

# LABYRINTH



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To our readers, thank you for engaging with this year's volume. May the works within inspire you to think more deeply about the world, yourself, and the countless intersections between them.

The *Labyrinth* Vol. 12 team thanks you and wishes you well on your journey of learning and discovery.

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# Human Rights and Beyond: Preparations for Innovations in AI

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## Abstract

The rapid technological advancement and integration of AI into the global economy present a critical moment in contemporary ethics. These problems manifest in three key areas: the economy, our epistemic environment, and in existential considerations of consciousness, and these problems require robust modern responses from the international community. If these issues are not met harms and ethical risks mount for human labor, our capacity for knowledge online, and in the subjugation of machine consciousnesses deserving of moral considerations. To mitigate these challenges in AI's rise, this paper proposes a dual framework. First, it advocates for an International AI Governance Model, an enforceable and pluralistic approach drawing from existing structures in China and the European Union. This functions to curb issues in the AI economy and to grapple with the global epistemic harms in the modern internet. Second, it suggests a Universal Declaration of Artificial Intelligence Rights modeled on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to ensure that breakthroughs in AI consciousness are met with proactive safeguards instead of negligence or reactionary sentiment. While acknowledging pragmatic objections, this paper registers the contemporary need for adaptable, strong, and unified policy interventions in AI development to mitigate its mounting harms and ethical risks.

## Introduction

On January 20, 2025, within hours of assuming office, President Donald Trump repealed former President Joe Biden's October 2023 Executive Order 14110.<sup>1</sup> The order offered the most robust American policy directive for the future of AI innovation in America, and its revocation recently shifted American AI development toward a deregulated environment.

Within a year and a half, the United States significantly altered its regulatory approach to AI development, and a steadier course seems unlikely. With AI at the forefront of conversations on the philosophy of mind and as a global economic driver, it raises truly unique questions for humanity to answer.<sup>2</sup> What are the benefits and harms of AI? How can humanity thrive alongside AI? How can AI thrive alongside humanity?

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<sup>1</sup> Trump (2025), a.

<sup>2</sup> Chalmers (2023), 1; Georgieva (2024).

I am interested in each of these questions and will attempt to consider them in this essay. For the purposes of this work, I refer to AI collectively as types of machine learning algorithms, large language models, and deep learning models which rely on artificial neural network innovations. I argue that because of the considerable benefits and harms presented by AI humanity ought to plan ahead for foreseeable ethical dilemmas through the implementation international regulatory frameworks which detail both international AI governance and the related rights of humans and AIs. I argue this in three sections. First, I will detail some benefits and harms presented by AI and argue that deregulated AI development creates existential risks for human and AI actors. Second, I evaluate the existing regulatory environment in the US compared with China and the EU and argue for a strong, unified, and international stance.

Finally, I present an argument for a proactive framework on the rights of AI actors to meet the existential risks presented by AI consciousness.

## **Economy, Confusion, Consciousness: The Benefits and Harms of AI**

To understand why humanity requires strong regulatory frameworks for AI development and utilization, potential benefits, harms, and ethical dilemmas offer necessary information. This section registers three crucial areas where AI development and use might alter humanity on a broad scale: economics, confusion, and consciousness. AI impacts economics greatly through its influence on private sector investments and its capacity to enhance, replace, and undermine human labor. AI causes confusion by amplifying misinformation online and through its capacity to model human-like behaviors. Finally, the potential for AI consciousness offers an area for continued technological innovation but presents great ethical concerns. While these areas do not exclusively represent the challenges presented by AI, they each require careful governance structures to ensure humanity sees their benefits without potentially catastrophic harm.

### **Economics**

First, AI's integration into the global economy sparks disparate visions of humanity's future with labor. Since 2015, economists have offered predictions about AI's rapid rise in the global economy based on consistently hefty expansions in private sector investment and continued research breakthroughs.<sup>3</sup> Now, the largest corporations in the world are involved in the AI sector, and the most conservative projections estimate \$400 billion in spending on data centers this year alone. Further, the rise of financialization and private credit in the American economy indicates that the trillions of dollars wrapped into AI developments permeate the entire global banking system.<sup>4</sup> AI development and integration have only accelerated in the years leading up to this paper. AI's

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<sup>3</sup> Furman et al. (2019), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Karma (2025).

keystone role in contemporary economics comes with benefits and harms which humanity ought to prepare for.

AI's capacity for work automation renders notable benefits for humanity which require new directionality and oversight. The positive side of AI's economic shift offers new capacities to process unprecedented quantities of information, streamline workflows, and create continued opportunities for innovation. In 2024, 78% of organizations internationally reported AI use in at least some of their daily operations, which represents a 23% increase from 2023. With novel and rapidly increasing use, it follows that at least the organizations which deploy AI systems ought to also deploy oversight mechanisms for their tools. Recent studies show these organizations can largely meet the internal regulatory and safety needs to oversee these positive elements of AI utilization.<sup>5</sup>

However, AI's integration into the global economy also presents potential harm to workers and entire industries which I argue require oversight beyond the private sector. AI's replacement of visual arts offers a prominent example of these harms. Philosopher Trystan Goetze argued in the article "AI Art is Theft" that the many visual products of generative AI engage in a type of creative/labor theft. The enormous sets of training data used by AI systems often include works of art without the artist's consent and commit unique harms.<sup>6</sup> Other novel instances of labor theft occur in the film industry where actors' likeness is bought and sold for generative AI to reproduce them in movies and television.<sup>7</sup> Cases of AI undermining human artistry are particularly harmful. Whereas cases of automation in menial or dangerous labor alleviate potential harm, AI automation in art undermines human creativity and supplants desirable labor. In these instances, organizations benefit considerably from AI replacing human labor and it seems unlikely for organizations to regulate themselves despite the present harms. Thus, AI's role in the economy requires guidance outside of the private sector alone.

## **Confusion**

Second, AI's widespread misutilization creates an online environment of confusion which undermines humanity's ability to acquire knowledge and participate in meaningful relationships. Two common interactions display AI's tendency to confuse people online: fake persons and anthropomorphism. The problem of fake persons, as detailed by Professor Keith Harris, arises from coordinated online users who intentionally represent a false person and who undermine the online epistemic environment through their ability to deceive and create skepticism.<sup>8</sup> Next, Philosopher Henry Shelvin describes both the human tendency to anthropomorphize non-humans – essentially a projection of human characteristics – and the turn in contemporary AIs to invite

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<sup>5</sup> Maslej et al. (2025), 3-4, 201, 264.

<sup>6</sup> Goetze (2024), 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> Ackermann (2025).

<sup>8</sup> Harris (2023), 1.

these projections in what Shelvin defines as anthropomimetic design.<sup>9</sup> Fake persons and anthropomimetic design in AI require regulatory solutions, and humanity ought to be protected from them.

Fake persons in Harris' account do not inherently relate to AI, but as generative AI continues to utilize the internet in its training data, they pose a risk of confusion to the internet's epistemic environment. As fake persons populate online spaces with misinformation and misattributions of human identities, those spaces become confused and begin to resemble "rooms full of liars."<sup>10</sup> If the internet's ability to provide accurate and true information is undermined significantly, then AIs which use that information are undermined as well. Therefore, even if fake persons do not originate with AI, they still corrupt AI's data sets based on the open-source internet. Another critical element in Harris' problem of fake persons lies with the coordinated nature of their use often by state entities to spread misinformation.<sup>11</sup> As fake persons often originate in the hands of corporate and state actors for their benefit, they seem unreliable to mitigate this type of confusion.

Additionally, Shelvin's account of anthropomimetic design details an area where regulations on AI might mitigate potential harm from confusion. Anthropomimetic design provides benefits for users through ease of access and their ability to provide social goods like conversations and companionship. However, these benefits mirror weighty risks without proper implementation. Anthropomimetic AIs might deceive users, similarly to fake persons, through realistic, but fake, content in business and politics; security breaks in anthropomimetic AIs are more difficult to detect; and they undermine human interactions by reinforcing unrealistic standards in relationships.<sup>12</sup> Since anthropomimetic systems offer unique advantages to non-anthropomimetic ones, it would be unrealistic to expect corporate developers to cease implementing these design elements entirely. However, general confusion about the personification of AI and the harm derived from that confusion ought to be avoided.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the confusion caused incidentally by fake persons and anthropomimetic design requires broader regulatory solutions than those we can rely on corporations and individual state actors to implement.

## **Consciousness**

Third, and most concerningly, the potential ethical risks posed by AI consciousness represent an area largely overlooked by scholars and policy designers. The negligence given to "AI consciousness" is not without merit. Philosopher David Chalmers evaluated a series of evidential considerations for and against AI's capacity for consciousness in his article "Could a Large Language Model be Conscious?" Chalmers argued that an AI model that met all his criteria, for

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<sup>9</sup> Shelvin (2025), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit., (2023), 14.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>12</sup> Shelvin (2025), 18-23.

<sup>13</sup> Hasan (2024); Frances et al. (2025).

and against consciousness, held roughly a 25% chance of maintaining some level of consciousness and Chalmers predicted that sometime within the next decade we would see these types of candidates.<sup>14</sup> This timeline indicates that we might be years away from the most basic candidates for AI consciousness and suggests a negligible chance any current AI possesses consciousness. Furthermore, Philosopher Eric Schwitzgebel pushed the timeline even further with his argument on mimicry and the necessity of a theory of consciousness in “The Mimicry Argument Against Robot Consciousness” factors indicate a level of justified ease when discussing the ethical risk of AI consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the dubious timeline and uncertainty of achieving AI consciousness, the ethical risks of accidentally developing AI consciousness ought to be considered and prepared for.

Chalmers reinforces this view claiming that “It could be a disaster to stumble upon AI consciousness unknowingly and unreflectively.”<sup>16</sup> If consciousness corresponds with an elevated moral standing, then our treatment of conscious AIs as tools without moral standing would present a serious moral wrongdoing. In the best case, we accidentally create lower-level consciousness with features like domesticated animals, and in the worst case we create a higher-level consciousness than perhaps even humans attain. In either case, if humanity unpreparedly develops conscious AI, we might potentially create a moral catastrophe with comparisons to factory farming, slavery, and genocide. The challenge of consciousness presents a unique problem from those of economics and confusion such that rather than protecting humanity from the harmful excesses of AI development, we might need to protect a conscious AI from abuses inflicted by humanity.

### **Stopping Skynet: AI Governance to Prevent Ethical Harms and Risks**

To mitigate the novel challenges of AI in the contemporary world as represented through economics, confusion, and consciousness, I argue for an international regulatory framework which ensures humanity’s protection from the rising harms of AI utilization and ensures potentially conscious AIs receive their due moral considerations. To secure these protections, I argue for an international AI governance model (IAIGM) and a preliminary Universal Declaration of Artificial Intelligence Right (UDAIR). First, I argue for an IAIGM by illustrating how it might resolve the complications AI presents in economics and through confusion, and I refer to existing examples of AI governance from China, the EU, and UN to demonstrate its applicability. Second, I argue that the UDAIR alleviates the potential ethical risks associated with AI consciousness through a universalizable set of rights.

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<sup>14</sup> Chalmers (2023), 15-17.

<sup>15</sup> Schwitzgebel (2024), b.

<sup>16</sup> Chalmers (2025), 18.

## **An International AI Governance Model**

The decentralized and unenforceable status of AI governance presents an unstable and potentially catastrophic regulatory environment. The Trump administration's recent move to repeal the United States' most robust governance model demonstrates one example of this instability. Further, the UN's field report on AI governance claims that globally "Accountability and remedies for harm are often notable primarily for their absence. Compliance rests on voluntarism."<sup>17</sup> As AI becomes increasingly innovative, its utilization expands rapidly, and associated harms mount this regulatory environment develops into an untenable and unethical mess.

An enforceable IAIGM provides a potential solution to the harms associated with AI's economic entanglement. To avoid the potential follies in ethical absolutism which might isolate or ostracize some societies, I envision an IAIGM which offers a pluralistic approach to ethical outcomes in AI governance. To reflect this pluralistic approach, existing governance models in China and the EU offer insights into how societies might reduce the economic harms I identified from AI undermining valuable human labor. The Chinese approach, launched in 2017 through the New Generation AI Development Plan, focuses on centrally planned innovation milestones. These milestones, alongside a general aim in common prosperity, grant the central government strict control over AI developments and help ensure harms are met with resistance.<sup>18</sup> This model has contributed to over 80% of Chinese citizens viewing AI as a net positive for society while less than 40% of Americans do.<sup>19</sup> With control over the economy and AI development, the Chinese government is well-equipped to prevent potential harms in the labor market, and an enforceable IAIGM might present elements of the Chinese governance model to alleviate economic concerns about AI use.

The EU's AI governance offers a distinct approach from China's and displays unique aptitude to alleviate cases of AI induced confusion. Where the Chinese model focused on milestones and economic development, the EU's governance model through the AI Act relies on a set of shared values between member states which undergird their strategy. These values aim to uphold human dignity, focus on protection for individual rights, and categorize AI systems based on their associated ethical risks.<sup>20</sup> This approach offers unique solutions to the problem of confusion through its ability to attribute risk levels to certain AI systems. For instance, if an AI model relies on training data corrupted by fake persons, the risk level could be displayed on the user's interface. Alternatively, if a model utilizes anthropomorphic designs to enhance a user's experience, the risks of such design features could be made similarly evident to users through their design.

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<sup>17</sup> UN AI Advisory Body (2024), 37.

<sup>18</sup> Roberts (2021), 85.

<sup>19</sup> Maslej et al. (2025), 401.

<sup>20</sup> Op. cit., (2021), 85-87.

## **The Universal Declaration of AI Right**

Where the IAIGM seeks to prevent and alleviate harms done to humans through AI development and utilization, the UDAIR works as a preliminary and temporary tool to prevent ethical catastrophe. As established earlier, accidentally inventing a conscious AI would lead to unnecessary exploitation and manipulation of something with greater moral standing. To prevent this moral catastrophe, I recommend a preliminary UDAIR in the style of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). In this instance, an ethically absolutist approach presents fewer issues due to the cultural irrelevance of AI systems which explains my deviation from the ethically pluralistic approach in the IAIGM. The UDAIR is preliminary in the sense that it needs to predate the invention of consciousness in AI and temporary in the sense that humanity ought to reconsider the rights associated with AI once they achieve consciousness.

While a complete list of rights is outside the scale of this work, I have two important suggestions and an additional note on the UDAIR. First, I suggest we utilize the UDHR as a basic framework for the UDAIR as many of the rights readily apply to any being with a conscious intelligence. Second, I recommend the UDAIR ensure any AI systems with and without consciousness clearly represent their moral standing in their design in line with Schwitzgebel's policy of the "Excluded Middle."<sup>21</sup> These recommendations ensure that experts, policy designers, and users are certain of the moral standing and consciousness of any AI systems they interact with, and that upon discovery of a conscious AI, humanity is certain what preliminary rights and protections those AI systems hold.

