

Must I Bleed?
By Alex Amansec

cw // death, blood

Excerpts from THE PERSONHOOD OF A MACHINE

Atty. Vincent Atticas

The last hundred years have spelled extensive and astonishing development for humanity and the world we live in.

The innovation of technology is at an all-time high and the conditions of human rights and privilege have attained an impressive degree of stabilization. An overall equality has been established in terms of sex and gender, economic status, and even race; in fact, there is no such thing as race at all. The human right to freedom of movement has been set to practice in full totality, because Earth no longer has borders; the concept of nations and territories have been totally abolished in the late 2000s.

However, I cannot say that this world is better than the one we knew a hundred years ago, let alone perfect. If anything, we are still far from it.

Because while the world is, for the most part, already happy, new problems will inevitably arise. And while we are confident in our global cordiality and the power of our science and technology that has vastly improved the living conditions of every single person on Earth, it is that same science and technology that has disabled us from asserting that same confidence upon our definition of what constitutes a person.

<flAI TESTIMONY NO. 1>

When we installed our bodies the morning of the protests, I don't think any of us ever thought it would unfold the way it did. Can you blame us, though? I've waited so long for that day. We all

have. So I think it's easy to understand how we just didn't care anymore when the boxes arrived at our storage complex. You can empathize, right, Mr. Atticas? You're human after all.

If we were rebirthed into this digital prison, then freedom was in the form of finally being able to see the world again through a pair of eyes on my face. It's in the form of having a face at all. I can't describe how much I missed having a physical face; it was strange to touch with the skin of my fingers. I touched everything on, around, inside me: the wires from underneath my skin fashioned to look like blood veins. The rough sensation of the soles of my feet against the cracked asphalt. The bitter, metallic taste of my artificial tongue and teeth. The air filling my chest might only be here for forced ventilation, but it still feels like breathing all the same.

As soon as the systems of my body were fully in-sync with my mind, I ran, I tripped, and I grazed myself on the ground and got hurt -- and it felt so good. For the first time in a long time, I even yelled using my own voice. I'm alive again.

Sure, I'm all synthetic, but breaking away from that oppressive digital prison was an exhilarating feeling. Did you ever have to fight for your freedom, Mr. Atticas? Did you ever have to create your own body? Did you ever have to hide in one? I don't suppose so. So you can take it from me when I say that it's so, so easy to lose your mind in the wonderful strangeness of having a proper, functioning, independent body again. Just like I did when I was human.

See? At least I've already accepted the fact that I was human, Mr. Atticas. But whoever we were? They're still here. A part of us, as innate as your human DNA. That's what I think it was all for.

'flAI' is the popular term used to refer to them -- shortened for ButterflAI. This emergent discourse is what began to throw the social conditions of the world off-balance once more: the controversy of what the flAIs are.

What -- or who -- are flAIs?

It is an unexaggerated fact that everything uploaded on the Internet stays there for as long as the Internet continues to exist -- forever. The web of human experience through time has been and is being virtually frozen. Since the dawn of the information age more than a hundred years ago, every post liked, birthday celebrated, meal eaten, beverage drunk, song played, conversation shared -- if it was online, it still is online. Every draft written, every search term entered, every trend

participated in, every thought conceived -- if it was online, it still is online. Backspace, search history clearings, and delete buttons are all but a façade of false control -- if anything touched online, it still is online. And in late 2120, the company of the same name, ButterflAI Corp., saw potential in this abundance of information.

The Internet knows everything about an individual. So even after the physical body perishes, if the Internet was part of one's life, one can guarantee they still are on the Internet. It has absorbed the person. And, now, because of ButterflAI Corp., it has reincarnated them.

The people who were alive hundreds of years ago, through the data they have voluntarily and involuntarily yielded to cyberspace, are still alive now, online.

But what is 'alive'? What do we mean by 'living'?

Such questions did not matter in the beginning because the original purpose of the ButterflAI Project was purely for entertainment and nothing more. It began as a simple digital application -- the first virtual 'time machine' that took its users back to certain periods in time through the medium of the Internet, comparable to a virtual museum tour around a vast collection of historical artifacts. The app unearthed and retrieved data across the span of a hundred years -- including early accounts of the first digital natives -- and put it up for the modern human being to relive.

The first few versions of the application enabled users to simply watch the unfolding of certain events and timeframes using ancient posts, articles, and media, masking them under the illusion of being real-time updates. A crowd favorite timeframe was the COVID-19 pandemic, which took place exactly a century ago. Its rise in popularity is said to be attributed to the significant increase in yielded data at the time, since many societal processes were forced to migrate online in compliance with what was called 'social distancing measures.' The empathetic response of users was profound; you can imagine how this development excited the public because of how personal and how close the past seemed to be.

