ChatGPT

AGI as Myth and the Limits of "Intelligence" in AI

Mythologizing Artificial General Intelligence

Several experts argue that **"Artificial General Intelligence" (AGI) is more myth than reality** – a buzzword imbued with almost **religious or symbolic significance** rather than a concrete, achievable technology. Sociotechnical researchers Alex Hanna and Emily M. Bender describe **AGI as a "vague signifier" often invoked to promise** "endless abundance for humankind" **while sidestepping accountability** [1] [2] **. In their view, tech CEOs and futurists treat AGI as an** inevitable, almost messianic goal**, even though no one can agree on what it actually means or how to create it. Instead, the term serves to** evoke awe and attract investment**, much as "AI" once did before becoming an overused marketing term** [3] **. Hanna and Bender pointedly call out "**adherents to the myth of AGI**" – those convinced that building a superintelligence is the paramount project for humanity, a quasi-utopian quest that will magically solve social problems and usher in a "new age of abundance"** [4] **. They argue this** mythology of AGI **isn't just harmless speculation; it's used to** justify massive funding **(and to** protect tech moguls' interests**) while distracting from present-day ethical and social responsibilities** [1] [2] .

Tech pioneer **Jaron Lanier** likewise criticizes the **quasi-religious aura around AGI**, tracing it back to a long-standing subculture in computing. Lanier notes that since the dawn of computers, some have **equated algorithms with life or mind** and promoted a **"historical determinism"** that machines will *inevitably* outsmart and **"take over"** from humans [5] . He calls this belief *"that computers will be smarter and better than us"* a **modern mythology** – one that has even provoked its own high-profile "reactionary" prophets of doom [6] . In Lanier's words, the **"new religious idea of AI"** parallels traditional religion: people are asked to serve a hypothetical super-AI (as if it were a deity) while a priesthood of tech elites benefits in the here and now [7] [8] . This critique portrays AGI as **essentially a mythological construct** – a **"big, possibly benevolent robot god"** in the popular imagination [9] – rather than a scientifically defined goal.

The "Intelligence" in AI vs. Human Intelligence

A common theme among AI researchers and philosophers is that **what current AI systems do is far from true human intelligence**, despite superficial appearances. **Large language models (LLMs)** like GPT-4 can *appear* highly intelligent and articulate, yet their functioning is fundamentally different from human thought. As one commentator quipped, **"looking for intelligence in an LLM is like walking around the back of a phonograph player to find the musicians"** [10] . All an LLM really does is **extremely sophisticated pattern-matching**, not reasoning or understanding [11] . **Dr. Ben Goertzel**, an AI researcher who ironically helped popularize the term *AGI*, emphasizes that today's models **"utterly lack the creative and inventive spark that characterizes human intelligence at its best."** In his words, they literally **"don't know what they're talking about"**, because their "knowledge" isn't grounded in lived experience or true comprehension – it's *"pattern matching at an extraordinarily sophisticated level, but pattern matching nonetheless."* [12] . This highlights a crucial gap: **machines manipulate symbols and correlations, whereas humans develop understanding**.

Noam Chomsky and colleagues similarly argue that current AI systems **miss the core faculties of human intelligence**. Chomsky describes programs like ChatGPT as **"lumbering statistical engines"**

that **"differ profoundly from how humans reason"**, encoding *"ineradicable defects"* that prevent them from ever achieving genuine understanding [13] [14]. He points out that **true intelligence requires not just describing or predicting facts, but being able to grasp what is *not* the case and what *could or could not* be the case**. In other words, **human cognition thinks counterfactually and causally** – formulating *explanations* and imagining alternatives – whereas an AI language model merely imitates patterns from data [15]. *"Those are the ingredients of explanation, the mark of true intelligence,"* Chomsky writes, and by that mark today's AI falls short [15]. This view suggests that the **"I" (intelligence) in current AI is at best an analogy**, lacking the rich, context-grounded, generative thinking that human minds perform. However advanced our machines become, critics say, **they may still be fundamentally alien to human cognition** – powerful problem-solvers, yes, but not **minds that truly understand**.

AGI as an Unattainable Goal

Because of these profound differences, a number of experts believe **human-like AGI may never be achieved at all** – at least not in the straightforward way people imagine. Some go so far as to compare the pursuit of AGI to the **pursuit of a perpetual motion machine**: a **centuries-long dream that turned out to be physically impossible, yet taught us useful lessons along the way** [16]. In a recent analysis titled *"The Illusion of AGI,"* the authors flatly conclude that *"the vision of AGI is powerful, but like the perpetual motion machine, it is ultimately a myth."* They identify multiple **structural reasons why general human-level AI is unattainable**, ranging from theoretical limits (e.g. Gödel's incompleteness theorem showing formal systems have unprovable truths) to practical ones (the "bucket" memory limits of current models) [17] [18]. **AGI, they argue, cannot be built** – at least not by simply scaling up current approaches – because **intelligence is not an infinite free lunch** that can be conjured from data alone [17]. As a result, **"AGI is a myth in much the same way as a perpetual motion device was,"** they write, and **the *final* goal of human-equivalent AI "will never be reached."** [16].