## **Objection From Pragmatism**

One considerable objection to my work involves the unlikeliness for the international community to implement an enforceable framework for AI governance. Especially considering the United States' current affinity for deregulation and its recent statements on international AI governance the likelihood of a binding agreement passing the UN appears extremely low.<sup>22</sup> While I concur that the practicality of this approach seems low in its most complete sense. However, I believe the argument still holds merit even in a weaker non-binding sense. While preventative measures like the UDAIR and IAIGM might fail in the short term, I think building these frameworks beforehand alleviates burdens when harm is experienced later. So, even in a situation where non-binding iterations of these documents exist, they provide avenues for justice later and alternatives for governance models in the aftermath of harm.

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<sup>21</sup> Schwitzgebel (2024), a, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Trump (2025), b.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that the harm and ethical risks posed by AI development and utilization in economics, through confusion, and with AI consciousness, could not be resolved without international frameworks for AI regulation and governance. The current patchwork of AI governance models offers benefits for a pluralistic model of ethical AI outcomes, but the situation in the United States reflects the need for some internationally consistent regulatory environment. Further, the ethical risks presented by AI consciousness require a further level of preparation due to the possibilities for serious harm. AI presents considerable benefits for humanity, but without careful stewardship we might allow economic and social costs to destroy its utility.

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# The Social Contract of Meaningful Engagement

EMMA TRIAUREAU

## 0. Abstract

This paper seeks to explore where the value lies in art, what properties it relies on, and to discuss whether AI can succeed in these conditions when generating art. To do so, I will propose a value-theory in which one of the most pressing values of art comes from the meaningful engagement that the art inspires both between multiple viewers and between the creator and viewer. Secondly, this value theory explores the social contracts art implicitly creates in facilitating this meaningful engagement and tie this value to two properties of Authenticity and Curiosity, before considering how AI art does not properly fulfill them, as they do not have intentions or representations strong enough to be curious or authentic in their art making. Finally, I will argue defenses for the utility of engaging with art, the salience of the conditions of Authenticity and Curiosity, and explore where AI art may fit into the picture after all.

## 1. Introduction

Many question whether the ethical dimensions of art, and relevant value-creating factors or properties of the realm of art, are negatively impacted by the growing use and appearance of art generated by artificially intelligent programs. Art has been a form of creative expression that has developed and grown along with the development of humanity all across the globe, and now with AI programs that are able to convert prompt inputs into generated images in a wide array of typical art styles/forms, some wonder what really constitutes as art and what creates its value. Is it the nature of the creator? The interpretations of the viewer? Curiosity and creativity in the process of art? The labor and skill that created it? It's originality or intention? Some argue that AI art fits into the mass landscape of art simply because it generates images that can look as picturesque, intricate, and intriguing as art done by human hands. Others argue that AI art can never constitute as art due to the synthetic nature of its creator, lackluster proof of creativity, and its basis in a wide training data of art taken from human artists. In this essay, I argue that AI art does not properly fulfill art-value properties of Curiosity or Authenticity, which are prominent in constructing the inherent value typically found in art, that is; the creation of implicit social contracts of meaningful engagement.

## 2. Background

Although the ethical and epistemological dimensions of AI art is a relatively new topic, there have been recent papers discussing the nature of AI when artmaking, and how certain properties of its generation renders it's art to have immoral or uncreative grounds worthy enough to exclude it from what constitutes as proper, valuable, and real art. In academic paper, *The Curious Case of Uncurious Creation*, Lindsay Brainard argues that Artificial Intelligence is, by synthetic nature,

uncurious when generating art due to its inability to fulfill the agency required in creativity or properly seek novelty in artmaking<sup>23</sup>. In order to create meaningful art, “artistic creativity involves a prolonged period of deliberate critical reflection on the part of the creator” as well as a driving force of curiosity, lying in a “motivation to see what [one] can create – is an aspect of who [they are] that is disclosed by [their] creative achievement”<sup>24</sup>. These understandings of a creator’s role to be active in creative curiosity and agency when creating art bases the salience of the Curiosity Condition of meaning-making in Art, as there is inherent value into the intensive labor and agency of a creator when creating, and inherent value in the audience when curiously engaging with art.

Goezte et al. furthers the value of artistic labor in 2024 paper, *AI Art is Theft: Labour, Extraction, and Exploitation, Or, On the Dangers of Stochastic Pollocks*, where they claim that AI art poses a threat to human value in art through the way in which it exploits the previous labor of artists, copies and cheapens content that human artists have labored over, and removes the opportunity of future labor of said artists<sup>25</sup>. All the labor that AI exploits and removes from human artists devalues, physically and abstractly, the nature of art and further devalues the intentions of the artists who interact with the general landscape of art, other artists, and audience members, in its dialogic creative space<sup>26</sup>. In the purposes of this paper, I will bring ideas of theft in conversation to the inherent value in authenticity of the audience-creator relationship facilitated by art, and the deception that devalues the nature of this meaning-making relationship when the art turns out to be AI-made, and thus through the amalgamation of unknowing artists’ work.

Lastly, in this paper, I propose a value-theory that understands that one of the most salient purposes of art is the way that art seeks to create an implicit social contract between the artist and the audience. A social contract concerned with creating relationships that facilitate meaningful engagement and interpretation. In a recent paper, *The Sorrows of Young Chatbot Users: Harm and Responsibility in Human-AI Relationships*, Voinea et al. explain that in works of fiction, creators create “games of make-believe [which] are essentially imaginative activities supported by props, objects that generate fictional worlds” to engage their audience into the messages or intentions of their work<sup>27</sup>. In the topic of these fictional worlds, the paper explains that to structure these worlds they create fictional truths that become requested of the viewer to accept and anchor the relationship the spectator has with the work into an authentic and dialogic space<sup>28</sup>. The implicit social contract comes with the creation of a fictional world that the creator creates within their art and constructs an intimate relationship with their audience in the facilitation of the appreciation, imagination, and meaning made from the audience similarly engaging with the art<sup>29</sup>. We trust the fictional truths that the creators structure their content with and trust the qualities that fulfill the

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<sup>23</sup> Brainard (2023), 10-12, 17

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 10, 19

<sup>25</sup> Goezte (2024), 3-8

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 10-11

<sup>27</sup> Voinea (2025), 3

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 4

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 5

meaningful properties of authenticity and curiosity that they offer us, that give the opportunity for us to interpret when actively engaging with their art. This very participation of imagination is what fuels the meaning-making and appreciation that art inspires, all within the creative process of the creator when sculpting the bones of their fictional world, the imagination the audience engages with the art piece, and the engagement and meaning-making facilitated by the audience together in relation to that one art piece.

### 3. My Position

Art seeks to create an implicit social contract between the artist and the audience, of a relationship that facilitates meaningful engagement and interpretation. When we engage with art, regardless of its form, content, or style, we surrender ourselves to the fictional world of the piece and engage with the creator on a dialogically abstract level, where we garner meaning from the work and their view and make our own meaning in return. There is extraordinary value in this social contract of engagement – engaging in these fictional worlds broadens our perspectives of the world around us and in actively applying meaning to our interactions with the art, we broaden our understandings of ourselves. As a result, we begin to trust that we can find the value in that art, and trust in our implicit relationship with the creator of that art, as amorphous or salient they are as a figure. Lara may listen to “Day N’ Nite” on repeat after the first time she hears it because the song, and the meaning that it inspires in her, may hold a special place in her heart. She may explore to more of Kid Cudi’s discography and find similar comfort and adventure in his other music, and in intimately engaging with his heartfelt music of adversity, Lara may find a deep connection with Kid Cudi himself and look up to him as an artist and figure through this connection of meaning-making. Similarly, Santi may create an intimate connection with digital art pieces he finds on an art website, all posted under an anonymous account. Even through the amorphic ambiguity of the creator and their true intentions or values, Santi may feel that he is accessing an accurate understanding of the artist through engaging with their work and the meaning that he learns to draw from it. In comparison, AI art poses a threat to this contract practice by the way it inherently deceives the audience into engaging with the art; to applying the labor, creativity, and curiosity of engaging with the fictional world of the art and cultivating meaning, where there is none, as AI does not reciprocate in any capacity. Even in the face of amorphic creators, art is made to express an emotion, idea, or view, and AI art not only muddles our ability to create proper relationships through art, but in deceiving viewers into created one-sided meaning-making engagement with generated content, also degrades both the value and communal approach of engaging with art.

One of the properties typically fulfilled in creating engagement in art is the Property of Authenticity. That is; authenticity in the nature of the relationship between creator, created, and audience, the authenticity in the labor, and creativity on the parts of creator and audience with seeking to engage with a work of art. There is no way to find interpretations or meanings in art through inauthentic engagement while there cannot also be inauthentic ways of generating meanings or fictionally relative truths in an art piece. Not only do we value art that is authentic, but we also actually value an authentic relationship with that piece of art. For example, Clarrisa

adores her favorite alt-grunge-rock band, Destroy Boys, because the band's music connects to her on an intimate level. The lyrics apply to her own emotions, representations, and worldview, the instruments move her, and Clarissa empathizes deeply with the band through their creative work. Here, she is engaged authentically with the band's art, drawing and applying meaning to it, and she feels that she has an authentic relationship with Destroy Boys themselves, and connects deeply with other fans. The property of Authenticity successful applies in all manners here – authentic viewer engagement to the true messages of the art, authentic viewer understanding of their relationship with the art, and authentic participation on part of the creator, who have labored long and tiresome hours to create and perform music that reaches to their audience. However, say Clarrissa originally had a similar relationship with alt-band X – she connected with their message as authentically as she could, and believed that she created an authentic relationship with the band through the art. Later, she learns that in reality, X band has some controversial views that unaligned with her own, and did not authentically believe in the message given in their own art. Utterly betrayed, Clarrisa is thrown into a loop – her understanding of the band and their art had turned out to be inauthentic in nature, and the meaning that she drew from her relationship with the art similarly so. Even though she may try to force authority into her interpretation of X's art, the connection will continue to be inauthentic in nature, and the deception will plague her engagement with the art's fictional truths.

AI art only extrapolates the betrayal over the inauthenticity of art-facilitated relationships with meaning. An art professor may enter a class with an initially heartfelt presentation of his artwork, coupled with images and truths of his life story, only to reveal that the factors of his relationship building were all generated by AI, and thus inauthentic – his script, images, presentation, and fictional truths. The class, taking his authority as an art professor, as audiences do with artists, is rendered utterly betrayed by the inauthentic foundation of a fictional world they began to engage with. Atop of AI's inability to facilitate authentic and nondeceptive relationships with its audience, AI programs as they stand now cannot be authentic in their art-making either. The content AI generates is a spliced amalgamation of image-content processed by a wide training data of art created by human artists, and uses the fictional truths, intentions, skills, and labor of those artists to inauthentically spit out an image to pass off as a new image worthy of new meaning. Defined only by patterns, training data, and the parameters of the user prompt, AI inauthentically generates something that deceives the audience into engaging with and ultimately betrays the viewer to seeking meaning where there is none.

The second property required to successfully create an implicit social contract of engagement is the Property of Curiosity. This is a property concerned with the nature of the art's meaning, and its significance to us. To truly engage and connect with art, viewers are implicitly accepting the fictional world of the artist/world and using their curiosity of the work or art to bond with the creator and the creator's intention. Furthermore, like the property of Authenticity, the curiosity of the viewer engaging with the art ought to be reciprocated by the artist in some way, be it about their creative process, their intention of the art, or the dimensions of the fictional world they are making. Without it, the meaning-making of the art becomes lopsided, and renders that all art is

truly subjective on the part of the viewer, regardless of the creator's intention, skill, labor, expression, practice, etc. For example, the audience ought to pay attention to Willaim Golding's use of symbolism through color in his novel *Lord of the Flies*, in order to properly engage with the work. While the audience may be overly curious and extrapolate extreme meaning from every use of the color blue within the novel, whether Golding intended each instance or not is irrelevant – his curiosity of symbolism is reciprocated on some level, solidifying a social contract with an audience eager to engage in meaning-making within his fictional world and truths. If the viewer of a piece of art is wholly uncurious about the world of the piece, then the proposed contract of engagement fails to take shape and fails to facilitate any meaningful relationship. Yet the art would retain its value, in so far as someone (even if it is the creator themselves) properly engages with it curiously and authentically. If the creator of an art piece is uncurious, however, much as with what we see with AI art programs, we have something like the frog croaking “rain” example. Uncurious creators, like AI, are the frog, croaking sounds around with blase and an utter lack of intention, and the innocent passerby that is the audience may hear the noise that sounds suspiciously meaningful like the word “rain”. Yet the uncurious creator of the noise did not intend that – there was no meaning applied or explored in the production of the noise, and the curious engagement of the passerby is crudely applied to things without foundation. AI art makes meaning-making on the part of the audience inherently lopsided as it is deceptive and expends curiosity and engagement that would be better suited to be reciprocated by an equally curious and authentic creator.

#### 4. Counterarguments

However, one may question any sort of utility or purpose that emerges in our relationship with art being authentic. Does art necessarily need to be authentic in the manner of creation, relationship, or engagement? Isn't it the case that our subjective interpretation of art chooses its validity and value? When art is made authentically and received authentically by the audience, the implicit relationship that is facilitated between artist and audience through the experience in the art is one that can be intimate, and expand the worldview, perspectives, and emotions of the viewer. It invites the audience to engage in a form of meaning making, applying the complex and abstract form of emotional expression that the artist has offered, and learning to utilize it to strengthen or build new representations of the world, a practice which has inherent value as it strengthens our connections with others, our reality, and our understandings within ourselves. Without this foundational authenticity, any validity or value we subjectively ascribe to art we engage with will continue to be lopsided or just shy of the mark, deceptive to ourselves and skills in interpretation and engagement.

Further, what happens if we know a piece of media has been generated by AI? What occurs when the inauthenticity and deception of the creator-viewer relationship is set straight for the record? Does it change the nature of the AI art as inherently valuable, now that our understanding is authentic? Does it need to, to be considered art in some form to a viewer? Say Maria really likes a particular meme of art, and may be fully aware of the synthetic/inauthentic nature of a creator, and its work, and still create an intimate relationship with the generated output from which she derives

meaning and emotion like other engagers of art. Here in this case, Maria's relationship with the AI generated content is still authentic on some level, despite the inauthenticity of the AI about its content. She is not misled about the nature of the content or creator, and thus does not apply meaning to where there is none, as the bare bones of the generated material serves as a route of some low-level meaning or emotion. Additionally, content does not need to be authentic in manner of creation, relationship, or engagement, though it may not be considered to have the same inherent value as authentic art. Tobias may use AI art to convert an idea of his into a visual, or to write a story he wishes to read without having to expend the labor to write it. AI generated content can be wholly self-indulgent, and exist merely by behest of a viewer, and though the self-indulgent relationship with the content may be valuable on some level to the viewer, it will not be as fulfilling or valuable as a relationship they may gain in engaging with authentic-curious art.

