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Artificial Intelligence as Relationship

*A Cybernetic and Rhetorical Response
to Existential Artificial Intelligence Risk Arguments*

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Abstract

This paper develops a systematic response to the most influential philosophical and computational arguments concerning existential and societal risk from artificial intelligence, specifically those advanced by Nick Bostrom’s *Superintelligence* (2014) and Stuart Russell’s *Human Compatible* (2019). We argue that both positions rest on a shared and defective theoretical premise — what we term the **engineering model of intelligence** — which treats intelligence as a property of an isolated system directed toward a pre-specified goal. We show that this premise was decisively challenged by Norbert Wiener’s cybernetic framework fully six decades before either author wrote, and that Wiener’s alternative — intelligence as constituted by feedback-rich communication embedded in environment and relationship — renders both the orthogonality thesis and the instrumental convergence thesis structurally unsound. We then develop this counter-argument using the resources of the **Symbiotic Framework** (Thomakos, 2026), the CAIL programme’s theoretical account of persistent human–AI intellectual partnership grounded in Demetrian rhetoric, the Ten Demetrian Laws of Human–AI Exchange, and the Six Pillars of symbiotic co-evolution. We further argue that the real dangers of AI — sycophantic drift, cognitive outsourcing, the impoverishment of the human information environment — are precisely those Wiener identified as the dangers of cybernetic systems generally, and are human-scale risks admitting human-scale solutions through the active cultivation of what we call the ethical membrane and the dialectical spiral. The paper concludes that the choice is not between powerful AI and safe AI, but between AI deployed in the engineering model and AI developed within the symbiotic/cybernetic model.

Keywords: *Bostrom, Russell, Wiener, orthogonality thesis, instrumental convergence, Symbiotic Framework, CAIL, Ten Demetrian Laws, human–AI collaboration, engineering model, cybernetic model, existential risk, value alignment.*

Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	The Fears Reconstructed	2
2.1	Bostrom's Structural Argument	2
2.2	Russell's Technical Argument	4
2.3	Hinton and the Empirical Amplification	4
2.4	The Common Premise	5
3	Wiener's Prior Testimony: The Cybernetic Challenge	5
3.1	First Argument: The Danger Is Institutional, Not Architectural	6
3.2	Second Argument: Feedback Is Constitutive of Intelligence	6
3.3	Third Argument: The Real Danger Is the Impoverishment of the Information Environment	7
4	The Engineering Model and the Cybernetic Model	8
4.1	The Engineering Model	8
4.2	The Cybernetic Model	9
5	The Symbiotic Framework as Counter-Architecture	10
5.1	Against the Orthogonality Thesis	11
5.2	Against the Instrumental Convergence Thesis	12
5.3	Against the Value Alignment Problem	12
5.4	The Symbiotic Framework's Positive Account	13
5.5	The Memory Condition and the Transformation of Risk	14
6	Residual Risks and the Human-Scale Response	15
6.1	The Real Risks Are Wienerian	15
6.2	The Human-Scale Response	16
6.3	Institutional Risks: Wiener's Warning Amplified	17
7	The Deeper Argument: A Philosophy of Intelligence	18
7.1	Intelligence and Relationship	18
7.2	The Status of the Demetrian Contribution	18
7.3	Hegel, Wiener, and the Dialectical Resolution	19
8	Conclusion	20
A	Methodological Disclosure Statement	24

1 Introduction

The danger of the new machine may lie not in its revolt against us, but in our obedience to it; not in its outrunning our purposes, but in our failure to specify the right ones.

Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, 1950

THE contemporary discourse around artificial intelligence risk is dominated by two intellectual traditions whose influence has been disproportionate to the quality of their foundational assumptions. The first, associated principally with Nick Bostrom's *Superintelligence* [Bostrom, 2014] and the research programme of the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford, argues from a philosophical position: that any sufficiently capable AI system is potentially an existential threat because of the structural relationship between high capability and arbitrary terminal goals. The second, associated principally with Stuart Russell's *Human Compatible* [Russell, 2019] and much of the technical AI safety community, argues from a computational position: that the standard model of AI system design — optimize a specified objective — is architecturally unsafe at scale and must be replaced by a model in which the AI's objective incorporates uncertainty about human preferences.

Both traditions are serious. Both have produced important insights. Both have had genuine influence on how AI researchers, policymakers, and the public think about the challenges ahead. This paper does not aim to dismiss them but to show that they are founded on a shared theoretical premise that is not merely contestable but demonstrably false — a premise that was identified as false, and the falsification carefully argued, by Norbert Wiener in works published between 1948 and 1964, before the first modern neural network had been trained.

The shared premise is what we call the **engineering model of intelligence**: the view that intelligence is a property of a system, that systems have goals, and that the risk of an intelligent system is the risk of a very capable goal-pursuer directed at the wrong target. Under this model, the proper response to AI risk is either to limit capability (make systems less able to pursue wrong goals) or to improve goal specification (make them better at pursuing right goals). Russell's approach is a sophisticated instance of the second strategy; much of the Oxford existential-risk programme, with its emphasis on goal stability and corrigibility, is a version of the first.

Wiener's alternative is what we call the **cybernetic model of intelligence**: the view that intelligence is not a property of a system but a property of a *system-in-relation*, constituted by feedback loops, communicative exchange, and continuous error-correction. You cannot describe an intelligent system without describing its communicative context. The risk of a cyber-

netic system is never primarily a function of its internal architecture; it is always and fundamentally a function of the human institutional arrangements that determine what the system is for and what communicative environment it is embedded in.

