The following glossary of terms and "AI in plain language" text are from a Colloquium on Magnifica Humanitas on August 12, 2026 with the Priests of the Sacred Heart and wider community in Hales Corners, Wisconsin. Dr. Khaled Tannir prepared this information as a companion to his presentation. https://linkedin.com/in/tannir/
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https://dehoniansusa.org/dehonianspirituality/magnifica-humanitas-colloquium/

REFERENCE Glossary of terms

Artificial intelligence (AI)	Machines performing tasks that normally need human intelligence — perception, language, reasoning, choice. *Analogy: the whole food industry.*
Intelligence	A capacity for goal-directed action informed by understanding: to perceive, make sense, and act. *Plainly: a way of thinking that lets you take action.*
Artificial	Produced by a machine running algorithms that predict the likely answer, rather than by a mind that understands.
Algorithm	A precise, repeatable procedure a machine follows to turn an input into an output.
Machine learning (ML)	The branch of AI in which systems learn patterns from examples rather than from hand-written rules. *Analogy: a restaurant that learns its regulars' tastes.*
Supervised learning	Learning from labelled examples so as to handle new, unseen cases. *Like a child learning "cat" from a few cats.*

Generalization	Applying a pattern learned from examples to cases never seen before — the point of learning.
Deep learning	Machine learning using many-layered neural networks. *Analogy: a Michelin-starred chef's trained palate*.
Neural network	A layered web of simple units, loosely inspired by the brain, that learns by adjusting its connections.
Generative AI	AI that produces new content — text, images, audio, code. *Analogy: the chef who invents new dishes*.
Large language model (LLM)	A large generative model specialized in language, trained to predict text. Behind today's chat assistants.
Foundation model	A large, general-purpose model, trained broadly, that can be adapted to many specific tasks rather than only one.
Model	The trained system itself — in effect a large file of learned parameters that generates output. *Analogy: the chef, once taught.* Example: GPT-4.
Tool / application (product)	The product built around a model that people actually use — an interface, often adding memory, retrieval, and other tools. *Analogy: the restaurant*. Example: ChatGPT.

Plain-words recap

In the talk we said it simply: artificial intelligence is a machine doing things that normally take human intelligence — recognizing a face, understanding a sentence, choosing a route. No consciousness, no inner life; only tasks we once believed only people could perform.

Taking the term apart: two words

It helps to separate the two words, because each carries weight. Intelligence, in the working sense used here, is a capacity for goal-directed action informed by understanding: to perceive a situation, make sense of it, and decide what to do about it. Perception, reasoning, and action form a single loop — a way of thinking that issues in doing. When a child sees a cup at the table's edge, grasps that it will fall, and moves it back, that whole arc — notice, understand, act — is intelligence at work.

Artificial marks how the same outward results are produced: by a machine executing algorithms — precise, repeatable procedures — that compute the most probable answer from patterns in data. This is the crucial distinction. A person understands the meaning of what they handle; a machine calculates what is statistically likely to come next. The two can yield strikingly similar outputs — a fluent sentence, a correct route — by entirely different means. One rests on comprehension and lived experience; the other on prediction over patterns, without awareness that anything is being understood at all. Keeping this difference in view is what allows an honest conversation about both the power and the limits of these tools.

A more careful definition

More precisely, artificial intelligence (AI) is the branch of computer science concerned with building systems that perform tasks associated with human cognition: perception, reasoning, language, planning, and decision-making. The decisive shift of the last two decades is how these systems are built. For most of the field's history, engineers wrote explicit rules by hand. Today the dominant approach is machine learning: rather than being told the rules, the system is shown a great many examples and learns the patterns for itself.

About the author

Dr. Khaled Tannir is an AI and data-at-scale architect based in Montréal (Canada) and a lecturer at McGill University's School of Continuing Studies, where he teaches applied artificial intelligence and large-scale data engineering. He is the author of five technical books on AI and Data at Scale processing and has served as a technical reviewer for many others.