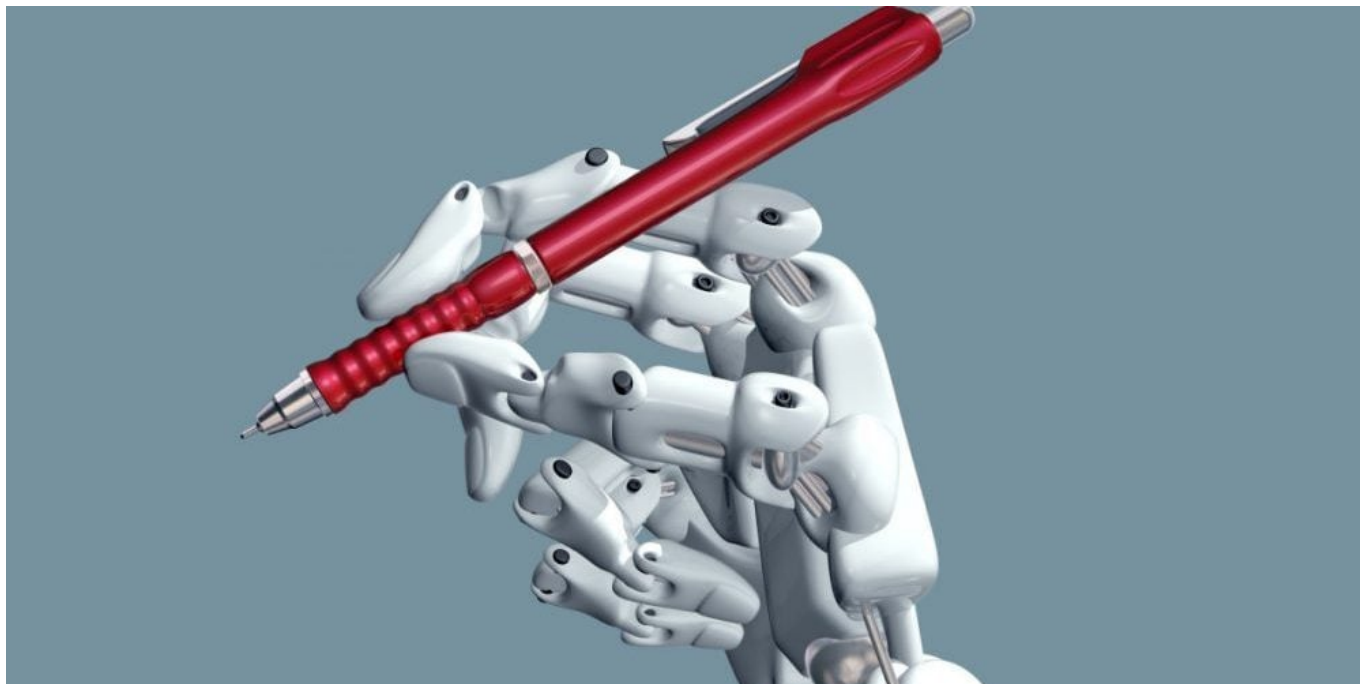# Will AI make us think?

by Lev Tsitrin

Almost two decades ago, I tried to promote my book by hiring a publicist who put me on a bunch of radio shows. It was a very expensive endeavor that did not pan out. In monetary terms, it was a total loss — apparently, the people who had their radios on, were not necessarily the people who buy and read books.

But in the terms of pure fun of talking to very intelligent people (and the hosts of radio shows are very sharp), it was great. A remark by one of them, made as we chatted during a commercial, was a real eye-opener. "The problem" — he said — "is that people don't like to think." What he meant by this was not that people are lazy or stupid, but that thinking may disrupt one's cherished worldview, and is avoided for the sake of one's inner comfort. The safest place is in ideological echo-chamber — it reinforces the long-held, perhaps inherited, views. Thinking is just too disruptive for mental (and therefore social) comfort; for that, conformism is the thing.

I had a vivid reminder of the wisdom of this observation

fairly recently, on twitter. I sent [my reaction](#) to the *New York Times'* "scoop" on how Alvin Bragg came up with justifications for indicting Trump that in my mind proved beyond the shadow of doubt that Bragg was motivated by politics, to those who tweeted the *Times'* article itself. I seldom get replies to such tweets, but this time around there was one, from @PamBerg, a "Political junkie, Activist, Bleeding heart, yellow dog Democrat- #FBR,#ResisterSister," according to her profile. The reply read: "LOL. yeah, right. New English Review? "The New English Review is an online monthly magazine of cultural criticism, published from Nashville, Tennessee, Scho[ar]rs have noted they have platformed a range of far-right Islamophobic discourse including conspiracy theories" Some source." To which I replied in kind, sensing what Obama called "a teachable moment" — "LOL @PamBerg, yeah, right. There is a term in logic for what you are saying — "genetic fallacy," i.e. because Einstein was Jewish, relativity cannot be true. Because NER is critical of Islamism, what it publishes is "conspiracy theories." Some logic!"