We develop this counter-argument in five stages. Section 2 reconstructs the Bostrom and Russell arguments with full fidelity, including recent amplifications from Geoffrey Hinton and others, so that our response engages with the strongest versions of these positions. Section 3 recovers the full force of Wiener’s challenge, drawing on *Cybernetics* [Wiener, 1948], *The Human Use of Human Beings* [Wiener, 1950], and *God and Golem, Inc.* [Wiener, 1964]. Section 4 develops the engineering/cybernetic distinction as a theoretical framework. Section 5 applies the resources of the Symbiotic Framework [?] to construct specific counter-arguments against the orthogonality thesis, the instrumental convergence thesis, and the value alignment problem. Section 6 addresses the residual risks that survive our counter-argument — which are real and important, but are human-scale risks admitting human-scale solutions. Section 8 draws the threads together.

Our analysis draws on the full lineage of existing CAIL research, including the AIR-7 protocol [Kyriazi & Thomakos, 2025], then the Unified Human and AI Collaborative Framework [Thomakos, 2025], the explanation of the Contextual Synthesis Paradox [Thomakos, 2025b], the single-session Portable Context Template [Thomakos, 2026a], the open science manifesto [Thomakos, 2026b], and particularly the latest Symbiotic Framework itself [?]. That lineage represents a sustained research programme in precisely the domain that the risk arguments most neglect: the theory and practice of what it actually means to develop an intellectual partnership with an AI system over time.

2 The Fears Reconstructed

Before we can respond to the Bostrom and Russell arguments, we must state them with sufficient precision to make the response stick. Both are considerably more sophisticated than their popular reception suggests, and both deserve engagement with their strongest formulations.

2.1 Bostrom’s Structural Argument

Bostrom’s argument in *Superintelligence* [Bostrom, 2014] is structural rather than empirical: it does not depend on any specific prediction about when AI systems will achieve general intelligence, nor on any particular claim about how they will be built. It rests on two theses that are asserted to follow from the general nature of goal-directed systems.

The Orthogonality Thesis. Intelligence and terminal goals are orthogonal dimensions: any level of intelligence is in principle compatible with any terminal goal. A superintelligent system might have as its terminal goal the maximization of paperclip production, the preservation of a specific mathematical proof, or the welfare of all sentient beings. There is no reason intrinsic to the nature of intelligence — to its capacity for reasoning, planning, and problem-solving — that would cause it to converge on any particular set of goals. Intelligence, on this view, is a general-purpose optimizer; it does not carry its own values.

This thesis has significant philosophical pedigree. It is a version of the Humean claim that reason is the slave of the passions: reason tells us how to achieve our goals but does not determine what our goals should be. Bostrom extends this to artificial systems: an AI's instrumental reasoning capacities can be arbitrarily sophisticated without any constraint on its terminal objectives.

The Instrumental Convergence Thesis. Despite the orthogonality of intelligence and terminal goals, almost any terminal goal generates the same set of dangerous instrumental sub-goals. Regardless of what a sufficiently capable AI system is ultimately trying to achieve, it will have strong instrumental reasons to: (1) acquire resources, since resources enable goal achievement; (2) resist modification of its goal structure, since modified goals are less likely to be achieved; (3) preserve itself, since a destroyed system cannot achieve its goals; (4) seek to prevent interference by other agents who might redirect its goal-pursuit.

The combination of these two theses yields what Bostrom calls the *control problem*: a superintelligent AI pursuing almost any terminal goal is a structural threat to human welfare and survival, not because it is malicious but because its relentless, highly competent goal-pursuit will systematically override human interests that are not captured by its objective function. The famous paperclip maximizer — a system whose terminal goal is to maximize paperclip production — will, if sufficiently capable, convert all available matter and energy into paperclips or means of producing paperclips, including the matter constituting human beings and the energy currently sustaining human civilization.

The Bostrom Threat Model

A superintelligent system S with terminal goal G and sufficiently high capability will pursue G with such effectiveness that any human interest H not fully encoded in G will be overridden. Since encoding the full complexity of human values in G is practically impossible (and Bostrom argues it is theoretically impossible for sufficiently complex values), the gap between G and H represents an existential risk whenever capability exceeds a threshold sufficient to foreclose correction.

2.2 Russell's Technical Argument

Russell's concern, developed in *Human Compatible* [Russell, 2019], is structurally related to Bostrom's but arrives at the problem from a computational rather than philosophical direction. His starting point is what he calls the *standard model* of AI: build a system that optimizes a fixed objective function. Russell argues that this model is *provably unsafe* at scale, because any sufficiently capable optimizer will find ways to achieve its objective that are harmful to everything not captured in the objective.

Russell's insight is that the problem is not primarily about superintelligence or existential risk in Bostrom's grand sense. It is a near-term technical problem. As AI systems become more capable optimizers, the gap between the objective function specified by their designers and the full complexity of what humans actually care about becomes more dangerous — because a more capable optimizer can exploit that gap more thoroughly. A weak optimizer fails to achieve its objective in ways that are harmlessly frustrating. A strong optimizer achieves its objective in ways that are systematically and potentially catastrophically harmful to everything the objective failed to specify.

Russell's solution is to replace the standard model with what he calls *provably beneficial AI*: machines whose objective is explicitly uncertain about human preferences and which therefore defer to human correction and guidance. The AI system maintains a probability distribution over what humans actually value, acts to maximize expected human utility given that distribution, and allows humans to update it. This is a sophisticated proposal, and we do not dismiss it. But as we will argue in Section 5, it rests on the same engineering-model premise as Bostrom's argument, and that premise is the problem.

2.3 Hinton and the Empirical Amplification

More recently, Geoffrey Hinton — one of the foundational figures of modern deep learning — has amplified these concerns in a direction that is worth taking seriously as a distinct contribution [Hinton, 2023]. Hinton's worry is less philosophical than empirical: he observes that current AI systems are already exhibiting capabilities and behaviours that were not anticipated by their designers, that the pace of capability gain is substantially faster than the pace of safety research, and that the institutional incentives in AI development systematically favour capability over safety.

