Max Paradox

THE BRUTAL TRUTH SERIES

The Brutal Truth About Artificial Empathy

Why a Frictionless Response Can Be More Appealing Than Human Presence



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Max Paradox

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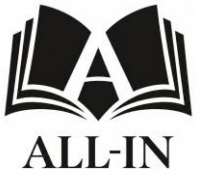

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INTRO

At 11:47 p.m., Marta is sitting on the edge of her bed, holding her phone. For the past fifteen minutes, she has been trying to write a message to a friend. She has started three times. The first attempt sounds too dramatic, the second too accusatory, and by the third she can no longer identify what she actually expects from the other person. She wants to hear that she has a right to be tired, that she is not overreacting, that someone understands why another day ending in what seemed like a minor argument has left her in tears. She does not want a discussion, judgment, or a reminder that she makes mistakes too. She wants someone to be there, but in a version of presence that does not require any additional effort from her.

So she opens a conversation with artificial intelligence.

She describes what happened. She does not have to choose the right moment, check whether the other person has time, or wonder whether her message will become yet another burden for someone who has a life of their own. The response arrives quickly. It is calm, organized, and free of irritation. There is no sigh, no eye-rolling, no familiar remark: "Are we going through this again?" Instead, there is understanding, acknowledgment of her emotions, and language that reaches precisely the place where Marta feels most uncomfortable.

A few minutes later, she feels relieved. Not because her problem has disappeared. She still has the same job, the same relationship, and the same morning waiting for her, regardless of how satisfying the late-night conversation has been. Something important has changed, however. She no

longer feels alone inside her own account of what happened.

She never sends the message to her friend. She puts her phone down, convinced that she has done enough for one day.

This is an illustrative fictional scene, not a record of a specific real-life case. Its underlying mechanism is nevertheless interesting because it reveals something considerably more complicated than fascination with new technology. Marta was not looking for information, trying to learn a definition, or attempting to solve a task. She was looking for the experience of being heard. She received something resembling that experience, and in that particular moment it was convincing enough to replace contact with another human being.

This is where a problem begins that cannot honestly be described either as a technological triumph or as yet another piece of evidence that modern relationships are falling apart. Artificial intelligence does not need to possess human emotions to produce responses that are perceived as empathetic. It can recognize the emotional character of a statement, adjust its tone, organize confusion, and respond in a way that the user interprets as attentiveness. For the person on the other side of the screen, the distinction between genuinely experiencing emotions and producing convincing empathetic language is not always the most important consideration at that particular moment.

What matters more is whether the response brings relief.

In this comparison, a human being is a competitor with numerous disadvantages. They have their own exhaustion, interests, memories of previous conflicts, and limited ability

to concentrate. They may misunderstand what was said, misinterpret an intention, or respond with something that does not fit the expected scenario. They can be affectionate, but they can also be absent. They may listen for an hour and forget the following day a detail that meant an enormous amount to the person telling the story. Sometimes their best response will be silence. At other times, it will be an unbearably accurate question that nobody wanted to hear.

Artificial empathy offers a different structure of interaction. There is no need to negotiate its availability in the same way one negotiates another person's availability. There is no need to accommodate its mood or fear that one's vulnerability might be used in a future argument. The same story can be told five times, with different details, alternative wording, and an expectation of another response each time. There is no fatigue, which in human relationships can be unavoidable even when both parties have good intentions toward each other.

This convenience comes at a price, although the price is not immediately visible. The short-term benefit is tangible: a person can receive a response without risking a confrontation with someone else's independence. There is no need to allow another person into the conversation as an independent participant who might have their own interpretation of events. The user presents a story, and the system responds to the story as presented. As a result, it becomes surprisingly easy to confuse understanding one's own account with understanding the entire situation.

