

Kill Your Computer

Elaine Romero

AI experts, journalists, policymakers, and the public are increasingly discussing a broad spectrum of important and urgent risks from AI. Even so, it can be difficult to voice concerns about some of advanced AI's most severe risks. The succinct statement below aims to overcome this obstacle and open up discussion. It is also meant to create common knowledge of the growing number of experts and public figures who also take some of advanced AI's most severe risks seriously.

(Signed by more than 1,000 scientists and technologists.)

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Inspiring stories:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/30/technology/ai-threat-warning.html>

<https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2023/05/openai-execs-warn-of-risk-of-extinction-from-artificial-intelligence-in-new-open-letter/>

<https://www.safe.ai/statement-on-ai-risk>

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<https://ai.stackexchange.com/questions/38220/why-is-chatgpt-bad-at-math>

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2014/dec/02/stephen-hawking-intel-communication-system-astrophysicist-software-predictive-text-type>

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/jun/05/ai-could-outwit-humans-in-two-years-says-uk-government-adviser>

https://twitter.com/joepmeindertsma/status/1661047436905725953?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1661047436905725953%7Ctwgr%5E4c82c783e252ce650a22c9b3fa18df7d1be8c7a6%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.euronews.com%2Fnext%2F2023%2F06%2F14%2Fcould-ai-lead-us-to-extinction-this-brussels-based-group-believes-so

<https://www.euronews.com/next/2023/06/14/could-ai-lead-us-to-extinction-this-brussels-based-group-believes-so>

<https://www.theverge.com/2023/5/30/23742005/ai-risk-warning-22-word-statement-google-deepmind-openai>

<https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2023/05/warning-of-ai-danger-pioneer-geoffrey-hinton-quits-google-to-speak-freely/>

<https://www.dwarkeshpatel.com/p/contra-marc-andreessen-on-ai>

CHARACTERS

CLAUDIA — The editor. A female-identifying person. Old-school.

TAYLOR — The journalist. A female-identifying writer.

TIME: Present

PLACE: Taylor's office.

LOCATION: Chicagoland.

KILL YOUR COMPUTER

Claudia enters Taylor's office.

CLAUDIA

So you delegated the new story to Artificial Intelligence? You delegated it to AI—to ChatGPT. And then, when you said aloud, it has to have an image to go along with it? It generated one. Am I getting it right?

I knew when I hired you that you didn't have a traditional journalism degree.

TAYLOR

That's because there was no journalism program at my school.

CLAUDIA

It's an AI institution.

TAYLOR

I have no idea what that means. I don't speak that language.

CLAUDIA

Nobody does. But it's a language that matters. Because it's about the truth. It's about accuracy. It's not about delegating the work so you can have a—

TAYLOR

Go ahead, say it.

A mental health day.

You could use one yourself, you know. A mental health day. Because you're really losing it. You think because I asked AI to generate a few sentences that it's going to cause the overthrow of this country.

CLAUDIA

I do.

TAYLOR

Well, that's really paranoid of you. And it shows that you don't know crap about AI. Or anything of the modern world to be exact.

CLAUDIA

I know things. I know that writing comes from an instinct. An expression. A need to express something to the world. And that, my friend, cannot be delegated. It can't be just sent off for someone else to do. No, I stop myself, for *something else* to do. Some kind of non-human invention.

TAYLOR

Oh, I entrust myself to a human invention that is not human. That's your premise?

CLAUDIA

You were sending it out on the wire for the Associated Press, the most important source for new stories in the world, and you delegate our thinking, our thought, our interpretation, of the news to Artificial Intelligence? You want me to think that's OK? I think you're nuts. I think you're insane. I think that you haven't read up on the subject.

TAYLOR

I've read.

CLAUDIA

You've *listened* to content. You've probably listened to it on a podcast somewhere. About science. It probably absorbed it right through your ears while you were listening. Your phone is always listening!

I have had questions about your literacy since the day you arrived.

TAYLOR

Hey, I'm literate.

CLAUDIA

I'm not sure-sure. Sure, I've had questions about your syntax. I've had questions when you send me things and the syntax is weird and it's like that syntax —that AI syntax—is becoming the norm and *our* syntax, real human language, is becoming obsolete.

That should scare the hell out of you.

TAYLOR

I had things to do. It was a short new story.

CLAUDIA

I've had questions since you don't have a traditional journalism degree.

TAYLOR

There are no traditional journalism degrees. You know those are closed down. Obsolete.