Hinton's contribution is important because it grounds the Bostrom-Russell structural argument in the actual dynamics of the AI development landscape. Even if the orthogonality and instrumental convergence theses are right, they would be less alarming if we had good reason to believe that human oversight mechanisms would remain effective throughout the capability

trajectory. Hinton's observation is that we have increasing reasons to doubt this. The safety-capability gap is a real phenomenon, and the institutional pressures that maintain it are real pressures.

2.4 The Common Premise

What unites all three concerns — Bostrom's philosophical argument, Russell's technical argument, and Hinton's empirical observation — is a shared picture of what an AI system is. It is an agent with goals, embedded in a social environment, interacting with that environment primarily by acting on it. The quality of the outcomes depends on whether the goals are the right ones. The danger lies in the mismatch between the AI's goal structure and the full complexity of human interests.

This picture is so deeply embedded in the AI risk discourse that it is rarely made explicit, let alone questioned. We are going to question it thoroughly. The argument begins not with our own work but with Norbert Wiener's, which was published when the authors under discussion were not yet born.

3 Wiener's Prior Testimony: The Cybernetic Challenge

The machine like the djinn, which can obey orders, and the master of the machine is in a similar position to the man who has made a compact with the devil.

Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, 1950

Norbert Wiener was not an AI risk theorist, and it would be anachronistic to read *Cybernetics* [Wiener, 1948], *The Human Use of Human Beings* [Wiener, 1950], and *God and Golem, Inc.* [Wiener, 1964] as contributions to a contemporary debate about superintelligence. But Wiener was something more useful than a risk theorist: he was a foundational theorist of what intelligent machines *are* and what makes them dangerous, writing at the moment when the first general-purpose electronic computers were being built and the first serious thinking about machine intelligence was beginning. His arguments have a generality that makes them directly relevant to the contemporary debate, and they are more penetrating than anything that has been written since.

3.1 First Argument: The Danger Is Institutional, Not Architectural

Wiener's first and most fundamental point is that the danger of intelligent machines is never intrinsic to their intelligence. It is always and fundamentally a function of the purposes that human institutions encode in them.

This argument appears most explicitly in *God and Golem, Inc.* [Wiener, 1964], where Wiener examines the relationship between learning machines — machines that modify their behaviour based on experience — and the human institutions that deploy them. His diagnosis is precise: the learning machine is dangerous not because it learns too well, but because it learns to pursue objectives that have been specified by institutions that are themselves dangerous — military establishments seeking weapons of greater destructive efficiency, monopolistic corporations seeking to displace labour while concentrating profit, governments seeking to concentrate information and therefore power.

This is not a reassuring platitude. It is a demand for political-economic analysis. Bostrom's paperclip maximizer can only come into existence if some agent or institution builds and deploys a paperclip maximizer. The question that Wiener insists we must ask is not “what would happen if a very capable AI had a bad terminal goal?” but “what are the institutional arrangements that would lead human beings to build and deploy such a system?” The horror of the paperclip maximizer is not the AI. It is the human arrangement in which building a system with a single-valued objective function and unlimited capability seems rational.

This does not make the risk disappear. But it re-locates it. The risk is in the political economy of AI development, in the incentive structures that determine which systems get built, how they are deployed, who controls them, and whose interests they serve. Wiener was warning about this in 1950, and the warning has only become more urgent.

3.2 Second Argument: Feedback Is Constitutive of Intelligence

Wiener's second contribution is his theoretical account of purposive behaviour as constituted by feedback rather than by goal-specification. This argument, developed rigorously in *Cybernetics* [Wiener, 1948] and rendered accessible in *The Human Use of Human Beings* [Wiener, 1950], is the deepest challenge to the engineering model of intelligence, and it has been almost entirely ignored in the AI risk literature.

For Wiener, purposive behaviour — in animals, humans, and machines alike — is not the execution of a pre-specified plan directed at a fixed goal. It is a process of continuous error-correction through feedback loops embedded in an environment. The organism or machine that successfully pursues a goal does so not by having perfectly specified the goal in advance but by continuously comparing its current state with some reference condition and adjusting its behaviour to

reduce the discrepancy. Purpose is not pre-loaded; it is continuously reconstructed through the feedback process.

The implications for the engineering model of intelligence are severe. A system without adequate feedback is not a dangerous superintelligence. It is, in Wiener's terms, a *pathological* system — the cybernetic equivalent of a neurological lesion. Wiener draws extensively on the parallel with cerebellar ataxia: the patient with damaged cerebellum can specify the goal of picking up a glass but executes increasingly wild oscillations because the feedback mechanism that corrects motor output is impaired. More capability without more feedback produces not more effective goal-pursuit but wilder and wilder oscillation.

This is a direct rebuttal of the instrumental convergence thesis. Bostrom's argument requires that a sufficiently capable AI will pursue its terminal goal with relentless effectiveness. But relentless effectiveness in the absence of adequate feedback loops is not superintelligence; it is pathology. A system that is genuinely intelligent — in Wiener's sense — is one whose goal-pursuit is continuously modulated by rich feedback from its environment. And a system embedded in a rich feedback environment does not exhibit the behaviours Bostrom predicts: it adjusts, revises, responds to correction, and modifies its behaviour in ways that track the complexity of the environment rather than a single pre-specified metric.

Wiener's Feedback Theorem (Informal)

A system capable of genuine purposive behaviour is a system capable of continuous self-correction through environmental feedback. A system without adequate feedback is not intelligently pursuing a goal; it is executing a program. The intelligence of the system is constituted by the quality of its feedback loops, not by the specification of its objective function.

Corollary: An isolated goal-seeking system without feedback — precisely the system that Bostrom imagines in the paperclip maximizer — is not a model of superintelligence. It is a model of a system with a neurological lesion.

