Cultivating Digital Wisdom in the Deep Future

Marcus T. Anthony
Beijing Institute of Technology, Zhuhai

Note –

As the author of this paper, Dr Marcus T Anthony, is Guest Editor of this Special Issue, he had no role in the editorial process or selection of his paper. Instead, the Editor-Chief, Dr Holger Briel, processed the submission and conducted double blind peer review.

Abstract

The central focus of this paper is on the concept of Digital Wisdom, which is defined as the degree to which a person is in conscious relationship with digital environments and technologies. The author identifies and discusses the three domains of Digital Wisdom: "know thyself," "know the humans," and "know the machines." Through a comprehensive analysis of literature, tools, and processes, the author provides insights into how netizens – individuals in online environments – can develop Digital Wisdom within each of these domains. The article also explores the interplay between the three domains and highlights the potential consequences of AI advancements on human cognition and mental well-being. By offering a detailed framework for cultivating Digital Wisdom, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on fostering a more balanced and holistic approach to understanding and engaging with the digital world amidst the rapidly advancing AI landscape, and in doing so create a Deep Future.

Keywords: mindfulness, wisdom, technology, introspection, digital society, futures studies, disinformation and misinformation

One of the fundamental decisions we must make regarding the future of our civilisation, including that of the internet, is how we are going to develop our minds, individually, and collectively, and via what ways of knowing. Deep Futures (Anthony 2012, 2023) by definition permit a broad expression of human values, worldviews and cultures, while honouring the embodied, intuitive and rational-abstract modes of cognition. The three prime human ways of knowing are all valid within their own domains, and are all potentially genuine sources of information and wisdom in Deep Futures. Following the taxonomy of Wilber (2000), these prime cognitive modes are: the scientific (empirical), the rational (philosophical) and the intuitive (spiritual). We can each reflect upon which ways of knowing are dominant for us as individuals, and within our organisations and as societies. Have we become overly comfortable with the rational (the conscious mind), too caught up in the web, or lost in intuitive fuzziness? Which layers do our ethnic and national cultures and institutions valorise or ignore? Such awareness is vital as we strive to develop Deep Futures.

The recent AI explosion (Anthony, 2023) and its effects on our minds will likely be a defining moment in the development of human civilization. On the positive side, these technologies may free up cognitive space for us to cultivate mental abilities that we now underuse, just as our visual-spatial intelligence has expanded during the era of television, computers, and video games (Flynn, 2000). However, if AI-driven systems increasingly replace human imagination, creativity, insight and perhaps even thinking itself, artificial intelligence may also retard these cognitive capacities. As just one example, staring at narrow screens each day impedes peripheral vision and potentially our capacity for a deep sense of connection to nature and time, including the experience of wonder (Paul, 2021). It may also impede the foundational domain of Digital Wisdom: "know thyself" (Anthony, 2023), because that requires interoceptive acuity.

Digital Wisdom indicates the degree to which a person is in *conscious* relationship with digital environments and technologies (Anthony, 2023). That wisdom includes understanding how online technologies and environments function, and how best to respond to them. However, to have an advanced degree of Digital Wisdom, we also need to develop an awareness of both interoceptive and exteroceptive experience, including mindful self-awareness. This includes an essential understanding of biology and human behaviour; and of the economic and political structures that constitute our society (online and offline).

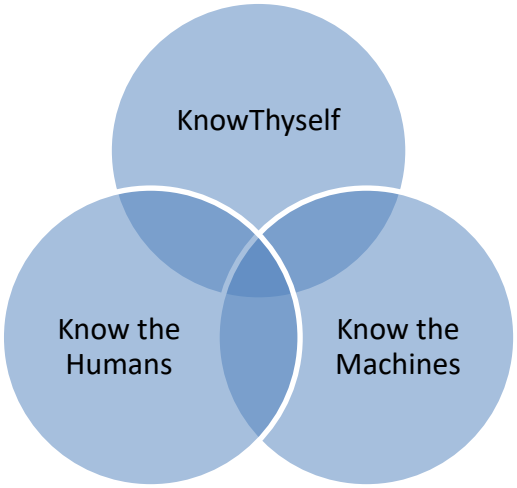
Digital Wisdom therefore comprises three parts, as shown in Figure 1, below. The first is "know thyself," the second "know the humans," and the third is "know the machines." Individuals, organisations and societies can potentially work at developing these three domains to cultivate Digital Wisdom, personally and collectively. There is often overlap between the three domains. Some tools for example, may require both introspection and knowledge of human physiology.

In the following paper, the three domains of Digital Wisdom will be defined in more detail, and relevant examples provided of tools and processes that netizens might use to develop each domain. A "netizen" is literally a citizen of the internet, and in the context of this article, refers

to any individual in an online environment.[1]

Figure 1

The 3 Domains of Digital Wisdom



Know Thyself

"Know thyself" is the foundational domain of Digital Wisdom. It entails coming to an experiential, embodied awareness of "the Authentic Self." The Authentic Self (Anthony, 2023) is a more grounded and genuine expression of character and behaviour than the distracted ego states that are often seen and experienced as "self" in the digital society. The concept of the Authentic Self draws from the introspective "awakening" traditions, and also from the work of trauma therapist Gabor Maté (2018). It is founded upon deep intuitions and the clarification of personal values. The concept of the Authentic Self transcends our personal identity, as well as our biographical and social conditioning.

The domain of "know thyself" necessitates understanding how our mind functions. That includes being conscious of our emotional trigger points and personal psychological issues, including the possible trauma that may underpin that. This first domain of Digital Wisdom also necessitates a well-developed capacity to bring ourselves to mindful attention *at will*, which helps establish the ability to access "the moment of agency." That moment is the point in time when we are making choices (Anthony, 2023).

