

## What is A.I.?. and what isn't?

Every profession has a vested interest in maintaining and extending its “special language” – that collection of special terms, acronyms, and adoptions from extinct languages that enable us to distinguish ourselves from “lay” people, and, whether deliberately or not, to confuse, obfuscate, bewilder, and impress them – as well as to justify high fees whilst doing so.

Whilst the legal and medical professions, especially, have refined special languages to a gold standard, the laggards in the Information Technology professions are doing our best – with the latest confusing term “Artificial Intelligence” or AI.

The problem, however, is that the same term is used for two quite different kinds of programs (and, by the way, the ubiquitous term “app” is simply a diminutive way of saying “application program”).

These two different AI's might best be described, to retain the acronym, as “Automated Interrogation”, and “Augmented Imitation”.

### AI = Automated Interrogation

This form of AI used to be called algorithmic search, sometimes including machine learning. It typically involves analysis of larger databases looking for specific data patterns to allow for either the identification and/or quantification of the patterns concerned. Sometimes the search and analysis process is gradually improved by retrospective reinforcement of the search and identification algorithms, based upon human validation.

This form of AI is exceptionally valuable in medical and social research, and as a diagnostic indicator, and treatment support. As such, it deserves our enthusiastic support, but requires proper testing and governance to ensure that it is used effectively.

### AI= Augmented Imitation

This form of AI is what most of the current hype is about. It typically allows for “human-like” outputs to questions to be generated, based upon analysis of very large text-based datasets. Essentially this delivers a “consensus” result, with the weighting of probabilities reinforced by both frequency and consistency. The key issue with this form of AI is that its human-like responses make it harder to distinguish from that of a human. It is, however, just as fallible, and potentially mislead, as we humans are.

It is not “intelligent”. It has no imagination, no discernment, no consciousness, no volition, no empathy, no morality, no sense of beauty, no humour, and, most important, no understanding of irony.

To reinforce the last omission, just consider **“Despite recent setbacks, the coach of our club has the full support of the board”**. Every supporter knows that the coach needs to consider some alternative employment very shortly!

This form of AI requires even more governance and caution in its application.

A.S. (“Artificial Stupidity”) might be a more accurate acronym.