Why AI?

by Theodore Dalrymple

Today I received a most kind, unsolicited offer on the internet to "amplify my potential" with, or by, ChatGPT. At my age, however, I think it's a little late in the day to "amplify my potential": I have reached, or failed to reach, whatever little potential I ever had.

The kind offer went on to say:

> *We've got you covered with the latest trends and updates in the world of AI.*

I am not entirely sure that I want to be "covered" with the latest trends in the world of AI. Is it not precisely one of the worrying things about AI that you don't have much choice in the matter of its coverage and powers of surveillance? Perhaps I am something of a linguistic dinosaur, but the expression "I've got you covered" conjures up a gunman who is either going to shoot you or prevent others from doing so, depending on the circumstances; but none of the circumstances seems very comfortable to be in. Besides, "cornered" seems a

better word here than "covered," though no doubt ChatGPT will correct me on that.

What will ChatGPT do for me, that is to say once my potential has been amplified? Among other things, it will "revolutionize my interior design process."

But what *is* my interior design process? I find, as I search my inner dinosaur, that these words convey almost nothing to me. It is true that my house needs redecorating, and I am sure could be furnished better and more tastefully, but I wouldn't call my very intermittent and fleeting thoughts about these matters "an interior design process."

Surely, then, the interior design process must be something else, perhaps a form of psychotherapy. But it is too late for that also; by now, my interior design process, whatever it may be, is as set in stone as Michelangelo's *Pietà*. One of the great compensations of growing old is that one doesn't have to think any longer of improving oneself, because it isn't possible, and what is impossible cannot be obligatory or even desirable.

With the AI that has got me covered, I will be able to "create presentations effortlessly"—which immediately put me in mind of Dr Johnson's dictum that what is written without pain is rarely read with pleasure. But is the effortless life desirable? It is certainly attractive. Who wants to do the shopping, the cleaning, the cooking? AI offers to do what domestic servants once did for the middle and upper classes; which, incidentally, is one of the reasons, or at least one of the preconditions, for the phenomenal productivity of some of our forebears. Mozart never went to a supermarket, or even parked a car at one. Perhaps AI will render obsolete the aperçu of the economist who said that one servant is worth a household full of appliances.

Another advantage kindly offered me is that AI would allow me

to create art. On the evidence presented, this was something of an exaggeration; what it would allow me to create (if "create" is the right word here) is kitsch. But once more, I suppose, I must distinguish between what is inherent in AI and what it is contingently used for. I am reminded of the argument of the late Neil Postman, in his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, that television was an inherently trivializing medium, incapable of seriousness.

I am still not sure whether he was right. It surely cannot be that no serious programs had ever been produced for television when he made his assertion; and if *some* had been produced, why not many? If the audience was too frivolous to demand serious programs, and money was to be made only from trivialities, then that was the fault of the audience rather than of the medium. The same might be said of books, the majority of which are not of great worth, as a glance at an airport bookstall will demonstrate. Postman's complaint may have been against human nature rather than against television, for wherever humans can be entertained without having to make any effort for themselves, they will seize the opportunity. On this view, Man is fundamentally a slob.

But to return to the art that ChatGPT will supposedly help me to "create" at the press of a few buttons: Does it reflect on the medium itself or upon the taste that the management of ChatGPT, or perhaps ChatGPT itself, thinks will attract people to use it? Is there any reason why ChatGPT should create crude, brightly colored, vulgar images, more or less in the style of a tattoo parlor? Why could the AI not be used to produce more Chardins or Hokusais rather than multicolored pictures of scantily clad, muscular busty blondes with hatred in their eyes and aggression in their hearts, of the kind that prisoners like to put on the walls of their cells?

Will AI be the creator or the follower of taste? On the assumption that the AI-generated pictures were intended to captivate me so that I would pay to use it, they gave a very

depressing insight into the state of public taste as it now is, or as it is assumed to be. Moreover, the advertisement—for that is what it was—told me that I could design buildings with the help of AI, an example to entice me being given that was almost as bad as a building by Frank Gehry. When it comes to architecture, what is needed is a little natural intelligence.

AI could certainly help me to write those two truly universal languages: bureaucratese and managerialese. No doubt it could also help me to ascend in the academic world by producing for me screeds of incomprehensible polysyllabic woke-ese. As the email put it:

> *Conversational abilities have captivated users worldwide. Its versatility has found applications in education, customer support, and beyond [including, no doubt, fraud]. ChatGPT's commitment to improvement and user feedback contributed to this remarkable success. This milestone underscores the transformative potential of AI in enhancing human AI interactions and productivity.*

Thank goodness the life of Man is but three score years and ten, after which my productivity will swiftly decline to zero.

First published in *[Taki's magazine.](#)*