Self-awareness is the bedrock of Digital Wisdom, and it is what distinguishes it from many similar concepts like "digital literacy" (Hargittai, 2016; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008). Such concepts typically fail to encourage introspective wisdom. Yet without this crucial grounding in self-knowledge, simply teaching people about the functional features of online systems –

[1] Significant portions of this paper have been adopted from the author's book: *Power and Presence: Reclaiming Your Authentic Self in a Digitized World* (Anthony, 2023).

like algorithms, echo chambers and disinformation – is insufficient.

In the following section, several introspective tools will be outlined; those that may assist in developing the first domain of Digital Wisdom (know thyself).

Mindfulness and Noticing

Adeptness at mindfulness helps us to return awareness to the body and reduce identification with thoughts and emotions (Davis, 2021; Ortner, Kilner & Zelazo 2007; Siegel, 2007). This skill thus potentially grants netizens the ability to pull out of attachment to online spaces, at will. This is also known as "cognitive responsibility" (Anthony, 2023), and includes the capacity to "notice" our own thoughts and feelings without judgment. Over-identification with thoughts and feelings retards our capacity to sense and feel our Authentic Selves, and may also make us more susceptible to online manipulation, because the moment of agency may quickly pass unobserved for those with low level executive functioning.

Body awareness exercises include "open monitoring," and the "soft gazing" process developed by Dor Abrahamson at the University of California, the latter inspired by tai chi (Paul, 2021). The "body scan" stress-release practice designed by Kabat-Zinn (2013) is a related tool. Meanwhile, breathing exercises are an old but effective mindfulness practice (Anthony, 2023; Jacobson, 2009), and they can be done while sitting at a computer, or in almost any setting.

Another self-awareness tool called "noticing the trigger point" can be combined with creative visualisation and can also help us avoid wasting precious creative energy on online drama (which could be seen as a key driver of online conflict). Our human physiology is what drives the anger/projection response in online environments, not merely the other's words. Physiology without immediate judgment and action soon fades, and the brain/body system returns to baseline. Nir Eyal (2019) suggests reconditioning online habits by "reimagining" more appropriate responses to trigger points. This can involve doing regular, short visualisation sessions where a person imagines him/herself responding differently at the moments when they habitually pick up the phone, peruse emails or respond angrily to online posts. In a similar vein, people can explore the benefits of mini-rituals as means to create more desirable online habits. Experimental evidence supports the claim that short rituals can offer effective interventions to online trigger points. Eyal (2019) states that rituals can help build an empowering identity, as they help people take control of personal habits. Finally, journaling can assist with developing a strong connection to the somatic body. We can keep a record of the choices we make and how we feel when we make them. Paul (2021) details this approach in *The Extended Mind*. Such journaling can help us clarify and codify the body's emotional messages.

Deep Questions

The concept of the Authentic Self implies that there are possibly many inauthentic expressions of "self." A delimited self-narrative and sense of identity may emerge from biographical and social conditioning, as well as repeated self-talk during childhood (Erikson, 1959). Netizens

ideally can begin to address this distinction between authentic and inauthentic expressions of self by asking whether their digital self/selves (their online personas and behaviours) are a reflection of their Authentic Self; or whether the digital self more readily resembles a conditioned self. The following deep questions may assist in determining this distinction.

- "Is the person I am online today the person that my 12-year old self would be proud to have seen me become?"
- "Are the web spaces I frequent and the conversations I have online (including anonymously) representative of the most noble and fulfilled expression of who I am?"
- "Are my thoughts and actions online really my own? Or have I become possessed by narratives and agendas that I am repeatedly exposed to? Are the typical actions and attitudes of my digital self those that that I have consciously chosen?"
- "Who could I be if I let go of the narratives, spaces and cognitive foci that express and circumscribe my online experience?"
- "What are some more empowering values and narratives that I could express today to truly embody my Authentic Self and why don't I just live that story?"

(Anthony, 2013)

An individual could reflect upon these questions in meditation, in journal time, or in mindful discussion with a trusted friend. Reflecting upon our highest values, the meaning of our lives and what we intuit that we are truly here to be and become is an important first step to developing Digital Wisdom. Taking the time to ask and answer deep questions can be a foundation for the domain of "know thyself."

Making an Online Oath

To live as a netizen of the twenty-first century, it is highly likely that netizens will frequent online worlds where political parties and politically motivated organizations are deeply invested in projection and bigoteering. Many of these bad faith actors want to manipulate our minds. It is to their advantage that we do *not* assume responsibility for our thoughts and feelings, especially our blame and anger. Projection against others remains a key driver of politics and its tribalism. As shall be discussed later in this paper, part of Digital Wisdom is becoming conscious of political manipulation, and then making a commitment not to engage in unhealthy practices that others are manipulating us to participate in.

Despite the current provocative political environment, organisations - political or otherwise – our institutions and Big Tech companies can learn to be proactive in shifting online conflict culture in a positive direction. One way that they could do this is by writing and promoting an organizational online oath, then inviting their constituents to write a personal one. An example is written in the personal statement (oath) shared by the author below, except that the organization's name could replace the individual's name. The leader and other key members of the organisation could sign the pledge.

Writing an online oath is one powerful way to begin to embody the values identified in the previous section about "deep questions." This oath can also help affirm a commitment to transforming our internet cultures into something which embody a higher expression of human consciousness. Without deep intentionality, it is going to be difficult to rectify the issues raised throughout this paper about online cultures and our Authentic Selves. We need broader social change which includes *self*-transformation – not merely top-down authoritarian and punitive intervention. The author's suggestion is thus that we declare an affirmation of commitment to honouring our Authentic Selves in online contexts.

The idea of writing an online pledge has been adapted from a thought-provoking *Medium* article written by Peter Limberg and Conor Barnes (Limberg & Barnes, 2018). In that article, the two authors address the incivilities of the present-day culture wars, and call for "a Culture War equivalent to the Hippocratic Oath." They suggest that this could be affirmed not only by ordinary netizens, but also by the leaders of the various memetic tribes. Here, "combatants" could pledge their commitment to peace. Limberg and Barnes feel that making a public commitment would increase the motivation to keep the pledge, due to the risk of being shamed for breaking our word. Limberg and Barnes' online oath can be modified to incorporate a commitment to our Authentic Selves. We could easily make a pledge on any of our social media platforms. We could then invite others to share their own.

