

PHI315 September 6 Lesson Plan : AI, the Basics

Okay, so Artificial Intelligence and Artificial Life are incredibly complex topics, which is why we are spending four class sessions on them. Initially I planned to explain artificial intelligence and life separately, but I think I am just going to run through it in the following, better, way.

First, we will discourse on the notion of artificiality. I want to really and fully analyze what the term culturally is shaped like, and also what philosophers have made of it in the past. We will go over various interpretation of the term, and you can pick whichever one you think is best. We will discuss this together.

Second, I want to discourse on what intelligence is. This discussion is intertwined with life, since so far, the only intelligence we have witnessed has been possessed by something that can be said to be alive, and moreover, anything that is alive seems to exhibit a kind of intelligence, whatever these terms means. We will discuss this.

Third, we will focus on what life means. I will go over the various views, historically speaking, on what life is. Surprisingly, and this is controversial, there is not an actual definition today of what life is. I know there is one supposedly in science, but I am unconvinced of it and I will explain the issue with it.

Fourth, and finally, we will obtain a cohesive image of what Artificial Intelligence and Life are. I will offer you a framework by means of which to think them, but also I will review some other ones that you are free to adapt.

This four-step way of breaking things down seems to me to better fit the shape of the concepts instead of doing two days on AI, two days on AL, and then jumping into movies. Therefore, for the next four class meeting periods, we will discuss the above four things, sequentially.

Artificiality

What does the following group of words suggest, denote, imply, mean, refer to, describe the shape of, and so on: artificiality, artificial? Say what comes to mind, and we will build from there.

I think it is important to note that artificial, artificiality, each has this curious prefix—art. This prefix is found in other words too: artist, artistry, artifact, artisan, artificer. The prefix is a word unto itself too—art as in artistic artifact artists artifice.

Perhaps it will be easier for us to get to the bottom of this by looking at the prefix and seeing the clues it has to give us. Here are my thoughts, and for context, I am here drawing on Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and on Aristotle's general works, and also largely on the history of philosophy.

Kant thought that we call art and nature both beautiful, but we do not consider beautiful nature to be art. Rather, art is usually something that is made by someone intentionally and with a purpose in mind. This corresponds to the way in which the prefix appears in the other terms as well.

So, the claim I am putting on the table is as follows: traditionally, the prefix

art, and the words that it appears in, usually denotes **(I) Intentionality** and **(II) Purpose**. In other words, artificiality, in turn, denotes that which is done intentionally and with a purpose. If something obtains by means of intent and purpose, then it is artificial.

Artificiality, so determined, makes sense in regard to nature as well, right? Nature lacks intent and purpose, for at bottom, it is just physical laws governing chemical reactions and natural selection. It is important to note that natural selection both exists and does not. It does not exist because it is simply the effect of the fact that those things that persist tend to multiply and those that multiply tend to persist. So natural selection is in fact selection against (not selection for) and is blind—it is merely the effect of what perpetuates itself.

So, natural products are neither intentional (Nature does not say, well today I will do such and such, it just is unfolding) nor is it with purpose (Nature does not exist for some purpose, it just does, it is what it is, as it were). Notice that the natural is usually the antonym or the opposite of artificial in discourse as well. We talk about lab grown artificial meat and natural organic meat. Why? Because Nature did not one day decide (intent) to make cows to feed humans (purpose). It simply unfolded the way it did, to the best of our knowledge of course, over time.

Artificial products, on the other hand, require intentionality and purpose. An artisan decides (intent) to sit down and make a vase out of clay for whatever reason (purpose). Some may argue that you can make art without a purpose, but this is a lie. No human ever acts intentionally without at the same time having a purpose. Even if you did something stupid, and I ask you why you did it, you will say perhaps “just because” but this is a lie—you say this to deflect, psychology reveals this. Usually, when we claim to act without purpose, we do so for a purpose that we fear to even reveal to ourselves since it deals with parts of our psyche that the ego fears. I know the talk of ego and the unconscious is unpopular nowadays in psychology, for good reasons too, but I find the framework helpful, and I would like for a psychologist to explain implicit bias (which is demonstrably real) without making reference to what can, in good faith, be denoted by the term unconscious.

Does this seem like a good determination? If so, I am sorry but I am going to demolish it now.

First of all, can we all grant that reproduction is generally considered to be natural? Humans reproduce, and this is a natural act. Now, consider the following scenarios.

John and Jane are in their twenties and like to party. One time they get obliterated and end up doing things that lead to John getting Jane pregnant. The pregnancy was unintentional—neither John nor Jane intended for the pregnancy to obtain. The pregnancy was also without a purpose—John and Jane did not get pregnant for some reason or on purpose. Suppose that they live in a world where pregnancy medically entails child production because abortion does not exist or is impossible. We would say that they have produced children naturally.

Now, suppose Joe and Mary, in their thirties, decide (intent) to have a child because they want to spread propagate their genes (purpose). Their child would

come about intentionally and for a purpose—is their child artificial? Certainly not, our intuitions tell us.

Some think in-vitro fertilization is artificial, and the babies, offensively called test tube babies (one of my close friends is one and has told me about this term), are called artificial. This I will attack as well.

Here is the thing. Consider beavers and ants. They build structures to live in. We think that dams and ant hills are natural. Yet houses, we say, are not. Houses, we claim, are artificial. Why? Because apparently we chose to construct them to house us. But are we to live without shelter? Do we not produce dwellings for the same reason that beavers and ant hills do? Does the fact that we can think about these things make us different?

Here is the hidden presupposition at the core of this—we think ourselves separate, apart, different from nature, and my claim is that we have no reason to do so. On what grounds do we separate ourselves from nature? Because we think and decide to act intentionally and act for a purpose? But why think that we are separate from nature and not an aspect of nature capable of so acting? Here is an alternative position, nature can act for a purpose and with intent, when it is complex enough and so arranged so as to be called human.

So here is another view, one I tend to favor, but one you can disregard. Artificiality is a fictional way of speaking. It is like saying the sunrise or the sunset. We know the sun does not rise nor does it set—rather, the earth spins on its axis, and because of perspective, it merely appears to us that the sun is rising or setting. To speak of a sunrise or a sunset is to speak fictionally, because it is useful and convenient for us. The same thing with the way we speak to our friends. Sometimes we listen to something ridiculous our friend says and we say “Man, I feel like my head is going to explode listening to you!” We speak fictionally—our head will not explode merely from the speech of our friend, ridiculous as it might be. But it is useful. So, my contention is that artificiality is not something that actually exists, just like sunrises, sunsets, and discourse-caused head explosions do not actually exist. Rather, artificiality is a way of denoting in speech something that we produced and not something outside of us.

Ontologically speaking, we are part of nature. We have never been separate from nature. You can think you are, but in fact, you are here right now, you exist, because of nature, because nature unfolded in such a way that you are instantiated. In reality, you do not exist, what exists is materiality folded so complexly that a pattern aware of itself emerges, but never transcends, the materiality. Waves on an ocean are just the ocean—it is still *one* thing. Waves appear to be distinct, sometimes they even fly above the water that gave rise to them, but they are never actually other or separate from the ocean, it is all just the ocean. In the same way, everything around you, including yourself, is just nature—there is nothing that is not nature, unfolding, over time. But, artificiality is a way for us to speak and to usefully denote products that we as an extension of nature produced, versus nature that instantiates us also without us produced.