

25 Dec 2024

Dear friends and colleagues,

This holiday season I am thinking a lot about progress: mine and ours.

My post-COVID condition has improved so much in 2024. There's more progress to be had, but I am grateful to report that I am now returning to my work at the university. My group presented three papers at NeurIPS this year, and as the new year approaches, we're preparing for new collaborations and follow-ups. We cannot let this slow us down.

I am also thinking about the progress we make as communities. When I joined our field, over a decade ago, we were hand-deriving the gradient calculations for our neural networks, struggling to initialize the weights, and training on small fixed datasets of tens or hundreds of thousands of examples.

Now our field has transformed beyond recognition. We build neural networks *with neural networks* in software so reliable that much of our focus has shifted to data and benchmarks. We've created companies that draw billions in investment, we train on an entire internet's worth of data, and my grandmother now asks me about AGI.

Progress like this isn't abstract—it's deeply personal. For example, I am on a monoclonal antibody treatment that has now largely resolved the eczema I struggled with for a decade. A condition that once seemed an immutable part of my life has been transformed by a drug that simply didn't exist ten years ago. I hope that our work in our field will one day drive progress like this in the wellbeing of our species.

Before getting sick, I interacted with institutions as if they were platonic entities, operating under fixed rules. But I've learned to see institutions as organic networks of incentives that bind people with a shared purpose, and progress happens because people choose to make it happen. Every advancement in our field comes from us, from people choosing to push boundaries.

This progress is built with human hands and sustained by human communities—by all of you. What we have built is alive, growing, and it demands our careful stewardship: a community that protects its members in times of need and celebrates our collective achievements.

So, thank you, friends, for everything you've done—for me personally and for our shared work. I am deeply grateful to work alongside you, and I look forward to another decade of progress together.

Warmest regards



Chris Maddison