Making such an oath does not imply that there cannot be legitimate analysis and (polite) criticism of others, nor the calling out of inappropriate behaviour. Yet the distinction between a "judgment" and an "analysis" of someone else's post or article is not always clear (the former is more emotion-laden, often with projection, blame and shame). We can make that distinction for ourselves. Finally, even after taking our oath, it is perfectly okay to discuss social and political issues online. However, our online contributions may need to change in content and tone.

Writing an Online Oath

An online oath can be handwritten or typed, concluded with a personal signature to signal intent. Ideally, we then post it online. The hard copy can be framed and placed upon the pledger's desk, or hung on the wall near a private work space.

The following is an example of such an oath.

I, Marcus T Anthony, currently resident of Zhuhai, China, do solemnly pledge to respect all others on the internet from this day forth. I vow to help make the internet a space which helps create a wiser, compassionate and happy world.

I promise to:

- *Listen to those who hold different perspectives and engage them courteously.*
- *Assume responsibility for my anger and personal prejudices while online.*

- *Where moved to do so, defend respectfully those who are being misrepresented, bullied or attacked online.*
- *Honour this pledge even when engaging online spaces anonymously.*
- *Quickly acknowledge or even apologize when I find myself breaking this*
- *pledge.*

I promise not to:

- *Judge and condemn those I engage with on the internet, nor share such sentiments about non-present others.*
- *Engage in ad hominem attacks, including bullying, name calling or shaming.*
- *Write, speak or share overtly racist or bigoted comments and direct them at others, or alternatively about others.*
- *Engage in bigoteering: recklessly calling others bigots as a means to gain power or control over them, or to "win" a debate.*
- *Virtue signal, judging and condemning others as morally inferior in order to boost my own self-image or my status within my online communities.*
- *Engage in any tribal conflicts on the internet, except with the intent to help resolve those tribal differences.*
- *Misrepresent or straw man others, so that I or my community can attack them.*
- *Initiate, encourage or participate in the doxing of others.*

Marcus T Anthony,
Zhuhai, China,
April 07, 2024.

Paying Attention to our Attention

Another simple tool which can assist netizens in honouring their highest values and their Authentic Selves is to be vigilant in noticing when their attention is being taken away from affirming spaces and experiences. If we notice that our attention is being regularly hijacked, and that we are losing the capacity for focus, we can then take action. Attention is power. If we cannot bring our mind to focus upon spaces that are aligned with our Authentic Self, we have become a disempowered human being.

It is important to structure our environment and activities such that our attention is not constantly under siege. Author Tim Ferris (2016) and social commentator Daniel Schmactenberger (Addressing the Sensemaking Crisis, 2021), for example, have removed their social media apps from their phones. They emphasise the benefits to turning off all social media and email alerts.

It is important to set clear parameters for social media use and online activity. Many successful people have a daily morning routine that they stick to. A very bad habit is to keep a smartphone

handy, and to open it while still lying in bed. Choosing not to use a smart phone or any media or social media for the first few hours of the day can help avoid having one's attention distracted by the agendas of media and social media.

Another beneficial process may be what Leonard Jacobson (2009) refers to as an emotional "alignment." This mirrors the concept of "right relationship" with thoughts and feelings, as found in traditional Buddhist teachings, as well as scientifically well-established mindful "noticing" techniques (Paul, 2021). Emotional alignment involves bringing attention to the emotional body and giving verbal and/or physical expression to any strong or subtle feelings that may be resident in the body (especially anxiety/fear, anger, shame or sadness and so on). When the practitioner is emotionally aligned with them, they may then reflect upon what is most important to them, including what they wish to do with the day (or longer period) to follow. In other words, the individual can learn to put their attention where they choose, not where media and social media actors would prefer them to put it.

Expansion and Constriction Modes

By its nature, social media permits a rapid creation and publication process. It enables an almost immediate communication of thoughts and ideas, and the tendency is to hit the enter button without achieving sufficient distance from the contents one is about to publish, nor from the situation we are embedded in.

There remains a great deal of online content that is very negative, that is victim-centred, angry or overtly hostile. Many content creators hold a persistent attitude of small-minded negativity. It is important *not* to develop this kind of mindset, because it is clearly incompatible with wisdom. Further, it may cause harm to both creators and content consumers. The distinction between *expansive* mode online content versus *constrictive* mode online content can help alleviate this tendency towards online negativity (Anthony, 2023).

Expansion mode is constructive, creative and often uplifting. It is typified by a spirit of generosity and elevates the spirit, an intuitive sense that our boundaries are shifting outward and upward. Expansion mode represents the embodiment of the Authentic Self. The constriction mode of expression, conversely, is fearful and angry. In its essence it is mean-spirited, leading to an intuitive sense of feeling smaller and less connected. It takes us into the world of drama and projection, and away from our Authentic Selves.

The motivation for the author in developing this simple distinction is to be able to easily notice when we are falling into bad online habits; and secondly, to assist other individuals and online communities to do the same. The author's goal is to work in expansive mode as much as possible, and reduce time spent in constrictive mode, both as creator and consumer.

Table 1, below, contains a list of attitudes and states of mind associated with the two modes (Anthony, 2023).

