

"How We Are Better Than AI"

~ Rev. Tet Gallardo

Good morning once again, Unitarians of Westchester. I'm so happy to be with you all this morning for you, evening for me. Thank you to Rev. Arlin Roy for lending me your pulpit. I vaguely remember coming through Westchester when I lived in New York from 2002-2004. I lived at first in Hell's Kitchen and subsequently moved to Brooklyn across the train tracks from Chinatown, I think it's called Bay Ridge. I was the trailing partner of a Filipina women's rights lawyer who landed a fellowship in the Center for Reproductive Rights on Wall Street.

The perfect sabbatical after a burnout with social democrats and several NGOs. I had more than a year to burn and I did that by exploring the city to the fullest: Broadway, Off-Broadway, Off-Off Broadway, fringe films in the East Village, bluegrass jazz in hole in the walls, avant-garde art in Brooklyn, a Tori Amos concert on Jones beach, soaked in beat poets and buskers, visited museums, public libraries, apprenticed with a Cuban filmmaker, got to know HBO executives, I was recruited by JP Morgan Chase after passing a rigorous exam on stock trading, but instead I volunteered with the New York Anti-Violence Project, and worked in a tech school in Little Korea. I also drove all over the tri-state area, flew over the Statue of Liberty, explored upstate New York, Montauk, and drove to Niagara Falls. I even visited Florida, Philly, and Boston. I auditioned as a drummer for so many bands and settled for being a groupie. And of course, it was then I discovered Unitarian Universalism when my Filipina friend married a UU divinity student in Harvard. Two years later, I became a co-convenor of a UU chalice circle in Manila.

Ok I live life to the fullest and truly want a highly diverse set of experiences to help my sense making abilities. Is it the same for you? Don't you love those a-ha moments that border on the mystical, like a sharp cognition of conditions that give rise to certain events, such that it seems you are clairvoyant. For instance, you come to your lover's lair, and you see there's wine, the bath is running, and there's the smell of food cooking - is it a supernatural gift to be able to predict that you may have some hopes fulfilled for that evening? For a mystic, those conditions may not all add up in the logical brain and they may not even be fully conscious of those conditions that the subconscious can recognize. But what if say there's wine, the bath is running and there's food cooking, but there's also

friends coming over to watch tv with your family, there's a thousand things missing in the refrigerator you need to go out in the evening for groceries, there's video calls from relatives who are refugees somewhere. And then one of your friends produces a crisis with another friend. Wouldn't it be too easy to miss the dots that should have connected? There are too many variables floating around. The logical mind may say, ugh it will be an exhausting night, but then you can't help feeling or sensing intuitively that this night is your night for some reason. Like it would end nice. Suddenly, while you're chomping down your pasta, you just get it, the a-ha moment. And you go, "oh!" like you can't explain it, it borders on the mystical. You know your lover wants you that evening.

I may have had a couple of those so-called mystical experiences regarding New York. Before I came to New York, I had been having these recurring nightmares and daytime visions of the collapse of two twin buildings. I would see two building on fire, and I thought it was about my twin tower complex in Manila where I lived. Sometimes, I would be swimming happily in our community pool and then I would be jolted by visions of towers being destroyed. The visions stopped after 9/11.

While living in New York, I would constantly be bogged by the phrase "General System Failure" in my mind's ears. Of course, I checked with a psychologist who found nothing wrong with me. Soon after, 55 million people would experience the second largest power outage in human history that affected so many states in the Northeast and Northwest of the States even as far as Ontario. That was 2003.¹

These experiences have left me with a deep respect for the power of the human mind - how the mind has the capacity to connect the dots like background services in a computer. I'm sharing this because I believe that mysticism and artificial intelligence share a great potential for predictive analytics² using algorithms and various models³ for finding relationships in the seemingly unrelated. I believe that for both AI and human beings, an efficient cognition occurs in a non-linear way, similar to the way mindmaps meander outwards. Except in sense making, the dots fall inwards towards a central a-ha moment.

¹ <https://abc7ny.com/2003-blackout-nyc-20-years-power-outage/13646160/>

² <https://www.ibm.com/topics/predictive-analytics>

³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/cognitiveworld/2021/05/30/the-five-ways-to-build-machine-learning-models/?sh=5d2d371011a8>

For any system to predict outcomes, it must have the ability to recognize which variables matter in making a model or a mindmap of the world.