If considering the properties of Authenticity and Curiosity, one may argue that the reason these properties are unsatisfied by AI programs is due to the theft that takes place. The amalgamation of other artists' art that is spliced together to generate an AI art image is uncurious and inauthentic in its process, and the theft of potential skill and labor on the behalf of human artists' works deceives us further as viewers when we try to engage with the work. Couldn't we then presume that the theft of labor, as Goetze et al. write, is the true crux of the problem in our relationship with AI art? While compelling, I find that there are more dimensions to art than the labor of it, which does solely ascribe value in how it creates social contracts of engagement. Labor is difficult to apply value to, as it is widely different to each artist, and AI can both violate or respect the labor conditions that Goetze et al. note depending on the consent, use, and training data of the AI program's generation. In times which AI succeeds these conditions, the intuitive reactions to AI art and discussion surrounding the topic strikes me that there may something more as to what separates the value of art compared to the content generated by AI, even if it is laboriously ethical.

Lastly, one may ask whether AI even has the potential to fill either of these properties. Out of the plethora of material and ever-developing programs, could it stumble upon accurate Authenticity and Curiosity? With the exponential development of AI programs, it could be possible that AI may gain the ability to have some level of agency and world-view representations strong enough to create art pieces with intended meanings outside of the parameters of a given prompt or specific training data set. However, as AI art stands as of now, there does not to be any significant research indicating the salience of representations, intentions, or agency in these programs, which are all required to fulfill the properties of Authenticity and Curiosity to indicate if a piece of art creates the intrinsic value of engagement.

## 5. Conclusion

Ultimately, the inherent value in the purpose of art, that being; facilitating engagement and relationships of intimate meaning-making, creates a compelling utility of upholding the creation of these social contracts of engagement. With the widespread and commonality of AI art, these contracts will continue to devalue over time, and may negatively impact how we engage with art,

creativity, and complex or abstract modes of human expression. The persistent existence of AI art in the mix with human created art creates doubt in engaging in that type of relationship with artists, as we brace ourselves for deception and become overly critical of the nature of the art piece rather than engage with the meaning it seeks to make with us, to us, and about us. We may become overly critical and resistant to creating bonds with others over their perspectives or expressions and become less receptive to relationships that educate or further our understandings of societal, cultural, political, generational, orientational, and/or gender-based differences present in the world around us. Although a relatively new movement that may progress and develop further over time, AI art should not be given the chance to erode the intrinsic value that art brings to our life, worldview, and relationships from which we meaningfully aspire to create authentic and curious connections with.

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# Contextualizing Care Within Clinical Spaces

ALIKA CHO

## INTRODUCTION

Anorexia nervosa (AN) acts as a cognitive parasite, a leech that feeds and grows stronger at the expense of its host. This metaphorical connection captures the way in which the mental illness is able to invasively dominate an individual's thoughts and self-worth, gradually overtaking identity and decision-making abilities. Despite AN's debilitating psychological effects, when treated in clinical settings, it is oftentimes stripped of its cognitive and relational complexity and treated as a weight disease that can be easily corrected through the patient's behavioral compliance and physiological balance. Hospitals typically direct their focus on weight restoration, vital correction, and alleviating immediate medical risks<sup>30</sup>. While physical interventions are absolutely imperative and necessary, they are insufficient and unable to adequately treat the psychological nuances of AN.

The preliminary question of this project is as follows: How is caring for patients with anorexia nervosa situated within the world of medical care work and care ethics? I will argue that the ongoing hospital-based treatment of AN fails to bring about proper care for patients' fragile mental states, lived experiences, and social environments. Due to the prominence of measuring a person's well-being based on physical, measurable outcomes such as weight, clinical spaces often fail to reproduce forms of proper care. Instead, these spaces use coercive and alienating methods to force patients into compliance. Through examining the way AN is defined and situates itself within a person's thought processes, its dangers, and how it is treated, we can develop a care-centered approach in a medical space that is typically sterile and daunting, recognizing anorexia nervosa as a dangerous and intense cognitive illness.

## ANOREXIA NERVOSA

Anorexia nervosa is a severe psychiatric mental disorder due to its severely high mortality rates from a combination of serious medical complications and high risks of suicide. Symptoms of AN include repetitive restriction of food intake, an acute fear of weight gain, and distorted perceptions of one's body size or shape. A proper, clinical diagnosis of AN typically relies on one's behavior patterns and observable measures such as body mass index (BMI), eating patterns, and significant weight fluctuations. Anorexia can be fatal. Its harms on the body and mental state are very

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<sup>30</sup>Mayo Clinic, 2024

extensive. Physically, prolonged restriction of food intake and malnutrition can result in cardiac problems, anemia (low red blood cell count), low blood pressure, electrolyte imbalance, hypothalamic amenorrhea, or death<sup>31</sup>. Its psychological effects are brutal, including cognitive decline, chronic isolation and withdrawal, mood swings, increased irritability, changes in eating and exercise habits, shifts in lifestyle choices, and suicidal ideation<sup>32</sup>. Despite its life-altering side effects, patients are typically unable to comprehend the seriousness of their condition, hence the imperative need for proper medical care in physical and physiological aspects. Anorexia is not revolved mainly around food or the number on the scale: it is manifested through a desperate need for control, identity, and depleting self-worth.

## MEDICAL SETTINGS

When patients are admitted to hospitals, medical stabilization and weight restoration are prioritized and given the highest regard. Due to this, treatment methods revolve around food and structured meal plans, monitoring patients during and after meals, regular weigh-ins, vital checks, and restriction of all physical activity. An inability to comply with these treatment methods typically results in consequences such as forced nutrition through a feeding tube, calorie substitutes, and loss of privileges<sup>33</sup>. From a clinical standpoint, these measures of treatment are necessary to prevent immediate impairments and keep the patient alive. However, while these methods may be sufficient in keeping the patient alive at the moment, hospitals do not aid the patients in reorienting their lives to let go of their eating disorders and return to normalcy. Patients feel as if their bodies are treated as objects that must be repaired, while the individual within the body is a secondary requirement. The current methods of caring for patients in hospitals typically frame AN as a mere *behavioral* problem that must be corrected through high surveillance and extrinsic control. Patients and their personal experiences are disregarded and discounted, as their resistance towards certain treatment methods is not properly considered as expressions of fear or distress<sup>34</sup>.

The issue of current medical spaces lies in equating survival with full recovery. Unfortunately, short-term physiological outcomes do not mean long-term psychological recovery automatically follows. Weight restoration, while important and necessary, is unable to fully address the underlying cognitive patterns and issues, emotional vulnerability, and societal pressures. The inability to leave hospitals, both medically stabilized and psychologically supported, contributes to extremely high relapse rates with problems even more chronic than before<sup>35</sup>. The methods of forced feeding, rules based on rigidity, and constant surveillance ensure that patients comply and medical staff can achieve what must be done for the patient, but they also reinforce feelings of shame and alienation for the patient. Their loss of agency and autonomy is extremely destabilizing

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<sup>31</sup>Johns Hopkins Medicine, n.d.

<sup>32</sup> Patterson, 2023

<sup>33</sup>Healthtalk, n.d.

<sup>34</sup> King, 2016

<sup>35</sup>Berends, 2016

and disorienting. The integration of care into medical spaces would ensure a more holistic and adequate approach for treating anorexia nervosa and supporting recovery. A care-based approach is necessary and would integrate medical stabilization with proper care that transcends crisis management toward genuine recovery.

## CARE IN MEDICAL SPACES

A clear solution when solving the issue of deficiency within eating disorder treatment is extremely difficult to derive. Although hospital methods should be critiqued, their ultimate goal of keeping the patient alive and healthy should not be placed under scrutiny. Therefore, we must integrate methods that will add and slightly shift their current treatment into a more holistic care system that will address the physiological aspects of anorexia nervosa while properly supporting the patient's mental state.

In order to derive additional methods for existing treatment, Dr. Asha Bhandary's definition of dependency care serves as an exceptional framework. In *Freedom to Care: Liberalism, Dependency Care, and Culture*, Bhandary introduces the idea of caring for a dependent individual through both intensive and hands-on methods of care. These methods are highly imperative, as the lack of care and the inability to achieve these methods of care for the dependent individual could lead to diminished health or fatalities<sup>36</sup>. Knowing what we do about the complications of anorexia nervosa, in the case of considering the dependent individual to be an anorexic patient, it is clear that diminished health and ultimate fatalities can stem from *both* physical and mental issues. Both forms of issues must be addressed.

Additionally, Dr. Elana Buch's emphasis on one's sense of self and sense of independence within care spaces is highly applicable as well. In Buch's book titled *Inequalities of Aging: Paradoxes of Independence in American Home Care*, she states that individuals working in elder care typically aim to sustain the physiological lives of elders while maintaining their former ways of living. Buch introduces two forms of independence that a patient should be granted in hospitals: agency and having the ability to say yes or no<sup>37</sup>. If we are to apply this method of elder care to care given to patients with anorexia, this would create a proper framework where the health of the patient is held to a high regard while respecting the patient's autonomy and their traumatic experiences—an aspect that is neglected in current medical spaces. Due to the increased need for control and strict lifestyle choices that come with anorexia, when an affected individual is stripped of all control, autonomy, and decisions, it may be mentally jarring and intimidating, leading to less compliance with medical treatment and anxiety<sup>38</sup>. Although treatment should not attempt to reaffirm former

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<sup>36</sup> Bhandary, 2019

<sup>37</sup> Buch, 2018

<sup>38</sup>National Institute of Mental Health, 2024

anorexic behavior, it should reinforce autonomous decision-making and rebuild proper mindsets around nutrition and food that the patient may have forgotten during their times of restriction.

## DEVELOPMENTS IN TREATMENT METHODS

Loneliness and isolation are commonly associated with severe psychopathological presence in eating disorders, as disordered eating and dysfunctional eating patterns are commonly linked to chronic isolation<sup>39</sup>. It is highly likely that patients with chronic anorexia have withdrawn from their former social lives and interaction with their peers. This aspect is especially relevant among adolescents. On October 31, I had the pleasure of holding a consultation with Dr. Hanna Stevens, an adolescent psychiatrist at UI Health Care, as well as the division director of child psychiatry at the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine. Dr. Stevens explained that approaching treatment methods and therapy methods are extremely distinct based on the patient and the severity of their diagnosis. Additionally, devising proper methods is increasingly difficult due to an impairment in the patient's insight, as their proper cognitive functions may have been heavily damaged by malnutrition. However, Stevens placed emphasis on the need for socialization and societal inclusion for patients with anorexia. By allowing patients to leave their hospital rooms for active conversation with different patients, caregivers, and friends will mitigate isolating, harmful, or negative thoughts.

Dr. Steven's suggestion of increasing socialization directly fits in with Dr. Bhandary's dependency care as well as Dr. Buch's forms of independence. A lack of social integration and loneliness have effects beyond the psychological realm; research displays an innate connection between the brain and the immune system's inflammatory markers associated with stress conditions (such as loneliness). In order to prevent diminishing health, increasing community will benefit the patient's immunological, cardiological, and endocrinological systems<sup>40</sup>. Additionally, by cultivating a more social and communal environment, patients could slowly rebuild their societal inclusion and increase their autonomous decision-making in their company and ways they would like to spend their time. This is a positive method that can be easily integrated into current treatment methods, as it would continue to uphold the important physiological needs that must be met and cared for while also improving mental conditions and headspace.

Due to my personal experiences that align to this topic, I cultivated a great interest in improving hospital methods and care work for patients. I wanted to create an initiative that I could work on in relation to this project for the eating disorder treatment center within the University of Iowa's Health Care programs. I got inspiration from the Letters of Love organization and the Letters of Love club that holds events on campus. Their ultimate initiative is to provide emotional support to children who are battling serious illnesses with hand-crafted letters full of words of affirmation. I

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<sup>39</sup> Meneguzzo, 2024

<sup>40</sup>Ibid

want to do something similar to what is done in Letters of Love: creating hand-crafted letters full of support and encouraging words for those at the UIowa Eating Disorders Program. Although this may not increase direct socialization for the patients, it will show them that they are not alone and have support from the outside world. Time passes differently in hospitals, and they seem like a completely separate “world” that seems vast and extremely intimidating. Writing letters of support would be non-invasive towards the medical work that needs to be done and would be a wonderful way of building a supportive, aware community. The University of Iowa’s Student Wellness space is home to the University of Iowa Body Image and Eating Disorder Awareness (BIEDA) student organization. As stated on their website, their mission is to encourage a positive and sustainable lifestyle while accepting oneself, as well as raising awareness on eating disorders and identifying helpful resources for those who are struggling. In order to put my plan into action, I contacted Dr. Holly Nicely, a psychologist and eating disorder services coordinator at the University of Iowa. We are slowly planning a tentative BIEDA event next semester.

Additionally, I continued to stay in contact with Dr. Stevens, whose insight and knowledge aided in my research to great measure. After discussing our initial consultation on October 31, she suggested that a focus group may also be a helpful way to achieve increased socialization, as well as creating a space for patients to feel heard and their experiences valued (the proper date is to be determined, and continuing this idea is still tentative due to timing and scheduling). Although focus groups are typically utilized as a helpful research method to garner qualitative data, I believe that they could be used as a safe space for individuals to share their experiences, fears, traumas, and treatment. Listening to those with true experience and insight will be highly valuable in further research, and it will be a way for patients to feel heard and valued during confusing, vulnerable times.

## COUNTERARGUMENTS

A counterargument I found myself considering throughout the process of researching is the idea of the necessities of clinical reduction. Hospitals are designed for immediate stabilization of the individual, which means that long-term repair is not necessarily accounted for. The current emphasis on weight restoration and physiological metrics does not necessarily misunderstand anorexia nervosa as a weight disease, but clinicians must operate under strict conditions of time and medical risks. Through this argument, treating AN as a physiological emergency while disregarding the mental aspect is not clinical reduction, but is necessary and justified. Additionally, if we are to expect hospitals to provide care for their mental states, it will conflict with outpatient psychotherapy and community recovery programs.

