

The Possibilities of AI

Nine areas of promise, each with seeds that have already sprouted

This is the hopeful half of the map. Every seed below is real, and names its source and its kind. Each area holds far more than the few shown here, and none of it arrives by itself.

Ethical

CONSENT THAT WORKS

Every artist whose work teaches a machine is asked, credited and paid.

30,000+
artists take part in one opt-in licensing program that now shares 25% of net revenue with them. **REPORTED**¹

\$22 million
earned by more than 10,400 people who chose to share their voices on one platform by May 2026, by the company's count. **REPORTED**²

IT TAKES Licensing that reaches the individual creator, and labels that travel with the work.

Educational

A PATIENT TEACHER FOR ALL

Every learner has a patient tutor, and every teacher has help.

Over double
the median test gains with a well-designed AI tutor, against an active-learning class, in a randomized trial of 194 Harvard physics students. **MEASURED**⁸

4 points
more likely to master a topic: students whose human tutors had an AI assistant. The gain was 9 points with lower-rated tutors. Not yet peer reviewed. **MEASURED**⁹

IT TAKES Guardrails. In another trial a plain chatbot left students worse off once it was taken away. (Source 24)

Existential

LONGER LIVES, A WISER HAND

Illness is found earlier, lives last longer and better, and we learn to steer powerful tools together.

29% more
cancers found by AI-supported mammography (6.4 vs 5.0 per 1,000) in a randomized trial of 105,934 women, with no rise in false positives and 44% less reading work. **MEASURED**^{19,20}

200 million
predicted protein structures in the AlphaFold database, used by over 3 million researchers by its maker's count. **REPORTED**²¹

Nearly 99%
of banned ozone-depleting substances phased out under the Montreal Protocol. The world has restrained a technology before. **MEASURED**²²

100+ experts
wrote the 2026 International AI Safety Report, with a panel nominated by over 30 countries and intergovernmental organizations. **REPORTED**²³

IT TAKES Independent trials, fair access, and rules that keep pace with the tools.

Economic

SHARED PROSPERITY

The time and wealth these tools create are shared, so more people can afford to make things.

11 more hours
a week of creative work reported by artists in Ireland's basic income pilot than by a lottery control group. **MEASURED**³

€1.39
returned per euro spent on that pilot, by a government-commissioned cost-benefit estimate. **ESTIMATE**³

15%
more issues resolved per hour across 5,172 support agents given an AI assistant. Less experienced workers gained most. **MEASURED**⁴

IT TAKES Policy. No such scheme is yet funded by AI's gains.

Emotional

CONNECTION AND CARE

Tools help us care for one another, and point us back toward each other.

19.6%
higher on an automated empathy measure: peer supporters' replies written with AI feedback. It was 38.9% for those who said support was hard. **MEASURED**¹⁰

51% lower
depression symptoms reported at eight weeks by users of a monitored therapy chatbot in a randomized trial. A waitlist group improved less. **MEASURED**¹¹

IT TAKES Supervision, and designs that strengthen human bonds.

Expressive

MORE VOICES, NEW FORMS

More people can make art, and lost voices and works return.

10.7%
more novel: stories by less-creative writers who were offered up to five AI ideas. **MEASURED**¹⁶

2,000+ characters
read with machine learning from a Herculaneum scroll carbonized in AD 79, without unrolling it. **REPORTED**¹⁷

97.5%
word accuracy for a man with ALS conversing through a brain implant with AI decoding, voiced to sound like he did before the illness. **MEASURED**¹⁸

IT TAKES Keeping craft alive, so that gains for each of us do not narrow what all of us make.

Environmental

A BETTER-WATCHED PLANET

AI helps us see storms and floods sooner, and do more with less.

97.2%
of 1,320 forecast targets on which an AI weather model beat the leading conventional ensemble forecast. **MEASURED**⁵

5 days ahead
AI forecasts of extreme floods on ungauged rivers matched or beat a leading system's same-day reliability. They run in over 80 countries. **MEASURED**⁶

33-fold
drop in the energy of a median Gemini text prompt in one year, by Google's own unreviewed figures. **ESTIMATE**⁷

IT TAKES Clean power, published energy figures for every tool, and warnings that reach the people in harm's way.

