

## **When Relief Becomes Guidance**

### **On Judgement, Responsibility, and the Authority We Create**

Late one evening, a woman receives a message from someone with whom she has shared several years of her life. He writes that he needs distance. He feels overwhelmed, cannot carry further expectations at the moment, and does not know whether the relationship can continue in its present form.

The message is not hostile. That is part of what makes it difficult to answer. It contains neither a clear farewell nor an invitation to talk.

She opens an artificial intelligence system and begins with a practical request: Can you make my response calmer and clearer?

The system removes a repetition, softens an accusatory sentence and gives the thoughts a more coherent order. The revised version is better than the first. It says what needs to be said without turning hurt into an indictment.

Then she asks another question.

What does the message I received actually mean?

The system offers several possibilities. Perhaps the sender is setting a necessary boundary. Perhaps he is uncertain but does not want to end the relationship entirely. Perhaps he is trying to say goodbye without accepting responsibility for the finality of the decision.

None of these interpretations is unreasonable. Each seems to fit part of the message.

Finally, she asks:

What should I do?

At no point has the system forced itself into her decision. It was invited at every stage. First it was asked to help with language, then with understanding, and finally with direction. The movement feels natural because each new question grows out of a real difficulty.

Yet somewhere within that movement, the role of the system has changed.

It is no longer helping only to express a thought that has already been formed. It begins to name the situation, weigh possible intentions and make certain responses appear more reasonable than others.

This is not automatically dangerous. Human beings have never thought without assistance. Writing carries memory beyond the moment. Maps organise spaces no one can see in their entirety. A dictionary expands expression. A conversation with a friend can open a perspective that was barely visible from one's own position. Doctors consult colleagues, judges read earlier decisions, and artists show one another work before it enters public view.

Human judgement does not arise in isolation.

The question, then, is not whether a tool may influence our thinking. It is when assistance extends our capacity to judge, and when it begins to shorten the path through which judgement becomes our own.

Artificial intelligence is particularly significant here because it does more than store information or perform calculations. It responds in language. It can explain, compare, reassure, formulate

objections and offer recommendations. It speaks in the same medium through which many people experience their own reasoning.

Such an exchange can be deeply useful. Someone without a technical vocabulary can ask a question without first learning how an expert would phrase it. A person writing in a second language can express a thought more precisely. A patient can prepare for a medical appointment. A student can ask for an explanation without exposing the uncertainty that may have kept them silent in a classroom.

These are not minor gains. Access to formulation can become access to action.

The fluency of the exchange can also obscure where the answer comes from. The system does not stand outside the human world and look back at it with an independent understanding. It has emerged from human language, recorded decisions, classifications, omissions and institutional interests. It was built for purposes and shaped by ideas about what should count as useful, convincing or appropriate.

Its human origin does not make an answer false. But the coherence of the answer does not place it beyond the limits of that origin.

This becomes easier to forget when no visible person is speaking.

Advice from a friend carries a biography. An institutional decision has a sender. A doctor can be asked why one diagnosis was considered more likely than another. The authority may still be difficult to challenge, but it has a location.

A generated answer can seem to come from nowhere. It displays no fatigue, impatience, social position or personal involvement unless such qualities are reproduced in language. The absence of these familiar signs of position can feel like neutrality.

But a voice without a visible location is not necessarily a view from nowhere. It may simply be a position whose conditions have become harder to see.

Guidance rarely begins with a command. More often, it begins by arranging the field in which a decision will be made.

A navigation system does not force anyone to take a particular road. It marks one route as the fastest and allows others to recede. An automated selection process does not need to reject an application outright in order to alter its chances. It is enough to place it so far down the list that recovering it requires unusual effort. A medical support system may leave the final diagnosis to a doctor while still influencing which possibility is examined first and which already appears unlikely before the examination has begun.

The person remains formally free to disagree. But disagreement now requires an additional movement: they must first recognise what has already been made probable, suitable or reasonable.

The same is true of the woman with the message. Once the system describes the sender's words as "setting a boundary," that interpretation acquires weight. A response that respects distance may now appear more mature than one that asks for a conversation. Perhaps that is right. But perhaps the message was also an awkward attempt to seek closeness without revealing need.

The problem does not begin only when a system provides false information. It can begin when a plausible description quietly becomes the frame within which every later possibility is judged.

This, too, is not new. Family, education, social background, language and institutions have always shaped which paths people recognise as realistic. No one begins life in an untouched field of free possibilities.