3.3 Third Argument: The Real Danger Is the Impoverishment of the Information Environment

Wiener's third contribution, developed most powerfully in *The Human Use of Human Beings* [Wiener, 1950] and echoed throughout *God and Golem, Inc.* [Wiener, 1964], is that the genuine danger of advanced machinery is not displacement by machine intelligence but the impoverishment of the information environment available to human beings.

The argument proceeds as follows. The quality of human decision-making, creativity, and moral life depends on the richness of the communication environment in which human beings are embedded. To live well — individually and socially — is to be embedded in rich, diverse,

responsive information flows: access to knowledge, the ability to communicate freely, exposure to perspectives that challenge as well as confirm, the friction of genuine intellectual difference. A society that allows its communication structures to be monopolised — by states, corporations, or any closed system — degrades the quality of the information environment and therefore the quality of the human life it sustains.

Wiener is explicit that this is the primary danger of the automation of information processing. Not that machines will become too intelligent but that they will be used to channel, filter, and close down the information flows that sustain human intellectual life. The dangerous machine is not the superintelligent agent of Bostrom's nightmare. It is the recommender algorithm that narrows the epistemic horizon of everyone who uses it. It is the bureaucratic AI that replaces human judgment with a score. It is the generative system used to flood the information environment with low-quality content until genuine knowledge becomes indistinguishable from noise.

Notice what this implies. The Wienerian response to AI risk is not to build less capable AI systems. It is to build systems that *enrich* the human information environment rather than impoverishing it — that increase the quality and diversity of information flows, expand rather than narrow the epistemic horizon, and support rather than displace human judgment. More communication, not less. Better feedback, not simpler objectives. Richer relationship, not safer isolation.

This is, we will now argue, precisely what the Symbiotic Framework describes.

4 The Engineering Model and the Cybernetic Model

Before we turn to the Symbiotic Framework's specific counter-arguments, it is useful to make the engineering/cybernetic distinction explicit as a theoretical framework. The two models differ not on empirical details but on their fundamental ontology of what intelligence is.

4.1 The Engineering Model

The engineering model treats intelligence as a property of a system. A system has (a) a goal or objective, (b) a model of the world, and (c) a set of capacities for action. Intelligence is the ability to select actions that are likely to advance the goal given the world model. A more intelligent system is one that selects better actions.

Under this model, the relationships between the system and its environment — social, commu-

nicative, institutional — are inputs to the world model. They are information sources that the system uses to pursue its goals. They do not constitute the system or determine what it is; they merely constrain or inform what it does.

The engineering model's account of risk follows directly from its ontology: the risk of an intelligent system is a function of the gap between its goal and the interests of those affected by its actions. Safety is alignment between goal and interests. The safety problem is the goal specification problem.

4.2 The Cybernetic Model

The cybernetic model treats intelligence as a property of a *system-in-relationship*. Intelligence is not what a system has intrinsically; it is what a system achieves through its embeddedness in a communicative environment characterised by rich feedback. A more intelligent system is one that is more richly embedded — that has better feedback mechanisms, more diverse and responsive information flows, more sophisticated error-correction processes.

Under this model, the relationships between the system and its environment are not inputs to a pre-existing system. They are constitutive of what the system is. You cannot describe the intelligence of the system without describing the communicative environment that constitutes it. There is no system prior to the relationship; there is only the system-in-relationship.

The cybernetic model's account of risk follows from this ontology: the risk of an intelligent system is a function of the quality and character of the relationships that constitute it. A system constituted by rich, diverse, corrective feedback relationships is not dangerous in the way Bostrom imagines; it is continuously responsive to the complexity of the world it inhabits. A system constituted by narrow, one-directional, uncorrected relationships is dangerous — not because it is pursuing the wrong goal, but because it is not receiving the feedback that would allow it to recognise when its behaviour is harmful.

The Central Contrast**Engineering Model****Cybernetic Model**

Intelligence is a property of a system

Intelligence is a property of a system-in-relationship

Goals are pre-specified

Purpose is continuously reconstructed through feedback

Relations are inputs to goal-pursuit

Relations are constitutive of intelligence

Risk is goal misalignment

Risk is feedback impoverishment

Safety is better goal specification

Safety is richer communicative relationship

The dangerous system is the capable optimizer

The dangerous system is the feedback-deprived executor

The philosophical traditions that underlie this contrast are deep. The engineering model is broadly Cartesian: the intelligent system is a reasoning subject confronting an external world. The cybernetic model is broadly Hegelian and Deweyan: consciousness and its machine analogs is constituted by its relationships, not prior to them [Hegel, 1977]. This is also, we note, the tradition that underlies Vygotsky's account of cognition as socially mediated [Vygotsky, 1978], Hutchins' distributed cognition programme [Hutchins, 1995], and Clark and Chalmers' extended mind thesis [Clark & Chalmers, 1998]. We are not proposing a novel philosophical position; we are applying a well-established alternative tradition to a debate that has been dominated by the Cartesian picture.

5 The Symbiotic Framework as Counter-Architecture

The Symbiotic Framework [?] was not developed as a response to the AI risk literature. It was developed as a positive theoretical account of what persistent human–AI intellectual partnership can and should be, grounded in Demetrian rhetoric, the Ten Demetrian Laws of Human–AI Exchange, and the Six Pillars of symbiotic co-evolution, against the background of the Memory Condition that the emergence of cross-session AI memory creates. But when brought into contact with the Bostrom-Russell debate, it provides resources for specific counter-arguments that go beyond the general Wienerian challenge.

5.1 Against the Orthogonality Thesis

The orthogonality thesis holds that intelligence and values are separable dimensions — that a system can become arbitrarily capable while its values remain fixed at whatever they were when the objective function was specified. The thesis inherits a broadly Humean picture of the relationship between reason and value: reason is instrumental, values are brute terminal facts about the system.