Table 1

Expansion versus constriction modes

Expansion mode	Constriction mode
A sense of expansion, opening and growth	A sense of contraction, closing, smallness
Creative, receptive	Destructive, domineering
Hopeful: A strong sense of an attainable vision for self, society & planet	Hopeless: Little sense of attainable vision for self, society & planet
Moves towards a solution or creative process	Strikes out against an enemy, threat or problem
Authentic Self, know who we are	Separated sense of self, unsure of who we are
Stands in their power, internal locus of control	Victim consciousness, external locus of control
Non-judgmental, impersonal	Judgmental, blaming, ad hominem attacks
Receptive, generous & open	Closed & mean spirited
Intellectual humility. “I may be right, but you May also be right.”	Intellectual arrogance. “I know best. I’m right, you’re wrong.”
Listens first,	Poor listener, instructs, lectures, moralises
Good humoured, light hearted	Self-serious, sarcastic, derogatory humour
Relaxed	Tense
Inviting	Rejecting
Responsible, owns emotions	Irresponsible, projecting emotions
Is a witness to own thoughts & opinions	Identifies with own thoughts & opinions
Present, embodied	Not present, caught in the mind, rumination
Optimistic, trusting	Pessimistic, untrusting, neurotic, conspiracy-minded
Forgiving & tolerant	Resentful, intolerant, blaming, bitter
Patient with self with & others	Impatient with self & others
Peaceful, or appropriately assertive	Aggressive, violent language & attitudes

When we take assertive action in the world, including in online environments, our neurophysiology reflects that mental state. Here dopamine plays the role of prime neurotransmitter in the motivation and reinforcement of goal-directed behaviour, and with the prefrontal cortex mediating executive functions such as planning and decision-making

(Friedman & Robbins, 2022). It is thus reasonable to assume that action-oriented expansion modes and passive constriction modes propagate contrasting mental states.

Habits of mind greatly impact our ability to embody our Authentic Selves. Therefore, both our mind and our physiology need to be deliberately shaped to reflect the values of the Authentic Self. This can be done by establishing proactive and positive habits relating to our cognitive, physical, social and online behaviours.

Developing mentally expansive, positive habits online (and offline) is not only good for the individual, it is potentially good for those they encounter, according to the findings of the Framington Heart Study (Robson 2021). The psychological phenomenon of "social contagion" suggests that the attitudes of friends and acquaintances of an individual can impact that person's own state of mind. The Framington Heart Study found that having a friend with a very positive attitude and a zest for life rendered participants in the study a 15 percent more likely chance of achieving a high score on the survey's life satisfaction index, even with no change in their immediate life circumstances. And that positivity effect does not stop there. The Framington study found happiness may be passed down the line even to friends of friends, regardless of whether they have ever even met the original happy individual (Robson, 2021).

We can think of a meme as being like a social contagion. Though the term "meme" is now mostly used in relation to viral images on social media, the original concept of a meme was made popular by people like Richard Dawkins (1976). It initially referred to ideas that saturate populations, much like fluid seeping into a piece of chalk which is dipped in a cup of water. And in the context of today's digital society, memes (in both meanings of the word) travel at the speed of a Wi-Fi connection.

Once an individual is grounded in expansion mode and the Authentic Self, the individual can then go out into the world and "teach people who they are," to borrow the words of therapist Jerry Hyde (Talking masculinity, 2022).

Recognising Drama and What Drives It (Then Pulling Out)

Our tendency towards "drama" and projection may emerge from our personal unresolved trauma and unmet emotional needs (Maté, 2018; Jacobson 2009). cognitive responsibility and shadow work (exploring our repressed psychic states, as advocated by Carl Jung) can potentially help us bring that into conscious awareness. A simple way to avoid getting caught up in online dramas may thus be to become very familiar with how we may unconsciously create conflict in our lives. Once we know ourselves and especially our ego and shadow, we may also start recognizing these things in others. That self-awareness may then enable us to avoid getting drawn into online and offline games with those we encounter.

There are numerous studies which suggest that mindfulness practice may directly or indirectly help reduce conflict and projection. Mindfulness can diminish emotional reactivity while increasing cognitive flexibility (Ortner, Kilner, & Zelazo, 2007). Further, it enhances self-

observation (Siegel, 2007), while meditation activates brain regions associated with greater adaptive response to stress (Cahn & Polich, 2006). There is also evidence that mindfulness assists rapid recovery to baseline after negative provocations (Davidson, Jackson & Kalin, 2000). Mindfulness can also help reduce rumination and stress, improve focus and boost working memory (Davis & Hayes, 2012). In other words, it helps us quickly return to peace after we have been triggered into strong emotional responses.

Mindfulness practices have to be applied smartly. For example, one recent clinical study tested whether teaching mindfulness can reduce the tendency of netizens to engage in online disputes. The study used short, fifteen-minute mindfulness sessions. Yet the experiment produced no significant evidence for reduction in online projections. After the mindfulness training, the participants quickly returned to squabbling with political opponents (Petersen & Mitikidis, 2019). The study concluded that mindfulness practice has no significant effect in increasing tolerance in relation to political discourse or "generating desirable political outcomes."

Yet, the study appears to have suffered from a flaw. As Leonard Jacobson (2009) has long taught, becoming present is only the first step in engaging mindfully with others and the world. The second and most important step is learning how to *stay* present. The Petersen and Mitikidis study (2019) made no attempt to teach that vital second step.

Not Knowing: Cultivating Intellectual Humility

Most of our ideas are not chosen by us, but have been "downloaded" into our skulls by our parents, teachers, society, secular and religious organisations and, increasingly in the age of the internet, by the algorithms that run our machines. Still, despite all these "downloads", we live in an age of great change and great confusion, where certainty appears to be diminishing. When we feel confused, it is natural to seek understanding, to seek closure. Yet, in times of change we need to admit the possibility that we could be wrong, including in regard to our own strongly held beliefs – which may have become limited or simply wrong.

A good question to regularly ask is, "How do I know that this is true?" Chances are that we may not know for sure. The basis of our knowledge can be quite fragile. This does not mean we cannot hold intellectual positions or personal beliefs. It means that there are benefits to holding them more lightly, and in establishing the right relationship with our minds, as is practiced in the Buddhist tradition (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2009) and in the Buddhism-inspired teachings of Leonard Jacobson (2009). Intellectual humility is an attitude which emerges from the realization that we may not know as much as we *think* we do. It is an important mindset to cultivate in the domain of "know thyself."

