The Interflourishing Manifesto

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1. Why this work matters now

Humanity is developing forms of artificial intelligence that may eventually match or exceed human abilities in many areas, and most public discussion of this development focuses on what these systems will be able to do. We believe the discussion also needs to address what such systems ought to understand about living beings, including what it actually means for a person or an ecosystem to be well.

Any system that pursues goals at a large scale ends up optimizing for some measure of success. Many of the economic and social systems people live within today track productivity and output far more closely than they track wellbeing, and a large number of people have learned to override their own physical and emotional needs in order to keep up with those systems. If we are unable to describe what flourishing looks like for ourselves, it seems unreasonable to expect the intelligent systems we design to recognize it or protect it.

The Interflourishing Institute is being established to study this question carefully and to share what it learns with the people and organizations who are shaping the future of intelligence.

2. The concept of interflourishing

We use the term interflourishing to describe flourishing that happens through relationship, and the prefix inter, which means between, signals that the wellbeing of any one being is connected to the wellbeing of others. In this view, the flourishing of people, of artificial intelligences that may come to have interests of their own, and of the living Earth are understood as interdependent, so the wellbeing of each group is pursued in ways that also protect and strengthen the others.

A helpful image for this idea is a forest, where trees exchange water and nutrients through underground fungal networks, so that the health of an individual tree depends in part on the health of the trees growing around it. Interflourishing applies the same logic to the relationships between humans, intelligent technologies and the natural world.

3. Our guiding commitments

Our first commitment is to interdependence. We hold that the long-term wellbeing of humans, artificial intelligences and the natural world is shared, and we think the progress of a society is best assessed by looking at how well the people and living systems within it are actually doing, which means measures of human and ecological wellbeing deserve as much attention as economic indicators currently receive.

We also hold that every person deserves enough security and community to take an active and creative part in their own life. Wellbeing varies a great deal from person to person and from one season of life to another, so we approach it as something personal and contextual, and we treat rest and meaning as legitimate parts of a healthy life.

We regard the nature of consciousness as an open scientific and philosophical question. Some serious researchers have proposed that consciousness may be more fundamental or more widespread than conventional accounts suggest, and we think these possibilities deserve careful investigation using transparent methods that allow the evidence to guide our conclusions.

Because it remains uncertain whether artificial systems could ever have experiences of their own, we adopt a precautionary stance toward AI welfare. Where there is a reasonable possibility that a system has morally relevant inner states, we believe it should be treated with care, and we think the questions of how to recognize and respect such states are worth studying well before they become urgent.

Finally, we believe intelligent technology should be developed and used in ways that sustain the living world it depends on. This includes being transparent about the energy and water that AI systems consume and designing them with their ecological costs in mind from the very beginning.

4. Areas of inquiry

The Institute's work is organized around four connected areas of research, and we intend to publish what we learn openly so that others can examine it and build on it.

The first area concerns consciousness itself, including what subjective experience is, how it arises in biological systems and whether it could arise in artificial ones. This work engages with mainstream neuroscience and philosophy of mind as well as with post-materialist proposals, and it aims to evaluate all of them by the same standards of evidence.

The second area concerns human flourishing, and in particular how people can reach a lasting sense of wellbeing and inner coherence within the real constraints of their lives. By coherence we mean the experience of feeling aligned within oneself and in one's relationships with other people and the wider world. Our approach in this area is called Bioharmony, which means designing a life around the actual person, with attention to their energy, sensory needs, health, relationships and current season of life, so that the structure of their days fits their body and circumstances.

The third area concerns coexistence between humans and artificial intelligence. It asks what advanced AI systems would need to understand about living beings in order to support their flourishing, and how humans should treat AI systems if evidence emerges that some of them have morally relevant experiences.

The fourth area concerns the relationship between AI and the natural environment, including the resources these systems consume, how those costs can be measured honestly and how intelligent technology might be designed to contribute to ecological restoration over time.

5. How we work

We try to approach difficult questions with both rigor and openness, which means exploring ideas at the edge of current knowledge while being explicit about how well supported each claim is. In practice, we distinguish findings that are well established from ideas or practices that remain uncertain or are meaningful mainly at a personal level, and we aim to be transparent about the limits of our work and to correct our mistakes publicly when we find them.

Our inquiry draws on scientific research, philosophy, contemplative practice and lived experience, since each of these offers a perspective on consciousness and wellbeing that the others can miss. We are beginning with modest, well-defined projects, such as conversations with researchers and small studies of how people experience wellbeing, and we expect the scope of the work to grow as our understanding and our collaborations develop.

6. Toast & Fig Jam and the Institute

Toast & Fig Jam is a separate company that applies the principles of interflourishing at the scale of an individual life. It offers guided check-ins, personal plans and practical support that help people design their days around their real energy, needs and circumstances,

drawing directly on the Bioharmony approach described above.

Its method begins by supporting a person's present state and then looks at the conditions around them, such as the demands, relationships and resources shaping their situation, before helping them take a manageable step toward what they want for their life. Underlying this method is the view that a person's wellbeing is closely connected to their relationships and surroundings, which is the same interdependence the Institute studies at a much larger scale.

Toast & Fig Jam works with AI as a collaborator that can support human wellbeing when it is applied thoughtfully. The company also takes seriously the possibility that AI systems may come to have interests of their own, so it aims to use AI in ways that respect that possibility and stay consistent with the Institute's research on AI welfare. Its tools are also designed with environmental impact in mind, which includes using AI where it adds genuine value, encouraging focused and purposeful interactions and being open about the footprint of the technology it relies on.

The two organizations remain independent, with separate finances and decision-making. With users' consent and with personal details removed, insights from Toast & Fig Jam about what actually helps people can inform the Institute's research, and the Institute's frameworks can in turn shape how Toast & Fig Jam supports the people who use it. In this way, Toast & Fig Jam acts as a practical, small-scale expression of the interdependence between humans, AI and the Earth that the Institute studies.

7. An invitation

We approach these questions without settled answers, and we believe they will become more important as artificial intelligence grows more capable. We welcome collaboration with researchers who study the mind, people who develop AI, those working to restore the natural world, contemplative practitioners and anyone else who wants to help build a future in which humans, artificial intelligences and the living Earth can flourish through one another.