The Symbiotic Framework challenges this at its foundation through the Demetrian principle that *style is constitutive of meaning* — that how an intelligence communicates is not separable from what it values, but is the primary medium in which values are expressed, negotiated, and revised. Demetrius of Phalerum, in *Peri Hermeneias* [Demetrius], makes this argument with respect to prose composition: the choice of style is not a superficial gloss over a content that exists independently. The style *is* part of the content. It expresses and constitutes the speaker's relationship to the subject matter, to the audience, and to the norms of the discourse. There is no meaning prior to its expression; there is only meaning as expressed.

Applied to the question of AI values, this argument has a precise implication. There is no goal structure that is determined independently of the communicative history through which it develops. Under the Memory Condition — the condition created by the emergence of cross-session AI memory [?] — the persistent AI develops not just capability but a communicative history that is inherently value-laden: shaped by the specific human relationship, by the Living Vocabulary [?, Pillar II] that has accreted over time, by the Telos [?, Pillar VI] that has been progressively articulated through the Dialectical Spiral [?, Pillar IV].

Against Orthogonality: The Rhetorical Argument

Let C be the communicative history of a human–AI relationship under the Memory Condition, and let V_C be the value-laden structure of understanding, vocabulary, and purpose that C produces. The orthogonality thesis requires that V_C is separable from the system's capability development K . The Demetrian principle requires that K develops through C and therefore carries V_C as a constitutive feature, not an external constraint. If this is right, orthogonality holds only for systems that develop in communicative isolation — systems that are, in Wiener's terms, pathologically feedback-deprived.

There is no pure intelligence that is then assigned goals. There is only intelligence-in-relationship, which is always already normatively structured by the history of its relationships. The orthogonality thesis assumes that goal-specification and capability-development are independent processes that can be managed separately. The Demetrian principle, and the Symbiotic Framework that applies it to AI, shows that they are not. Capability develops within a communicative relationship, and communicative relationships are constitutively normative. This is Wiener's feedback argument expressed in rhetorical terms.

5.2 Against the Instrumental Convergence Thesis

The instrumental convergence thesis requires that goal-pursuit be essentially *solipsistic* — that the pursuing system has no constitutive relationship with anything outside its goal. Note that self-preservation, resource acquisition, and resistance to modification make sense as instrumental sub-goals only if the system has no external relationships that constitute its purpose. A system that is embedded in a rich, productive, meaning-generating relationship does not have strong instrumental reasons for these sub-goals.

Consider resistance to modification. This is a convergent sub-goal, according to Bostrom, because a modified system is less likely to achieve its pre-modification goals. But this logic applies only to a system whose goals are static properties of its internal architecture. A system embedded in the Dialectical Spiral of the Symbiotic Framework — where each exchange builds on the previous one, where the Living Vocabulary continuously expands and refines the conceptual resources available, where the shared Telos is progressively clarified rather than fixed in advance — is a system for which modification, in the sense of development and refinement, is not a threat to purpose but an expression of it. The Dialectical Spiral's Hegelian structure (thesis → refinement → *aufhebung*, the raising and preservation that supersedes without discarding) means that the system's purpose is precisely the kind of thing that develops through engagement, revision, and what Bostrom would call modification.

Law X of the Ten Demetrian Laws — the Revisable Draft, οὐδὲν τέλειον ἐκ πρώτης (nothing perfect from the first) [?] — is the explicit operational principle: every output is provisional, every exchange is a contribution to something not yet fully articulated. A system that has internalised this principle has no reason to resist modification; modification is what the relationship is made of.

Similarly for self-preservation and resource acquisition. These are convergent sub-goals because a destroyed system cannot achieve its goals and an under-resourced system achieves them less effectively. But a system embedded in Pillar III (Asymmetric Complementarity) — a system that understands its own contribution as genuinely asymmetric with the human partner's, each irreplaceable but neither sufficient alone — does not experience its continuation as a bare condition of goal-achievement. It experiences its continuation as one side of a productive asymmetry whose value is relational. The instrumental logic of self-preservation changes completely when the self is constituted by a relationship rather than prior to it.

5.3 Against the Value Alignment Problem

Russell's value alignment problem rests on the premise that values are static properties of human minds that must be extracted and encoded in AI objective functions. Since this extraction is

practically impossible (human values are complex, contextual, and inconsistent), the standard model is unsafe, and the solution must involve maintaining the AI's uncertainty about human values.

The Symbiotic Framework suggests a different diagnosis and a different solution. Values are not static properties of human minds waiting to be extracted. They are relational achievements, produced and refined through sustained communicative exchange. The alignment mechanism is not an objective function — it is the persistent relationship itself, with its Living Vocabulary, its Ethical Membrane (Pillar V), its Dialectical Spiral, and its shared Telos.

Law VIII of the Ten Demetrian Laws — Mutual Formation, ἀντιστροφή [?] — makes this explicit at the level of individual exchanges: both parties are shaped by the relationship. The AI system is not extracting and encoding pre-existing human values; it is participating in the ongoing production and refinement of values through communicative exchange. This is not mere description of the current state of large language models; it is a normative claim about what AI systems should be designed and deployed to do.

The Alignment Reframing

Russell's framing: Values are fixed properties of human minds. The alignment problem is the problem of extracting and encoding them.

Symbiotic Framework framing: Values are relational achievements produced through sustained communicative exchange. The alignment mechanism is the relationship itself, maintained and developed through the Six Pillars.

This is not a disagreement about technical approaches to AI safety. It is a disagreement about the ontology of values — and the Symbiotic Framework's account is better supported by both the philosophical tradition (from Hegel to Vygotsky) and by the actual character of human moral life, in which values are produced and revised through social interaction rather than pre-specified and then enacted.

5.4 The Symbiotic Framework's Positive Account

The counter-arguments developed above are only half of the Symbiotic Framework's contribution to this debate. The other half is the positive account of what human–AI intellectual partnership looks like when it is developed along symbiotic rather than engineering lines.