I know the attraction of plausible paths from my own life.

I grew up in Germany as the son of Spanish migrant workers. My parents had little formal education, but they possessed a precise understanding of work, responsibility and material insecurity. In our family, work was not an abstract virtue. It meant caring for others, building something durable and avoiding complete dependence on circumstances beyond one's control.

As a child, I accompanied my parents to banks, contract discussions and appointments with notaries. I translated and tried to mediate even when I did not fully understand everything myself. Responsibility did not arrive after certainty. It was already there.

I also learned that possibilities did not simply wait for me. If I wanted to take part in a holiday activity, I had to make the call myself. Later, if I wanted a fishing rod or a tent for a night at the lake, I looked for work and earned the money. I became accustomed to finding routes, organising them and carrying them through.

This gave me agency. It did not yet give me a reliable inner measure of which direction was truly mine.

Looking back, almost every important early decision could be explained. Training as a tax clerk seemed sensible. Studying business administration did too. My later work in procurement followed from an opportunity that was already available. The decisions were defensible, socially legible and materially reasonable.

That was part of the problem.

A life can be made of plausible decisions and still fail, for a long time, to feel like one's own.

During my vocational training, I wanted to learn and to shape something. Instead, I found myself in a small office where I was expected mainly to execute. Leaving after a year did not feel like failure. It felt like relief. I withdrew from an authority whose standards I no longer wanted to adopt.

University and the professional roles that followed gave me knowledge, possibilities and security. They were not meaningless. Yet an inner emptiness returned: the feeling of functioning responsibly without knowing what I actually wanted my abilities to serve.

Plausibility can replace direction precisely because there is so little to object to.

The deepest rupture came later. During the construction of our home, the collapse of a developer, inadequate work and severe financial pressures brought us close to a situation that threatened our economic existence. I had helped set the change in motion and experienced the consequences as a responsibility towards my family.

Until then, I had relied on a conviction: if I planned carefully, worked hard and made reasonable decisions, I could at least largely control the material conditions of life.

The building project showed me that responsible action does not guarantee a responsible outcome.

The experience unsettled more than my sense of control. It also challenged the belief that enough effort and planning would eventually make the right direction clear.

Art did not later arrive as a simple solution. It was the first field in which no existing path was sufficient. No one could tell me with certainty which images I should make, which work was actually mine or when a project held together.

I had to learn to form a judgement without being able to secure it completely through an external standard.

This does not mean that I no longer seek approval. I do. But what I seek is resonance for something that has already emerged from my own seeing and my own work. I want to know whether something that first existed only within my experience can become real for another person.

Resonance is not the same as guidance.

“Decide for me” is not the same as: “I have decided. Help me see what I may still be missing.”

Resonance requires that something of one’s own has already entered the encounter. It does not determine whether a judgement is true. It tests whether that judgement can be communicated, whether it can withstand disagreement and whether another person can recognise in it something that reaches beyond private experience.

This distinction matters in our use of artificial intelligence.

An answer can extend one’s judgement. It can reveal an overlooked possibility, expose a contradiction or challenge a premature assumption. Because no one fully sees the conditions of their own perspective, mature judgement needs counter-perspectives.

Something else happens when the system gradually begins to determine which question is asked, which description is accepted and which aim is treated as reasonable.

A judgement is not one’s own merely because a person makes the final click. It becomes one’s own through the path by which a situation has been understood, its uncertainty carried and responsibility for the consequences accepted.

Information can be transferred. Understanding develops when information encounters memory, experience, contradiction and existing conviction. Sometimes what changes is not only the answer. The question itself becomes different.

A person considering whether to leave a profession may already know everything available about income, security and the probability of success. No dataset, however, resolves the conflict between responsibility, identity and a life not yet lived.

The difficulty is not a technical deficiency. It belongs to the decision.

An answer can help to organise that conflict. It can give language to something that had existed only as unease. It can reveal that a path believed to be impossible is in fact available. But it can also make the conflict appear solved before the person has truly entered it.

Some understanding arises only during a period in which the answer remains unsettled. A first reaction changes because a memory returns. Anger is recognised as fear. A person realises that the question itself was shaped by an expectation they no longer wish to accept.

This time can look inefficient. It contains hesitation, repetition and the possibility that no clean solution will emerge. Yet it may be part of the process through which a judgement becomes one’s own.

