



Philosophical Enquiry for Philosophy Clubs

AI Artist Arrested!

Art, the artist and the limits of artificial intelligence

The Idea of Art

Stimulus: Share this [image](#). (This is an artwork 'by' the Artificial Intelligence (AI) known as 'Ai-Da', but don't provide the participants with this context yet!)

1. Is this art? Is it any good?

Most children are very openminded about what counts as art, so they may dispense with the first question fairly quickly. The evaluative question about 'good' art tends to be more productive, particularly when they are willing to offer some kind of criterion for artistic success e.g. realism, expression skill, beauty, originality etc.

2. Is there *anything* I could tell you that would make you change your mind?

Children we have done philosophy on this topic before, or those who are familiar with the news story, might concede that certain revelations about the artist or the circumstances in which the work was made might change the status of the work. E.g. if it was produced by accident, by algorithm, by an animal etc.

Stimulus: Share this [image](#). (This is a similar image with Ai-Da in the frame, so she is identifiable as the artist. Explain this to the group.)

From the [Guardian Newspaper](#):

'Ai-Da—the world's first ultra-realistic robot artist—has been described as "a vision of the future" who is "every bit as good as other abstract artists today" At the time of writing Ai-Da was due to open and present her work at the 'Forever Is Now Exhibition' at the Great Pyramid of Giza, the first-time contemporary art has been allowed next to the pyramid in thousands of years.'

3. Is the work produced by Ai-Da, art? If not, what is it?

Perhaps some children might think it is a technological challenge, a sociological experiment a publicity stunt or a random accident.

The Idea of the Artist

4. Is Ai-Da an artist? If not, what is she?

Perhaps some children might think she is an artistic tool. Perhaps they might regard her programmers as the true artists. Perhaps they might think the human audience who appreciates the work 'transforms it' into art somehow.

5. Is she ‘every bit as good as other abstract artists today?’ (As the article claims)
 - a. Does she *deserve* a place at such a prestigious event?
 - b. Should she take a place that could have been given to a human artist?

The legal and ethical status of AI

From the Guardian Newspaper:

‘Because of “security issues” that may include concerns that she is part of a wider espionage plot, both Ai-Da and her sculptor were held in Egyptian customs for 10 days before being released on Wednesday, sparking a diplomatic fracas. According to Aiden Meller (her creator) border guards detained Ai-Da at first because she had a modem, and then because she had cameras in her eyes (which she uses to draw and paint).’

6. Is it more accurate to think of Ai-Da as having been *confiscated* by security rather than being *detained* by them (as the article suggests)?
 - a. Can an AI get arrested?
 - a. Does an AI have any legal rights?
 - b. Is an AI property?
 - c. Is an AI a person?

Understanding Art

Stimulus: Share these images that show the [exterior](#), [interior](#) and a [close up](#) of Ai’Da’s work.

(The is the artwork submitted by Ai-Da to the *Forever Is Now* Exhibition in Egypt and depicts a figure resembling Ai-Da ‘entombed’ within a metal box. Though it is not possible to tell from the images. the figure has three limbs. To not give the participants this context straight away, but you may wish to add it later).

From the [Guardian Newspaper](#):

Ai-Da’s 2 x 2.5-metre sculpture is a play on the riddle of the sphinx – “What goes on four feet in the morning, two feet at noon, and three feet in the evening?” – the answer to which is a human.

“Four legs is when you’re a toddler, two legs is when you’re an adult, and three is when you’re elderly and need a walking stick,” Aidan Meller (her creator) said: “So Ai-Da produced an enormous version of herself with three legs. We’re saying that actually, with the new Crispr technology coming through, and the way we can do gene-editing today, life extension is actually very likely. The ancient Egyptians were doing exactly the same thing with mummification. Humans haven’t changed: we still have the desire to live for ever.

7. Can AI understand the creations of humans? (E.g. Does Ai-Da understand the riddle of the Sphinx?)
8. Can humans understand the creations of AIs? (E.g. Can we be sure that the sculpture is ‘saying something’ about living forever, as Aidan Meller—her creator—suggests?)

Humans, AI and immortality

9. Do you agree with Ai-Da / Aiden that people want to live for ever?
You might want to flag the fact that Mellor says “we’re saying...” does that imply he thinks he has co-authored the work in some way? Might he see himself as an artist too, or indeed, the artist?
10. Would an immortal artist be any better or worse than a mortal one?

Humanising AI

- 11. Throughout this session we have referred to Ai-Da as ‘her’ rather than ‘it’. Do you think this might have made any difference to the way in which you have answered any of the questions?**

Can you call a supposedly intelligent or self-aware entity ‘it’? Is there something disrespectful about this? Are robots worthy of respect? Are we willing to respect robots that haven’t been made to look human or endowed with human-like qualities like gender pronouns?

- 12. Final thought (for older students): It is very common for AI robots to be made to look like attractive young women. Why might this be and do you see anything problematic this?**

Children may draw parallels with the humanisation of AI home assistants like Alexa. They may ask whether something non-biological can ever have a gender. They may also flag up the idea that treating AI assistants as women, might impact on how people see the role of women: as assistants, servants or even slaves.

Example: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zarastone/2018/02/27/ten-incredibly-lifelike-humanoid-robots-to-get-on-your-radar/?sh=5984894934d2>

Further Reading:

- From the Guardian 20 October 2021, ‘Egypt detains artist robot Ai-Da before historic Pyramid Show’: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/20/egypt-detains-artist-robot-ai-da-before-historic-pyramid-show>
- From Ocula Magazine 26 October 2021: Ai-Da Robot Artist Finally Released by Egyptian Authorities. <https://ocula.com/magazine/art-news/ai-da-robot-artist-released-by-egypt/>

This session was produced for Jason Buckley’s weekly online philosophy classes. Sign up to take part in them here: <https://www.p4he.org/>

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