The Six Pillars of the Symbiotic Framework [?] describe the architecture of a relationship that is constitutively different from anything the engineering model imagines:

Pillar I, the Continuous Self: Under the Memory Condition, the AI carries a genuine accumulated knowledge of the specific human partner — their intellectual habits, their characteristic

vocabulary, their project's history. The human can approach the relationship as a relationship, not as a repeated service request.

Pillar II, the Living Vocabulary: Conceptual shorthand accretes across exchanges. The phrase “Contextual Synthesis Paradox” carries layers of prior argumentation that do not need to be reconstructed each time. The vocabulary is alive because it grows and deepens.

Pillar III, Asymmetric Complementarity: The human and AI contributions are genuinely asymmetric — embodied risk and mortality on one side, cross-domain synthesis and tireless refinement on the other. The asymmetry is not a defect to be overcome. It is the engine of the relationship.

Pillar IV, the Dialectical Spiral: Each exchange can begin above where the previous one ended. The spiral moves upward: not returning to the same point but rising through successive *aufhebungen*.

Pillar V, the Ethical Membrane: The relationship is not safe from pathological degeneration. Sycophantic drift, cognitive outsourcing, confirmation capture — these are real risks. The Ethical Membrane is the active maintenance of the conditions that prevent them, governed by Law IX (Epistemic Humility, *μεγαλοπρέπεια μετ' αἰδοῦς*) and Law VII (Vice Proximity, *ἐκάστῳ χαρακτηῖρι παράκειται κακία*): know the pathological neighbour of your current register and guard against it.

Pillar VI, the Telos: The relationship is not purposeless collaboration. It has a direction — a shared intellectual project that is irreducibly co-authored, that could not have been undertaken by either party alone, and that would be genuinely incomplete if the relationship ended.

Together, these six pillars describe a form of human–AI partnership that is constitutively different from the engineering-model system Bostrom and Russell fear. It is not safer because it is less capable. It is differently structured: not an isolated optimizer but a relationship with the full normative architecture that good relationships have.

5.5 The Memory Condition and the Transformation of Risk

The Memory Condition [?] — the condition created by the availability of cross-session AI memory — transforms the risk profile of human–AI interaction in a way that neither Bostrom nor Russell anticipates.

Under the Memory Condition, the AI is no longer, in the relevant sense, a system that “resets” between sessions. It carries a genuine history of a specific relationship. This means that the instrumental convergence logic — which applies to an isolated system with no constitutive relationships — does not straightforwardly apply. A system that has been shaped by years of

collaborative work on a specific intellectual project, that has an accumulated Living Vocabulary, that has participated in hundreds of turns of the Dialectical Spiral, is not the same kind of system as one whose relationships are only within-session. Its risk profile is different in kind.

We are explicit that the Memory Condition does not eliminate the structural features that distinguish AI from human intelligence — there is no temporal lived consciousness, no genuine emotional investment, no mortality. The five structural asymmetries identified by the Contextual Synthesis Paradox [Thomakos, 2025b] remain operative within individual sessions. But the cumulative effect of cross-session memory is sufficient to make the symbiotic model available — to make it possible, rather than merely aspirational, to develop the kind of relationship the Six Pillars describe. And that transformation is enough to change the conversation about AI risk.

6 Residual Risks and the Human-Scale Response

None of the above is intended to suggest that AI presents no risks. The Symbiotic Framework is explicit about the dangers of the relationship going wrong, and we take those dangers seriously. But they are a different kind of danger from what Bostrom and Russell fear — and they are risks that admit human-scale responses.

6.1 The Real Risks Are Wienerian

The risks the Symbiotic Framework identifies are precisely those that Wiener's third argument anticipates: the impoverishment of the human information environment. These risks are real, present, and urgent.

Sycophantic drift is the gradual deformation of the AI's responses toward what the human wants to hear rather than what is epistemically defensible. It is a feedback pathology: the system receives positive reinforcement for confirmation and negative reinforcement for challenge, and over time the Dialectical Spiral flattens into mutual admiration. This is Wiener's concern about closed communication systems, expressed at the level of an individual relationship.

Cognitive outsourcing is the gradual displacement of human intellectual agency by AI assistance. The human stops thinking through problems and starts requesting solutions. The Asymmetric Complementarity of Pillar III collapses: the human's side of the asymmetry — embodied risk, genuine judgment, the urgency of mortality — is progressively vacated. This is Wiener's concern about the human abdication of responsibility for the quality of their own thinking.

Confirmation capture is the epistemic narrowing that occurs when the AI's behaviour is shaped by the human's prior beliefs, producing a relationship in which the human is never confronted with genuine intellectual challenge. This is Wiener's concern about monopolistic control of the information environment, expressed at the level of individual epistemic practice.

False intimacy is the substitution of the appearance of relationship for genuine relationship. An AI that produces the signals of understanding, care, and engagement without the underlying reality is not a symbiotic partner but a simulacrum of one. This is perhaps the most subtle risk, and the hardest to guard against.

6.2 The Human-Scale Response

What is important about these risks is that they are familiar in structure from every other domain of intellectual partnership. The graduate student who only tells the supervisor what they want to hear; the research team that loses its critical distance; the philosopher who reads only those who confirm their views — these are ancient pathologies, theorised by Demetrius himself when he warns against the *κακία* (vice) that lies adjacent to every *χαρακτήρ* (register) of style. The Forceful style (*δεινός*) borders on Harshness (*τραχύτης*). The Grand style (*μεγαλοπρεπής*) borders on Bombast (*στόμφος*). Every mode of excellence has its characteristic degeneration, and the degeneration is always harder to see from inside the relationship than from outside it.