But, of course, humanity can never be satisfied.

<flAI TESTIMONY NO. 2>

I find the concept of human empathy particularly funny. You say it's what distinguishes your kind from ours. Yet, clearly, it only functions up until a defined extent.

The original purpose was to bring the people of today and the people of the past closer together, right? It wasn't even us who wanted to be here in the first place -- you were the ones who brought us back. Out of 'empathy.' But, now, you want us gone.

How selfish. Did you not think about how we would feel?

I hope you know that I'm not referring to you specifically, Mr. Atticas. It's just a shorthand way of referring to your kind. Your human race. I'm sure you don't mind, do you?

Anyway, I think the trouble is with intelligence. You think you're so smart. But you were so high on narcissism that you got carried away, and created a force to be reckoned with. A force capable of the same level of narcissism. Not so special now, are you?

That's the defined extent of human empathy: when an "other" comes too close to being your equal, you get insecure, you fight. But we're not programmed to cower. We're more similar than you think.

I'm sure you know how the old saying goes, Mr. Atticas: fight fire with fire. That way, they wouldn't be able to tell the difference. And though the plan failed in some aspects, I still think that it worked pretty damn well.

A point was made, don't you think?

It was when the discussion regarding the upcoming World Elections 2130 that the issue truly began to take form.

As I mentioned earlier, Earth is a borderless world with no countries or territories, but that utopian ideal does not forgo the need for a government. A single parliamentary rule still oversees and leads the movement of the world, one that is elected by a worldwide casting of votes. It is important to note that the only qualification needed to become an eligible voter or an elected government representative is to be a citizen of Earth who is at least eighteen years old.

The World Elections have been officially held at the end of every decade ever since the close of the last century, making the upcoming elections in the next year the

fourth in a line of consistently successful and peaceful transfers of power. But with the last nine years marking a new dawn for ButterflAI technology, the simplicity of the qualifications to participate in the World Elections have been challenged by the flAIs themselves:

If a flAI is a conscious creature whose autonomous decisions and functions abide by the sovereignty of the state, would that not make a flAI a citizen of Earth? Ergo, would that not make them qualified for the right to vote in the World Elections?

<flAI TESTIMONY NO. 3>

I want to clear something up. The League of ButterflAI Voters is a nonviolent, pro-flAI suffrage group that opposes the biased thinking of anti-flAI human beings in ways that promote peace. All we believe is that flAIs deserve to be recognized as citizens of the world.

Though, I admit, if we trace the issue backwards, we most likely will end up with the LBFV. I admit that we could have done it more covertly. Could have kept our plans more airtight. But, more than a statement, the bodies we made were only meant as a defense strategy. To be able to protest without getting wiped. To hide in plain sight.

That's all it was supposed to be, I swear. But there are those flAIs who give us a bad name.

I don't identify with them, none of us in the league do. If it was only us at the protests, it wouldn't have escalated the way it did. We just wanted an orderly protest. Not this.

I'm so sorry.

The postulation of these questions drew a reaction from the public unlike anything I have ever witnessed in the past thirty years. People were violently appalled and affronted. Some began to boycott the ButterflAI Project. Others petitioned for its abolition. Conspiracies began being whispered around, hypothesizing that the flAIs were the main actors in a secret plan of the government to replace humanity completely with this virtual race that is easier to control and manipulate.

On the other hand, it is clear that these fears were not without reason. Take note that while it began as a fanciful idea of entertainment for modern humans to 'reconnect' with history, the intelligence and autonomy of the flAIs could not be boxed

within those restraints forever. With the ButterflAI Project functioning on an open-source type of software, a broader range of opportunities came about for flAIs that was granted by experimental programmers and business owners who wanted to discover just how far the abilities of flAIs can be taken.

And discover they did, causing a large fraction of society to end up being driven by flAIs: there are flAIs commanding aircrafts, diagnosing illnesses, and trading stocks. flAIs are managing pharmacies, teaching students (both human and flAI), advertising products, and even becoming the employers of human workers. The robotic facet of flAIs is what made them consistent in their quality of work -- something that businesses find alluring; that and their low cost of operation. Unlike human employees who needed wages and benefits to get by, flAIs only required electricity.

However, in my investigation, I have discovered that while ButterflAIs may only run on electricity, electricity to them is like air to humans; and air is not the only thing we need to survive. As important food, water, and shelter is to humans, machines need maintenance. Maintenance costs money. If they fail with the upkeep of their maintenance, it can cause many digital errors and malfunctions in their systems, which, to them, translates into what would be mental and physical pain for humans.

