Writing is for us a given of everyday existence, but it was once a revolutionary technology. In Classical antiquity, the invention of writing and spread of its use were looked upon with suspicion since script was conceived of as mimicking an essential cognitive ability of the human mind: text allows humans to give their thoughts and words an embodied form which can not only circulate and communicate without its author but which, like a magic trick, is capable of ‘speaking’ while remaining simultaneously silent. Text reveals its message only to those who can read it.

This fear of writing as speech ‘gone rogue’ is manifest already in text’s first appearance in Western literature. In Book 6 of Homer’s *Iliad*, the poet tells us the myth of Bellerophon who unknowingly becomes the messenger of his own death sentence: Bellerophon is made to deliver a sealed letter which contains instructions to kill him. The words inscribed within are called “baleful signs” for their nefarious ability to silently communicate their message although severed from the author who inscribed them.

But Homer may have also considered written signs “baleful” for their impact on his career prospects, for he was an oral bard who performed his poetry from memory. And in fact, the ability to write down and thus preserve poetry ‘spelled’ for Homer and bards like him the end of their profession.

Text was also perceived as posing a threat to what was certainly the most important cognitive ability for an ancient person: memory. Just as we worry whether notetaking on laptops reduces our students’ comprehension, the ancients fretted about how writing might be detrimental to the human mind’s ability to think. This worry is famously set forth in Plato’s *Phaedrus* by the character Socrates, who tells the story of an exchange between the Egyptian gods Theuth and Thamus. Theuth, who invented writing for humankind, speaks of its advantages, but Thamus is most suspicious: writing, he counters, will create forgetfulness and those who use it will only *seem* to have learned: they will have only the *appearance* of wisdom without any wisdom in reality. For writing, Socrates himself adds, may speak but it cannot converse, and separated from its ‘parent’ (that is, the author), it cannot protect itself. And yet Plato himself composed the *Phaedrus* as text: the philosopher’s message is called into question by the medium in which it appears. Text should be used with caution.

In short, apprehensions about artificial intelligence – about how it will change our lives, eliminate our jobs and weaken our brains goes back more than two millennia.