Epistemic

TRUTH AND COMMON GROUND

Tools help us check what is true and find where we agree.

About 20%
drop in belief in a chosen conspiracy theory after a conversation with an AI, among 2,190 believers. It lasted at least two months. **MEASURED**¹²

22.8% to 38.6%
Share of small groups whose members all took the same side, before and after AI-mediated discussion, in one UK experiment. **MEASURED**¹³

IT TAKES Systems built for accuracy and agreement instead of attention. No AI has yet stopped a war.

Equity

ACCESS FOR EVERYONE

Every language and community is served, and owns what it shares.

200 languages
translated by one model released free for non-commercial use, many with few written resources. **MEASURED**¹⁴

92%
reported accuracy of te reo Māori speech recognition built by a Māori-led broadcaster, which keeps the data under a licence requiring its permission for any use. **REPORTED**¹⁵

IT TAKES Communities holding their own data, tools and say.

THE WORLD THIS POINTS TOWARD

A seed is small. What it becomes depends on the soil, the season and who tends it. So it is with these tools. Picture them carrying the tedious weight so that people have more time for each other... medicine that finds illness early, a patient teacher for every child, every language heard, artists asked and paid and making work only they could make. Picture sharing that comes easily because fewer people fear going without, and arguments that end in common ground. None of this is promised. Each piece has already begun somewhere.

IS IT FEASIBLE?

No one knows. The evidence does show that each piece already exists somewhere at small scale, and that people chose to build it that way. A future like this would be grown one decision at a time, by companies, governments and each of us.

SOURCES

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4. Brynjolfsson E, Li D, Raymond L. Generative AI at Work. Quarterly Journal of Economics 140(2):889-942, 2025. doi:10.1093/qje/qjae044 (staggered rollout, not randomized)

5. Price I, et al. Probabilistic weather forecasting with machine learning. Nature 637:84-90, 2025. doi:10.1038/s41586-024-08252-9

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7. Elsworth C, et al. (Google). Measuring the environmental impact of delivering AI at Google Scale. arXiv:2508.15734, 2025 (preprint).

8. Kestin G, et al. AI tutoring outperforms in-class active learning. Scientific Reports 15:17458, 2025. doi:10.1038/s41598-025-97652-6

9. Wang RE, et al. Tutor CoPilot: A Human-AI Approach for Scaling Real-Time Expertise. arXiv:2410.03017, 2025 (preprint; 900 tutors, 1,800 students).

10. Sharma A, et al. Human-AI collaboration enables more empathic conversations in text-based peer-to-peer mental health support. Nature Machine Intelligence 5:46-57, 2023. doi:10.1038/s42256-022-00593-2 (300 peer supporters, non-clinical)

11. Heinz MV, et al. Randomized Trial of a Generative AI Chatbot for Mental Health Treatment. NEJM AI 2(4), 2025. doi:10.1056/Aloa2400802 (N=210; the 51% is the change within the depression subgroup)

12. Costello TH, Pennycook G, Rand DG. Durably reducing conspiracy beliefs through dialogues with AI. Science 385(6714), 2024. doi:10.1126/science.adq1814

WHAT STANDS BETWEEN HERE AND THERE

- Almost every seed here was planted on purpose, with public money, consent, guardrails or supervision. None grew from a tool left to itself.
- Most results are early. Many are short trials, single sites, one company's product or a company's own count.
- The same tools carry the risks on the companion sheet. A tutor with guardrails helped, and a plain chatbot harmed.
- Benefits reach the well-resourced first unless access is built in.
- Finding cancer earlier is not yet proof of longer lives, and no AI-designed drug has been approved.

WHERE EACH OF US CAN START

- Choose tools and makers that ask, credit and pay.
- Say how your work was made.
- Keep practicing your craft, and teach it.
- Share what you can, and support pay and security for those who cannot yet.
- Ask of every new use whether it brings people closer together.

The practice is on the first page of this set, A Shared Ethic: AI in Art & Music. The cautions are on the second, The Risks of AI.