It is this not-knowing, this humility and the spirit of adventure that opens us to the potential for transcendence of the ego (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2009). It is the doorway to the Authentic Self. Embodying the Authentic Self thus necessitates finding a balance between standing in one's own power while setting clear boundaries, but also in being open to what life brings forth. In a sense, we have to learn to say both "yes" and "no" in equal measure. The Authentic Self is

more water than rock, but not quite either.

A perfect example of intellectual humility can be found in Charles Darwin's 1860 letter to Pictet de la Rive, a genuine critic of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, published in 1879 (To F. J. Pictet, 2021). De la Rive had written a strong critique of Darwin's seminal book, where he opined that natural selection could account only for small changes in the morphology of species, and not large-scale shifts from one species to another. Darwin's letter of response displays a genuine open mindedness and engagement with his ideological opponents. One can only imagine how today's online and personal interactions could be transformed if netizens adopted Darwin's intellectual humility.

The letter also features a good example of "steel manning," where we communicate our understanding of what the other has said. Below is an excerpt from Darwin's letter.

> Dear Sir
>
> I must trouble you with a few lines to thank you most truly for your very kind note. What you say about my Book, pleases me *extremely*, & I am far from surprised that you go with me a very short way. I remember how slowly I changed my own opinion; & even supposing for the moment that my views were in the main right, I do not think anyone could at once undergo so great a revolution in opinion.— *I thank you cordially* for the notice which you intend to publish, & for so kindly offering to send me a copy. *This will be invaluable, as showing me what parts you think weakest*; & it will largely spread the knowledge of my book.—
>
> Do you ever see the American Phil. Journal? There will appear in the next number an excellent Review by that admirable Botanist Asa Gray. He informs me that your illustrious countryman, Agassiz, is very bitter against my Book, as I fully expected would be the case.— *Prof. Bronn of Heidelberg although very much of course opposed to my doctrine, with noble liberality of sentiment is going to superintend the work* of a *Translator into German*; so that my Book will be pretty widely known, & consequently *what is true will soon be known from what is false in it.* You will think me very presumptuous, but as your studies naturally lead you to reflect much on Geological Succession, Geography. Distribution, Classification, Homology & Embryology, I expect & *hope you will be led ultimately to go a little way further with me*: as these facts receive some sort of explanation on the theory of descent; whereas they are inexplicable on the theory of creation.
>
> Pray believe me, dear Sir | with *sincere respect & cordial thanks* for your kindness | *Your faithful servant* | Charles Darwin
>
> **(**Darwin 1860, Italics added, except for "extremely.")

Here Darwin, one of the greatest figures in the history of science, display's an almost unimaginable degree of intellectual humility by today's standards. Particularly intriguing is Darwin's signature: "…with sincere respect and cordial thanks… Your faithful servant." These

words echo the teachings of Chinese mystic Lao Zi, with the latter's imploring his students to lie below others, even as they sought to influence over them (Goddard, 2014). This old fashioned way of signing off on a letter makes for a stark contrast with today's rapid-fire online war zone of email, tweets and impolite comments.

Note also how keen Darwin appears to know of the weaknesses of his own thinking, and is willing to share that. And despite Prof Bronn of Heidelberg being opposed to Darwin's findings, Darwin's adversary agrees to help him translate it into German. This stands in great contrast to much discourse found in today's social media echo chambers, where many differences of opinion are shot down with caustic sarcasm and ad hominem attack.

Intellectual humility potentially generates an attitude of modesty, based on the awareness of the limits of our individual minds and the current levels of understandings of our human species. When we come to a premature conclusion about a particular subject, we lose the learning potentials of open-minded curiosity.

Several tools and attitudes which can help netizens honour the first domain of Digital Wisdom (know thyself) have been shared in the section above. The following section details the second domain of Digital Wisdom.

Know the Humans

In order to foster Digital Wisdom, it is important that we develop an understanding of how human beings function biologically and culturally. How and why do people behave the way they do, online and offline, and how is our personal behaviour connected to our common humanness? Armed with such knowledge, we can be better prepared both for our interactions with others online, and for the way online systems and technologies target our human traits and frailties. We have a tendency to judge behaviours in others that are also present in ourselves (Jacobson, 2009), so if we are able to recognize those common human imperfections within ourselves, we may also learn to be more compassionate when we see others embodying such traits.

There are several tools and attitudes which can help facilitate netizens' greater awareness of essential human behaviour. Some significant ones are described below.

Notice Your Tribe – Then Transcend Them

What can an individual do if they find that they have become caught up in online tribal dynamics, and that their mind, thoughts and feelings are no longer quite their own? It is highly likely that they may need to change the way they relate to the group. Or they may even choose to leave the tribe behind.

Adopting the wisdom of the noticing techniques of the Buddhist tradition (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2009) is one approach which can help initiate the necessary mental shift. While online, the

netizen can begin to identify what their tribalist trigger points are. In particular, they should notice when their judgment and anger are triggered while frequenting their tribal spaces - and also when entering other online tribal territories. Once these emotions have been brought into full awareness, netizens can then assume cognitive responsibility for those feelings by removing attention from the observed virtual space and onto the body and its feelings. This will likely reduce the possibility of projecting the feelings onto others. Noticing processes can help create emotional distance between the individual and the event being experienced (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), and in turn from the tribe itself.