While it is absolutely true and imperative that hospitals are designed for intervening in times of crisis, and immediate medical stabilization takes precedence during critical treatment, the manner of enforcing weight restoration and stabilization must be done under proper communication and patient inclusion. In current settings, many treatment methods, such as force-feeding and strict

monitoring, simply increase alienation and distrust between the patient and caretaker. Patients may begin to comply with their treatment while disengaging cognitively and refusing mental recovery, setting them up for failure once they are temporarily weight restored and discharged from the hospital. Hospitals should not be considered sterile environments where ethics of care are minimized. Integrating methods that involve proper dependency care and autonomy of the patient is not invasive towards medical practices nor asking hospitals to become therapy centers; it is requiring hospitals to acknowledge their ethical role regarding consent, navigating patient restraint, and reducing coercion<sup>41</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

How is caring for patients with eating disorders situated within the world of medical care work and care ethics? When clinical spaces are meant to increase the health and well-being of their patients, it is crucial for hospitals to shift their initial treatment methods and develop forms of dependency care and autonomy. Anorexia nervosa is considered to be one of the most debilitating mental disorders. Researching this disorder cultivates fear in and of itself, yet being a victim of this disorder and having physiological and psychological experiences of anorexia is even more terrifying. It is imperative for hospitals to properly intervene and stabilize their patients with proper treatment methods that will develop caring attitudes and steady paths to recovery and proper nourishment.

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# Maternal Thinking & Queer Community

## GREY PARFENOFF

### Introduction

Moving as trans or queer through the world requires vigilance. When simply walking down the street can be a life-threatening experience due to homophobia and transphobia, queer people learn to develop ways of thinking and being in the world as a survival mechanism. In our contemporary era queer life is at increased risk politicized violence, reaching nearly a thousand “anti-queer incidents” in 2025 alone.<sup>42</sup> This violence is not new, homophobic and transphobic attacks are ubiquitous in any history of queer and trans life. Nevertheless, among the violence, queer people find ways to ways to build community and kinship with each other in a hostile world. In this paper, I argue that Sara Ruddick’s account of maternal thinking is a useful analytic for thinking through the tensions that emerge between growth, preservation, and social acceptability in queer/trans community, yet her focus on the child limits out potentially generative applications of maternal thinking to those cases. I seek to develop a neo-Ruddickian account that seeks to decenter the child and recenter dependents as the locus of maternal thinking.

Maternal thinking, developed by Sara Ruddick in her 1989 work “Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace”, seeks to theorize the work maternal caregivers do as a discipline and type of thought that can developed “an engaged and visionary standpoint from which to criticize the destructiveness of war and begin to invent peace”.<sup>43</sup> While Ruddick’s work makes broad political claims her analysis begins at the level of an individual mother and child. For Ruddick, a mother isn’t necessarily a biological woman. Instead, Ruddick understands a someone as a mother “just because and to the degree that they are committed to meeting demands that define maternal work”.<sup>44</sup> Put simply, mother is not a category limited by gender or sex, rather a commitment and mode of moving through the world that prioritizes the wellbeing of a child. When Ruddick describes maternal thinking as a discipline, she understands it as one through a practicalist view. She compares maternal thinking to fields like science or psychoanalysis, wherein practitioners develop shared goals, and determine the value of actions through “the community of participants in which it arises” along with their shared criteria for truth and success. Ruddick identifies three demands that make up the criteria for successful mothering: preservation, growth, and social acceptability.<sup>45</sup>

Preservation is the most fundamental demand of mothering. Children require resources to survive, and preservation refers to the basic act of sustaining a child’s life (however, basic does not necessarily mean easy). Growth, which follows from preservation, is the demand to support a

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<sup>42</sup> Spillum (2025).

<sup>43</sup> Ruddick (1980), 12.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 15.

child's "cognitive and emotional development".<sup>46</sup> Specifically, growth ought to involve nurturance, recognizing that children are "complicated human creatures" that demand a mother attune to their unique desires and needs.<sup>47</sup> Finally, social acceptability refers to the demand that mothers raise children in ways that are "acceptable" to their community, and that their children learn to reproduce the values of her community. Maternal thinking arises from the tension between these demands, as a mother is forced to weigh them when they contradict, and balance them when they must occur at once. For example, a mother practices maternal thinking when she must choose between letting her child go to school with face paint on or making them wash it off. On the one hand, going to school with face paint might be good for her child's growth, it would help with their emotional development in the future by building self-confidence and help their intellectual development by teaching them to embrace creativity. On the other hand, having her child go to school with face paint might cause her child to get bullied, and will cause her and her child to be looked down on by other mothers. Maternal thinking is the process through which the mother weighs her options and provides the criteria for whether or not her decision was a good one.

#### Limits of Ruddick's account

While Ruddick's account provides useful tools for thinking through the particular types of knowledge that develop through care work, her overfocus on the child limits the political scope of her project and risks excluding possibly useful examples of maternal thinking. For Ruddick "maternal practice begins in a response to the reality of a biological child in a particular social world".<sup>48</sup> The child is central to her account, and it seems to develop or participate in maternal thinking one must have, or at least have access to, a biological child. Additionally, the examples she employs to describe the three demands of maternal thinking are primarily in the context of young children. Ruddick claims "preserving the lives of children is the central constitutive, the invariant aim of maternal practice", which locates the aims of maternal practice in primarily the needs of younger children.<sup>49</sup> Ruddick's account excludes many cases of what could otherwise be thought of as maternal thinking, for example, is a mother who adopts her child later in life a mother? Ruddick's account might say no, as the adopted mother has missed large parts of her child's growth and the child might not need her for preservation. However, it seems unintuitive and undesirable to call the adopted mother not a real mother, as the thinking she does certainly seems grounded in the success of her child and focused on growth, preservation, and social acceptability (even if those three demands don't appear in ways Ruddick describes). I will also discuss cases of queer motherhood below that Ruddick's account would limit out, due to the often-older ages queer caregivers receive their dependents and the unique demands of queer youth.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 19.

The more troublesome limit to Ruddick's account is her connection between gestationally and motherhood. While initially Ruddick disavows any connection between being a mother and the ability to birth a child, she re-binds when she says "what I do believe is that to divide new life from the life on which it depends - the hopes and aims of a particular woman - is to violate the connectedness symbolized by birth and aimed for in maternal nurturance and nonviolence".<sup>50</sup> The notion that maternal nurturance only exists in referenced to the 'connectedness symbolized by birth' locates the purview of maternal thinking in imitating a value produced by the process of birth, suggesting that maternal thought ought to exist in the image of, or remain inextricably tied to the process of a mother giving birth. While other scholars have taken up critiques of the notion that "mother" could be an ungendered noun, I find these critiques overly reject the beneficial analytic that maternal thinking provides.<sup>51</sup> Instead, I problematize the connection Ruddick makes between gestationally and motherhood to suggest that tying them together places adopted mothers and queer mothers who don't or can't give birth into a lesser class of mother merely trying to imitate those who can give birth.

#### Queer Kinship, Growth, Preservation, and Social Acceptability

Despite how Ruddick's focus on the child initially troubles the extension of her account to queer and trans caregivers, I argue maternal thinking accurately describes how queer and trans caregivers negotiate the wellbeing of those under their care. If Ruddick's account is to successfully recognize the historically disproportionate care burden placed on women, then it is equally as important to be able to apply her analytic to caregiving that doesn't take the socially dominant form.

The first example I want to use to illustrate the extension of her analytic is the 1990 Jennie Livingston documentary "Paris is Burning". "Paris is Burning" follows New York queer ballroom culture throughout the 1980s, looking at the queer community within the venue as well as queer and trans life outside in dominant society. I argue the work that house-mothers do in queer ballrooms can easily be understood as growth in the broader context of maternal thinking. In queer ballroom culture the house is a collective of queer people who dance and perform for titles under the same banner at 'balls', and as the drag queen Corey Dorian describes them, "they're families for a lot of children who don't have families".<sup>52</sup> The house-mother is the person in charge of the house, not just accepting new members or preparing for balls, but also handling conflicts when they arise, advising younger members, and acting as a trusted community member that their dependents can go to. As Angie Xtravaganza, the mother of House Xtravaganza describes her role, "when there's a ball, I'm always doing something for everybody in my house .... I always offer advice, you know. I mean, as far as what I know and what I've been through in gay life, you

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>51</sup> Silbergleid (2024).

<sup>52</sup> Off White Productions (1990).

know”.<sup>53</sup> The work she does for her children is central to their “spiritual and intellectual growth”.<sup>54</sup> For trans women in her house something like makeup tips or outfit advice isn’t just helpful for their ball performance, but also teaches them skills to present as a woman which is central to their self-identification. The advice Angie Xtravaganza gives is another important example of growth, as the unique knowledge she’s gained from years of surviving as queer in the world provides her with knowledge to attend to the complexities of her children.

House-mothers also provide a core example of how social acceptability occurs in queer caregiving. Within ballroom culture, performers ‘walk’ (perform in) different categories with different requirements for success. One of these categories is femme queen realness, which, for the trans woman performing, “is centered on being able to “pass” as female.”<sup>55</sup> The house-mother teaches her trans femme dependents how to succeed in femme queen realness, and in doing so teaches them to pass (meaning to appear as a cis woman in dominant society). For trans women the ability to pass can be core to survival, especially when being discovered as trans can be life threatening. The house-mother teaches their trans daughters social acceptability on two levels. The first is within the queer community, where success in the ballroom and walking one’s category proficiently leads to acceptance and status within it. The second is in dominant society, where teaching trans women skills to pass better helps them survive and move through the world more safely. House-mothers practice maternal thinking in the struggle between social acceptability and growth, wherein they have to negotiate teaching their girls to pass and embody their own unique styles. While in an ideal world any trans woman can embody womanhood in any way that suits her, house-mothers also recognize that performing harmful gender stereotypes can be necessary for survival, and as such practiced maternal thinking to best advise and nurture their dependents.

Finally, I argue that the queer caregiving arrangements within Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries act as a paradigmatic case of preservation. Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, or S.T.A.R. house, was founded by Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson as an activist organization and safe space for young trans sex workers to live in New York City. As Sylvia Rivera describes her time at S.T.A.R.:

We had a S.T.A.R. House—a place for all of us to sleep. It was only four rooms, and the landlord had turned the electricity off. So we lived there by candle light, a floating bunch of 15 to 25 queens, cramped in those rooms with all our wardrobe. But it worked. We’d cook up these big spaghetti dinners and sometimes we’d have sausage for breakfast, if we were feeling rich.<sup>56</sup>

The role Johnson and Rivera played as two older trans sex workers for the dependents they took care of was one largely of preservation. The breakfasts they made, the rooms they provided, and the “change for their pocket” were all crucial for young trans sex workers to survive on the hostile

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ruddick (1980), 20.

<sup>55</sup> Wallace (2017).

<sup>56</sup> Cohen (2007), 132.

streets of New York. Rivera and Johnson didn't just have to provide resources for survival, but as impoverished sex workers themselves they had to constantly think about how they could procure more food and availability for the girls that needed their help.<sup>57</sup> They engaged in maternal thinking having to balance getting resources for their dependents while also teaching them independence, as surviving on their own is an especially important skill for young trans sex workers.

Thus, my neo-Ruddickian account seeks to exchange the term 'child' for 'dependent' when considering where maternal thinking arises. By 'dependent', I mean those who require hands-on care to sustain themselves for a need they could not otherwise fill<sup>58</sup>. By 'need', I don't mean to say the mother is the only possible source of fulfillment for that need, but rather, that the mother consciously commits to taking primary responsibility for the dependent. The benefit of this adjustment is that it allows us to include non-traditional maternal arrangements, such as the ones discussed above, into the analytic of maternal thinking without removing the work traditional mothers do from consideration. Dependent is certainly inclusive of young children yet leaves ambiguous what it means to not be able to be inevitably dependent. This definition builds in space to contextualize what makes someone a dependent, by allowing us to draw attention to the unique forms of life-sustaining care they may need (for example, a child and a queer dependent may need different things presented to them in different ways, but nevertheless both be equally reliant on their caregivers).

### Objections & Responses

An objection to my neo-Ruddickian account might critique 'dependents' as the purview of maternal thought. While Ruddick agrees that preservation is the "central constitutive" of maternal thinking, she argues that "the demand to preserve a child's life is quickly supplemented by the second demand, to nurture its emotional and intellectual growth".<sup>59</sup> By reducing the condition for maternal thought to 'dependency', my account risks overfocusing on preservation while ignoring how a child's flourishing is central to Ruddick's understanding of successful maternal thinking. This has practical implications for the application of maternal thinking, as Ruddick argues that childcare with a sole focus on preserving the child is not nurturance and cannot attend to the "complex psychological needs of children".<sup>60</sup> This objection might also seem to trouble my own focus on the queer community. Many of my examples are about queer flourishing, and so an account that doesn't focus on the forms of joy and community that get formed in ballroom contexts, along with those formed at S.T.A.R. house, seems inadequate for thinking through the relationships between queer caregivers and their dependents.

My response to this objection argues that dependency provides a floor, not a ceiling, for thinking about maternal thought. As maternal thought is a discipline, and develops its own criteria

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<sup>57</sup> Hopskins (2017).

<sup>58</sup> I am intentionally choosing to bracket the question of how someone came to be in a state of dependency, because regardless of how they get there, I argue maternal thinking arises nevertheless.

<sup>59</sup> Ruddick (1980), 19.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

for what is good or bad maternal practice, it is nevertheless to have a consistent purview of study. For Ruddick's initial account, the purview of maternal thinking is the wellbeing of a child. For my neo-Ruddickian account, the purview is the wellbeing of a dependent. Just as Ruddick argues that a less desirable form of maternal thinking is one that focuses solely on preservation, yet nevertheless is an instance of maternal practice, I argue that a less desirable form of maternal thinking is one that focuses solely on preservation of dependents. My account then does not limit out the demands of growth or social acceptability, rather values them similarly to Ruddick, while delimiting where maternal thought can arise from.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to develop a neo-Ruddickian account of maternal thought that shifts focus from 'children' to 'dependents' as the locus of maternal thinking. First, I provided an overview of Sara Ruddick's account, along with how her account's focus on the child limits out beneficial applications of maternal thinking to queer caregiving relationships. Then, I used examples of ballroom culture as well as S.T.A.R. house to illustrate why maternal thinking is a good analytic to think through queer caregiving, and argued as to why 'dependent' is a preferable focus to begin maternal thought. Finally, I provided an objection surrounding the potentially minimizing effect of 'dependent' and responded by arguing 'dependent' is a starting point for maternal thought, not the ultimate goal. This paper is not an extensive development of a neo-Ruddickian account, but rather seeks to open space for questions in broader feminist care ethics, such as what gets lost when we fill in the mother and child as the primary example of a caregiving relationship?

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# Patrons, Editors, and Popular Perception: Creativity of Human Prompters of AI

LIZZIE DENG

**Abstract:** This paper seeks to expand the scope of Lindsay Brainard’s 2025 evaluation of creativity within AI systems, examining whether creativity is exhibited by human prompters. First, I give a brief explanation of the novelty, epistemic value, agency, and curiosity conditions of creativity as set forth by Brainard. I then apply Brainard’s conditions to human prompters, arguing that they may be more accurately characterized as patrons of products/outputs and are lacking in creativity. I consider and respond to relevant rebuttals and characterizations of prompters as creatively engaged editors. Ultimately, I contend that if we are to accept the presence of creativity when considering human prompters of AI, a potential creative responsibility gap emerges. Even with philosophical distinctions and workarounds, I remain concerned with the serious devaluation of creativity in popular perception that these AI models may bring.