Notably, even some *pro*-AI voices concede we are nowhere near genuine general intelligence. For example, Goertzel – a vocal AGI optimist – admits that **simply scaling up today's algorithms won't get us to human-like thinking**. *"GPT-5 and its successors will likely play important supporting roles in future AGI systems, but the starring role requires more innovative actors we're still in the process of creating,"* he explains [19]. In other words, **continuing on the current path will "never yield anything remotely 'intelligent'" in the human sense** [20]. Neuroscientist and AI critic Gary Marcus has put it more bluntly: **"AGI will not happen in your lifetime"**, arguing that we are *fundamentally missing* what it takes to replicate human common sense and understanding [15] [21]. And an extensive 2024 review by professor **Milton Mueller** finds that the very concept of an autonomous, *general* intelligence is built on shaky assumptions. Mueller identifies **a trio of fallacies behind AGI fantasies**: **(a) believing a machine could possess a monolithic "general" intellect, (b) anthropomorphizing AI with human-like goals or survival instincts, and (c) assuming that superhuman computation would translate into unlimited real-world power** [22] [23]. These, he concludes, are **"unrealistic" assumptions lacking logical or empirical support** – effectively *myths* that have gained undue influence over policy and research priorities [23] [24].

A Different Future: Augmented and "Alien" Intelligence

Interestingly, many of these experts suggest that **abandoning the AGI myth does not mean abandoning progress in AI** – it just reframes it. The **end of the AGI illusion could mark the beginning of a more productive path** [25]. Rather than chasing a humanoid *mind-in-a-box*, researchers foresee **developing powerful intelligences of a different kind**. One vision emphasizes **augmented or "distributed" intelligence**: AI as a **partner to human cognition rather than a replacement**. **Jiajie Zhang, PhD**, for instance, argues that fears of AI "surpassing" us betray a *"profound misinterpretation"* of

what technology has always done – *augment* human intellect [26] [27]. From the abacus to modern algorithms, our tools have extended our cognitive abilities. In Zhang's view, **advanced AI systems are best seen as "cognitive artifacts" integrated with human oversight**, forming a **"distributed intelligence"** system where machines handle vast computation and humans provide goals, context, and common sense [27] [28]. Far from creating an independent machine overlord, this **symbiosis amplifies human capability**. Zhang notes that while AI's computing power grows exponentially, the human brain remains the same – yet together, *human+AI* can achieve far more than either alone. This **"yin-yang" balance between human judgment and machine computation** means AI will **"enhance and extend our cognitive abilities"** rather than rendering us obsolete [29] [30]. In short, **AI supremacy is a myth**; the reality is a future of **collaborative intelligence**, which could be *more disruptive* to society *precisely because* it changes what humans + machines can do together, in education, science, healthcare, and beyond [31] [32].

Others concur that **the most transformative AI developments may not resemble a human mind at all**. **Grady Booch**, a veteran computer scientist, has argued that **the "one big brain" idea of AGI is misguided** – if super-intelligence comes, it **won't be a single, human-like entity, but an array of specialized systems and human-machine networks** working in concert. He calls the obsession with a sci-fi style superbrain a *"dangerous distraction"* from pressing issues like how AI automation affects society [33]. Instead of fearing a mythical conscious robot, Booch urges us to **focus on "real problems" and current AI capabilities** [34]. Even the authors of *The Illusion of AGI* paper emphasize that **narrow, "rigid" AI applications – far from being trivial – can be incredibly powerful** when combined with human expertise. They note that such systems *succeed* **"precisely because they are narrow,"** making them **reliable and cost-effective tools** for human decision-makers [35]. **The true promise of AI, in this view, lies in a proliferation of expert systems and assistants** that, while *not general*, will dramatically boost productivity and solve complex problems alongside humans [35] [25]. Paradoxically, this could be **more disruptive than any single AGI**, because it **pervades every industry and aspect of life**. As one commentator put it, *"the end of the AGI illusion is not the end of progress"* – it can usher in a *"pragmatic and productive future"* for AI [25].

Conclusion

Across writings by AI scientists, technologists, and philosophers, a clear theme emerges: **AGI in the popular sense – a human-like, all-purpose artificial mind – is widely regarded as a myth or at least a gravely misunderstood idea**. The **"I" in AI** today is **more like an imitation of intelligence than the real thing**, and many doubt that simply scaling up current techniques will ever bridge that gap to true human-like cognition [12] [15]. But rather than leading to pessimism, these critiques **redirect our attention to alternative visions** of what advanced AI can be. **Perhaps we will never recreate human intelligence in silicon**; instead, we will develop *non-human* intelligences – from powerful **specialized AI tools** to **hybrid human-AI networks** – that could revolutionize the world in ways we are only beginning to grasp. In refusing to **worship the myth of AGI**, we might free ourselves to pursue **more tangible innovations** that augment human intelligence and address real-world problems [33] [34]. As Lanier and others remind us, **the true challenge and opportunity of AI is not to surrender to a fantasy of machine superminds, but to shape how these technologies actually interact with human society**. Dispelling the myth of AGI can help us **demystify AI** and focus on making it *useful, safe, and aligned* with human values – **long before any "general" intelligence ever arrives** [24] [31].

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