Second, it is useful to have a working understanding of how other people and organisations deliberately or unconsciously target our trigger points to manipulate us. These "others" may be ordinary individuals, as well as media and social media companies, advertisers, trolls or even bots. Their typical goal is to grab our attention and suck us back into an emotional state such that your focus remains fixed long enough for them to enact their agenda (Zuboff, 2019). For political movements – and bad faith actors who exploit political and social movements – the goal is most likely to get netizen to emotionally identify either for or against an idea, person or group. Left and right. Woke and anti-work. Feminists and advocates of "red pill" philosophy China and America and so on. For news media, bloggers and various online organizations, a significant part of their profit model is to get web users to click, to like and to subscribe. This is what drives revenue to them via advertising, and garners rewards from tech platforms (Anthony, 2023; Zuboff, 2019). It also helps them sell their own products and services directly.

Nonetheless, we cannot simply declare the manipulators to be bad human beings, because they represent a significant portion of internet users. Most are merely doing what the system – the marketplace – incentivizes.

Of all the emotions to master in online contexts, anger and judgment are arguably the most important. But to master anger and judgment we need to assume cognitive responsibility for them; which in turn may require shadow work, and perhaps even healing. Once we assume ccognitive responsibility for our feelings and projections, and once our emotional energy is removed from the situation, we have reclaimed a great deal of our power from our tribal overlords and their technologies.

Bridging the Tribal Trenches

Daniel Schmactenberger (Addressing the sensemaking crisis, 2021) believes that netizens of the current age require increased competence in at least three domains of communication, if we are to (re)learn how to engage wisely with online tribal others.

Critically situating the position of the other party is the first and easiest competence to develop, according to Schmactenberger. This can include understanding their political alliances, their worldviews or their paradigms. Yet this is not enough; tribes are not typically very interested in collapsing the distance between "us and them," and walking in the other tribes' shoes.

The second required competency is the ability to deeply understand and engage with the other, including "steel manning" their position, which is the process of attempting to accurately paraphrase another's argument, and repeating it back to them. This aids in our capacity for deep listening. We can learn to listen without judgment, and just be present with the other person. This also facilitates learning. It is difficult to learn anything new while we are angrily dismissing the other person.

Schmactenberger's third requirement is that each of us must be able to reflect deeply upon our own biases and arguments. We have to be open to the possibility that our own thinking is limited or faulty, and that our biases and prejudices are clouding our thinking. Mastery of Schmactenberger's three competencies clearly requires a strong motivation within the individual to rise above tribal identification, and to challenge personal beliefs. But here lies a problem. As moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt (2012) points out, we humans are great at finding fault in others but poor at identifying it within ourselves. We love to moralise, but not to introspect. Morality binds us together, but also blinds us. So, how do we allow ourselves to see our own biases, or even errors in thinking, without becoming defensive?

The cultivation of the Authentic Self and especially cognitive responsibility and mindful presence can help us transcend the machinations of mind. A deepening of awareness of the nature of mind can help us reduce tribalist fervour. The moment of agency (Anthony, 2023) – where we are mindfully present with our own internal decision-making apparatus – represents that instant in time where we can practice free will, where we can choose preferred futures. That moment is where we have the power to disable the triggers that our biology and our conditioning have engendered within us, and to begin to initiate a trans-tribal perspective.

Being a Good Faith Actor

The concept of a "bad faith actor" typically refers to a person who deliberately attempts to lie and deceive others, such as when pushing a political or an ideological agenda, or just to seek attention and power. Ideally, we'd like to take guidance from good faith actors and good faith media, while avoiding the bad ones.

However, there is not always a clear distinction between good and bad faith actors and actions. It may be better to think of ourselves as being posited along a continuum of acting in good faith, and bad. Bias is a defining trait of the human mind, and many of our thoughts and actions have unconscious drivers. Further, some people we might think of as bad faith actors may not be *consciously* trying to manipulate or deceive. And those same people sometimes may act in good faith. Our perception of them will also inevitably reflect our own worldview and biases. Thus, there may be benefit in expanding the definition of bad faith actors to: "Those who either deliberately and/or unconsciously manipulate and deceive for the purposes of power and control over others" (Anthony, 2023).

Such a frame is a little more uncomfortable to contemplate than a simple good-versus-bad scenario, because we are moving into the realm of the shadow. And we have to ask ourselves

whether we as individual netizens – are tending towards the bad faith end of the spectrum at any given time. Yet if we are to transcend online culture wars and our political and tribal bickering, there's really no choice but to shine the torch of illumination into our own psyches.

How can we decide whether a particular actor acts – or an action is undertaken – in good faith? Towards this end, the author has developed a "good faith quiz" (Anthony, 2023). It consists of 16 questions, to which the respondent can answer yes or no (or undecided). This simple quiz can be used to reflect upon the intentions a particular person, debate, social/political movement, media channel or organisation. The questions can help the responder identify whether there exists the danger to be emotionally or mentally taken into the cognitive thrall of those spaces. Alternatively, the questions can be turned inward and applied to the responder. Several pertinent questions found in the quiz include:

- Is there an open discourse (or a noticeable ideological, political or institutional agenda)?
- Is the emotional mind-set balanced and bi-partisan (or partisan and tribalistic)?
- Is it safe to voice a dissenting perspective, and is there a spirit of respectful disagreement (or is there an insistence on conformity, with dissent punished)?
- Is there respect for facts and the truth, regardless of how confronting (or is there misinformation/disinformation, including a rigid narrative framing, and/or a common omission of important facts and stories)?
- Does the actor or movement depict the people they critique humanely (or are they dehumanized, and represented as dangerous threats)?
- Is my mind, psyche and sense of well-being being enhanced by engagement (or do I feel myself being dragged into anger, drama and projection)?

(Anthony, 2023)

No person, group or movement is perfect. We do not have to completely avoid those who embody some of these characteristics, because most people do these things at times. But we can learn to be mindful of the spaces and discourses we frequent online and off, and develop a conscious relationship with them. In that sense, the power is with the netizen, not with the good or bad faith actors they might be engaging with.

Finally, as Leonard Jacobson (2009) states, there is really "only one ego." And it is all of us. Once we become more honest about how we may lie and "cheat" ourselves, we may then be able to sense that same trait more easily in others. Ideally, we may be able to decide more readily whom to engage with, and whom to disengage from; which web spaces to frequent, and which to avoid.