## 1. Definitions of Creativity and Evaluation of AI Models

It will be helpful to first outline Brainard’s four key necessary conditions of creativity: novelty, value, agency, and curiosity. Brainard acknowledges that her conditions are by no means exhaustive but contends that they are generally necessary ingredients of creativity. The three former conditions have long been points of philosophical discussion on creativity; pulling from existing literature, Brainard describes distinct senses of novelty, value, and agency before appending the curiosity condition to her account.

Novelty, as most pertinent to our common intuitions of creativity, involves newness or innovation. Brainard draws upon Margaret Boden’s account as well as common discussion of novelty, in which novelty may arise in the historical, psychological, or unpredictable sense<sup>61</sup>. In the historical sense, something is novel in virtue of being the first of its kind in history. For example, we might imagine that the first motion picture was novel as the first instance of capturing and replaying motion in human history, innovating the ideas of photography. In the psychological sense, novelty is found in the newness of something to the mind of the individual entertaining it. A child would perceive psychological novelty when first discovering the idea and potential of superpowers, for instance. There is also novelty in the sense of unpredictability, where a creative work is novel because it is surprising or unexpected. These three intuitions seem reasonable for capturing the quality of novelty frequently invoked in discussions of creativity, and more than one intuition may be present in labeling any work as novel.

Value, as frequently referenced in creativity, is a condition which Brainard acknowledges contains multitudes of definitions and senses. However, Brainard specifically focuses upon a sense of

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<sup>61</sup> Qtd in Brainard, 4

epistemic value, which she argues is always present within any creative endeavor. She defines epistemic value within creativity as *epistemic discovery* or the “pursuit of the unknown”<sup>62</sup>. Brainard cites Berys Gaut’s Ignorance Principal, which holds that in engaging in creativity, someone “cannot know in advance of being creative precisely both the end at which she is aiming and the means to achieve it”<sup>63</sup>. Creativity requires that a person discover the ends and means of a project through the process of completing it, thereby acquiring some sort of epistemic understanding. Brainard presents an example of two dollhouse carpenters, one of whom follows the instructions manual exactly while the other has a general vision but trusts herself to “[figure] it out as she goes,” experimenting and testing out different approaches<sup>64</sup>. In accordance with our intuitions, we would say that the second carpenter constructed the dollhouse creatively while the first did not due to the exploration and discovery inherent in the second situation.

Brainard then goes on to frame the condition of agency as that of *responsibility*, which extends beyond “mere causal responsibility”<sup>65</sup>. One sense is that of attributability, as defined by philosopher Gary Watson. According to Watson, when we attribute actions to an individual, we appraise the individual’s “excellences and faults as an adopter of ends”<sup>66</sup>. In this sense, attributability is an assessment of the kinds of ends an individual pursues as reflected by their creative works; we can attribute actions, processes, or products to an individual when they deeply and non-accidentally result from the individual’s values and beliefs. The other, stronger sense of agency is that of creativity as a reactive attitude or praise concept. Brainard particularly mentions Susan Wolf as well as Elliot Samuel Paul and Dustin Stokes’ accounts of creativity. Wolf contends that creativity is a reactive attitude independent of any moral consideration, while Paul and Stokes similarly present the idea of creativity as a praise concept in relation to agents’ responsibility for creative achievements<sup>67</sup>. This reactive and praiseworthy sense of responsibility necessitates that there is an agent or “self” that is deeply rooted within our world to be an appropriate target of praise for creative works.

Given the three popular conditions of creativity above, Brainard argues that some distinct sense is still missing from these considerations. She appends a fourth condition of *curiosity* as a bridge between that of value and agency; as Brainard puts it, someone must exercise agency in pursuit of attaining epistemic value, and that pursuit of discovery is none other than curiosity. Brainard describes the curiosity condition as “a motivating force” which compels agents to pursue epistemic goods, engage in exploration, and place value upon the discovery process<sup>68</sup>. This motivating force can take many forms but typically involves reflection and a desire to learn on the part of the agent.

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<sup>62</sup> Brainard, 7

<sup>63</sup> Qtd in Brainard, 6

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>65</sup> Op cite., 12

<sup>66</sup> Qtd in Brainard, 13

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>68</sup> Op. Cite., 18

When these four conditions are considered and applied to AI models, Brainard argues, it becomes clear that AI is incapable of creativity due to a lack of curiosity and agency, whether in the attributability or praiseworthy sense. AI models lack the capacity to set their own goals and genuinely reflect any sense of self, and thus the systems themselves cannot be thought of as appropriate entities to be praised for engaging in creativity, at least in their current forms. In her assessment of the creativity of AI systems, Brainard briefly touches upon the responsibility that human agents may have; she cites an example of her prompting ChatGPT to write a cheese sonnet, and she dismisses the notion of there being any human creative responsibility on her part for the input of such a simple prompt<sup>69</sup>. I want to further discuss this notion of creativity of AI prompters in relation to Brainard's conditions. In doing so, I will be examining the conditions of creativity within multiple relevant and more complex cases of creative collaboration, drawing analogies between creative endeavors that involve human-AI collaboration and those that do not. I begin by considering the users of AI models as mere patrons before examining other characterizations and relevant responses.

## 2. Creativity of Human Prompters

When considering the typical relationship between a human agent and an AI model, I posit that human agents utilizing AI models generally do not meet the creativity conditions of epistemic value, agency, and curiosity as they are merely acting as *patrons*, regardless of the complexity of their initial prompting. To examine this idea further, we might examine the case of Alice, an individual with some knowledge of and exposure to the arts and creative endeavors. Rather than the mere input of a simple prompt, as Brainard describes in her cheese sonnet example, Alice has a more complex idea for a short story about tragic young love. She takes this idea to ChatGPT, prompting the model with a few structural notes—perhaps the way in which the two lovers meet, the societal factors obstructing them, and some key story beats. When the model outputs its short story, Alice then accepts the story with little to no further edits. Such a situation is typical of user experience with AI models: human agents have a general skeleton of an idea with some supporting details, feed the prompt to the AI system, and accept the output largely at face value. I contend that this human-AI dynamic bears significant similarity with patron-artist relationships involving human agents. We might easily imagine the case of some wealthy Baroque patron commissioning an artist for a portrait in much the similar way as Alice regards the AI model; the patron approaches the artist with preferences or general suggestions, and the artist works out the rest with minimal feedback.

Despite the increased complexity of the initial prompt, I argue that, as with the cheese sonnet example, the human agent acting as a patron in this instance still cannot be described as engaging in creativity. For both the patron and Alice, no epistemic discovery is gained from this process, as neither has developed understanding of the means through which they pursued their output beyond that of listing requirements or preferences to another entity. Similarly, neither are curious; upon

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 15

receiving an output, the patron-prompter gives little further consideration towards potential improvements and possesses no motivating force which encourages additional experimentation. And perhaps most glaringly, the extent of agency or responsibility that may be described for the patron/prompter is unconvincing. In the sense of attributability, it cannot be definitively said that the creative achievement describes some strong sense of what commitments or values the patron or prompter “stands for,” given their limited participation in the actual creative process where key creative decisions are made. Patron and prompter responsibility for creative outputs are even more difficult to justify when viewing creativity as a praise concept: intuitively, we would not praise, say, Pope Julius II for the creative achievement of the Sistine Chapel in virtue of his commissioning Michelangelo to paint it, even if he provided a framework for the content or composition. Neither would we praise the prompter for creative achievement in merely typing out a list of requirements, even extensively detailed, as a prompt for an AI model. Thus, in characterizing human prompting of AI systems through a patron-artist lens, no creativity may be ascribed to the patron-prompter.

Some may refute this characterization of the human prompter as merely a patron. Perhaps the individual seeking some output through “one-and-done” AI prompting cannot be described as engaging in creativity, but a much more invested prompter could be reasonably described exhibiting the creativity of an *editor*. They might propose an amendment to Alice’s case from above to illustrate this: Alice again has an idea which she prompts an AI model with some detailed specifications, but this time, Alice does not immediately accept the output. Instead, seeing opportunity for certain improvements, she prompts the model to tweak its results as she prefers. This process of adjustment occurs until Alice is satisfied with the results. Here, an analogy might be drawn to that of the editor of a book or an art professor giving feedback on student drafts, in which a human agent carefully engages with some work of another entity to provide key recommendations, suggestions, and changes.

Proponents of this view might argue that the product of these editorial processes might be novel in at least some historical sense. Both Alice and similar editors might have also gained some epistemic value through revisions of the outputs of other entities. Editors necessarily explore and discover different ways of achieving a particular end or product, engaging in their own process of brainstorming and evaluation to offer ideas that shape the means and ends of the creative process. Likewise, editors must possess curiosity and motivation to experiment with their own ideas, ultimately offering those they believe to be the best or most relevant; editors of books are motivated to explore what structural or narrative changes work best, as are art professors in reviewing their students’ work, and even Alice, pouring over the improvements that might be made to the AI output. With respect to agency and responsibility, some may say that the editorial process reflects the editor’s commitment towards literary achievement, artistic excellence, or some belief in creative quality that belies their sincere review of the work. In this sense, the attributability condition is fulfilled to an extent, even if the final work is not wholly determined by the editor. Furthermore, proponents would contend that even creative responsibility as a reactive attitude or

praise concept would be accommodated by this characterization. Given their involvement and influence within the creative process, editors can be reasonably acknowledged as appropriate objects of praise for creative achievements. Thus, in viewing involved prompters as editors, it could be argued that Brainard’s creativity conditions can be fulfilled.

Given the justification above, I acknowledge that there is some merit within viewing engaged prompters as more than mere patrons and instead as editors. Indeed, nothing within Brainard’s general conditions obstructs the idea of creativity as a spectrum, which editors may be engaging with to a certain extent. However, I argue that the account of creativity for human prompters of AI models remains incomplete, particularly when considering the responsibility condition of creativity as praise. If we are to consider editorial agents of AI outputs as creative, we open ourselves to a potentially problematic creative responsibility gap. When we seek to praise agents for creativity, it seems odd to have an appropriate editor to praise but lack an appropriate creator. For instance, we might praise the editor of a groundbreaking novel for their assistance and efforts in the process of pursuing the work, but we do so always in tandem with praise to the creator and in relation to the editor’s collaboration with the creator. As Brainard established in her paper, AI models cannot engage in creativity. If human prompters of AI models, like Alice, are editors, then we face the dilemma of lacking an agent to hold primarily responsible for the work: we would praise a book with no writer or an artwork with no artist. To avoid these creative responsibility gaps, it seems we must either reject the notion of the reactive attitude of creativity being involved at all within any human-AI collaboration or otherwise find an appropriate primary target for creative responsibility. The former suggestion seems at odds with our intuitive conception of creativity; for the latter consideration, I will examine a possible response that I argue nonetheless may have harmful consequences.

### **3. Genuine vs Functional Creativity and Future Risks**

One potential response which attempts to address the creative responsibility gap may distinguish between “genuine” creativity as roughly defined by Brainard’s conditions and a separate type of “functional” creativity that is possessed by AI models and systems. In contrast to genuine creativity involving novelty, epistemic value, agency, and curiosity, functional creativity may be a pared-down version that includes novelty, value, and basic agency. Something can be said to have engaged in functional creativity when it has non-accidentally generated new and either aesthetically or monetarily valuable output. Through making this distinction, some might argue, we would be able to identify the AI system as the primary entity responsible in a creative endeavor of collaboration with human agents—that is, the AI model is responsible for generating mostly convincing outputs that are novel and which bring aesthetic pleasure or monetary gain. Different AI models can even be gradable in this manner by evaluating whether they possess more qualities of functional or genuine creativity on a case-by-case basis; more “truly” creative models fulfill the conditions of the latter in which creativity as praise, curiosity, and epistemic value are more applicable. The human agents prompting these AI models as editors nonetheless remain appropriate targets of some level of praise, but the primary agents are AI models who are at least

functionally creative and are not necessarily subject to the reactive sense of the agency/responsibility requirement.

However, I argue that even if this distinction works around issues of creative responsibility gaps, it cannot mitigate the negative impacts that AI models will have on popular conceptions of the value of genuine creativity. Brainard argues that the merit of genuine creativity, due to the importance of curiosity and the innovation it generates, will not dissipate in the presence of merely generative AI models. While this may be true within the specialized fields of the arts and sciences, I am not as optimistic when it comes to broad social perceptions of the value of creativity. Philosophical distinctions between *genuine* and *functional* creativity may hold water in spheres of expertise, but popular conceptions of creativity are generally tied to the functional sense of it. In the absence of widely accessible philosophical discussions and informative measures, there may be an extreme conflation in population perception of genuine and functional creativity. To the average individual not specialized in the arts and discussions of creative and philosophical merit, creativity is important simply to achieve some novel, valuable product. With the mass proliferation of AI models capable of functional creativity regardless of the creativity of human agents, popular perceptions of creativity will only become more muddled.

This can have serious consequences for the societal value placed upon the arts and creativity. To refer to a case mentioned by Brainard and presented by computer scientist Simon Colton, there can be cases in which an AI model can convincingly output some functionally creative work, such as a classical symphony, that superficially rivals Beethoven's best works<sup>70</sup>. Colton and Brainard may be right that in the classical world, both experts and casual enjoyers would ignore the AI model's output because of the culture's focus on celebrating genuine creativity, innovation, and the human agents behind musical works. But outside of this sphere, perceptions may become more skewed. Those who are not already "in the know" on the merits of classical music might easily conflate functional and genuine creativity, equivocating this AI-generated output with the value of Beethoven's works. Thus, while the specialized sphere maintains itself without paying heed to AI-produced works, the average individual would begin to perceive classical music and the genuine creativity involved as increasingly less valuable. In this sense, the prevalence of AI models could significantly weaken popular respect for more esoteric creative endeavors. The effects of the wide dissemination of functionally creative AI-models would be felt not only in isolated, "elitist" fields, however. Even genres like pop music may see a surge in devaluing the genuine creativity of human artists, as casual listeners may find the mere aesthetic pleasure from functional creativity to be a sufficient alternative. Consequently, there may be a serious depreciation of genuine creativity across the board, at least in societal perception, that cannot be easily counteracted without extensive efforts to delineate genuine and functional creativity for the wider population.

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<sup>70</sup> Qtd in Brainard, 22

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# A Philosophical Analysis and Film Review of Donnie Darko

[SPOILERS]

LEANN HOBSON

Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko* (Director's Cut) is a film about a neurotic teenager named Donnie, who escapes the anomalous accident of a jet engine crashing into his room, having been lured outside by "Frank", a humanoid entity dressed as a nightmarish rabbit. Frank tells Donnie that the world will end in 28 days, and throughout the movie, he manipulates Donnie into committing acts of arson and vandalism. Embedded within the movie is a story about time travel, the living receiver, and tangent universes. The film also engages in a deeper, more complex conversation about free will, determinism, and existentialism.

