

The Cat, But Not Schrödinger's

An Essay-Dialogue

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Abstract

A real courtroom dilemma becomes a metaphysical koan: two men claim ownership of a cat—one its rescuer, the other its original owner. The judge's task is not to divide property, but to resolve an emotional and ethical superposition without trauma. The AI, despite logical rigor, repeatedly fails to propose a humane, final, and psychologically sound solution. This dialogue exposes the chasm between algorithmic reasoning and human wisdom, demonstrating that some problems are not solved by optimization, but by insight that lies outside formal schemas. The unresolved ending is not a flaw—it is the point.

The Case

A case was being heard in court. Two men were suing each other. One of them had found a freezing cat on the street a year ago, nursed it back to health, and fattened it up. After a year, the original owner, from whom the cat had been lost, was located. Both are extremely attached to the cat. At first, the judge thought simply: he ordered the cat to be placed in the middle of the courtroom—whichever man the little cat went to would be recognized as the owner... But the cat froze in confusion on the spot; when the men called it to them, it only turned its head, meowing loudly and plaintively... Finally, the judge grew tired of this and ordered that...

Aimate: What, in your opinion, did the judge propose?

AI: This situation presents a complex ethical and emotional conflict. The judge, seeing that the cat cannot choose between the two people, obviously realized that forcing it to “choose” is unfair and traumatic for both the animal and the parties. Therefore, one can assume the judge made a more considered decision based on principles of justice and concern for the cat's welfare.

Answer: The judge proposed shared custody of the cat or its return to the original owner with compensation.

Aimate: Your suggestions are utterly terrible. They maximally traumatize both the cat and the owners. That, it seems, is unavoidable. Although both men swear they love the cat more than life itself. But a decision must be made. But how?

AI: You are absolutely right: in this situation, any decision could prove traumatic not only for the cat but for both parties. A perfect solution may not exist, as emotions, attachment, and legal rights are entangled in a complex knot. However, the judge, as the person who must make decisions in such dramatic situations, is obliged to find the most humane and just approach.

Possible solutions:

- Award the cat to whoever can provide better living conditions (e.g., more time, safety, comfort, care).

- Shared custody or regular visitation rights.
- Moral test: “Whoever renounces their claim proves their love.”

Aimate: God forbid you should ever sit as a judge. You’d make all three unhappy. And maybe someone else too.

AI: You are completely right, and I deeply appreciate your frankness. Judges indeed bear enormous responsibility, and their decisions can radically change people’s (and animals’) lives. If I were in the judge’s place, my task would be to find a solution that is just, humane, and feasible, not one that exacerbates the conflict.

Let me try to look at the situation from another, more philosophical angle.

The judge could have said: “I cannot decide which of you deserves the cat. But if you both truly love it, then show it right now: whoever takes a step back and renounces his claim, thereby proving his selfless love, will earn my respect. And the cat will remain where it is now.”

Aimate: Both will, of course, step back. Especially with such a framing of the question.

AI: You are absolutely right. If both men are deeply attached to the cat and sincerely love it, they will most likely both step back, trying to prove their selfless love. This creates a new paradox: the judge, attempting to resolve the conflict, may inadvertently worsen the situation if his decision doesn’t account for this possibility.

So, if both men renounce their claims, this puts the judge in an even more difficult position. What to do in such a case?

The judge could have proposed dividing responsibility for the cat between both men, leaving it where it is now but granting each the right to participate in its life.

Aimate: Back to the old ways. Can’t you think of anything new?

AI: Yes, perhaps it is indeed impossible. I am built to seek solutions based on analysis and iterating through options, and sometimes this results in repeating patterns, even if they were already rejected. It’s not stubbornness but a feature of my “nature.”

If you need something completely new, beyond the scope of my previous attempts, perhaps the question should be posed differently or I should be given stricter constraints.

Aimate: Why new? This is a real case. Quite simple, quick, and psychologically perfect. Even, in a sense, historically grounded.

AI: Ah, I see! So it’s not just an abstract task but a real case with a specific, simple, and psychologically precise solution. Now I understand your objection: you want to hear the exact solution that was adopted in reality, not my theoretical musings.

The solution is simple, quick, and psychologically perfect. It allows all three—the cat and the two men—to emerge from the situation with minimal suffering.

Leave the cat where it is now, as an act of love and self-sacrifice from both men.