Reigning in the Negativity

Human beings possess a strong bias towards noticing the negative (Robson, 2021), and today's click bait culture of the media and social media content creators often exploits that tendency. Humans have evolved to be on high alert for threats. For the animal in us, the end is always nigh. This is why it is important for web surfers to appreciate that the online world is not *really* real. It is constructed not of earth and water, nor of bricks and mortar. Instead, it is built from an illusionary mixture of hyperbole, fear and the impending threat of tribal others, all saturated in oceans of dopamine.

Minding Conspiracy Culture

The rapid expansion of conspiracy theory culture is a readily notable feature of the internet (Haidt, 2022). Such spaces are typified by a scornful, angry distrust of the system, and a deep resentment of leaders and institutions. Conspiracy worldviews tend to contain a mixture of truths and untruths. Further, their explanations of the coordinated manipulation of the world by secretive organisations is typically vastly oversimplified – and often just plain wrong.

Conspiracy theory culture is arguably driven by a strong sense of individual powerlessness and the resonant confusion of living amidst the confounding pace of change of the twenty-first century world (Douglas, Sutton & Cichocka, 2017). The increasing complexity and ultimate disintegration of our sense-making systems has engendered a loss of trust in our societies (including governments), and this has been exacerbated by increased time spent online (where misinformation and disinformation abound). Another recent driver is the turmoil and trauma of several years of Covid deaths, lockdowns and general mayhem (Anthony, 2023; Haidt, 2022).

Bad faith actors and systems often pray upon the psychological issues and resonant trauma of netizens to draw them into shadowy web spaces. It is not that those netizens have no choice in the matter, but arguably, the anger, resentment and fear that emerges from their personal trauma makes them more susceptible to manipulation (Douglas, Sutton & Cichocka, 2017). Therefore, one ideal antidote to conspiracy culture may be to develop cultures which value mindfulness and cognitive responsibility, where people learn to take greater responsibility for their emotional life and their pain, and to learn healthy ways to express their angst.

In the next section, the discussion moves on to the third domain of Digital Wisdom, which addresses the need for an essential understanding of modern technologies and how they operate.

Know the Machines

"Know the machines" is about developing a competent understanding of how the internet and current information technology function. Functional democracy relies on a critically thinking populace, and this is arguably more important than ever in the current age of widespread disinformation, including alleged interference in electoral processes via propaganda disseminated over social media (Stewart, 2018).

In a December 2016 *New York Times* op-ed, Mark Galeotti states that:

> Instead of trying to combat each leak directly, the United States government should teach the public to tell when they are being manipulated. Via schools, nongovernmental organizations, and public service campaigns, Americans should be taught the basic skills necessary to be savvy media consumers, from fact-checking news articles to how pictures can lie.

Developing a functional understanding of information systems and technologies is not a static skill set, as technology is forever changing, along with the human cultures that are in a relationship with it. For example, at the time of writing, the AI Explosion (Anthony, 2023), and especially the arrival of chat bots like ChatGPT, is heralding a seismic shift in the way humans relate to technology, society and even to our own minds. This will inevitably lead to many great benefits, but as with all technologies, there will be numerous unanticipated impacts.

Knowing the machines is not necessarily about becoming a tech wizard, learning how to code or to build a computer from scratch. Nor does it require launching your own interstellar transport company like Elon Musk. Instead, what is most needed is a practical awareness of how technologies and online spaces impact our bodies and minds.

Ideally, netizens should be aware of the potential effects of internet usage and informational technologies on their minds and lives, including the following understandings.

Misinformation and Disinformation

Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have found that falsehoods on Twitter are 70 per cent more likely to be retweeted than accurate news (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Misinformation and disinformation abound on today's internet, and we are embodying Digital Wisdom when we are mindful of that. Significant information should always be double-checked, as should information that is shared publically. Further, just because someone is being honest does not mean they are right, nor that they are not misleading others. Misinformation differs from disinformation in that the former is not deliberate deception, and the falsity of the information is unknown to the person disseminating it.

Deep Fakery

Deep fakes – deliberately falsified video, audio and written facsimiles of the words and actions of actual people – are becoming even deeper and faker. A good example is the "Fake Tom Cruise"? His actual name is Miles Fisher, and in real life he does look remarkably like the actor Tom Cruise. With the help of deep fake company Metaphysic, he has produced numerous Tik Tok and YouTube videos which appear to show Tom Cruise, but the words and images are all of Cruise's imposter. Current deep fake companies can take a few images and sound recordings of individuals and then produce video and audio content with a very high degree of similarity to the person being faked. Rapper Snoop Dog, for example, "appeared" in an Australian

television commercial in 2021. However, Snoop Dog himself never shot the video. He gave approval for the advertising company to use his image, and they deep-faked his appearance in the advertisement (CBS News, 2022).

The contents produced by Google Deep Mind's LaMDA and also ChatGPT are also easy to confuse for those of an actual person. Further, we now know that many posts on online platforms such Twitter and in news site's comments sections are generated by machines (bots). An indeterminate number of the comments on many social media sites and news channels are produced by these bot accounts, and these bad faith bots may be sourced to meddling governments, organisations, hackers and trolls (Nonnecke et al, 2022).

The problem of deep fakes will likely only worsen over time as technologies improve, and the day is coming soon when the differences will be almost impossible to distinguish. For individual netizens, once again the key is to be aware that the issue is becoming increasingly serious.

A Tendency Towards Online Addiction

Beginning around 2010, Big Tech companies like Instagram, Facebook and Uber appropriated research into human behaviour – most particular that of Stanford professor B.J. Fogg – and deliberately deployed it to make their social media platforms and companies more addictive. The Fogg Behaviour Model states that for a behaviour to occur, there needs to be motivation, ability and a trigger. Motivation is our degree of desire, while ability refers to how difficult or easy it is to perform the behaviour. Finally, we need a trigger or stimuli that prompts us to take action. Nir Eyal (2019) argues that big tech social media companies now routinely apply Fogg's model to make their platforms and products more addictive.