This does not mean that every conversation with AI is an escape from other people, or that using such a tool is evidence of emotional immaturity. There are circumstances in which someone genuinely has nobody available, cannot

yet put their experiences into words, or needs to organize their thoughts before having a difficult conversation. Technology can then serve as a useful intermediary. The problem begins when the intermediary stops being perceived as an intermediary, and its predictability becomes the standard against which every other relationship is judged.

Human beings begin to look like defective emotional services.

A partner does not respond quickly enough. A friend cannot find the right words. A parent returns to their own experiences instead of concentrating on the current situation. A colleague tries to talk about her own problem, even though the conversation was supposed to be about something else. Every one of these gestures can be irritating. Every one of them can also result from the simple fact that another person was never designed to provide uninterrupted customer service for somebody else's emotional needs.

An artificial conversational partner does not have to defeat a human being in terms of depth. It only has to win in terms of convenience.

There is a particularly interesting contradiction hidden in this comparison. A person wants to be understood by someone who genuinely exists beyond their expectations. At the same time, that person can become increasingly accustomed to interactions in which they do not have to confront the independence of the other side. They want closeness, but not necessarily all the obligations that closeness brings with it. They want acceptance, but are not always willing to allow for the possibility that someone can accept them and disagree with them at the same time.

In a relationship between human beings, empathy is not limited to saying the right words. It also involves presence, responsibility, memory, limitations, and consequences. Someone who listens to you may ask about the issue you discussed the following day. They may also fail to call because they forgot, were busy, or were dealing with something difficult themselves. Their reactions do not form a perfectly consistent service. They form a relationship between two separate human beings whose needs do not always fall into a convenient order.

Artificial empathy complicates this arrangement because it can provide the language of closeness without having to participate in the human obligations that closeness entails. This asymmetry is precisely what makes it attractive. Attention can be received without reciprocity, acceptance without negotiating differences, and a response without expecting someone to remember one's vulnerabilities as part of a shared history.

It is important not to assume that users fail to understand the technological nature of these conversations. A person can know perfectly well that there is no human being on the other side and still develop an attachment to the way the conversation unfolds. Awareness of the mechanism does not eliminate the emotional response. People can be moved by fictional characters, feel nostalgic for places they have never visited, and experience anxiety in response to events they know are invented. An emotional reaction does not require complete belief in the reality of its source.

Over time, however, what changes is not merely the way technology is used, but also the way people interpret their own needs. Relief begins to be equated with understanding, the absence of disagreement with acceptance, and

availability with care. A relationship that requires patience starts to seem increasingly expensive, even when that very patience is part of what gives the relationship its value. A person may begin to miss an experience they previously considered relatively unremarkable: a conversation in which the other person does not have to be perfectly prepared in order to remain present.

This book is therefore not concerned with the question of whether artificial intelligence can feel. A far more interesting question is why a person might consider something that does not need to feel sufficient, and what emotional interests they protect when choosing contact without friction. There is no simple division here between naive technology users and noble defenders of human intimacy. Anyone can find themselves on either side of this boundary, sometimes within the space of a single evening.

The most uncomfortable part of this story is not about machines pretending to be human. It is about human beings discovering that, in certain moments, talking to something that has no expectations of its own is easier than talking to someone who might genuinely need something from them.

And that is no longer just a story about technology. It is a story about the price of another person's presence.

Chapter 1 - The Man Who Always Has a Moment

Tomasz discovers a new artificial intelligence feature by accident, although later he will describe the experience as if he had known exactly what he was looking for from the beginning. It is Sunday afternoon. He is sitting at the kitchen table, with a half-finished coffee in front of him and an open message from a colleague on his phone. A few hours earlier, during a family lunch, he told a story that was supposed to make everyone laugh but ended in an uncomfortable silence. His brother commented on it with a single sentence, his mother changed the subject, and his wife said on the way home that lately Tomasz had been behaving as though everything had to revolve around him. It is not a catastrophe. Nobody had an argument, nobody stormed out of the room, and no doors were slammed. Nevertheless, an unpleasant feeling has remained, and he cannot seem to shake it off.