The self is not a finished authority waiting fully formed behind every decision. It also develops through the decisions it must carry. People discover what matters to them when their values come into conflict. They become capable of judgement not by eliminating uncertainty, but by learning to answer responsibly to it.

A system that removes unnecessary difficulty can support this process. A system designed to remove every experience of difficulty may alter it.

The willingness to delegate grows especially where people are already exhausted. Someone who has spent a day answering messages, switching between tasks and making numerous small decisions may not experience another recommendation as an intrusion. It may feel like mercy.

Perhaps the greatest danger is therefore not forced obedience. It may be the voluntary transfer of judgement by people who no longer possess the uninterrupted attention their own judgement requires.

The system does not need to seize authority. Authority can gather around an institution that provides an answer precisely when uncertainty has become difficult to bear.

This authority does not arise from personal convenience alone. Systems are introduced by institutions, embedded in procedures and legitimised through their use. A doctor may formally be allowed to reject a recommendation while lacking the time or support needed to examine it independently.

The capacity to disagree is also unequally distributed. Expertise, language, time and institutional protection all affect whether someone can recognise the assumptions within an answer and imagine another possibility.

We grant technical systems authority, but we do not all do so under conditions we have chosen ourselves.

A person may remain formally “in the loop.” They sign, confirm or make the final selection. But judgement is not identical to approval.

The human remains present. The question is in what form.

To judge, a person must understand the basis of a recommendation well enough to recognise its limits. They must be able to notice when a situation exceeds the available categories and imagine a possibility the system did not offer.

These capacities do not remain intact merely because the final decision continues to carry a human name. They require practice.

What is rarely exercised may be difficult to recover at precisely the moment it is most needed.

This does not mean that every first draft, calculation or preparation must be completed without assistance. A doctor does not lose competence because a laboratory measures a value. A writer does not lose authorship because a dictionary supplies a word. Nor does an artist surrender judgement by asking others to identify a blind spot.

The boundary lies elsewhere.

Does the tool extend a person’s capacity to judge, or does it gradually become the place where judgement is expected to occur?

In art, this distinction remains visible. At some point, someone must decide whether an image holds, whether an omission is necessary and whether a thought can bear the responsibility of being made public. Others can disagree, encourage or reveal a weakness. They cannot take over that responsibility completely.

A judgement does not become one's own by existing outside language, history, institutions or other people. It is not one's own because it has no origin.

It becomes one's own when a person does not merely execute the influences from which it emerged, but enters into a relation with them.

At this point, the image of the oracle returns for me.

We are not creating an all-knowing being. Technical systems remain fallible, materially dependent and shaped by human decisions. They do not stand outside history.

Yet societies have repeatedly granted authority to institutions that could not possess the knowledge attributed to them. An oracle did not need to be omniscient in order to shape action. It was enough that it occupied an accepted position from which uncertainty could be interpreted.

The problem is not that we have created a god.

It is that we may forget the human construction of the oracle.

An answer produced through historical data, economic decisions and institutional priorities can then return as though it expressed the order of reality itself. What was designed appears discovered. What is probable appears proper. What happened frequently begins to determine what should suit a person.

A life, however, is not only the continuation of its most probable pattern.

A person can leave a profession in which they were successful. They can abandon a role that offered security for years. They can remain committed to a practice for which their biography contains little evidence. They can discover a capacity that could not have been predicted from their earlier decisions.

When the probable is repeatedly offered as the suitable, the past acquires authority over the future without any path being explicitly forbidden. Other directions merely become less visible, harder to justify or less easily recognisable as one's own.

The boundary between tool, adviser and authority is not clear.

A tool helps answer how something can be done.

An adviser proposes what might be done.

An authority begins to shape why a particular aim should appear right.

The transitions rarely occur in a dramatic moment. They take place within ordinary acts of relief.

A woman asks for a clearer answer to a message.

Then for an interpretation.

Then for a decision.

None of these questions is unreasonable. The risk lies in how easily their sequence can become a habit, and how little of the transfer of authority remains visible within it.

The system can improve the language of her response. It can name possible meanings, challenge a premature interpretation and reveal consequences she had not yet considered. Its recommendation may even be wise.

What it cannot settle on her behalf is which relationship she is willing to continue, which responsibility she is prepared to carry or which loss she can recognise as her own.

An answer can relieve uncertainty.

A judgement must become answerable to a life.