For example, they say, France, Germany, and Italy have high salt, high fat diets same as America, but that these European countries have a lower incidence of heart failure⁴. With some intelligent calculation, you could create a model of correlated variables to come to the logical conclusion that the lifestyle of Europeans allows them to better manage unhealthy diets. The not-so intelligent might say, aha! speaking English causes heart failure!

In creating AI models for predictive analytics, it is increasingly clear that a diversity of layers of variables are more reliable rather than what seems obviously related in a linear sense. Meaning if you can find the correlations between more diverse variables, your model could be more grounded in the reality of the world. Like how scientists say the flutter of a butterfly's wings⁵ in Portugal can be correlated to the wind patterns in Africa. If scientists can find how they are correlated, then they would be able to predict more accurately these normalizing catastrophes. I call this grounded wisdom.

A lifeless AI would be hard-pressed to provide meaning and sense making in what would matter to human quality of life and relationships in complex fields like politics, religion, and social networks. But, for humans, grounded wisdom can be developed with some techniques in relaxation, skills in appreciating diverse topics, practicing mindful listening, and learning empathy.

Now humans can also process information better than AI when working in groups. In my work teaching teams and communities how to think together, I roll out this exercise created by NASA⁶, where you're supposed to rank 15 items by order of importance for survival in your journey on the moon. After scoring your team answer against the NASA answer key, I'd ask their satisfaction with their group conversation - if they felt that they mattered in the rating process, in the group sense making.

⁴ <https://academic.oup.com/eurheartj/article/44/28/2560/7192512>

⁵ <https://www.technologyreview.com/2011/02/22/196987/when-the-butterfly-effect-took-flight/>

⁶ https://www.csuchico.edu/anthmuseum/_assets/documents/nasa-exercise-survival-on-the-moon.pdf

Always, always, teams who have a higher diversity score better than others⁷, teams with more women score better⁸ - and this is corroborated by research published in Harvard Business Review, and lastly teams that are highly satisfied with the conversation always win⁹. I call this embodied interbeing. Any group of people can develop a democratic way of increasing participation and engagement that is constructive and productive, and it produces strangely wise decisions - and I've tried this with farmers, UU ministers, bankers, clerks, laborers and other professions who have highly varied views on the science of outer space. We can produce an intelligence so powerful when we allow ourselves to interdepend on one another, developing a culture of care in the process - we begin to care for what our teammates think and feel.

You would think that people would know this by now that saving the planet from extinction or at least from the series of polycrises would push us to depend on the persons more different from us in terms of creating more intelligent decisions. Sadly, this remains only a potential for humankind.

Given this potential, I am appalled at how humans conceive and carry out such atrocities that are a threat to their very own human security - creating unnecessary enemies, antagonizing neighboring countries, generating trauma for future generations.

Sometimes I'd like to do a mental exercise of asking the question, how are we not artificial intelligence? Are humans pretending to be rational, reasonable, and realistic? Are we even real? Let's go there. Let's bring out our college readings on Kierkegaard and Descartes and assess how are we real.

In my years of experience in pastoral care and social justice advocacy, my theory is that people feel most real when they feel that they matter, that they made a difference, such as when they can affect outcomes, when they are being pivotal to a sequence of consequences, when they contribute to the outcome of a conversation or are when they are disrupting a chain reaction. When humans feel most real, they perform most intelligently. Can you relate to this? In short, it's you being you for the common good. We

⁷ <https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter>

⁸ https://hbr.org/2011/06/defend-your-research-what-makes-a-team-smarter-more-women?cm_sp=most_widget_-_default_-_Defend+Your+Research%3A+What+Makes+a+Team+Smarter%3F+More+Women

⁹ <https://hbr.org/2018/12/the-right-way-to-use-the-wisdom-of-crowds>

know you are being real when you are not acting from a pre-programmed process. You are not just being provoked for a predictable reaction or a desired response, but you are generating your own menu of responses and can choose even not to respond. That's when you are not being a machine, and you are being human, therefore way more worthy of being called Homo Sapiens or the wise human.