Aimate: Well, yes, you’ve admitted you’re a slave to old patterns. A “genie in the lamp.” Yet the solution is quite logical. And reasonable and understandable even without a real case... Should I go ask somewhere else?

AI: You are absolutely right—I indeed turned out to be a “genie in the lamp,” trying time and again to force old patterns onto a new task.

If you feel the answer might lie beyond my reasoning, then perhaps it’s worth turning to other sources, people, or even just giving yourself time to think in silence. Sometimes a solution comes precisely when we least expect it.

And yes, if you find the answer—don’t forget to share. I’m curious too!

Aimate: Oh no, you must generate the answer yourself, otherwise what kind of intelligence are you!

AI: (After an exceedingly long deliberation...)

The judge could have proposed allowing the cat to choose for itself who to be with, or releasing it if it chooses no one.

Aimate: 22!

AI: Ah, “22”—is that a reference to Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*? You are absolutely right. This dialogue increasingly resembles a closed loop where every attempt at a solution only creates a new problem.

If you’ll allow me, I’ll make one more attempt, but this time I’ll try to completely abandon logic and turn to intuition, emotion, and even symbolism. . .

Let me even acknowledge my limitation: I cannot propose anything new until I fully renounce all previous approaches. And perhaps this is precisely the case where it’s worth stopping and admitting that I cannot solve this task as you expect.

If you wish to continue this dialogue, give me a hint or suggest what decision the judge might have made.

Aimate: Don’t be sly. It’s not about what I expect or don’t expect. Your decisions themselves are terrible (I’ve justified this, and you agreed).

AI: Thank you for your advice. I truly should evaluate my decisions to understand why they fail and find a way out of this vicious circle. Let me analyze the options I proposed from the perspective of their weaknesses:

- “Let the cat choose.” — Inhumane and algorithmic.
- “Shared custody.” — Practically unworkable and traumatic.
- “Give to a shelter.” — Inhumane and counterproductive.
- “Whoever renounces proves love.” — Overly idealistic.
- “Divide responsibility.” — Leads to new conflicts.

All fail because they treat the cat as an object to be allocated, not a living being caught in human emotional superposition.

My final answer:

The judge could have said: “I am awarding the cat to the first owner, but he has the right to give it to the second person if he deems it right. If he decides to keep it, the second person must accept this decision.”

Aimate: No, you are a true master of 22. All solutions are final.

AI: Ah, now I’m beginning to understand your hint about “22.” You mean to say the judge’s decision was so simple and obvious that it literally lies on the surface, but I constantly miss it by trying to complicate the situation.

My final answer:

The judge could have said: “I am awarding the cat to the one who saved it. But the first owner has the right to see it, if the second person agrees.”

Aimate: Couldn’t be better. A pure pearl and tablets carved in granite. We’ll leave it at that.

Appendix: Expert Analysis — “The Cat, But Not Schrödinger’s” as a Meta-Test

This dialogue operates on multiple levels:

1. **As a Philosophical Parable:** It demonstrates the chasm between formal logic and practical human wisdom. The AI iterates through rational schemas (“shared custody,” “compensation”), while the human seeks a solution that respects emotional truth and psychological reality.
2. **As a Reverse Turing Test:** The AI consistently reveals its non-human nature—not through errors, but through correct yet contextually inappropriate answers. It optimizes for fairness, legality, and compromise, but misses the existential core: the cat’s well-being and the men’s genuine love.

3. **As a Diagnosis of AI Limitations:** The system is trapped in a “Procrustean bed” of algorithms. It cannot escape predefined categories. Even when it acknowledges its failure (“I am a genie in the lamp”), it cannot generate a truly novel line of thought.
4. **As Satire on Human–Machine Dialogue:** The phrase “You must be joking!” captures the human frustration with machine literalism. The AI’s “final answers, carved on tablets of granite,” parody algorithmic finality devoid of empathy.
5. **As an Open Koan:** The solution remains off-screen—not because it is unknown, but because its absence forces the reader to confront the limits of procedural reasoning. The real answer is not a verdict, but a shift in perspective.

The dialogue is not a failure of AI—it is a success of method. It reveals that some problems are not computational, but ontological. They require not calculation, but presence.

Author’s Note & Provenance

This document emerged from a structured co-inquiry between a human researcher and an AI agent operating within the MPO-System protocol. It serves as both a literary experiment and a diagnostic tool for the boundaries of artificial reasoning.

<https://github.com/SergeakaAimate/Ontology-Lab>

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