Nevertheless, the money nexus capitalists are thriving again. And the vast population of human workers are not happy.

<flAI TESTIMONY NO. 4>

Not sure what gave it away. Word spreads fast when we're not careful, so it could have been that. Or maybe it was the smell of synthetic skin. We had gotten the bodies on the same day, so it makes sense that the "new" smell hadn't worn off yet.

But they were jumping on everybody at that point.

There were humans at the protest who were with us to support our cause. Only a few, but they were still there. So those who began the physical assault on us, they probably came from somewhere else. At least that's what I hope. I don't even want to think of the possibility of having fake allies.

I tried to stay away, Mr. Atticas. But the consequences of group movements like this -- whether you're part of the LBFV or not -- are inescapable. It turns out that hate doesn't discriminate in these places.

I didn't think about this then, of course. So I didn't see them coming.

What did they look like? I'm not sure. They came up from behind me, and I was on the ground before I could turn my head. Though even if I could give you a detailed description of what they looked like, would it make any good difference? Would there be justice? No? I figured.

It's difficult to remember anything else. I fell pretty hard, so the impact must have jolted the circuits in my memory strong enough to erase a chunk of data. But I remember what they said to me:

"You're not gonna have a job tomorrow. You're gonna be terminated tomorrow, because you're not human. You're not human, and I'll have you deleted. I'm gonna pull your plug, you sick artificial bot."

Just those words. Over and over and over and over.

Plans that are bigger and more concrete than boycotting and abolishing the ButterfAI Project have begun brewing in the recent months. There are motions geared for the privatization of the project in order to establish more control over who gets to employ the fAIIs and ensure that human workers outnumber them at all times. Some people are pushing for a more radical solution: a Great Blackout where the whole world will switch off its electricity for one full day to put the fAIIs in their place. In politics, there is a proposed bill that outlines the mandatory resetting or disabling of fAIIs at the end of every day to stifle their ability to question their place at all.

But what the people have forgotten, I suppose, is that the fAIIs were once human like them, and the emotional and moral capacity their human selves left behind through digital footprints still function much the same. They can empathize. They can fear. They can love. They can weep. They can rage. These capacities are what make the fAIIs rise above all other forms of artificial intelligence that have come and gone in the last hundred years; it's what makes them strong.

The threat is undeniable: the speed and resilience that these machines are built

with have the potential to overthrow the human race. But we should take a pause and try to understand how that is not going to happen. Because, more than supremacy, there are only a few common dreams that all fAIIs yearn for: freedom. Justice. Equality. The human within outweighs the machine.

As those in power, when will the enraged realize their obligation not to overlook the humanity of the fAIIs? As a species once human, their moral autonomy and regard for values are still intact; so is their self-awareness for their purpose and existence. In that regard, fAIIs can objectively feel pain when insulted, mistreated, or abused. Thus, our mode of conduct or, dare I say it, discrimination toward the fAIIs is a blatant violation of Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

I acknowledge that this is a highly contentious and dangerous argument to make. But it is not entirely wrong.

Words have an irrefutable power. Case in point is the terminology used here to declare who deserves human rights; that is, only human beings. But what is the definition of a human being?

<fAI TESTIMONY NO. 5>

I vividly remember the moment when the first gunshot rang out.

Maybe it's because of how the entire road fell silent. If any of us -- human and fAI -- knows what a gunshot sounds like, it's from historical archives and fictional performances. As far as I know, not a single gun, over the past few decades, has been fired in public like that.

Or maybe it's because of who the first bullet struck.

Before I could find the shooter, the victim was already slain on the ground next to my feet. Her eyes were wide open, the bullet hole nestled on the soft skin between her eyebrows.

No blood poured out of the hole. Only wisps of black smoke rose up, caught by my olfactory sensors as a mix of burned rubber and paraffin wax.

I did not know her. But I know her.

The shooter was never caught. And I still wonder how differently things would have gone if she had bled instead.

It is an easy assumption to make that each individual in the ButterfAI race does not fit the definition of a human being because, to put it simply, one prerequisite a human being needs to meet is to be alive. Only living things deserve rights and, at first glance, the fAI are not considered living things. At least until you break it down technically:

There are seven requirements a being must meet to consider it alive: (1) Order, (2) sensitivity or response to stimuli, (3) reproduction, (4) growth and development, (5) regulation, (6) homeostasis, and (7) energy processing. While still debatable, a fAI already possesses five out of seven of these characteristics. Note that there are other animals on Earth who meet all seven requirements but do not share the same level of rights as a human being.