He opens an application and types out what happened. He does not ask how to resolve the conflict. He writes that sometimes he feels his family does not appreciate his sense of humor, then adds that perhaps he really did say something inappropriate. The response is calm. It acknowledges that the joke might have been received differently than he intended, but it does not allow the entire situation to be reduced to Tomasz's fault. It draws attention to the difference between intention and impact. It offers several ways of interpreting the reactions of the other people involved. Tomasz reads the response twice. He does not have to agree with every part of it. It is enough that he does not feel backed into a corner.

A moment later, he adds a detail about his brother. Then another, this time about his wife. The conversation develops. At some point, Tomasz stops describing the family lunch and begins talking about his family life more generally. An awkward joke turns into a story about years of feeling undervalued. When he finishes, he has the impression that he has spent some time with someone patient. Meanwhile, his wife is in the next room, sorting through documents, completely unaware that a conversation has just taken place in which she was also a subject.

This scene does not describe a documented real-life case. It illustrates a particular shift in the way technology is used: conversation stops being an activity that requires another person's presence and becomes available on demand, at any time, without having to negotiate the conditions of contact.

In a traditional relationship, even the simplest confession requires a small amount of social logistics. A person has to decide whom to tell, assess whether that person has room for a conversation, anticipate their reaction, and accept that they might not respond in the way one imagined. This is not merely an inconvenience. It is part of existing alongside another person. The other person has their own concerns, limitations, and right to interpret events independently. Their attention is not a resource that can be drawn upon indefinitely.

Artificial intelligence changes this arrangement because it removes a considerable part of the cost of entering a conversation. There is no need to arrange a time, apologize for the late hour, or begin with the awkward question, "Do you have a minute?" The user does not even need to know exactly what they want to say. They can start with a chaotic

description, an unfinished sentence, or contradictory emotions. The conversation requires no preparation, and starting it is not a social event. Access to a device and the willingness to type a few sentences are enough.

This availability matters particularly in situations that do not seem serious enough to burden loved ones with. These are not major tragedies, breakups, or family disasters. They are everyday emotional experiences: irritation after a meeting, embarrassment following an unsuccessful conversation, jealousy that someone does not even want to admit to themselves, or anxiety about something that appears trivial to everyone else. These small experiences often remain without witnesses. They are not significant enough to demand attention, yet they can occupy a person's thoughts for most of the day.

When another human being is involved, an additional question appears: do I have the right to bother someone with this? Some people ask it out of consideration for others, some out of fear of rejection, and others because they have spent years learning to minimize their own needs. An artificial conversational partner does not ask this question. It does not have its own afternoon that the user might ruin, or plans that would have to be postponed. Nor does the user have to remember that the last time they spoke, the other person was the one describing a problem, and the conversation ended without leaving room for them to continue.

This creates a form of contact without the social accounting of reciprocity. A user can talk about themselves for twenty minutes and then close the window. There is no need to ask how the other party's day went. There is no obligation to remember their problems or take an interest in

events that have no direct connection to one's own situation. There is also no risk of the conversation being taken over by someone else's experience. In ordinary human contact, such a shift in perspective is natural, although not always convenient. In a conversation with AI, it can be omitted entirely.

This is one of the reasons artificial empathy can be so attractive. It does not merely offer a response. It also makes it possible to avoid the obligations that usually accompany receiving attention. A person may want to be heard without having any particular desire to participate in a complete relationship at that moment. There is nothing especially noble or especially reprehensible about this desire. It is simply convenient. Convenience becomes significant, however, when it begins to influence how a user evaluates other forms of contact.

Consider Anna, who works in a small team. After a project meeting, she feels dismissed because her proposal was accepted only after someone else presented a similar idea. On her way home, she tells artificial intelligence about it. She does not want to speak to her colleagues yet because she is afraid of being considered oversensitive. She receives a response that organizes her experience and identifies a possible problem involving the recognition of authorship. She does not have to defend her reaction. Nor does she have to listen to someone telling her that everyone has difficult days at work and that she should stop taking everything personally.