@PamBerg did not reply, but the *New York Times* did — by publishing the next day a "[guest essay](#)" by a former federal prosecutor that was — in the structure of its argument — the exact carbon copy of my article. Seeing my point confirmed by a source accepted by @PamBerg as impeccable, I could not resist rubbing it in: "BTW @PamBerg — here is the exact same point that NER made yesterday — but this morning it was made by NY Times. Happy now? And agree that NER is excellent? — Compare it to [NER link] and let me know… And please apologize, too…" There was no reply and no apology, but I did not particularly mind, feeling that I won this mini-war of words.

It is not that @PamBerg did not think — but she thought not about the merits of the argument, but only about the platform on which it appeared, as described by an "authority" —

Wikipedia. To her, when the *New English Review* says something, it is not worthy of attention, but when the *New York Times* says it, it is. This is exactly what the logicians call "the argument from authority" — and in describing it, they stress its pitfalls. For one, a person who is an authority in one area may not be an authority in another one — I vividly remember the brouhaha some years ago over Israeli Nobel winner in chemistry answering a journalist's question about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Her "answer" revealed ignorance of politics that was so appalling that the common folks who likely would not tell oxygen from titanium laughed her off, telling her to mind her own business and go back to her lab. She was by no means stupid — and had a Nobel to prove it — but she simply veered into an area about which she knew absolutely nothing — which proves the vulnerability of the "argument from authority" when it gets misused.

The other problem with that kind of argument is that the acknowledged authorities may be wrong even in their own area of expertise. No one would dispute that Ayatollah Khomenei is an expert on Islam — and yet he (and every Islamist) turns Islam into an idolatrous creed by insisting that God definitely talked to Mohammed and that Koran is unquestionably God's word to be followed to a dot — when in fact there is absolutely no way for Khomenei (or anyone else) to know whether that is true or not, for a very simple reason that the two-step, three-party communication on which Islam is based is by its very nature unreliable.

Or how about Lenin, who declared that "the teaching of Marx is all-powerful because it is true"? For Lenin, Marx was an unassailable authority — and for the Soviets, Lenin himself was the embodiment of the ultimate truth. And yet, if one is to consider Marxist doctrine with a less pious eye, it turns out to be garbage, since it inverts the reality, bunching individuals into "classes" as if individuals did not exist but "classes" had real existence — while in reality it is

individuals who actually exist, while "classes" are merely an artificial mental constrict.

And into this world of ours that is ruled by intellectual "authority" now comes a very disruptive force — AI. It is disruptive not only because it will cost people jobs — for instance, automating legal research (on which the *New York Times* recently [published a lengthy piece](#)), and not only because it allows students to cheat, ordering their papers from AI chat bots instead of sweating them out — but because it completely disrupts the very notion of "authority." Not knowing whether a piece of writing was produced by a human or a machine, one can no longer resort to the "argument from authority" in order to avoid the uncomfortable process of thinking. It will not be possible to say, as @PamBerg did, "this comes from *New English Review*, and therefore it is no good" while "that comes from the *New York Times*, and therefore it is good."

Nowadays, this kind of "reasoning" that is no reasoning at all is followed by the millions who find thinking uncomfortable and disruptive, @PamBerg being but one of them. However, a real possibility that a text that is claimed to have come from an "authoritative" source, had in fact been generated by a mere *machine* — which, not being human, is of no authority at all, puts one at a loss of how to treat it. It requires a totally different way of evaluation — an evaluation by thinking, rather than by referencing the pecking order of the "authority" of the author or publisher. As with all things that are made by a machine — which is to say, almost everything we have — the question will have to become not "who produced it?" but "is it good?"

And this, I think, is all for the good: AI will discredit the @PamBerg kind of "thinking" that in reality is mere mental bondage. With a real chance that an "authority" may turn out to be a machine, the "argument from authority" will become unusable.

I, for one, like this new world. Ideas should be judged on their merit, irrespective of their authorship or publication venue. Once the pecking order of the prestige of a publisher is no longer factored in, the works published by *New English Review* will no longer be considered by the ilk of @PamBerg *a priory* inferior to the works published by the *New York Times*. When works are judges by the criteria of merit rather than "authority," it becomes obvious that the *New York Times'* opinion section publishes plenty of drivel, and a lot of what appears in *New English Review* is both thoughtful and well-written, and is easily on par with anything that appears in mainstream publications now seen as "authoritative."

To put it simply, AI will force us to think, rather than to hide behind "authorities." It will force people to open their minds. A new Age of Reason will dawn. People thinking for themselves rather than slavishly following others, there will be less of Communism and less of Islamism in the world — which is a very good thing. Though AI scares the heck out of us at the moment, we may yet come to say "thank you AI"!

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