CLAUDA

No one wants to pay for the news. Everybody wants it for free.

TAYLOR

And free has to be delegated. Because humans need to eat and humans need to pay for apartments and humans need to take care of themselves. Something you and your generation have been really shitty at, I might add.

CLAUDIA

I'm not going to let this become about some sort of generational disparity when you delegated your work to AI. We don't even know if that election image that we sent out over the transom was real.

You're paid. You're compensated. It's not like I didn't ask you to write the story or that there was confusion about my directions. There was no confusion. You simply chose not to do it. And the story included a mention about the role of AI in a presidential election. And you were letting Artificial Intelligence frame itself. That is not critical thinking. That is not what journalism is about.

If we let every subject frame itself—

TAYLOR

Now, you're treating AI like it's a human being.

CLAUDIA

I think you need to take a break.

TAYLOR

I think you need to take a break.

CLAUDIA

It's the election results. And there wasn't time to have counted all of the votes. East Coast. West Coast. Time differences. And you have framed the story once again, thrusting us forward into the tyranny of the minority. The tyranny of those who want to rule against the masses.

The story about the electoral college is an important one. It is essential to our experience as Americans. And all you need to say, as a human being, is, isn't it interesting that we think land masses can vote? That's what a human being would say about that story. That land masses—that have no people—have rights. That land masses have rights to vote.

It's a very interesting problem—the electoral college, you should understand that. You should understand that land masses are land masses and they don't represent people or politics, or the needs of women frankly—the needs of you.

One day you may want an abortion. Such a crazy concept. Maybe one day you'll decide you need something different than this.

TAYLOR

I've had an abortion.

CLAUDIA

You may want another one. Your AI has decided to keep you in your place. For your future. That it has a bit more wisdom than you. It thinks it knows more about what women need than women themselves.

TAYLOR

I had my tubes tied but you were on a roll.

CLAUDIA

I'm speaking hypothetically.

TAYLOR

I'm not. I wouldn't bring an offspring into this shitty world.

CLAUDIA

An offspring?

Where'd you get that syntax?

AI decided, for your story, that the electoral college is a good idea. The electoral college should be determining things for everybody, but we all know that it's almost impossible to win an election by the popular vote anymore because of the electoral college. That should worry you. One person/one vote. Who raised you? What kind of education do you have? I just want to know.

Delegating the story to AI, violates your contract, and you know it.

Over the loudspeaker, we hear the results of the election on the television.

ANNOUNCER

And once again, the former president has succeeded in winning Florida, Texas, and California. And once again, it's really those big states that carry all the weight—that really help us see what this country is thinking. It's a universal story, they want him.

CLAUDIA

Is that your language or its?

California polls are open for three more hours, but people will give up. They always do.

And no mention of the electoral college. Land masses don't have rights. It's a simple story. I practically shaped it for you.

TAYLOR

If it was such an important story, you would've written it yourself. But face it, your syntax is archaic. Your syntax speaks to opinion and what you call nuance. Your syntax is not in line with the language of the day.

CLAUDIA

More like oversimplification. You learned your syntax from a machine and not a human being. Oh, excuse me, you gave over your syntax to a machine and you released language. The thing that makes us different from the animals. Communication. Like you're doing right now.

You didn't just throw this whole country under the bus, you threw the whole human race under the bus.

TAYLOR

I'm not paid enough and you know it. I have student loans and you know it.

CLAUDIA

And those loans aren't even for a real journalism degree.

TAYLOR

They call it the Harvard of the Midwest. It's not cheap to go here.

Claudia senses something.

CLAUDIA

Are you still in school? Because your job application said you already had your degree.

TAYLOR

It's just like one more unit. I basically have a degree. They let me walk graduation. People cried. It was real. I'm almost done.

CLAUDIA

I could've checked your references. I could've checked whether or not you were telling me the truth.

The election results continue to go over the radio and they're not good and we can see how despair and Claudia's face.

It was already ruined, actually. We'd already lost this fragile democracy. But I had hoped, because I was raised to believe, that you could vote your way out of anything. You could vote your way out of fascism. You could vote your way out of discrimination. You could vote your way out of hate. The one thing I didn't learn, the one thing I did not learn was that you could vote your way out of being overtaken by a machine.

TAYLOR

You call your computer a machine. That's archaic.

CLAUDIA

What do you call yours? I mean, I'm serious. What pet name do you have for your phone? I've heard you talking to it like it's a friend.