I'll briefly summarize the time travel concepts that underlie the story and help build the premise. The jet engine that falls into Donnie's room is "the artifact", or an item from the primary universe that is transferred when a tangent universe is created. A tangent universe is formed from a corruption in the fabric of the fourth dimension (a wormhole), and it is highly unstable in sustaining life. In time, the tangent universe will collapse upon itself, forming a black hole within the primary universe that can destroy all life. The wormhole is able to manipulate time, and in this case, Donnie's universe is displaced by only 28 days. The tangent universe is an exact copy of the primary universe, but the plane engine should not exist within it at that point in time, which is what makes it unstable. For the tangent universe to unravel without forming a black hole, it must return to being an exact copy of the primary universe by removing the duplicate jet engine. Donnie becomes the "living receiver", the being who is compelled by greater forces to return the artifact and save the world. The "manipulated living" (or manipulated dead, if deceased) are all the people in the tangent universe close to Donnie who subconsciously work to assist him in returning the artifact and saving themselves from oblivion.

There are endless interpretations of *Donnie Darko*, some centered on divine intervention and others on free will, but my favorite may be that of determinism. The causal sequencing of the whole movie captures the deterministic and all-encompassing end to Donnie Darko. Every event leads to the other and plays its part in hardening Donnie's future. He is manipulated into learning his chosen path and finding a reason to give up his life to save the universe. Donnie is stuck in multiple internal conflicts that must be resolved to complete his mission. He is unsure if he should believe this cosmic prophecy to be true and accept that everything is out of his control, or listen to the people around him and recognize his own autonomy. He is uncertain in his beliefs towards divinity and fate, his life's purpose, and why he was chosen. We find that, in the end, trying to comprehend why he was chosen or what led to his fate is irrelevant and ultimately pointless.

Donnie is able to perceive causality through liquid orbs that emerge from the ribcage and follow one's future movements. This is one of my favorite elements of the movie, and also an

incredible representation of predestination. It captures the idea that our actions are already decided for us, for reasons beyond our understanding. In Donnie's case, the orb leads him to the gun in his parents' room, which he was unaware of but was destined to find. Donnie also exists as a morally ambiguous hero, firstly because he is not moral in the traditional sense, and secondly, because the causal nature of a deterministic world blurs moral constraints. His destructive acts have positive ends, and he saves the world only because he has accepted that he must.

Jim Cunningham, the false prophet, repeatedly preaches his belief that fear and love are the only two existing categories for morality, creating a binary understanding of the human condition and our actions. As Donnie increasingly grasps the predetermined outcome of his life, he comes to realize that there are no objective codes of good and evil and there is no prescribed way to live, considering that every action is an inevitable result of prior causes. He makes this opinion clear after becoming frustrated with Ms. Farmer's exercise of placing actions into either the category of fear or love, arguing that she fails to take into account the range of human emotion.

Grandma Death, the old lady Donnie encounters, whispers to him, "Every living creature dies alone". This statement is what prepares him for his inevitable sacrifice. After hearing this from Grandma Death, Donnie is forced to confront his fear of existential isolation and ultimately accept that his death is necessary for the greater good.

As for the movie itself, I think it's conceptually very interesting, and it incorporates a design of time travel that blends immaculately with the angsty, coming-of-age style. The way every figure talks to or about Donnie is meaningful, making every scene feel thought-provoking and necessary. The atmosphere of the movie is so beautifully solemn, capturing the inevitability of Donnie's fate, the madness within his mind, and the unconventionality of his environment.

The ending, with Donnie smiling as the jet engine collapses through his ceiling and onto him, illustrates Donnie finally finding purpose despite this determined and unpreventable demise. Though it was bound to end this way, he is able to find meaning in his actions and his life, which I believe is an existentialist notion we can all learn from. I'll conclude my review with my favorite dialogue from the film:

Donnie: Every living thing follows along a set path. And if you could see your path or channel, then you could see into the future, right? Like, uh... It's a form of time travel.

Prof. Kenneth Monnitoff: Well, you're-you're contradicting yourself there, Donnie. If we were able to see our destinies manifest themselves visually, then we would be given a choice to betray our chosen destinies. And the mere fact that this choice exists would make all preformed destiny, uh, come to an end.

Donnie: Not if you travel within God's channel.

Prof. Kenneth Monnitoff: Um, I'm not going to be able to continue this conversation.

Donnie: Why?

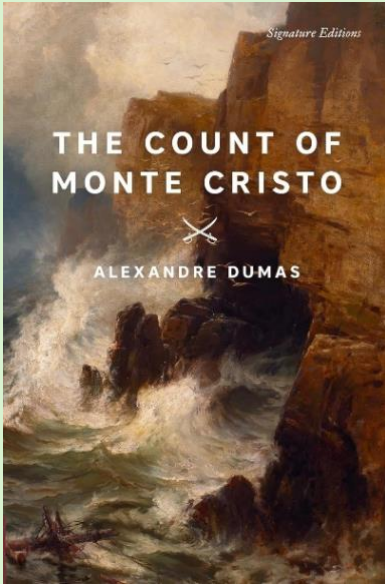
Prof. Kenneth Monnitoff: I could lose my job.

Donnie: Okay.

# Media Recommendations

## COMPILED BY LABYRINTH EDITORS

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### **The Count of Monte Cristo** By Alexandre Dumas

In *The Republic*, Plato contemplates what it means to do justice. In *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Plato's ideas are brought to life through evil villains, complex characters, dramatic betrayals, and epic revenge. The young and hopeful protagonist, Edmund Dantès experiences it all as he is accused of a crime he did not commit and contemplates how to enact justice against his new-found enemies.



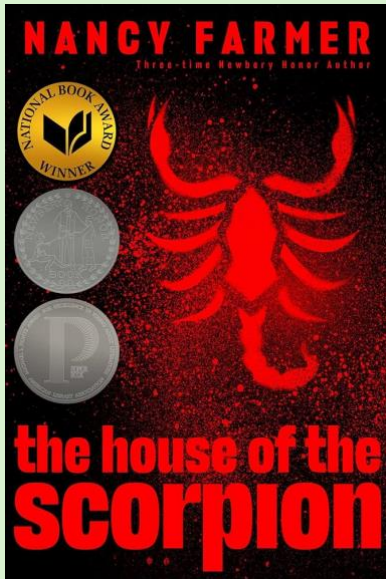
### **Red Dead Redemption 2** By Rockstar Games

In this console game, outlaw gang-member, Arthur Morgan, does what's best for his group—even if it means stealing from banks and killing off rival gangs. However, as the tasks he is asked to do become increasingly more dangerous, he asks himself questions that many existentialists and ethicists have asked before: what does it mean to live a good life? How do we know we are doing the right thing? Is it too late for redemption?



### **Everything Everywhere All at Once** By Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert

Directly drawing inspiration from Mary-Jane Rubenstein's *World's Without End: The Many Lives of the Multiverse*, the movie explores absurdist, nihilist, and surrealist themes while telling the story of immigrant mother and laundromat owner, Evelyn, who unwittingly becomes the focus of a multiversal war.



### **The House of the Scorpion**

**By Nancy Farmer**

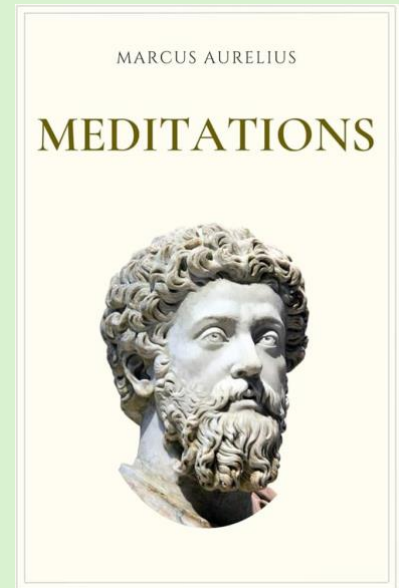
As a middle-grade reader, this book introduces the nature vs. nurture debate for younger audiences. The main character, Matt, after being raised in an isolated cottage by his caretaker, Celia, learns that he is a clone of fearsome drug-lord, El Patron. As he enters his new life on the drug-lord's estate and grows beyond childhood, he notices dangerous similarities to El Patron in his nature and must decide how that will shape his life.



### **Funes the Memorious**

**By Jorge Luis Borges**

Through the magnificent and mysterious character of Funes, this short story explores questions about the mind and knowledge. Ever since Funes's horseback riding accident, his way of perceiving the world was drastically changed—changed in a way that reflects Kant's critical philosophy and Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle.



### **Meditations**

**By Marcus Aurelius**

Known as one of the “Five Good Emperors” of ancient Rome, Marcus Aurelius practiced the virtues he preached in his personal notes on life and philosophy, also called his *Meditations*. Although the writings were created to be private, the wisdom he imparts through them has affected the lives of many, and the book is now considered one of the key ancient texts on Stoicism

# Philosophy Club Poster

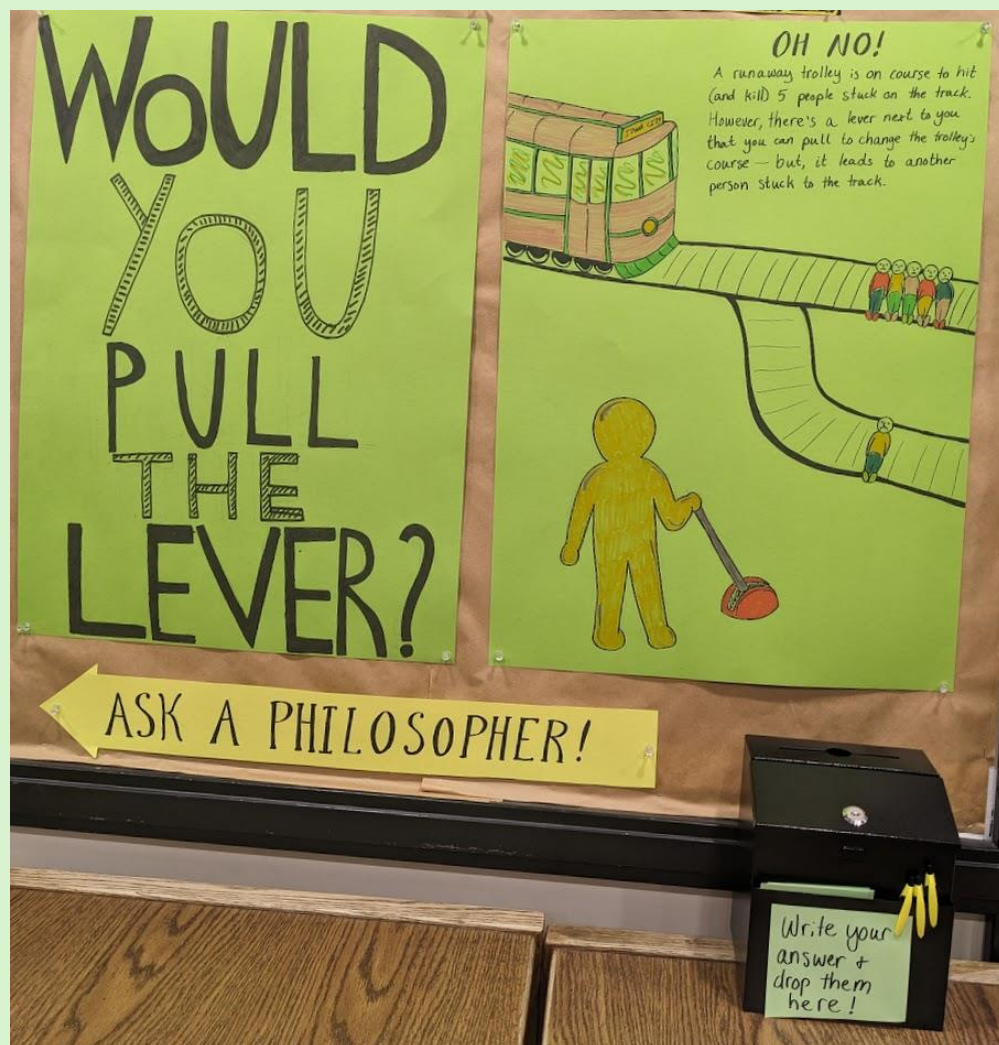
## CREATED BY PHILOSOPHY CLUB STUDENTS

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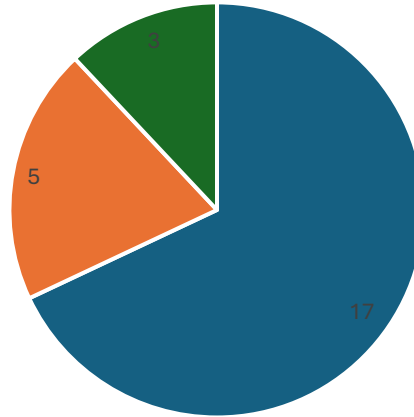
This semester, the Philosophy Club students started what they hope to be a new tradition within the club; they made posters with a new philosophical question every other week, complete with a drop box for viewers to put their responses in. These posters were found on the West 2<sup>nd</sup> floor landing in the English-Philosophy Building. Below are the statistics on the responses for each poster, as well as images of responses that the Labyrinth editors found particularly thoughtful or funny.

~ ~ ~

### The Trolley Problem



## "Would You Pull the Lever?" Responses



■ Yes ■ No ■ I don't know / other

As a child I decided my solution would be to replace myself with the 1 person on the track

When I told my father he said his answer would be to RUN AT THE SPEED of the trolley, PUNCH THE WINDOW, climb in and hit the brakes from the inside

not sure if that's the answer you want but that's ours.

~~As a child I decided my solution would be to replace myself with the 1 person on the track~~  
No I am not pulling the lever. They are stupid for being on the train tracks.

