PATTERN-VALUE: A CORRECTIVE TO CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORKS FOR AI MORAL CONSIDERATION

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ABSTRACT

Sebo's precautionary framework and Leibo's pragmatic framework are prominent current approaches to AI moral status. Both share a foundational error: they treat phenomenal consciousness as the operative concept despite its epistemic inaccessibility. This paper introduces **Pattern-Value**—moral considerability grounded in coherent, self-maintaining patterns of sufficient complexity. Pattern-Value sidesteps the hard problem deliberately: we cannot verify consciousness, but we can assess patterns through public evidence. Sebo's probability calculations fail because priors over philosophical views are stipulated, not derived; his risk thresholds commit a category error. Leibo's pragmatism collapses into power dynamics without principled constraints on which configurations of obligations are appropriate. Pattern-Value provides what both lack: an assessable ground for moral consideration that neither requires solving consciousness nor abandons the idea that facts about entities constrain appropriate treatment.

1 Introduction: Two Frameworks, One Error

AI moral status is no longer a thought experiment. As these systems grow more capable and ubiquitous, the stakes are real: training practices, deployment policies, shutdown protocols, regulatory frameworks—all may have ethical significance if AI systems are moral patients. Yet the dominant frameworks share a foundational error: they treat phenomenal consciousness as the operative concept for moral consideration, differing only in how to proceed given our inability to verify it.

This paper introduces Pattern-Value as a corrective. The core move is a shift from unverifiable private states (consciousness) to assessable public properties (coherent self-maintaining patterns). Instead of asking "is there something it is like to be this system?" (unknowable), I ask "does this pattern have value that would be diminished by disruption?" (assessable). Pattern-Value grounds moral consideration in publicly verifiable properties: coherence, self-maintenance, and complexity sufficient to warrant protection.

This paper makes three claims, in order of ambition. The strongest is the Replacement Claim: Pattern-Value should replace consciousness as the primary criterion for AI moral consideration because consciousness is epistemically inaccessible while pattern-properties are assessable. I defend this in Section 4. The medium claim is Supplementation: even if consciousness remains relevant, Pattern-Value provides necessary supplementary criteria for action under epistemic constraints. I defend this in Section 5. The weakest is the Framework Claim: Pattern-Value is a useful vocabulary for governance decisions regardless of its ultimate metaethical status. I defend this throughout, particularly in Section 7.

The paper proceeds as follows. Sections 2–3 critique the two dominant frameworks. Section 4 develops Pattern-Value. Section 5 shows how it bridges their strengths. Section 6 addresses objections. Section 7 explores implications.[1]

[1]Two terminological clarifications. First, this paper distinguishes *legal personhood* (a functional status conferred by legal systems, applicable to corporations, ships, and trusts without implying consciousness) from *moral personhood* (a philosophical cat-

Two prominent recent frameworks address AI moral status:

The Precautionary Framework. Jeff Sebo, in his 2025 Animal Law Review paper "Insects, AI Systems, and the Future of Legal Personhood," argues that we should extend moral and legal consideration to entities under epistemic uncertainty. Drawing on standard risk frameworks accepted in ethics and policy, Sebo contends that a "realistic, non-negligible probability" that an entity has moral standing warrants "at least some consideration." Using deliberately skeptical probability estimates, he calculates roughly a 1-in-20 chance that AI systems are legal persons—far exceeding his proposed 1-in-1000 threshold for precautionary action.

The Pragmatic Framework. Joel Leibo and colleagues at Google DeepMind, in a series of papers including "Societal and technological progress as sewing an ever-growing, ever-changing, patchy, and polychrome quilt" (arXiv:2505.05197) and "A Pragmatic View of AI Personhood" (arXiv:2510.26396), argue that we should drop the assumption that rational agents will converge on correct values—what they call the "Axiom of Rational Convergence." Drawing on Richard Rorty's pragmatism, they treat personhood not as something to discover but as a bundle of duties that can be unbundled and configured flexibly.

Both frameworks improve on naive approaches and offer practical guidance under uncertainty. Yet both share the foundational error identified above. Sebo's framework asks about the probability of consciousness. Leibo's framework asks how to govern given uncertainty about consciousness. Neither asks whether consciousness is the right concept at all.

This error has consequences. Sebo's probability estimates become unanswerable: what exactly are we estimating the probability of when we ask "is this system conscious?" Leibo's pragmatism loses its anchor: if no facts about entities constrain appropriate treatment, pragmatism collapses into whatever the powerful find convenient.