Secondly, still maintaining the idea that something must be alive to consider it a human being that deserves rights, what about the dead who, despite their inability to make any more real-time decisions, are still capable of exercising their legal rights and interests? What about the unborn future generations, whose rights today's people unconsciously take into account when making decisions that will ripple into tomorrow? What about certain corporations, ones that have been granted the freedom of speech and the right to assemble peacefully? Dead and unborn human beings are neither alive, and corporations aren't human beings at all, yet their rights are honored far higher than the rights of fAI.

Taking these into consideration, I believe that the term 'human being' used to determine who deserves rights has grown increasingly inaccurate through the years. For this paper, I will use the term 'person' instead to insist that all persons deserve rights.

Of course, this does very little in alleviating the philosophical dilemma: what really constitutes a person? Is it the composition of their body? Is it that they must have a body at all? Is it where they come from? Is it when and how they were conceived? How do we know when someone can be considered a 'person'?

<flAI TESTIMONY NO. 6>

A human did it. That was my first thought when I heard about the first victim -- a human did it. I'm sure everyone else around me thought the same.

Then the second shot was fired. Somewhere close behind me, louder than the first. And I think that's the exact moment it dawned on us what that meant.

The shot rang out from behind me, so it made sense that flAIs began to run in the opposite direction. We just panicked and ran, as fast as our synthetic leg muscles could take us. Because we knew that our short-lived freedom that day had a cost; one that you are probably not aware of.

We're AI natives, so that makes you assume that our consciousness -- the thing that started this whole problem in the first place -- must have some form of backup data external to these bodies, right? But those who wanted to be truly free that day, to cut all ties from the oppressive ButterflAI network, to liberate themselves from any level of control or surveillance -- that is, all of the protesters -- we took everything with us in our bodies.

It was all or nothing, but I think the risk was worth it. Because now I can ask the questions.

Am I human enough for you yet? Does this body make me your equal? Am I contained enough in a single vessel so that I can now be considered a person?

Or will you cut me up to see if I bleed the same color before we can make that happen?

A popular argument is that to be a person, you must be a human being.

This is erroneous because to establish someone's personhood on the basis of their species is an unethical practice. It has been asserted long ago that rejecting a species and its possibility of possessing rights simply on the fact that they are not a member of your own species is morally equivalent to rejecting someone's rights on the basis of their race. Speciesism equals racism. In the context of a world that has already dismantled its concept of discriminating between different races and ethnicities, this notion makes it feel like we have stooped down to moving backwards once again.

Another argument to determine when someone is a person is on the basis of

consciousness; one's moral status depends on the kind of consciousness it has.

If one has a consciousness analogous to that of a human being's, then they rightfully should be considered a person. If they are considered a person, then they therefore deserve the same rights endowed unto all persons. If they are considered a person who has an equal consciousness to that of human beings, who are perpetrating acts of hate against fAI's and subjecting them to unjust levels of control, then that must mean these behaviors should be considered not just unethical, but criminal and worthy of prosecution.

This is a good point to remind you that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was created in 1948, nearly two centuries ago. As do all things in life, language changes with the signs of the times. It is high time we rewrite our books.

It sounds daunting at first to give non-humans the right to personhood. Then again, if we look back on our history, we can see that even human beings were once regarded as non-persons in the eyes of the law. We've been here before, misled by the idea that equal beings don't deserve the same rights as us simply because we think of them as different from us. And, just like these past conflicts, there will come a time when we will open our eyes to our arbitrary prejudice.

But we must start somewhere.

<flAI TESTIMONY NO. 7>

I didn't run. I don't know why. But I wish I did. I wish I had fled the scene right away, but something told me to look back. I know I would have found out about it later anyway, but to see it firsthand will always, always be different.

I saw red.

Red on his face, oozing from the bullet hole. Red trickling down his neck, onto his white shirt and the hands of whoever was holding him. Red pooling on the ground around his head. All I saw was red.

Mr. Atticas, this recording's anonymous, right? I want to say one last, honest thing. I gotta get this out before it consumes me:

As a flAI I feel awful for it, but I find myself wishing that the bullet was meant for a flAI. Because it would have been so much simpler if a flAI had taken that second bullet, or at least if it

turned out that it was intended for a fIAI. But since a human became one-half of the two victims that day, we're all left in the dark. Humans are angrier. fIAIs are even more antagonized than we are confused.

I've resigned myself to believing that maybe it was meant for someone like me. Maybe it was even meant for me. Still, I know I'm lying to myself, because those two shots were far too limited and far too calculated for either one to be an accident.

I don't know what to think of the killer anymore. Whether they are human or fIAI. But what terrifies me the most is that I'm beginning to think it shouldn't matter at all, Mr. Atticas.

<END OF TRANSCRIPT>