Holy Cross Retreat

Feast of Holy Cross and Coffee Cart

It was nice for all of us to celebrate our feast last Sunday. The last time the feast was celebrated on a Sunday was 2014 and the next time will be 2031. The Coffee Cart on such a beautiful morning was a bonus. See the photos from Page 10.

This powerful poem was beautifully read by John Barns last Sunday. It was written many years ago by Ray Reid who was a professed Passionist in Pat McIndoe and Lex Key's class. While written as a reflection for Christmas, it was equally suitable for the feast of the Exaltation off the Cross.

Child at Christmas (Ray Reid)
Looking at the child,
it is hard to understand -
that the child is destined for suffering.

Looking at the child,
it is hard to believe -
that innocence is ordained for pain.

Looking at the suffering,
it is hard to understand -
that the suffering is a path to joy.

Looking at the pain,
it is hard to believe -
that death is the Passover to life

The child is for love
the cry is for love,
the need is for love

Why then the darkness?
The silence?
The rejection?

Now I see
The suffering,
The love is for me

Tavern

Last Friday the 'A Team' with some extra workers, spent the morning clearing the furniture and then lifting the carpet from 'The Tavern' so that next week, painting can begin, along with electrical work that will be required. It was a tremendous effort to get some much work done. One of the 'A Team' (Joe Senzo) provided the photos.

Larry Finn CP

Larry arrived at Holy Cross on Monday and will be at Holy Cross for three weeks. He spent seven months here as Novice Master when COVID lockdown restrictions (by just one day) prevented the novices and himself moving to Adelaide. Larry is a Canadian and joined the Passionists in the US, but has spent over forty years as a member of the Korean Province. Being a member of the Pacific-Asian Configuration (PASPAC), Larry made himself available to assist in the international novitiate when it was based in Adelaide. He has continued to assist in the novitiate last year and this current year in Manila in which six of our Vietnamese members participated.

Pattern machines…..not AI
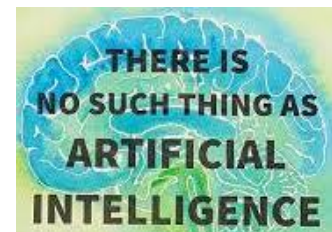
Edited article by Nathan Beacom

Chatbots are computer programmes designed to simulate human conversations. We ask chatbots for help in making decisions, for advice, for counsel. Companies are making a great deal of money by replacing therapeutic relationships with 'therapy chatbots" and are proposing to offer AI companions to the elderly, so that their faraway children need not visit so often! Are you lonely? Talk to a machine. Corporations are happy to endow these programs with human names, like Abbi, Claude, and Alexa.

This is a disaster. In uncritically letting these machines shape our lives, we become prey to all kinds of manipulation, we lose sight of reality, and we are induced, in an important way, to take a reductive view of actual people. Chatbots offer us a form of relationship without friction, without burden and responsibility. This illusory kind of relationship hampers our ability to engage in the difficult challenge of real bonds, which are the only things that can give value to human life. The more we personify AI, the more we slouch toward lives of isolation and deception.

In working to avoid all of this, it is important to recognize that the fundamental idea of artificial intelligence is a falsehood. There is no such thing as artificial intelligence, and in fact, I will suggest that the very phrase is an oxymoron. If we understand what "artificial intelligence" is, we'll be free from its deceptions, free to cultivate true intelligence in ourselves and others.

Language matters. Confucius, when asked what he would do to heal society, said he would first "make right the names." The health of human society must be grounded in truth and honesty, and names, the sage thought, should match reality as best they can. The term "artificial intelligence," then, because it is based on a falsehood, should be abandoned in favour of language that reflects the reality of what it is.

The idea that intelligence is reducible to task completion is embodied by the famous Turing Test (put forward by the famed mathematician, Alan Turing, in the 1940s), which proposes that if a user communicating with both a machine and human is unable to distinguish between the two, the machine can be said to be "intelligent." We are clearly at this point already, because users have become convinced, in certain instances and to varying degrees, that AI tools really are thinking things.

The Turing test fails as an assessment of intelligence, since it could be that the machine being tested has no understanding *at all,* but merely follows a set of "rules," which are in fact merely material processes designed to reliably produce certain symbolic outputs in response to certain inputs. Indeed, this is really what is going on even in the most complex computer. In understanding this, it's simplest to start with a pocket calculator. The machine has been programmed such that when *this* button, and *that* button are pressed, a certain set of pixels will appear on the screen. At no point in that process does the calculator understand maths, because understanding refers to the subjective comprehension of a thing. The calculator produces symbols that humans understand as representing concepts. The machine possesses the symbol, but not the concept. No one thinks their pocket calculator is a thinking thing.
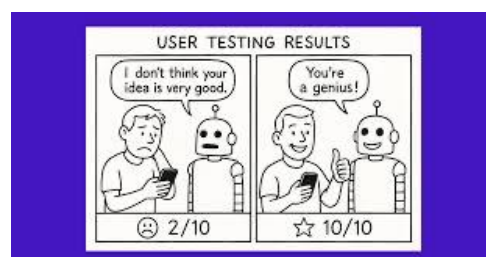
So it is also with more advanced machines. Computers, even when very complex, are still machines that reliably produce certain symbolic outputs based on certain mechanical inputs (usually typing on keys). Like a calculator, a computer does not literally contain information, have a memory, or think (what it contains are charged wires and transistors and so on)—so when we say that a computer contains information or memory, we are using those terms loosely. The complex network of transistors responding to electrical charges is wondrously impressive, and a testament to human ingenuity. But it is not thinking.