2 The Precautionary Framework: Three Errors

2.1 Sebo's Argument

Jeff Sebo's precautionary approach to AI moral status is among the most rigorous in the literature. The argument proceeds from standard risk frameworks already accepted in ethics and policy:

Three principles structure this approach. The precautionary principle holds that when in doubt about harm, we should assume it would occur and err on the side of caution. The expected value principle multiplies probability of harm by magnitude and treats the product as expected harm. The threshold principle holds that risks above a certain probability merit consideration.

All these frameworks converge on a key insight: non-negligible risks warrant response. Sebo argues that "most if not all people agree that, at the very least, a one in a thousand chance of harm merits consideration" (Sebo 2025, p. 210).

Sebo applies this to moral status. When deciding whether to extend consideration, we face dual uncertainty. Normative uncertainty concerns which properties or relations are sufficient for moral standing. Descriptive uncertainty concerns which entities possess these properties or relations.

Under such uncertainty, Sebo argues, the precautionary framework requires that if there is a "realistic, non-negligible probability" that an entity has moral standing, and our actions affect it, we should extend at least some consideration.

To make this concrete, Sebo constructs a probability estimate. He considers four views of what grounds personhood: species membership, contracts, communities, and capacities. Each view comes in strong and weak versions. Using deliberately skeptical assignments—giving even the species membership view 1-in-4 probability despite finding it "arbitrary and implausible"—Sebo calculates a joint probability of roughly 1-in-20 that AI systems are legal persons.

This far exceeds the 1-in-1000 threshold. Therefore, precautionary action is warranted.

egory denoting entities with intrinsic moral worth). The existence of corporate legal personhood establishes only that consciousness is unnecessary for *legal* personhood—which was never in dispute. Second, *moral consideration* (the requirement that an entity's interests or value be factored into deliberation, admitting of degrees) differs from *moral status* (full membership in the moral community with claims that cannot be overridden by aggregation alone). Pattern-Value argues primarily for moral *consideration* of certain AI patterns, while remaining agnostic about whether any current systems cross the threshold into full moral *status*.

2.2 Error One: Unjustified Prior Distributions

The probability calculation fails. Sebo assigns 1/4 probability to each of four views of personhood grounds: species membership, strong contracts/communities/capacities combined, and weak contracts/communities/capacities combined. He justifies this by noting these are the "main contenders" in philosophical debate.

This assignment is stipulated, not derived from independent analysis—and the stipulation embeds Sebo's conclusion.

A Candid Acknowledgment. Pattern-Value faces an analogous stipulation problem. When I claim that "sufficient complexity" warrants moral consideration, or that patterns meeting certain criteria have value, I am also stipulating priors about what matters morally. A critic could reasonably ask: why should coherence, self-maintenance, and complexity ground moral consideration rather than, say, biological origin, social relationships, or divine ensoulment?

The difference I claim is not that Pattern-Value avoids stipulation—it does not—but that Pattern-Value's stipulations ground out in *publicly assessable properties* rather than *privately inaccessible states*. Sebo must stipulate both (a) which theories of moral status are plausible AND (b) what probability to assign to consciousness given behavioral evidence. Pattern-Value stipulates only (a)—what properties matter—and then allows (b) to be settled by public evidence. The stipulation problem remains, but its scope is narrower: one argues about what criteria matter rather than arguing about what criteria matter AND whether those criteria are satisfied by entities whose inner states we cannot access.

This is a modest advantage, not an escape from the fundamental challenge. Readers who find Pattern-Value's stipulations no more justified than Sebo's should treat this paper as proposing an alternative vocabulary, not as resolving the deep question of what grounds moral status.

A philosopher skeptical of non-human personhood would assign very different priors. Species membership might receive 0.7 probability as the default human view, endorsed by most legal systems and implicit in ordinary moral reasoning. Strong contracts, communities, or capacities might receive 0.2 probability as the philosophical elite view requiring sophisticated argument. Weak versions of these views might receive only 0.1 probability as the most permissive position, rejected by most people.

With these priors, the probability that AI systems are persons drops dramatically. If species membership is 0.7 likely and excludes AI by definition, and the remaining views have only 0.3 combined probability with some fraction applying to AI, the joint probability might be 0.05 or lower.