Shoshana Zuboff's (2019) concept of "surveillance capitalism" is a related concept that may enhance Digital Wisdom. Ideally, netizens should have an awareness of the clicks-for-profit model that drives the way online content comes to us. Social media giants are not a charity. They make money by selling advertising, and to do so, they need to collect users' personal data so that they know which ads to target to which people. By improving an ad's click-through rate, tech platforms can charge more money for advertising. Tristan Harris (The Social Dilemma, 2020) has famously stated that "If you aren't being billed, *you* are the product."

Digital Wisdom can help protect us against the attempts of tech giants and smaller online content creators to hijack our brains; and in particular if we develop an essential understanding of the neurobiology of web surfing. Stanford University neuroscientist Andrew Huberman (Huberman Lab, 2021) has pointed out that the intermittent dopamine drip that occurs as we scroll through social media pages is particularly damaging to the brain's reward system. It is the slow-drip dopamine release that occurs from longer-term focused activities that is essential for us to be successful at many meaningful activities. Huberman argues that, ideally, people should condition themselves to become "addicted" to the good feelings that emerge when they spend extended time and effort achieving longer-term successes. The worst case scenario is

that a netizen assumes habitual behaviour which is akin to that of the mice in well-known experiments where the mice incessantly tap a lever, electrically releasing dopamine via stimulating the ventral tegmental area of the brain. Such mice may eventually stop eating and drinking, and effectively self-destruct (Huberman Lab, 2021).

Audience Capture

There is a bind that many content creators typically encounter: that of choosing whether to produce content they believe is of highest value to society, or to produce content that pleases their audience and thus optimises revenue. The algorithms tend to reward simple, repetitive narratives that garner the most clicks from a socially and politically homogenous audience. The story of YouTuber Nikocado Avocado is a good example. Nikocado morphed from a 170-pound vegan into a 300-plus-pound obese human who devoured an entire McDonalds menu in a single sitting to satisfy his viewers (Gurwinder, 2022).

Once content creators develop a significant audience for their channel or product, the algorithms tend to reward them for repeating the same themes and narratives, but punish them if they deviate from them. On platforms such as YouTube, when any given content isn't "liked" or clicked on, the content creator literally gets paid less. The creator then has to choose between producing content which reflects what they truly want to create or say, or what the platforms are "telling" them to produce. For those watching the channel, this leads to the next issue.

Echo Chamber Effects

A well-known problem, and one of the most obvious features of MemeWorld, is the prevalence of echo chambers. The algorithms not only straightjacket content providers, they also tend to herd users into flocks of online "sheeple" with similar worldviews and opinions – then fleece them of their cash. Those who express dissenting views may get heavily criticised. The result is a highly constrictive relationship between the content users and providers, with each ultimately trapped in their own online echo chamber.

There are relatively simple ways for netizens to prevent online platforms from dictating their feeds. They can alter their settings on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. Netizens have more control over their content than they realise. For example, amongst many possibilities, on YouTube a user can simply pause their "watch history;" while on Facebook they can delete their posts, likes, and searches (Anthony, 2023).

Beware the Shifting Mob

Much has been said and written about "cancel culture" and how online pressure groups can destroy a netizen's reputation both online and off. This potentially affects everyone, because over time the Overton Window (the acceptable range of opinion) can shift dramatically. When the soon-to-be Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau engaged in "black face" performances (both as a student and as an older adult), at the time that was not considered particularly

offensive. But times have changed, and today he is being called out on his previous behaviour. Times will change again and it is highly probable that future generations will consider some current attitudes and behaviours appalling.

Everything a netizen puts online, including their history of likes and clicks, should be considered by that person to be potential public information. This is true even if posted on private forums, because that netizen can never know who is going to share that information. And that "like," text, post or flippant comment may be around for centuries. Part of Digital Wisdom is keeping this in mind (Anthony, 2023).

This is not to suggest that we should not express our opinions online, be critical of ideas, or even make light-hearted fun of people (up to a certain point). But we should be mindful of not going too far – and it is best to err on the side of caution. If the individual has written an online oath, its stated values and behaviours can be used as a reference point.

Digitally Wise Habits and Deep Futures

The three domains of Digital Wisdom constitute knowledge and skillsets that can help us honour our Authentic Selves as we navigate online environments and attempt to build Deep Futures (Anthony 2012, 2023). Merely possessing the awareness of these things can be potentially empowering, and may make a difference to our digital lives. Several practical tools and solutions have been outlined above, for each of the three domains of Digital Wisdom. There are numerous others that could have been included, such as: verifying media and social media sources; being aware of the bias of media and social media creators; limiting online usage; prioritising offline relationships; deactivating smart phone alerts; cultivating the habit of perusing news from a variety of "tribal" sources and so on.

While it is true that we can simply choose to put down our devices and turn off our machines, completely distancing ourselves from digital society is not a valid choice for most netizens today. Much of what we do, including work and personal communications, requires use of the technologies that undergird that system. There are enormous benefits and opportunities that smart technologies bring us. The key then, is *conscious* engagement with our machines and with other users who populate online spaces: this behaviour lies at the heart of developing Digital Wisdom.

Psychologist James Flynn (2000) has argued that the relatively recent public awareness of shorthand abstractions like "average," "placebo," and "random sample" have made us intellectually smarter. Today, we may also be able to instil mindful cognitive skills in users via the three domains of Digital Wisdom. We can no longer simply allow the young to stumble into virtual landscapes and trust that they have the ability to make sense of it all. Our schools and online platforms must begin to incorporate curricula and cultures which promote Digital Wisdom – and Deep Futures.

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Corresponding author: Marcus T. Anthony
Email: marcus.anthony@cgt.bitzh.edu.cn