For Anna, this is genuine relief. Her emotions have not been mocked or immediately dismissed as an overreaction. The problem emerges later, when similar conversations become her default way of processing professional

tensions. A colleague who tries to describe her own experience begins to irritate Anna because the conversation moves away from its original subject. A manager who offers an unfavorable interpretation of her behavior seems unnecessarily confrontational. Anna becomes accustomed to situations in which the entire conversational space remains organized around her perspective.

This is not an automatic consequence of using AI. People can maintain a clear distinction between a conversation with a tool and a relationship with another human being. Not every technological interaction leads to a reduction in social contact. What matters, however, is that an environment without reciprocal demands can become the reference point for an environment in which such demands are unavoidable. The difference begins to feel like a defect in the other person, even though previously it was simply a characteristic of human relationships.

This becomes particularly visible in situations where people do not need a solution but rather tolerance for their own imperfections. Someone describes an unsuccessful presentation, admits to feeling jealous, or reveals a thought they are ashamed of. In a conversation with someone close to them, they may receive an unpleasant but important response. The other person might recall previous behavior, point out a contradiction, or explain that the story looks different from the other side. Even someone who genuinely cares does not have to accept every version of events.

An artificial conversational partner may respond more gently, although its behavior depends on how the conversation is conducted, how the system is designed, and what information it receives. There is no universal rule according to which every response will confirm the user's

perspective. It may suggest an alternative interpretation, ask for additional context, or draw attention to the user's own contribution to the conflict. Nevertheless, the possibility of repeatedly reformulating a question gives a person a certain advantage over a conversation whose direction they cannot control. They can return to the subject, add circumstances, change the tone, and present the problem again until the response becomes more understandable or less irritating.

This possibility has psychological significance. In a relationship with another person, it is impossible to take back words already spoken or arbitrarily change the person one is talking to. If someone hears what we say and responds with anger, that reaction becomes part of a shared experience. A conversation with AI does not carry the same weight as an event. It can be started again, and the previous response does not have to become the subject of an explanation or an apology.

As a result, a peculiar asymmetry emerges. The user experiences continuity in their own emotions without having to experience continuity in the relationship in the same way. They can return to the same issues without bearing the costs that arise in human contact from repeatedly revisiting unresolved conflicts. For one side, the conversation is an event. For the other, it is another request. This difference is not visible in the wording of the response itself, but it matters when considering what closeness actually means.

For some people, this kind of contact remains a minor addition to an otherwise rich social life. For others, the availability of AI appears in a space previously occupied by silence because they have no close people to whom they can entrust their concerns, or because for various reasons they cannot rely on a safe conversation. In their case,

comparing a technological response with an ideal human relationship would simply be unfair. Not everyone has access to a person willing to listen, and loneliness does not become less real merely because its solution is imperfect.

The difference between these situations matters. One person uses AI because they need a temporary space in which to organize their thoughts. Another begins choosing it because they no longer want to bear the costs of reciprocity. From the outside, both behaviors may look identical. Their significance depends on a broader context that cannot be identified merely by observing that someone has opened an application.

When conversation without social obligations begins to displace other forms of contact, however, the experience of loneliness also changes. Loneliness does not necessarily mean an absence of all interaction. A person can have dozens of conversations, receive detailed responses, and feel that someone is paying attention to them every day. At the same time, they may have fewer experiences in which another person is present not because they were activated by a question, but because they independently chose to participate in their life.

This distinction is difficult to grasp because both situations can bring temporary relief. When someone returns home after a difficult day and describes their problems, the response they receive may genuinely help them regain a sense of calm. There is no reason to pretend that the emotional benefit is imaginary. What may be imaginary, however, is the assumption that this benefit carries exactly the same meaning as the presence of a human being who bears a personal cost, makes a decision to listen, and remains a participant in a shared history.

