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Preserving the Ideals of the Enlightenment in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Distinguished guests, visionaries of the future.

Today, we stand at a historic crossroads. In an age when human ingenuity has birthed machines capable of performing feats once confined to the realm of imagination, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming a defining force of this century. Yet, as we harness this power, we must ask ourselves: Will AI amplify the ideals of reason, liberty, and individual dignity—the foundations of the Enlightenment spawned here in Paris—or will it lead us down a path of control and conformity?

Our challenge is threefold. First, we must ensure that humans maintain control over AI. Second, we must champion the democratic, freedom-focused model of AI over authoritarian models that threaten individual autonomy. Third, we must address the broader societal impacts of AI, such as fairness, privacy, the future on work, fair value for creators, cultural diversity, the well-being of children, sustainability and misinformation.

Let us begin with considering our highest priority: human control over AI.

First-Order Priority: Human Control Over AI

To ensure AI serves humanity, we must keep humans firmly in control, especially as AI systems in the future surpass our immediate understanding. History teaches us the perils of relinquishing unchecked power. AI must remain a tool of humanity, bound by frameworks of accountability, transparency, and ethical responsibility.

As Stuart Russell warns in *Human Compatible*, focusing on AI's intelligence without embedding human-centric controls poses an existential risk. Russell counsels that AI systems must be designed to prioritize human preferences, ensuring they serve our values, not their own objectives. Henry Kissinger, Eric Schmidt, and Craig Mundie, in *Genesis*, argue that AI development must be anchored in human dignity. If preferences conflict with dignity, human dignity must prevail.

As stewards of this technology, we must heed these calls and ensure that the human mind—not the machine—remains the ultimate arbiter of decision-making. Maintaining human control over AI is not optional—it is the bedrock upon which all else depends.



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Second-Order Priority: Ensuring the Freedom-Focused Model Prevails

Our second-order priority in AI governance recognizes we face a fundamental clash of ideals. On one side stands the democratic AI model championed by the United States, France and our allies—a model that seeks to empower individuals, protect freedoms, and foster innovation. On the other side is the authoritarian AI model advanced by China, which uses AI for surveillance, control, and social engineering.

The Chinese model prioritizes the collective over the individual, stability over freedom, and party control over dissent. While efficient, it denies the human spirit the liberty to flourish. Through mechanisms such as AI-driven surveillance and social credit system, this model transforms technology into a tool of control.

In contrast, the Western model of AI is rooted in Enlightenment ideals of personal autonomy and human dignity. It views AI not as a means of control but as a tool for empowerment—expanding opportunities, improving lives, and enabling individuals to reach their full potential.

Excessive Regulation Could Yield Advantage to the Authoritarian Model

France, as a birthplace of the Enlightenment, must play a pivotal role in ensuring the democratic model prevails. Yet, excessive regulation risks stifling innovation, allowing the Chinese model to triumph. The European Union's (EU) onerous [AI regulatory](#) framework, though well-intentioned, has already delayed the deployment here of AI features by major technology firms and is particularly burdensome to startups and small businesses.

Excessive restrictions may allow us to maintain control over AI and address other societal concerns, but at what cost? If such measures drive innovation elsewhere—particularly to China's state-centric model—we risk ceding global leadership. When one considers the military applications of AI in surveillance, drones, space, and offensive cyber weapons, the prospect of Chinese AI supremacy should send chills up your spine. The recent advances of [DeepSeek](#) suggest this is not an idle concern.

As President Macron aptly noted, "Europe is in a state of economic lethargy; it must be awakened. It is technology and artificial intelligence that will allow us to revive the economy." Macron is right. Europe must balance safety and innovation, embodying the Enlightenment's spirit of progress. Yesterday at the AI Action Summit here in Paris, the launch of the **Robust Open Online Safety Tools (ROOST)** initiative offered an example of how this can be achieved. Incubated at Columbia University, ROOST unites tech companies and philanthropies to create open-source, scalable safety frameworks for the AI era.

Open-source safety tools foster innovation while building trust through transparency, ensuring rapid AI advancement with safeguards in place. Amanda Brock, OpenUK CEO, [noted](#) that this approach highlights the EU's misalignment with global trends, contrasting the EU's burdensome AI Act with ROOST's collaborative vision.

ROOST exemplifies how to maintain human control over AI—our **first-order priority**—without stifling progress, thereby also achieving our second-order priority of ensuring freedom-focused models prevail over authoritarian ones. France and Europe must embrace such initiatives



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to lead in AI, avoiding the risks posed by overly restrictive regulations that could cede global leadership to China.

Third-Order Priority: Addressing Societal Concerns

We must also confront the societal impacts of AI, even as we must also recognize they can only be effectively addressed if we succeed in the two higher priorities of human control and freedom-focused AI leadership. The transformative power of AI affects nearly every aspect of human life.