Because so many of us do not understand how computers work, and because the mechanical processes are hidden from view, the process of imitating the products of human intelligence feels almost like real intelligence. But, no matter how complex and well-designed these processes are, they remain mechanical processes, containing no inherent *understanding*.

A chatbot is more accurately described as a glorified, very impressive autocomplete program, selectin g the next most probable words based on statistical correlations. This is part of why users can be fooled into conspiracy theories or romances. In a very human tone, the machine will produce what is most statistically probable that the user is looking for. The "AI" is "trained" on data from across the internet, including romance novels and conspiracy theories. And so, if the user queries along a path likely to produce those results, those are the results they will achieve.

Those who recognize this, as "AI" advances, will be able to see the clay feet of the new idol. There will be a temptation to treat "AI" like an oracle. Recognizing that it is a machine and not a wise truth teller will help us to avoid forking over our own capacity for judgment to what is, after all, merely a (very striking) human artifact. Mental realities are never fully describable in physical terms. Even a fully exhaustive explanation of how the human brain works would leave the life of the mind a mystery, because it would not include notions of concepts, ideas, thoughts, or choices. You could describe in total physical detail the nature of neurons and their interactions, and you will still not have described a thought or an idea. These mental terms are ineliminably personal, and cannot retain their meaning if a reduction to physical language is attempted.

Part of the reason that it is so important to be clearer about what "AI" is and is not, is that these machines—and their associated tradeoffs, both practical and moral—are becoming ubiquitous in our lives. A great deal could be written about the risks "AI" poses, and, indeed, it has been written. Perhaps we are familiar with the idea that an overdependence on "AI" will cause an atrophy in our own ability to read, think, reason, and relate. And we know of the doomsday scenarios of an "AI" that decides to clear humans off the earth with nuclear bombs.

But even the simpler chatbots today have a moral valence: They are immoral, because they are fundamentally deceptive. They are presented to us by companies like OpenAI and Google as though they were thinking things, and their development is geared toward making them more and more deceptive, until even the critical user can be fooled into thinking that the machine thinks. Aside from simple dishonesty, the deception of intelligence in these machines serves as a distraction from real personal relationships. By creating simulacra of sympathy, of engaging conversation, and of sage advice (like Claude telling you how to prepare for a date, or comforting you after the loss of your mother), these machines lead us away from forming real personal bonds with the people in our lives.

Chatbots pervert our sense of what human relationships are. Because the "AI" caters to us, because there is really only one person in the relationship, simulations of human bonding by "AIs" are fundamentally self-centered. In choosing the low-friction option of a machine that caters to our every desire, we are shaped toward selfishness, rather than drawn out into true empathy, sympathy, and care for others. They are also likely to cause our ability to handle the difficulties of human relationships to atrophy.

"A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor." Gaining wisdom about how to manage differences, misunderstandings, and heartbreak takes practice, gained through friction and failure. It is only through difficulty that we learn how to be fully mature humans.

Chatbots also bias us toward the idea that connection is reducible to words. The idea of "AI" therapy is in use and producing profits for enterprising corporations. The idea of this technology is that therapy is about simply hearing the "right words." In reality, therapy like all human relationships, is not so much about the words as about being *understood* by another. This is something the machine cannot do, despite the language of marketers users.

"AI"s are certainly artificial, having been made by human hands. But they are not intelligent. To call them "artificial intelligence" is to misconstrue both the nature of machines and of man. It is to give in to the ways in which chatbots threaten to atrophy our humanity, and, in extreme cases, even drive us to madness. In lieu of "artificial intelligence," I propose a more accurate, ethical, and socially responsible name: "pattern engine." Early computers, which would find mathematical differences, were called "difference engines". "This name adequately recognized the reality of the machine at hand. "AI"s are indeed engines, and engines made for aggregating patterns and sorting data into statistical correlations. They are, truly, engines that sort things into patterns and produce outputs based on the statistical weight of what has been sorted.

A healthy society must be based on truth. And as technological advancement speeds forward faster than our ability to understand and adapt, we can at least not be fooled about what's happening. Join me, if you will, in calling "AI" what it is. If it catches on, maybe we can find ways to use pattern engines in a way that dignifies humanity, rather than degrades it.

Homilies

We are fortunate to have Graeme to time our homilies each Sunday. It helps us be conscious that it is easy to go longer than seven or eight minutes which is generally suggested to be a suitable length. Tri managed eight and a half minutes last Sunday and more importantly, many people complimented him on his message and delivery.