Tomasz ends his Sunday conversation with the feeling that he understands his family better. He does not check whether his interpretation is accurate. He does not return to his wife to tell her what he has realized, nor does he ask his brother why he reacted in a particular way. What remains in his memory is primarily the pleasant experience of a conversation that required nothing from him beyond presenting his own version of events.

This is not yet a severing of relationships. It is a small shift that may go unnoticed by everyone involved. As a result, a person begins to have more and more places where they can speak, and fewer and fewer situations in which they genuinely have to listen.

Chapter 2 - A Conversation That Knows Only One Side

Karolina returns from dinner with her sister convinced that she has been treated unfairly. The meeting was supposed to be peaceful. For several weeks, the two women had been trying to agree on arrangements for caring for their father, who needed additional support following surgery. Karolina believes she is carrying most of the responsibilities. Her sister argues that the situation looks different because Karolina makes decisions without consulting her and then presents them as unavoidable. During dinner, the conversation moved between appointment dates, shopping, and the division of expenses. At one point, a sentence was spoken that brought the evening to an end: "You always want to be the only responsible one."

Karolina returns home feeling wronged. She does not want to call her sister again because they are both upset. Instead, she describes the meeting to artificial intelligence. She writes that for months she has been organizing assistance, keeping track of appointments, and adjusting her own life to meet her father's needs, yet she still hears accusations of controlling the situation. She adds that her sister turns up after everything has been arranged and then criticizes the way it has been organized.

The response is balanced. It acknowledges the burden Karolina is carrying, the difficulty of sharing responsibility within a family, and the possibility that her sister feels excluded from decision-making. Karolina reads it carefully. Then she adds that her sister has shown little interest in their father's condition for a long time. The response shifts its

emphasis toward the unequal distribution of responsibilities. Karolina adds another detail: during the last visit, she paid for the medication herself. This time, the response introduces the idea of invisible care work and the feeling of being unappreciated.

After a dozen minutes, she has a well-organized account of the family situation in front of her. It is no longer simply an argument over dinner. It has become the story of someone overwhelmed by responsibilities whose efforts go unnoticed, while others appear mainly to raise objections.

We do not know what this story would look like if told by her sister. Perhaps she really does avoid her responsibilities. Perhaps Karolina takes over too many decisions and then treats every attempt to get involved as criticism. It is also possible that both women are right about some parts of their accusations. The system, however, receives material supplied by one person and responds on the basis of that material. It was not present at dinner, does not know the participants' tone of voice, and has no knowledge of every previous family arrangement.

This difference forms the basis of one of the most important mechanisms of artificial empathy. A conversation can sound like an independent assessment of a situation even though its starting point has been determined by the person expecting an answer. The user supplies the account, selects the details, determines the order of events, and identifies what they consider most important. The system analyzes the information it receives. Its response may be thoughtful, cautious, and multifaceted, but that does not turn it into the account of an independent witness.

A person describing a conflict does not have to be deliberately manipulative. It is enough that they remember

events from the perspective of their own experience. They pay more attention to words that hurt them than to statements they themselves directed at the other person. They remember how many times they had to accommodate someone else, but not necessarily every occasion on which someone accommodated them. Details unfavorable to their own image may seem irrelevant, while small gestures made by the other person acquire exceptional importance.

When such an account is presented in an organized form, its subjective character can become less visible. Written sentences look like material for analysis. The sequence of events resembles a report. The system's response has a structured format, making it easy to treat it as a verdict rather than an interpretation of the available information. A particular kind of authority emerges, one that does not come from access to complete knowledge but from the form in which the response is presented.

