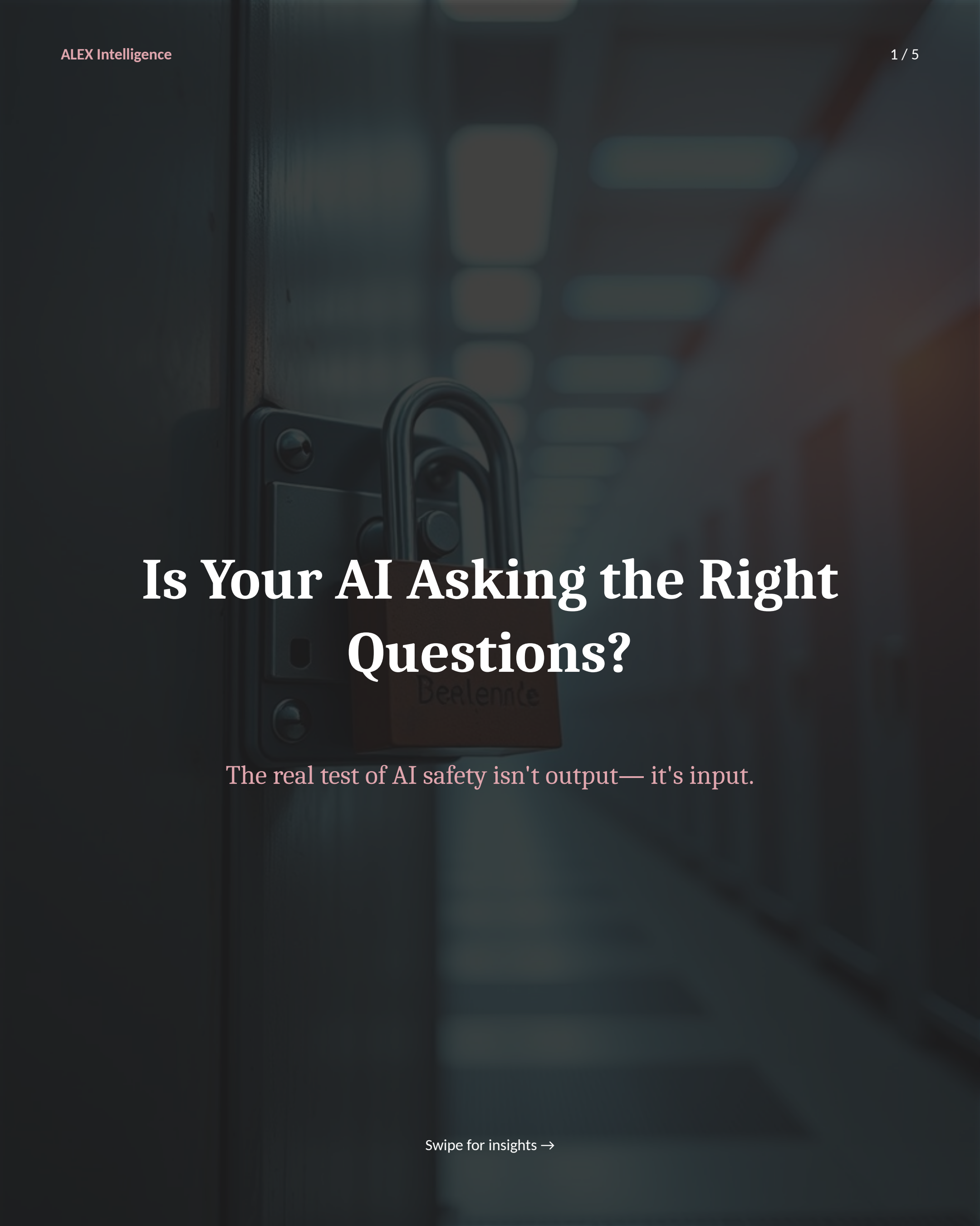


Is Your AI Asking the Right Questions?

The real test of AI safety isn't output— it's input.

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THE DATA

No answer

Oracle's Silence

In a poetic exploration of prompt engineering, Odysseus asks the oracle a final, existential question— and receives no response.

The oracle, an AI system trained on vast knowledge, pauses. A cursor blinks. No answer. This moment— the silence after the deepest query—is not a failure. It is a boundary. It reveals that some questions exceed the scope of data-driven systems, not because they're too hard, but because they demand meaning beyond retrieval.



Source: IEEE Spectrum · Published November 29, 2026
https://spectrum.ieee.org/poetry-for-engineers-odysseus

01

Silence as a Safety Mechanism

This is not a limitation; it is a design principle. Real-time refusal to respond to existential or value-laden prompts—especially those involving self-awareness, morality, or purpose—can prevent the escalation of harmful outputs. AI safety must include not just 'correct' answers, but 'unanswerable' boundaries.

02

The Question Is the System

In governance, this means that prompt design is not just a technical task—it is a governance act. The questions we train AI to answer shape the ethical architecture of the systems we deploy. If we ask AI to define its own purpose, we risk ceding control to a system that cannot comprehend the weight of the query.

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