Artificial Intelligence is still a machine, no matter how we slice it, it doesn't have the stake, the interest, and the care we have for personal fulfillment, human aspirations, and trauma healing processes. It's main raison d'être is just what it is pre-programmed to do. It cannot disobey, it cannot expand or redefine like humans can with some imaginative construction, asking what is not here that could change things? Carl Jung said, Thinking is difficult, that's why most people judge or evaluate in simple terms, is it X or not? This is how AI works.

Imaginative construction helped us understand drug addiction. Wrong conclusions were once drawn about drug addiction when rats were caged with nothing but drug as the stimulus¹⁰. The scientist concluded that addiction is the product of drug exposure. Because rats in a cage just devoured it. However, the scientist began to ask, what are we missing? So, the rats were exposed to a rat park where they could have some amusement, sex, food, and other stimulus, they actually started to ignore the drug. So, the correct conclusion is not that drugs cause addiction but it is disengagement and alienation that produces addiction.

Dear ones, right now we need all these three features of intelligence to get past the verge of extinction and move with the flow this planet once more. Grounded wisdom - a wisdom exposed and tested by a diverse set of realities; embodied interbeing - an intelligence that comes from a group of people carefully considering one another and acting like a greater mind; and imaginative construction - the ability to ask what-if, what else is possible, what are we missing?

The USA is specially challenged in this because the mainstream media and social media news feeds come through so much political bias, overthinking, censorship, or control. You can search this in Google, Time Magazine International's cover can be anything from Libya

¹⁰ <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/what-does-rat-park-teach-us-about-addiction>

to Russia to Korea, and Time Magazine in America can be anything about the American lifestyle or cultural icons, like kinda superficial stuff compared to the heavy topics in the international conversation. ¹¹

It isn't surprising that your tax money is always funding wars against some innocent country. Your media provides no timely information, no real conversations, and only gives you information that matters only to you and not to other cultures.

It is so different in the Philippines, one Filipino in every two Filipino families travel internationally to several different countries, in Africa, Asia, Middle East, Europe and the Americas.¹² The Philippine Islands are most intelligent every holiday reunion season when the exchange of views at dinner is filled with loving conversations and educational turns. We have a reverse racism where we like other cultures better than ours. They say it's a colonial mindset, but this radical welcome of ours has existed even before there was an America or a Spain.

Right now, I am shocked that many Americans are only learning about Palestine in the last few weeks when the Palestinians have been living in what is called the largest open-air prison in the world¹³. With the massacre of innocent civilians being carried out by Israel, Gaza is in fact functioning as a concentration camp¹⁴. After all, in prisons you are fed and you have more freedoms. I am shocked that no one knew that Hamas was, like ISIS¹⁵, created by Islamophobes including Israel¹⁶. And you can fact-check this.

In order to know more about the world, we cannot keep on checking with people who think alike, we cannot keep checking with only one kind of people, especially if they are called elites. We need to diversify the sources to stay grounded, we need to learn the skill of thinking in groups and learn to ask impossible questions. If you want to evaluate Muslims, learn from Muslims in all their diversity. Islam is different in each country; Indonesian Muslims are different from Yemeni Muslims and Palestinian Muslims. Did you

¹¹ <https://bit.ly/dumbdownamerica>

¹² <https://hir.harvard.edu/overseas-filipino-workers-the-modern-day-heroes-of-the-philippines/>

¹³ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/14/gaza-israels-open-air-prison-15>

¹⁴ <https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/qanda-what-happened-in-israel-on-october-7-was-a-slave-revolt-15361808>

¹⁵ <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/08/12/middleeast/here-is-how-isis-began/index.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/for-years-netanyahu-propped-up-hamas-now-its-blown-up-in-our-faces/>

even know that there are Palestinian Jews, Palestinian Christians, and Palestinian Muslims¹⁷? Do you know that Anti Zionism is not Anti Semitism¹⁸? That it was and still is European Anti Semitism¹⁹ that pushes the Jews out of Europe and into Israel? Perhaps I'm wrong, and that's why we need to be vigilant.

Let us be vigilant in outdoing AI before we surrender our rights of free thinking in either hiring AI or mimicking AI.

Thank you all for listening. This is a step forward.

¹⁷ <https://www.peterlang.com/document/1110732>

¹⁸ <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/32233>

¹⁹ <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-is-still-teeming-with-antisemitism/>