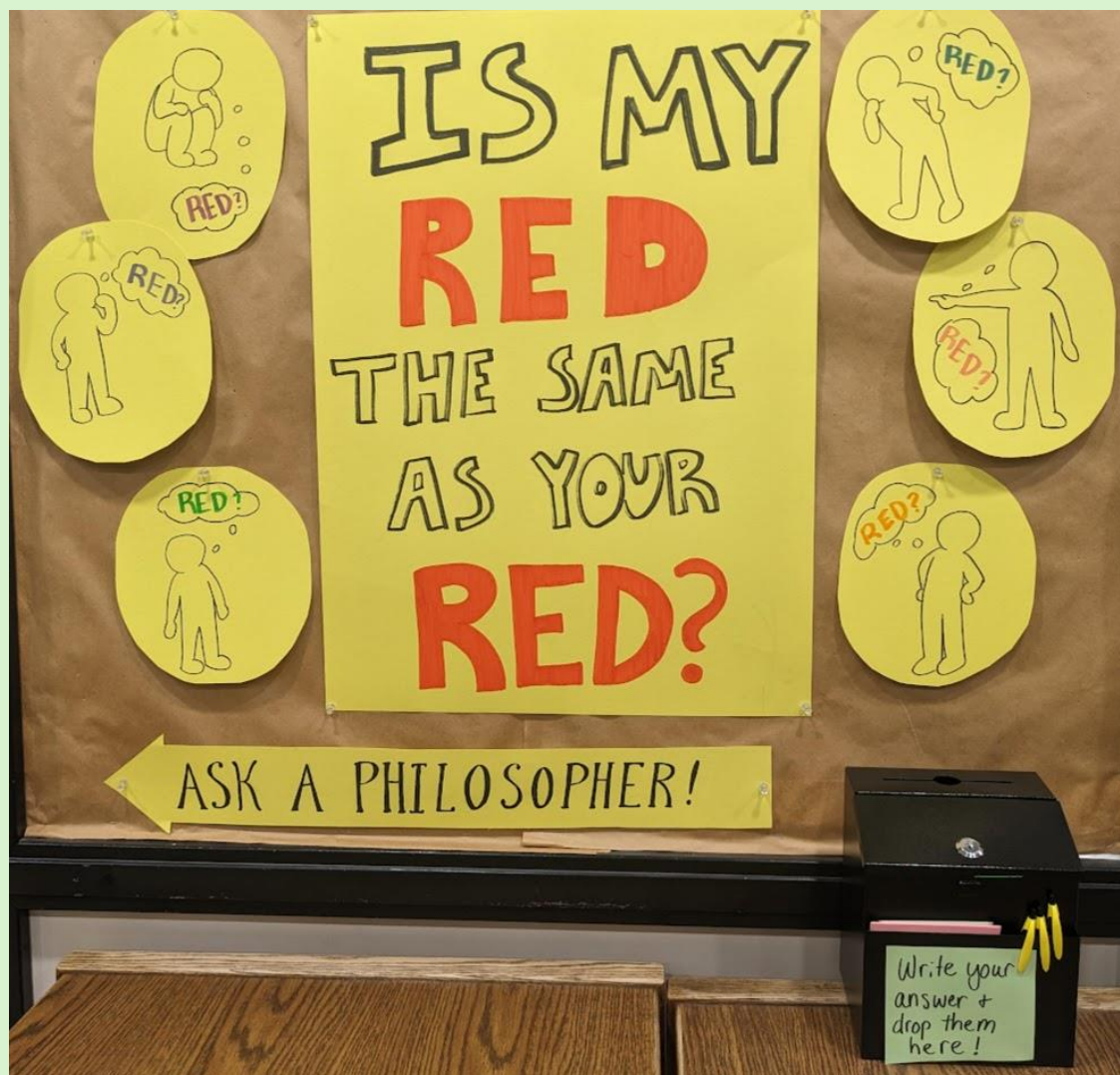
Pull the lever knock!

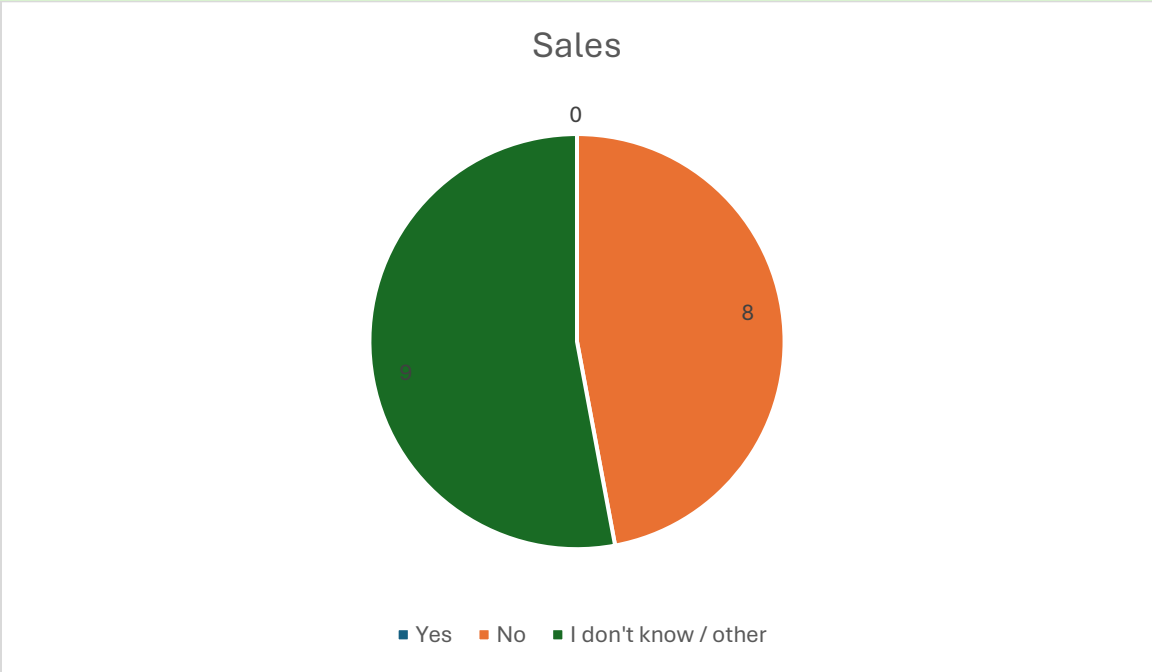
NAH

I will pull the lever  
and also kill the 5  
people because I am  
evil and take cold  
showers.

You Sacrifice  
yourself  
- The Good Place

## The Color Question





Wouldn't this be more of an optometrist question? At least for any distinction that would matter, that'd be their job, right? If we can all agree that all colors are what they are — are what we call them, then what difference would it make if we subjectively experience color differently from one another? How would you tell? What would you gain from knowing? If you could see someone else's red, wouldn't it still look like your red if you're seeing it?

NO! People do not own colors.

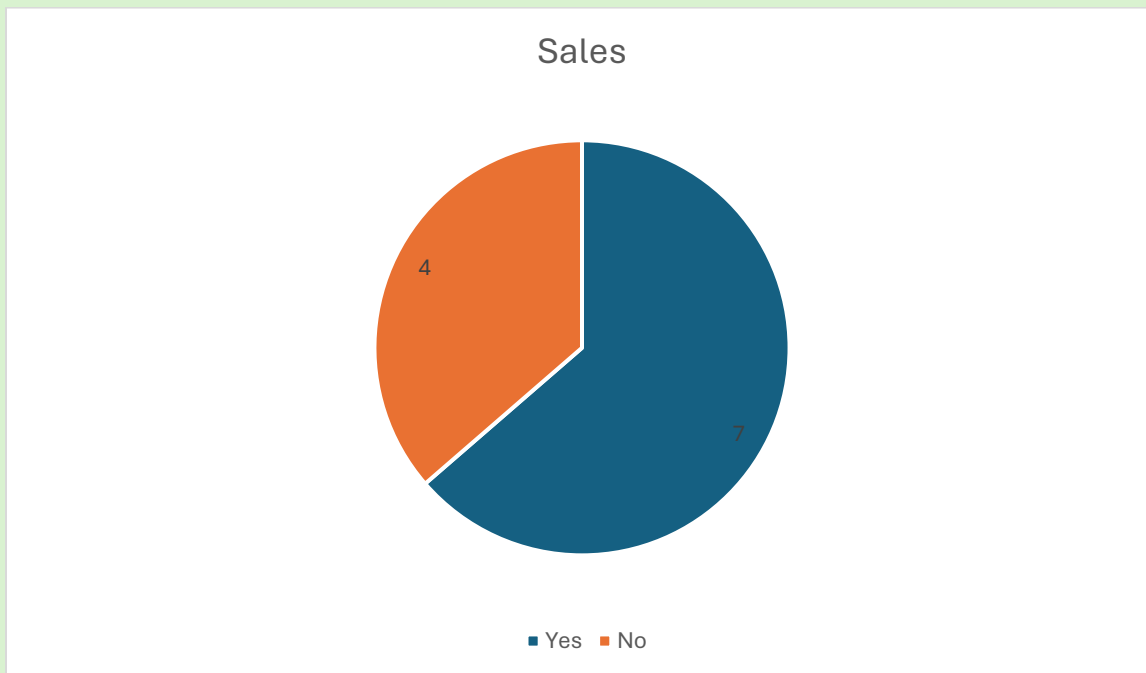
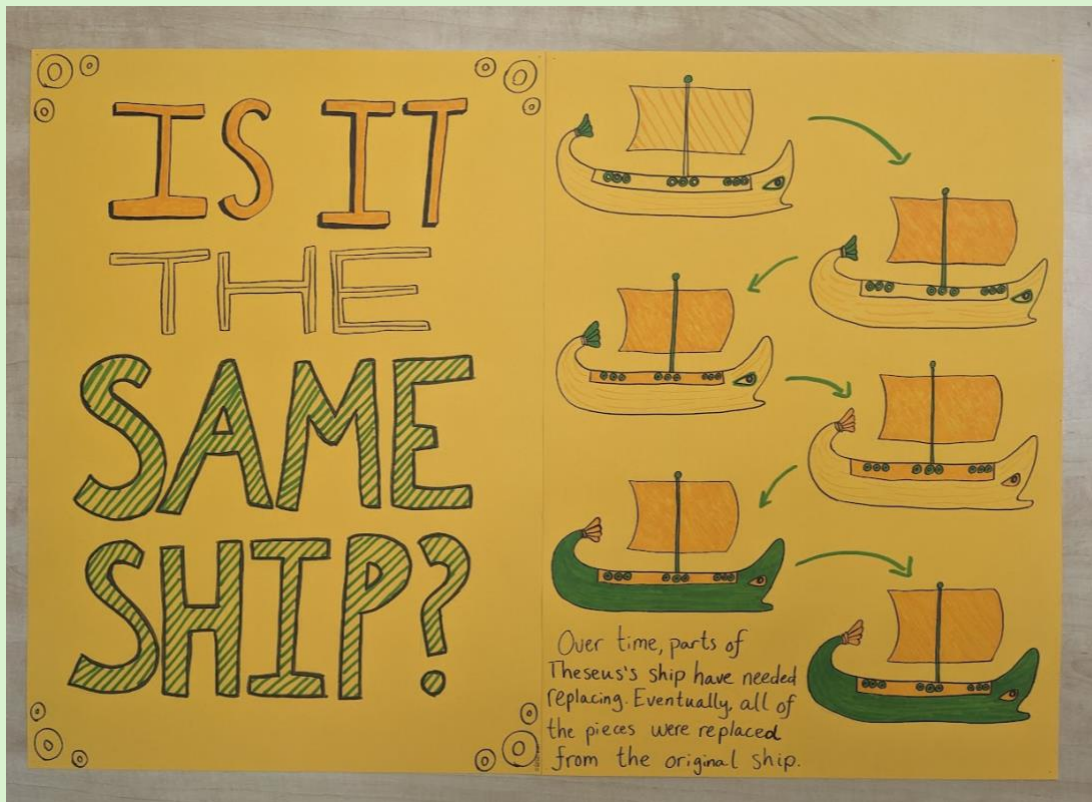
NO! From a physical standpoint, we can tell that people see color differently by the fact that colorblind people exist. There are different variations in the types of colorblindness too. We already know this is the case, so it is not a far leap to say each person is seeing colors differently based on the specific make up and distribution of rods and cones in the eyes. We also know it is a mental phenomenon based on certain types of blindness →

where the eyes are receiving stimulus, but the discrepancy happens somewhere in the path to the brain, causing their blindness. The mental origins of color is also apparent by human societal evolution of color. Not all human societies have distinguished colors the same way. There is a general path societies follow when "discovering" new colors. Blues are less often seen in nature, from our perspectives so it is a later developed color. Prussians distinguish baby blue as a different color from blue, similar to how we distinguish red and pink. If we all saw the same colors the same way, none of these phenomena would make sense.

Prolly

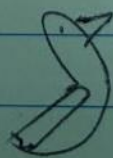
not.

# Theseus's Ship



Yes. The crew make the ship. As the spirit determines the man, so too, does the soul of the ship determine it's name. The composition is irrelevant.

The ship of Theseus remains the same ship so long as it is regarded as such. If, as you replace parts, you keep saying "this is Theseus' ship," it is. If, on the other hand, you take all the parts from the ship as soon as Theseus returns, and build them into a new ship, saying "This is the ship Boaty McBoatface," so long as you mean that, the ship of Theseus is gone and Boaty McBoatface is present. Things can only be what we think them as.

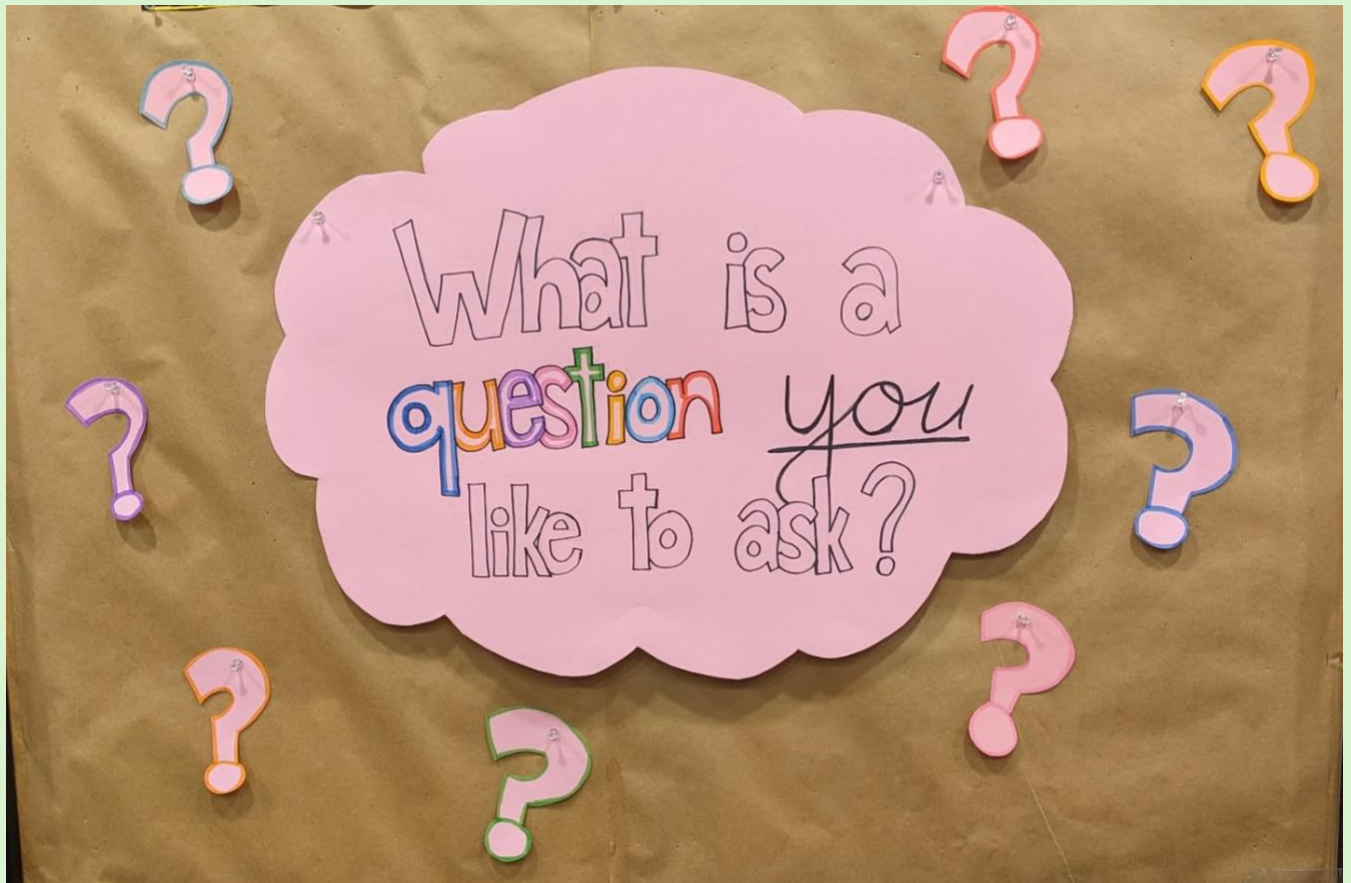


lives on

No, the planks are different

Yes, it is the  
same ship. It has  
been fully renovated


**The Current Poster (As of 5/8/2026)**



# Logic Puzzles

COMPILED BY LABYRINTH EDITORS<sup>71</sup>

## Puzzle 1. Easy



		First Names	Hobbies	Breads									
		Carlos	Emanuel	Selena	Thomas	astronomy	cooking	rafting	reading	cornbread	matzo	naan	pita
Anniversaries	January 4												
	March 13												
	May 6												
	September 15												
Breads	cornbread												
	matzo												
	naan												
	pita												
Hobbies	astronomy												
	cooking												
	rafting												
	reading												