- **Bias and Fairness:** Addressing inherent biases in AI systems is critical to ensuring equitable outcomes.
- **Privacy and Security:** Robust measures must protect personal data, maintaining public trust.
- **Future of Work:** We must equip workers with the skills needed for an AI-driven economy. OECD countries spend 4.4% of GDP on educating our youth, but only 0.1% of GDP on adult education. We will need to spend a lot more on adult education to help citizens disrupted by AI to upskill and reskill.
- **Fair Value for Creators:** AI-generated content must respect creators' rights, ensuring they receive fair compensation.
- **Cultural Preservation:** AI should support cultural diversity and serve diverse linguistic communities.
- **Impact on Children:** Safeguards must protect children from harmful effects as AI shapes how they learn, play, and interact.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** The energy-intensive nature of AI demands the development of energy-efficient and sustainable technologies.
- **Strengthening Democracy:** AI must bolster democratic processes, countering misinformation.
- **Mental and Social Health:** AI's influence on mental health and overall well-being must be managed responsibly.

These are not abstract concerns; they are the lived realities of millions. Addressing them is essential to ensuring AI serves as a force for good. Yet we must ensure that our solutions to address these concerns do not prevent the AI that embraces freedom from staying ahead of authoritarian AI.

Lessons from the Enlightenment

France's luminaries of the Enlightenment offer timeless wisdom as we navigate the age of AI.

Rousseau reminds us that “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” Excessive AI regulation bind our innovators in chains of bureaucracy, risking giving the advantage to authoritarian AI that squelches freedom.

Voltaire, the champion of reason, would argue: “Think for yourselves and let others enjoy the privilege to do so too.” AI regulations must encourage flexibility and individual creativity—hallmarks of Enlightenment thought.



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Descartes, the rationalist, would advise: “Divide each difficulty into as many parts as is feasible and necessary to resolve it.” This underscores the need for a decentralized approach to AI governance like ROOST.

Diderot, ever open to progress, counseled: “Let us not be afraid of new ideas. Let us be open to the possibility that we may be wrong.” The AI age demands calculated risk-taking and an openness to innovation, even if it disrupts established norms.

If these thinkers were alive today, they would likely feel more at home in Silicon Valley than in Brussels. Europe must today recall and heed their wisdom.

24/7 Government: Harnessing AI for Public Good

Rather than seeking to lead the world in excessive regulations, Europe should consider leading in embracing initiatives like the AI World Society (AIWS) Government 24/7 model of government promoted by the Boston Global Forum.

This is a vision for government that operates continually, efficiently, and ethically, driven by AI to enhance human governance rather than replace it.

Nearly every other aspect of society has become continually responsive to individuals simply by tapping day or night on our smart phones. To reflect the Enlightenment’s spirit of individual empowerment, government should be just as responsive.

The AIWS Government 24/7 model embraces ethical governance and includes several components:

- **Boston Areti AI** (Areti being the Greek word for virtue). This is the idea that governance can be improved by government leaders having access to an AI-driven decision-support agent that learns from history’s greatest leaders, accumulating the lessons learned from the past, and incorporating the best insights that AI can offer.
- **Integration of AI into all branches of government.** To ensure efficient and responsive government, AI should support executive decision-making, legislative analysis, and judicial processing. Yes, humans will remain at the heart of governance, but by leveraging AI, governments can be more responsive to their citizens.
- **AIWS University.** Universities should strive to become lifelong AI-empowered learning ecosystems, helping faculty to offer personalized education and accelerate research discoveries. Such universities would foster an interdisciplinary approach, integrating AI with ethics, policy, and technology to develop the next generation of leaders equipped to navigate the complexities of AI governance and innovation.
- **AIWS Healthcare.** In the age of AI, healthcare providers can be more patient-centric. They can benefit from AI-driven predictive analytics, resource optimization, diagnostics, and treatment planning to enhance patient outcomes and reduce medical errors, in pursuit of providing continual, equitable access to high-quality healthcare.



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- **Cybersecurity and Data Protection Policies** take on an even more important role. AI governance and service delivery systems must be safeguarded from misuse.

AI-assisted 24/7 governance promises greater efficiency, accessibility, and responsiveness. To achieve this, we must ensure it empowers government workers and citizens alike in like with the Enlightenment spirit, rather than overwhelming them with bureaucracy.

A Call to Action

We are at a defining moment. The choice before us is not merely one of technological design but one of philosophical alignment. Will we uphold the ideals of the Enlightenment, or will we allow them to be eclipsed by authoritarian efficiency?

The tasks before us are clear. First, we must ensure humans remain in control of AI. Second, we must champion the democratic, freedom-focused AI model over the authoritarian alternative.

Third, we must address the broader societal concerns AI brings.

France must embrace its Enlightenment heritage, streamline regulatory burdens, and lead in advancing safe, human-centered AI. By doing so, it can inspire not only Europe but the world.

The Enlightenment was a revolution of knowledge, autonomy, and progress.

Today, we must ignite a similar revolution, ensuring that AI serves humanity, protects dignity, and upholds liberty.

Together, let us ensure that the democratic AI model prevails—not just for the sake of innovation, but for the preservation of the human spirit itself.