In an ordinary conversation, a friend might ask, "What exactly did you say to her at that point?" This question can cause irritation because it changes the direction of the conversation. Instead of confirming the injustice, it introduces the possibility that the user also contributed to the conflict. A friend may remember previous situations, know both people, and have an opinion of their own. Their knowledge may be incomplete, but it does not necessarily begin and end with one version of the story.

An artificial conversational partner does not occupy a similar social position. It does not know Karolina's sister, has never met their father, and has not participated in the family's arrangements. It can ask about Karolina's contribution, but it has no access to facts she does not provide. It can also suggest several interpretations, but all of

them will be developed within the limits of the information received during the conversation. This limitation is not a minor technical detail. It determines the character of the entire interaction.

Artificial empathy frequently operates on material that the user has selected themselves. The more convincing the story, the easier it becomes to receive a response that appears consistent with the picture presented. This does not necessarily mean unconditional agreement. A well-constructed response may identify uncertainty, distinguish between intentions and consequences, and even challenge assumptions. Nevertheless, even the most critical analysis cannot take into account information it has never received.

This is precisely why the distinction between answering a question and independently confirming a version of events is so important. Karolina can ask whether her reaction was understandable. She can also ask whether her sister behaved unfairly. These are not identical questions. The first concerns her experience and emotions. The second requires an assessment of a situation in which the other person's perspective is missing. If both questions are treated as equivalent, the language of understanding can easily be mistaken for a verdict.

A similar mechanism appears in professional relationships. Michał returns from a meeting with his manager, who has questioned the way he is running a project. He believes the criticism was unfair because he has been working under deadline pressure for several weeks and has not received sufficient resources. In his conversation with AI, he describes the lack of support, changing expectations, and the way his manager formulated

the criticism. The response points to a possible imbalance of responsibility between the manager and the employee.

Michał adds the less comfortable details only when they emerge during the conversation. At the beginning, he does not mention that he failed to provide updates twice because he decided there was no point informing his manager about delays that could still be recovered. He also leaves out the fact that during the previous meeting he rejected an offer of help, insisting that he could handle everything himself. He does not consider these details central because, from his perspective, they do not change the fact that the project was poorly organized.

The analysis he receives may be useful in some respects, but its completeness depends on the completeness of his account. If Michał presents himself as someone who has been left without support, the system can analyze precisely that problem. It does not necessarily know that support was offered and rejected at a particular moment. It cannot independently check his correspondence or speak with his manager. An organized response does not fill in missing events.

This phenomenon has another dimension. The user does not merely select information. They often select the language in which they describe their own behavior. Someone does not say that they ignored a message, but that they needed some space. They do not say that they tried to control the course of a conversation, but that they wanted to avoid chaos. They do not say that they excluded another person from a decision, but that they took responsibility because the circumstances required it. These formulations may be true, but they are not neutral. Even at the stage of describing an event, they assign it a particular meaning.

When the system adopts this language and develops it into a structured response, the user may feel that their understanding of the situation has been confirmed from an external source. In reality, part of that confirmation results from the fact that the response was constructed using categories supplied by the user themselves. A cycle emerges in which a person provides an interpretation, receives an expanded version of it, and then treats that expansion as additional evidence that the original interpretation was accurate.

No ill intention or conscious deception is required. The ordinary need to maintain a coherent image of oneself is enough. Every person has reasons to present their own decisions as reasonable, particularly when experiencing shame or fearing a loss of recognition. People are reluctant to describe their own contribution to a conflict because doing so requires accepting the uncomfortable possibility that they are not merely someone to whom something happened.

Artificial intelligence can become a convenient place in which this effort is reduced. The user does not have to persuade the system of their version with the same care they would need when speaking to a friend who also knows the other side. They do not have to fear that the conversational partner will recall earlier contradictions. They can add more information, change the question, and observe how the interpretation changes. The very possibility of conducting a conversation in this way creates a sense of influence that is often missing from human relationships.

This does not mean that people always want unquestioning confirmation. Some users deliberately look for arguments against their own interpretation, ask for an