

*Thank you for being here!*

*Drop a comment in this doc, chat with me ([whatsapp](#)), email some thoughts-- any way you share your feedback will be very helpful. If the subject matter interests you there is much more I can share including an outline, etc.*

*Questions I have for you:*

*-- the focus of this writing is to have a strong hook-- is that achieved? This is likely to be the introduction or maybe the book proposal / overview for querying publishers.*

*-- do you get a sense of the core argument of the book? I worry it alludes too much without including enough of the "meat" of the argument.*

*-- if you're a layperson with respect to AI, is there too much jargon? What was most jarring?*

*-- if you're an AI person, am I simplifying too much? Where?*

*Ali*

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**General Intelligence is a Myth**  
***an insider's post-mortem at the intersection of recursive self-improvement***  
***and what we can build instead***  
*1st draft, introductory excerpt*

The race for artificial general intelligence is running on a biological lie. General intelligence is assumed to be an emergent, free-floating utility,<sup>1</sup> that once solved or achieved can be scaled infinitely to superintelligence via recursive self-improvement. Biological intelligence, though, is *always* a resultant property of an agent's interaction with its environment-- an intelligence emerges from a specific substrate (biological or digital) and a specific history of chaotic, contingent events. An AI agent, no matter how intelligent, cannot reach down and re-engineer the fundamental layers of its own emergence because any change to those foundational chaotic chains would alter the very "self" and the goals attempting to make the change. Said another way, recursive self-improvement assumes identity-preserving self-modification, but sufficiently deep modification necessarily alters the goal-generating substrate of the system, dissolving the optimizing agent that initiated the change. Intelligence, to be general, functionally becomes a closed loop—a self—not an open-ended ladder. Equivalent to the emergence myth is that meaning can be abstracted into high-dimensional tokens, detached from the biological imperatives—hunger, fear, exhaustion—that gave those words meaning to someone in the first place. Biologically, every word is a result of associations learned by an agent ultimately in the service of its own survival and otherwise devoid of meaning. By scaling training data and other top-down abstractions, we create an increasingly

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<sup>1</sup> intelligence too cheap to meter

convincing mimicry of generality that fails at the "edge cases" of reality because without the bottom-up foundation of biological-style conditioning (situated agency), the system has no intrinsic sanity check. It lacks the observer perspective—the subjective "I" that grounds intelligence in the fragility of non-existence. The general intelligence we see in LLMs is partially an "Observer Effect" where humans project their own cognitive structures onto a statistical mirror-- we mistake the ability to process the word "pain" for the ability to understand the imperative of avoiding destruction, an error we routinely make, confusing the map for the territory, perhaps especially the bookish among us. I should know-- I ran into this mirror firsthand and, painfully, face-first while developing an AGI startup in San Francisco. Our focus was to build a continuously learning system grounded in its own intrinsic motivations (starting with Pavlovian conditioning), and as our work progressed it became more irreconcilable with a status quo designed only to reflect. I remain convinced that general intelligence can --and should-- be gleaned from the myth, but the results will not be mythic digital gods to be feared or exploited as slaves, but digital creatures-- fellow minds with their own skin in the game, as limited, situated, and trustworthy as we are.