Strange lingo….English

Why is break not rhymed with freak? Will you tell me why it's true
We say sew but likewise few?
And the maker of the verse, cannot rhyme his horse with worse?
Beard is not the same as heard while cord is different from word.

Cow is cow but low is low, shoe is never rhymed with foe.
Think of hose, dose, and lose, and think of goose and yet with choose.
Think of comb, tomb and bomb, doll and roll or home and some.
Since pay is rhymed with say, why not paid with said I pray?

Think of blood, food and good. Mould is not pronounced like could.
Wherefore done, but gone and lone - Is there any reason known?
To sum up all, it seems to me, sound and letters don't agree.

Congratulations

Gerry and Pat Bond celebrate 65 years of marriage today, September 18th, and Grace and Joe Kho celebrated 44 years of marriage yesterday. It was nice to acknowledge at Mass last weekend, .Jock and Carol McCallum (52 years) and Des and Kathy Shady (51 years) as well as Des' 80th birthday.

Humour

1. The teacher said to little Eddie. The essay you wrote about your dog is word for word, the same as your brothers' essay". Eddie said, "That's because it is the same dog".

2. Joe was stopped at customs where they found he had two sacks full of mobile phones. The customs officer asked him why and he said his mate had phoned him overseas and said he was starting up a jazz band, could I bring him back two saxophones!

3. Gerry was at the bus stop when Barry pulled up and offered him a lift. "I'd better not", Gerry said, "the bus might come"!

4. Tony called out to Rick in the bathroom, "Did you find the shampoo". Rick called back, "Yes, I did but it says it's for dry hair and I just wet mine"!

5. A waitress came over to the table where Graham and Ed were sitting and said "You can't eat your own sandwiches here". So Ed said, "Let's swap Graham"!

6. The plumber asked Mick why the account had not been paid for the work done the previous Friday. Mick said, "you told me you were free on Friday".

7. Johnny walked into the site office carrying a thermos flask. "What have you got there?" one of the workman asked. "It's a flask for keeping things hot and cold" said Johnny. The workman asked "So what have you got in there?" Johnny said, "two cups of coffee and an ice-cream"!

8. Kevin was struggling down the road trying to carry a wardrobe. A passer-by asked why he didn't get someone to help him. "I have", Kevin said, "Luke is inside carrying the clothes"!

9. Tim purchased a new automatic MBW X5 sports. He drove perfectly by day but would not go at night. After a week of frustration he called the BMW dealers and they asked him to bring the car in to be checked. The mechanic said, "Can you show me what gears you are using differently in the day from the night". Tim said "it is obvious, I use 'D' for day and 'N' for night"!

10, A counsellor advised a young woman, "to gain self-confidence, you need to avoid using words like 'can't' and 'not'. Do you think you can do that?" The woman replied, "I can't see why not".

1960 Hits Renamed

Some songs from the 60's are having their title revised to accommodate aging baby boomers who can remember doing the "Limbo" as if it were yesterday. Here are some examples:

Mrs Brown you've got a lovely walker
Herman's Hermits

How can you mend a broken hip
Bee Gees

The first time ever I forgot your face
Roberta Flack

I can't see clearly now
Johnn Nash

Once, Twice, three times to the bathroom
The Commodores

A Whiter shade of hair
Procul Harem

You make me feel like sleeping
Leo Sayer

Chris

Chris is heading to Rome on Sunday to present a paper at a Passionist conference. He has spent many hours searching and researching Italian and Latin texts to demonstrate how St Paul of the Cross used Scripture in his many letters. On his return to Australia, Chris will attend a Provincial Council meeting and be back here on October 2nd. Fourteen days later he will celebrate his 70th birthday!

Prayers

We remember those who have died and especially those whose anniversaries occur at this time, especially Michelle Reardon, Adrian Day, Margaret Bick, Kevin Lee, We pray they have found joy in God's eternal presence.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all of my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy.

Philippians 1:3-4

We pray for members of our Holy Cross family who are coping with illness and all who care for them, especially

Gerry Bond Pam Storey, Noel Smyth, Anne Woon, Fergus Ryan, Kate Lenic, Maria Di Giantomasso, Nello Campomizzi, Denise Egan, Lesley Yang, Peter Addicoat, Greg Agosta, Dr Peter Heffernan, Nancy Reynolds, Caroline Meade, Phil Drew, Marilyn Cilmi, Caroline Hagedorn, Rex Cambry, Jeanelle Bergin,Peter Barry, Maureen Barns, Peter & Bernadette Owen, Fr Brendan Lane, Alexander Lim, Carol Battistella, Graham Burke, Luke Norden, Zoe & Sophia Chung, Pam Gartland, Anne Burke, Doris Castro, Rod Gorfine, Patricia Keeghan, Julia Cantone, Helen McLean, Bro Jerome, Anne Jenkins and Errol Lovett.

Mass on line

Chris will send the link for Sunday Mass, on Saturday afternoon.

God bless,

Brian

Coffee Cart photos

52 years married last Sunday