moral agency to machines while absolving ourselves of accountability. The ethical direction of AI depends on the intentions, structures, and values embedded within it.

We also share a concern about intelligence without compassion.

Knowledge and computational power can either alleviate suffering or intensify inequality. The difference lies not in the technology itself but in the ethical orientation guiding its use. Compassion, in this context, is not a sentimental add-on. It is a practical condition for ensuring that innovation remains connected to human needs.

Guiding Orientation for AI in the Service of Humanity

From our dialogue, a set of shared orientations emerges, but they are best understood not as rules but as a way of thinking. Everything begins with intention, because every technological decision

carries a moral direction. Ethical reflection cannot be postponed until after systems are deployed; it must accompany the entire lifecycle of design and use.

Responsibility must remain human. AI can inform and assist, but it cannot bear accountability. Decisions that affect lives, rights, or opportunities must always be answerable to human judgment and institutions. This recognition reinforces trust and prevents the illusion that technology can replace ethical deliberation.

Transparency follows as a form of respect. When people understand the limits and assumptions of a system, they can engage with it wisely rather than blindly. Transparency is therefore not merely technical disclosure but an ethical commitment to clarity.

At the same time, compassion provides the direction in which innovation should move. Technologies should be evaluated by whether they reduce suffering, strengthen dignity, and support meaningful human development. Efficiency and profit may matter, but they cannot be the sole criteria of success.

Because AI reshapes how we think, communicate, and decide, cultivating digital mindfulness becomes essential. This means learning to engage with technology attentively and critically, without being driven by speed or distraction. Such mindfulness allows individuals and societies to remain authors of their choices rather than passive recipients of algorithmic influence.

Finally, a deep awareness of interdependence reminds us that AI exists within social and cultural ecosystems. Governance must therefore be systemic, attentive to context, and sensitive to inequality. When innovation is balanced with wisdom in this way, progress can remain dynamic without becoming reckless.

Discussion and Implications

Bringing together inner cultivation and systemic reflection expands the scope of AI ethics. It suggests that policy frameworks alone are insufficient without ethical awareness, and that personal virtue alone cannot address structural challenges.

For education, this implies integrating ethical reflection into technical training. For governance, it means designing regulatory frameworks that prioritize human dignity and social equity. For society

more broadly, it calls for a cultural shift in how technology is imagined, from instruments of control to tools for understanding and care.

This synthesis also highlights the contribution that smaller intellectual traditions can make to global debates. Cambodia's philosophical heritage offers a perspective that complements dominant technological narratives by placing compassion and wisdom at the center of innovation.

Conclusion

Our conversation began with different questions but led to a shared insight: the future of AI depends less on what machines become than on what humans choose to value.

By bringing together the ethical discipline of intention and the philosophical aspiration toward Artificial Wisdom, we suggest that the challenge of AI is fundamentally moral. Technology can amplify confusion or clarity, division or compassion. The direction is not predetermined.

If AI is to serve humanity, it must be guided by both inner awareness and collective responsibility. The task ahead is therefore not only to build better systems but to cultivate wiser societies.

References

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