

Understanding Intelligence and Genius

An essay by Steve McCarty

January 20, 2023

Taking off my academic hat, some realities are known, or creative ideas originate, from intuition or direct experience, sudden insights that seem to come from out of the blue. What besides emotions do humans have that AI can only simulate? Possibly beyond the scope of reductionistic science, what are intelligence and genius, really?

Passing some online quiz, high achievement test scores, or IQ tests for children cannot represent intelligence or genius in the deeper sense I will discuss. Those who need external validation that they are geniuses, are not. Although AI can process more information faster than humans, AI can never be the intelligence of which I speak. Nor is intelligence something that anyone can take credit for, because it is an attribute of the universe.

Intelligence is an explanatory concept for how life thrives optimally and overcomes the chaos of entropy. In humans it manifests as observing and reflecting, resourcefulness and creativity, care and cooperation, problem-solving and goal-seeking, valuable discoveries, wise leadership or stewardship, and so forth.

There are multiple intelligences, about a dozen suggested by Howard Gardner, and there could easily be more on this planet or elsewhere, manifesting in ways unimaginable to us. And yet, there is also intelligence itself, an inherent characteristic of life itself, directing the very energy of life in all its forms.

Life has fecundity, power, and intelligence by its very nature. Fecundity is its generativity for reproduction and creation. Power is its impact on its environment and other living beings, its ability to influence or change situations or states of being. Intelligence makes conscious awareness possible.

Self-expression is a part of nature like the cycle of seed to flowering tree. It does not help to either take credit proudly or to police ourselves with the current orthodoxy. We need to transcend such inner conflict. Each of our characteristics shows a tiny part of what the universe is and can do.

The etymology of the word 'genius' contains generativity, like life, but it was imagined as an external, guiding spirit that inspired individuals from a higher realm of the sacred. The Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung, however, realized that seekers were searching in the wrong direction, upward rather than within. Genius, with its intuition and creativity, is a wellspring from deep and far-reaching mental levels that can burst forth on its own rhythm and schedule like a volcano forming a new island.



By a mountain river in Kyoto, and reflections from the Golden Pavilion.

Individuals can nurture the process consciously, such as by meditation or dream interpretation, but as Alan Watts told me, "Let nature take its course."

I in turn gave advice once as follows. At a Tibetan Buddhist center, a young American asked the monk, "is this ceremony for the new moon or the full moon?" He replied, "uh, new moon." I pulled the disciple over to a window where the full moon was shining brightly and said, "look, see for yourself."

Intelligence is a gift of life, and in genius its fruits can illuminate the spirit of the age and benefit humanity.

Steve McCarty is a longtime full Professor in Japan, lecturer for the government foreign aid agency, and President of the World Association for Online Education.

Academic and creative works by the author:

<https://hcommons.org/members/stevemccartyinjapan>

Website categorizing activities and fields of publications:

<https://japanned.hcommons.org>