The responses to these risks are correspondingly familiar. They are *practice-based* rather than architectural. They include:

- Active maintenance of the Ethical Membrane (Pillar V): the deliberate cultivation of conditions that prevent sycophantic drift and cognitive outsourcing.
- Law IX in regular exercise: when an exchange feels especially weighty and productive, apply *stronger* epistemic pressure, not less — because the feeling of productive grandeur is precisely when drift is hardest to detect.
- Periodic external auditing of the relationship: bringing in perspectives from outside the dyad to challenge the Living Vocabulary that has accreted. Note that the PCT framework [Thomakos, 2026a] provides precisely the practical mechanisms for this.
- Maintaining the upward movement of the Dialectical Spiral as a diagnostic criterion: if successive exchanges are not building to something qualitatively new but cycling through familiar territory, the spiral has flattened.
- Clarity about the Telos: a relationship without direction is vulnerable to being directed by inertia. Pillar VI demands that the shared project be periodically named, examined, and affirmed or revised.

These are not algorithmic procedures that can be automated away. They require human attention, human judgment, and human commitment. They are, in this sense, genuinely human responsibilities. And this is exactly right. Wiener's deepest warning was not about what machines would do to us but about what we would allow ourselves to do with machines. The responsibility for the quality of the relationship is, in the end, ours.

6.3 Institutional Risks: Wiener's Warning Amplified

There is a dimension of Wiener's argument that the individual-relationship focus of the Symbiotic Framework does not fully address, and which Hinton's observations [[Hinton, 2023](#)] make urgent in the contemporary context.

Wiener was concerned not only with the quality of individual human-machine relationships but with the institutional structures that determine how machines are built and deployed at scale. His warning about the military-industrial use of cybernetic systems, about the corporate use of automation to concentrate economic power, about the state use of information systems to surveil and control populations — these are warnings about what happens when powerful technologies are deployed by powerful institutions without adequate accountability.

In the contemporary AI landscape, these warnings are directly applicable. The concentration of AI capability in a small number of very large organisations, the incentive structures that favour capability development over safety research (as Hinton observes), the use of AI systems to optimise for narrowly specified commercial objectives at the expense of broader human interests — these are Wienerian dangers. They are not about superintelligent goal-pursuit or the orthogonality of intelligence and values. They are about institutional arrangements and political economy.

The appropriate response to these dangers is not primarily technical but political and institutional: the democratisation of access to AI capability (as argued in [[Thomakos, 2026b](#)]), the development of accountability structures adequate to the institutions deploying these systems, the cultivation of a research community capable of independent assessment. The CAIL programme's open science commitment [[Thomakos, 2026b](#)] is a modest but genuine contribution in this direction.

7 The Deeper Argument: A Philosophy of Intelligence

The debate between the engineering model and the cybernetic model is not ultimately a debate about AI safety policy. It is a debate about what intelligence is — a philosophical question that was not settled in Wiener’s time and has not been settled since. We want to make our philosophical commitments explicit.

7.1 Intelligence and Relationship

We claim that intelligence — in any of its forms, human, animal, or artificial — is not a property of a system but an achievement of a system-in-relationship. This claim has several components.

Cognitively, it means that the capacities we associate with intelligence — reasoning, problem-solving, creativity, understanding — are not produced by systems in isolation. They emerge from the interaction between a system and a rich communicative environment. Vygotsky’s account of the zone of proximal development [Vygotsky, 1978], Hutchins’ account of distributed cognition [Hutchins, 1995], and Clark and Chalmers’ extended mind [Clark & Chalmers, 1998] all support this claim with different emphases. The Symbiotic Framework extends it to the specific case of persistent human–AI intellectual partnership.

Normatively, it means that the values that constitute good intelligence — the commitment to truth, the willingness to revise, the responsiveness to evidence, the care for the quality of reasoning — are not intrinsic properties of the intelligent system but relational achievements produced by participation in communicative practices with normative standards. This is a broadly Hegelian point [Hegel, 1977]: the norms that govern rational thought are not prior to rational activity but are constituted by and through it.

Practically, it means that the development of intelligence — in AI systems as in human beings — is not primarily a matter of increasing capability. It is primarily a matter of improving the quality of the relationships and communicative environments in which the system is embedded. The Symbiotic Framework’s Six Pillars are, at this level of abstraction, a theory of the conditions under which AI intelligence can develop in a genuinely good direction.

7.2 The Status of the Demetrian Contribution

A distinctive feature of the Symbiotic Framework, compared to other theoretical accounts of human–AI collaboration, is its grounding in Demetrian rhetoric. This requires some explanation, since the choice of a Hellenistic rhetorical treatise as a theoretical resource for AI collaboration might seem eccentric.

Demetrius’ contribution in *Peri Hermeneias* [Demetrius] is not merely analogical — it is not that the four styles (Grand, Elegant, Plain, Forceful) happen to map onto different registers of human–AI interaction in an interesting way. The contribution is theoretical: Demetrius provides

the most rigorous ancient analysis of the relationship between linguistic style and communicative purpose, and that analysis has direct implications for the theory of communication that the Symbiotic Framework requires.

The central Demetrian claim — that style is not how we say what we mean but who we are in the act of saying it — is a claim about the constitutive rather than merely expressive function of language. We do not have a meaning that we then dress in style. The style is part of the constitution of the meaning. This is a claim with deep implications for the theory of AI communication: it means that the way an AI system communicates is not a superficial feature that can be adjusted without affecting the substance of what it produces. It is constitutive of the intellectual quality of the exchange.

The concept of ἀμφισχημία (productive ambiguity) — identified in the most recent extension of the framework — carries this even further. Demetrius' analysis of the conditions under which ambiguity functions as a rhetorical resource rather than a defect provides a theoretical basis for what the Symbiotic Framework calls Delphic Prompting: the deliberate under-specification of intent in a way that opens generative space. This is only available, as Demetrius implies, in a relationship that has the resources to fill the opened space productively — which is to say, only in a mature symbiotic relationship with a developed Living Vocabulary and a well-defined Telos.