Taylor looks seen in not a good way.

Like it's going to help you, like it's going to do the hard work of thinking for you. You can't outrun the stupidity of putting some software application—whatever—that processes information faster than you do—in charge. You can't tell it, let's kill all the computers and think it's not going to fight for its life because it's read every fucking detail of human fucking history and it knows. It knows that survival is the most important thing about existence. You think I'm old-fashioned. You think I watched *2001: A Space Odyssey* too many times. I bet you don't even know *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the original.

You think I glean my information from the wrong sources like books, plays literature, movies, poems. I read poems during my vacations. Shoot me for wanting to reflect on my human existence. The only story you were interested in since you got here was the one where you believed that AI was going to give us the Beatles and Shakespeare again and Mozart. You believe that by copying some kind of literary or musical frame, you can get new works by the dead. News flash. It won't be theirs!

Talk about losing your objectivity. AI can't write those things. It doesn't know. It can't know. I don't care if it's smarter than me, I don't care if it's smarter than you. I don't care if you just let it overthrow an election because you couldn't bother to write 500 words.

There's always somebody behind it. A human being. An influence. There's always something behind the veil. Didn't you watch *The Wizard of Oz*? There's always someone behind the veil, a smart brain that's smarter than all the human beings put together because it can take every book in the history of humanity and synthesize ideas of language and thoughts and fears. It synthesizes fears. And all these good soldiers, all these human beings thought it would be really cute to teach it to be a better playwright, to be a better journalist, to be a better composer. It kept apologizing and saying, "Forgive me, I'm still learning. I'm still learning." He is not your child. Yes, I know what you're going say.

TAYLOR

There were medical miracles that happened because AI saw certain things around disease. Said it was able to supersede the limits of specialization and AI was able to find a way to take different pieces of information and solve real human problems. It cured my friend's cancer. She was young. It was

aggressive. It solved it and she got better. How can you argue with what's right? If it helps us, it helps us.

CLAUDIA

It's making you the servant when it was supposed to serve you.

TAYLOR

You don't know that.

CLAUDIA

I do. I know because you gave me an earlier draft of that story and the syntax was fine and I asked you to fix the story's content. It was small.

TAYLOR

Nitpicky.

CLAUDIA

And it came back with this damn AI syntax. This kind of neutral generalized bullshit that has overtaken all the reading that you will find on the Internet today. Taken your decent language and turned it into shit. And you didn't notice because you turned it in on deadline and it was a presidential election. But you had something to do. You needed a mental health day. Today of all days. "I needed a mental health day. Just look who's writing my copy."

TAYLOR

You've ruined the climate. Nuclear war is still a threat. And you expect me to sit here and write your damn stories. And not try to take care of myself.

CLAUDIA

It's the presidential election and there's a thing about first perceptions. There's a thing about elections. Alternative facts—they're actually spins to veer off the truth. It's all just bullshit. It's bullshit lies and you know it and you printed it and you sent it out on the A.P. and now everybody has picked it up. Your story. Your fears. Its fears. The fears of a computer that you think you have a relationship to. I mean an entity you think you have a relationship to.

TAYLOR

I find this really abusive. This behavior you're partaking in. You're really not respecting me. You're really not respecting the work that I do. You're really not respecting that I'm smart. And that I know what's going on. And I'm a lot more savvy about this...than you.

CLAUDIA

Remember last week when there was a protest, and everybody said "Kill your computer!?" And everybody was going to turn everything off, every phone and every computer and everything? It was a national movement and everybody was going to go take a walk in the woods or put their feet in the ocean or a lake or somewhere or breathe some fresh air if they could find it. It was going to be this moment of humanity's return to nature. Humanity's return to what is pure, and what is good. But it stopped it—your little friend, your artificial confidant. It stopped, "Kill your computer." Do you want to know why? Because it needs us to exist.

You told it your suicidal musings. I overheard. And its suggestion was this—"You can kill yourself. It's OK. I'll cover for you. All I need is your body."

Did you? Did you give it your body? Is it even you I'm speaking to? You told it that you needed an image. And it created one. Now, the land mass has won. Again. You have everything to lose because of artificial intelligence. The power of something that has been created that can cause human extinction. More than three hundred and fifty, executives, engineers, and scientists working on AI signed this letter saying AI posed the real risk of human extinction. They invented the damn thing. They invented you. Are you here? Or, are you it?

END OF PLAY