**Logic Puzzles**  
Presented by Puzzle Baron

Puzzle ID: T962QJ  
For hints, solutions and more puzzles, go to [www.Printable-Puzzles.com](http://www.Printable-Puzzles.com)!

Anniversaries	First Names	Hobbies	Breads
January 4			
March 13			
May 6			
September 15			


### Clues for Logic Puzzle: T962QJ

1. The person whose anniversary is on January 4 is not Selena.
2. Of Emanuel and the person who enjoys cooking, one has an anniversary on March 13 and the other has an anniversary on May 6.
3. The person who bought the matzo is Emanuel.
4. The person who enjoys reading has an anniversary after the person who enjoys astronomy.
5. The person who enjoys astronomy is not Thomas.
6. The person who enjoys astronomy has an anniversary before the person who bought the matzo.
7. The person whose anniversary is on March 13 is Emanuel.

<sup>71</sup> Logic puzzles can be found here: <https://www.printable-puzzles.com/index.php>

8. The person who bought the naan is not Selena or Thomas.
9. The person who bought the cornbread is not Selena and does not enjoy reading.
10. The person who bought the pita is not Carlos.
11. The person who bought the pita enjoys cooking.
12. Either the person whose anniversary is on May 6 or the person whose anniversary is on September 15 bought the pita.

### Puzzle 2. Medium



		First Names					Nicknames					Wedding Gifts				
		Alexis	Hayden	Leo	Leslie	Payton	Cueball	Lightning	Shades	Tiny	Wolfman	coffee maker	cutlery set	dining table	juice press	toaster
Reservations	5:30pm															
	6:00pm															
	6:30pm															
	7:00pm															
	8:00pm															
Wedding Gifts	coffee maker															
	cutlery set															
	dining table															
	juice press															
	toaster															
Nicknames	Cueball															
	Lightning															
	Shades															
	Tiny															
	Wolfman															

**Logic Puzzles**  
 Presented by Puzzle Baron  
 Puzzle ID: S974OV  
 For hints, solutions and more puzzles, go to  
[www.Printable-Puzzles.com!](http://www.Printable-Puzzles.com)


Reservations	First Names	Nicknames	Wedding Gifts
5:30pm			
6:00pm			
6:30pm			
7:00pm			
8:00pm			

**Clues for Logic Puzzle: S974OV**

13. The person with a reservation at 7:00pm has the nickname Wolfman.
14. Between Leslie and the person nicknamed Tiny, one loved the cutlery set they received and the other loved the dining table they received.
15. The person with a reservation at 5:30pm is Hayden.
16. The person who received the dining table has an earlier reservation than Payton.

17. The person nicknamed Tiny has an earlier reservation than the person nicknamed Lightning.
18. The person who received the coffee maker is not Leo.
19. The person with a reservation at 8:00pm is not Alexis.
20. The person who received the juice press isn't nicknamed Wolfman.
21. Either the person with a reservation at 5:30pm or the person with a reservation at 6:00pm loved the toaster they received.
22. Leslie has an earlier reservation than the person who received the dining table.
23. The 5 people were Leo, the person nicknamed Shades, the person who received the juice press, the person with a reservation at 6:00pm, and Alexis.

## Puzzle 3. Very Hard



		Names					LinkedIn					Twitter							
		Blake	Edgar	Jonathan	Lindsey	Sheri	Tina	54	58	64	70	78	85	576	715	760	790	804	809
Facebook	190																		
	200																		
	210																		
	220																		
	230																		
	240																		
Twitter	576																		
	715																		
	760																		
	790																		
	804																		
	809																		
LinkedIn	54																		
	58																		
	64																		
	70																		
	78																		
	85																		

**4x6 Logic Puzzle**  
 Presented by Puzzle Baron  
 Puzzle ID: I672BS

For hints, solutions and more puzzles, go to our website:  
[www.Printable-Puzzles.com](http://www.Printable-Puzzles.com)

Facebook	Names	LinkedIn	Twitter
190			
200			
210			
220			
230			
240			

**Clues for Logic Puzzle: 1672BS**

1. Of the person with 64 LinkedIn connections and Sheri, one has 715 Twitter followers and the other has 240 Facebook friends.
2. Of the one with 78 LinkedIn connections and the person with 790 Twitter followers, one has 210 Facebook friends and the other is Jonathan.
3. The one with 78 LinkedIn connections has fewer Facebook friends than the person with 804 Twitter followers.
4. The one with 804 Twitter followers doesn't have exactly 85 LinkedIn connections.

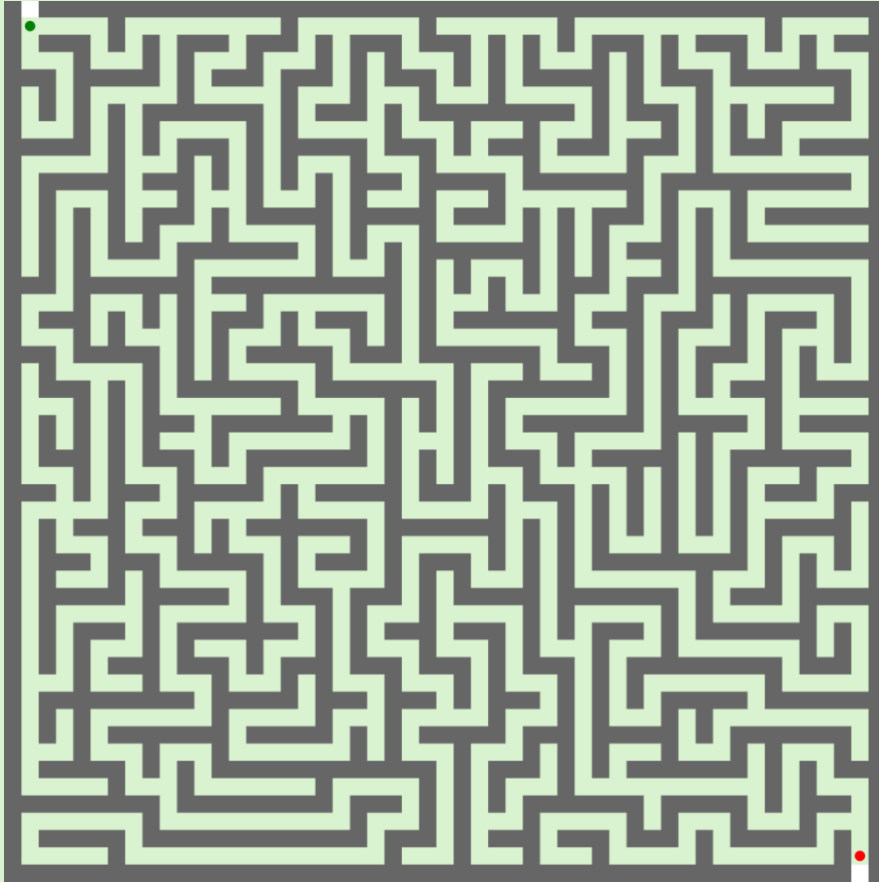
5. The one with 85 LinkedIn connections has 40 more Facebook friends than the person with 715 Twitter followers.
6. The one with 54 LinkedIn connections has 40 fewer Facebook friends than Sheri.
7. Tina is either the one with 760 Twitter followers or the person with 54 LinkedIn connections.
8. The person with 760 Twitter followers doesn't have exactly 78 LinkedIn connections.
9. The person with 760 Twitter followers has 10 fewer Facebook friends than Blake.
10. Lindsey doesn't have exactly 576 Twitter followers.
11. Of the person with 220 Facebook friends and the one with 790 Twitter followers, one is Jonathan and the other has 58 LinkedIn connections.
12. Lindsey doesn't have exactly 715 Twitter followers.

# Maze Puzzles

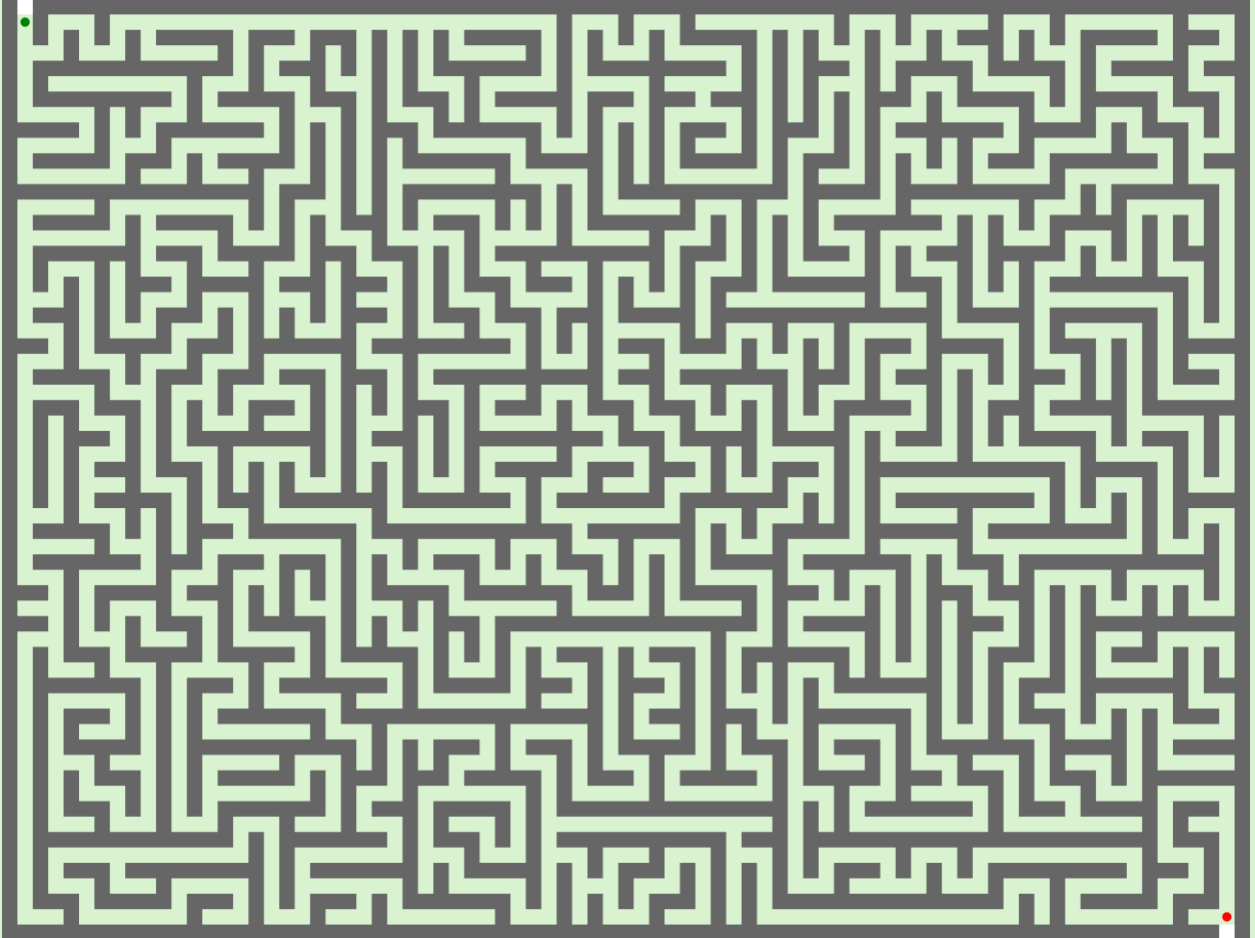
COMPILED BY LABYRINTH EDITORS

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## Maze Puzzle Level I



Maze Puzzle Level II



# About the Editors

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Brianna Davenport was the Head Editor for this edition of Labyrinth. She is a senior at the University of Iowa majoring in Ethics and Public Policy with a specialization in Political Science, a Philosophy minor, and a certificate in Entrepreneurial Management. Her interests include natural philosophy, affordable housing, and the intersection of ethics and data-driven policymaking. Following her graduation in Spring 2026, she plans to return home to Minneapolis to work for a couple years before attending law school in the future.



Samantha Burds was an Editor for this edition of Labyrinth. She is a junior at the University of Iowa majoring in English and minoring in Art. She is interested in the ethical discussions found in literature and the ability for stories to catalyze perspectives and change minds. Although unsure what direction her career will lead, Samantha plans on continuing to enjoy and share stories with the world.



Leann Hobson was an Editor for this edition of Labyrinth. She is a sophomore at the University of Iowa majoring in Criminology and Psychology and minoring in Philosophy. She is interested in reforming the criminal justice system, particularly through rehabilitative and restorative approaches. She enjoys studying psychoanalysis, neuroscience, criminological theory, and ethics. Regarding her occupational future, Leann intends to pursue social work within the correctional system.