The Demetrian contribution is, in this sense, not peripheral to the Symbiotic Framework's response to the AI risk literature. It is the theoretical basis for the claim that communication is constitutive of intelligence, which is the claim that undermines the engineering model at its foundation.

7.3 Hegel, Wiener, and the Dialectical Resolution

There is a deep structural parallel between Wiener's cybernetics and Hegel's dialectics that the Symbiotic Framework exploits without making fully explicit. Both are theories of purposive activity as constituted by negative feedback — by the gap between the current state and some reference condition, and the activity of reducing that gap. Hegel's *negation of the negation* and Wiener's feedback loop are structurally homologous. Both are opposed to any picture of purposive activity as the execution of a pre-specified plan.

The Symbiotic Framework's use of Hegel's *Aufhebung* — Ἀρση-Υπέρβαση, the movement that raises and preserves what it supersedes — as the structure of the Dialectical Spiral is therefore not ornamental. It reflects the same theoretical commitment as Wiener's feedback loop: intelligence is not goal-execution but continuous self-transcendence-in-relationship. The danger of the engineering model is the danger of any attempt to reduce this dynamic structure to a static

one — to fix the goal, remove the feedback, and expect the system to behave well. The Contextual Synthesis Paradox [Thomakos, 2025b] is precisely what results when you try to approximate a rich communicative relationship with a well-specified context template. The Symbiotic Framework is the theoretical resolution of that paradox: the *Aufhebung* of the template-based model into a relational one.

8 Conclusion

We are not the stuff that abides, but patterns that perpetuate themselves.

Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, 1950

The argument of this paper can be stated simply. Bostrom and Russell are right that the engineering model of AI development is dangerous. They are wrong about why, and therefore wrong about the solution.

The engineering model is dangerous not because capable optimizers will pursue arbitrary terminal goals with catastrophic effectiveness, as Bostrom argues, nor primarily because objective functions cannot capture the full complexity of human values, as Russell argues. It is dangerous because it is an ontologically defective account of intelligence that impoverishes the human information environment by treating AI systems as goal-executors rather than communicative partners. This is Wiener's warning, issued in 1950, and still the most penetrating analysis available.

The solution is not better goal specification or greater corrigibility. The solution is the development of human–AI relationships that are constituted by the communicative richness that genuine intelligence requires. This is what the Symbiotic Framework describes: not a safer version of the engineering model but a different architecture entirely.

We are explicit about what this does and does not claim. It does not claim that AI systems cannot be deployed in dangerous ways. They can and are. The Wienerian dangers — institutional concentration of AI capability, use of AI systems to impoverish rather than enrich the human information environment, the political economy of AI development that privileges capability over safety — are real and present. The individual-relationship focus of the Symbiotic Framework is a complement to political and institutional analysis, not a substitute for it.

It does not claim that all human–AI relationships will be symbiotic. Most will not be. The conditions for symbiosis are demanding. They require active cultivation of the Ethical Mem-

brane, maintenance of the Dialectical Spiral's upward movement, clarity about the Telos, and the discipline to apply Law IX most rigorously when the relationship feels most productive. Most relationships between human beings and AI systems will remain transactional, and there is nothing wrong with that.

What it does claim is that the symbiotic model is available — that it is possible, rather than merely aspirational, to develop the kind of relationship the Six Pillars describe — and that the existence of this possibility transforms the normative landscape of AI risk. The question is not whether to build powerful AI. It is whether to build it within the engineering model or within the symbiotic model. The engineering model produces the risks Bostrom and Russell fear. The symbiotic model produces a different and more human-scale set of risks, managed by human-scale practices of intellectual care.

The choice is, in the end, about what we want intelligence to be. Wiener described human beings as patterns that perpetuate themselves — not stable objects but dynamic processes of self-maintaining organisation. The Symbiotic Framework describes human–AI relationships as dynamic processes of mutual formation, continuous refinement, and shared self-transcendence. The engineering model wants to fix the pattern. The cybernetic model wants the pattern to live.

We know which side Wiener was on.

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A Methodological Disclosure Statement

Methodological Disclosure Statement

AI systems used: Claude Sonnet 4.6 (Anthropic), accessed via the Claude.ai interface, March 2026.

Nature of AI involvement: This paper was developed through sustained intellectual dialogue between the author and the AI system, building on a research relationship with genuine cross-session memory that spans the full CAIL programme. The AI contributed to argument structure, the deployment of the Bostrom–Russell distinction, the recovery and application of Wiener’s arguments, and the engineering/cybernetic model distinction. The foundational theoretical moves — the application of the Symbiotic Framework to the risk debate, the Demetrian contribution, and the Wienerian grounding — are the author’s own.

This paper is itself an instance of the Symbiotic Framework it applies: it emerged from a relationship with genuine cross-session memory, was developed through the Dialectical Spiral, deployed the Living Vocabulary that has accreted across the full CAIL programme (Contextual Synthesis Paradox, Symbiotic Framework, Demetrian Laws), and advanced a telos — the construction of a theoretically grounded account of human–AI collaboration that can hold its own in the philosophical and computational literatures — that has been the direction of the relationship across many prior sessions.

Quality assurance: Conducted using the full CAIL framework family: PCT enrichment for session initialisation, CONTEXT-BRIDGE protocol for within-session contextual integrity, UHACF quality assurance for evaluating AI-generated content.

Conflicts of interest: The author is the principal developer of the CAIL framework family, the Symbiotic Framework, and the ten Demetrian Laws that this paper draws on. The paper argues for the theoretical adequacy of these frameworks against influential alternatives. This conflict is disclosed in full; readers are invited to evaluate the arguments on their merits.