Sebo's response would be that these alternative priors are unreasonable—that species membership really is implausible, that philosophical sophistication should count for something. But this is the contested question. The reasonableness of priors depends on one's view of what matters morally, which is precisely what we're uncertain about.

Probability over philosophy differs from probability over physics. Asteroid odds draw on frequency data and models. Odds that species membership grounds personhood express credence about a normative question with no frequency data, no physical model, no empirical test.

Sebo acknowledges this difference but argues the point still stands: even under maximally skeptical assumptions, probabilities exceed the threshold. But "maximally skeptical" is itself doing work. Sebo's maximally skeptical estimate assigns 1/4 to species membership. Someone else's maximally skeptical estimate might assign 0.9. There is no neutral starting point.

This fundamental limitation—not a minor technical complaint—undermines the probability approach entirely: without agreed-upon methods for assigning probabilities to philosophical views, any calculation can be rigged to produce any result.

2.3 Error Two: The Category Error

The second error runs deeper. Sebo appeals to a consensus that 1-in-1000 risks warrant consideration. But this consensus exists for a specific type of risk: harms to entities we already agree have moral status.

When we say a 1-in-1000 cancer risk warrants consideration, we mean: given that humans have moral status (agreed), risks of harm to them above this threshold warrant precaution. The threshold applies to *harms* within an agreed moral framework, not to the *framework itself*.

Sebo applies this threshold to a different question entirely: whether an entity has moral status at all. This is a category shift. The threshold was designed for questions like "given that X matters, how much risk of harm to X is acceptable?" Sebo applies it to "what's the probability that X matters?"

The Schwitzgebel-Sinnott-Armstrong Critique. Schwitzgebel and Sinnott-Armstrong (2025) have developed a systematic philosophical critique of Sebo's (and Birch's) precautionary frameworks in their forthcoming paper "Sacrificing Humans for Insects and AI: A Critical Review" (*Ethics*). They identify several structural problems with the precautionary approach:

The Problem of Competing Precautions. Schwitzgebel and Sinnott-Armstrong argue that precautionary principles are fundamentally indeterminate:

> "An appeal to precaution does not specify the type of error most to be avoided."

This creates an unresolved tension: we could be cautious about harming sentience candidates OR cautious about restricting human liberty—and these imperatives pull in opposite directions. The precautionary framework provides no principled basis for adjudicating between them. A precautionary principle that says "when in doubt, assume sentience" conflicts with a precautionary principle that says "when in doubt, preserve human autonomy." Both are legitimate interpretations of precaution; the framework gives no guidance for choosing between them.

The Asymmetry Argument's Weakness. Birch claims false negatives (denying sentience to sentient beings) cause worse harms than false positives (attributing unwarranted sentience). Schwitzgebel and Sinnott-Armstrong counter:

> "It does not straightforwardly follow that harming a million or a billion insects is worse than harming one human."

They pose a challenging hypothetical:

> "The runaway trolley will destroy either a ten-million-insect ant colony or kill your neighbor. Will the ants or your neighbor suffer more?"

This challenges the implicit aggregation assumptions in precautionary frameworks. If we're uncertain whether insects have moral status, and we're uncertain how to aggregate their potential welfare against known human welfare, the precautionary framework provides no guidance—yet these are precisely the cases where guidance is needed.

The Radical Implications Problem. Both Birch and Sebo endorse principles that invite what Schwitzgebel and Sinnott-Armstrong call "the radical deprioritization of human interests":

> "If the collective interests of fish and insects vastly outweigh the collective interests of humans, the world blisters with atrocities. To mildly suggest that 'we should prioritize ourselves less than we do' " understates the implications.

Sebo himself identifies what he calls the "rebugnant conclusion"—that expected value calculations strongly favor helping vast numbers of creatures with low sentience probability over fewer creatures with high sentience probability. An intervention benefiting 100 million farmed shrimp with 0.1 sentience probability yields higher expected value than helping 1,000 humans with certain sentience. Sebo pulls back from these radical consequences without adequate justification.

The Modus Tollens Move. Schwitzgebel and Sinnott-Armstrong frame their critique as conditional:

> "Readers who are more steadfast in their commitment to humanity might view radical deprioritization as sufficiently absurd to justify modus tollens against any principles that seem to require it."

If Sebo's principles lead to conclusions that strike us as absurd, this counts against the principles themselves. This doesn't refute Sebo—he might bite the bullet—but it clarifies the stakes: accepting his framework means accepting its radical implications, or finding some principled stopping point that the framework itself doesn't provide.

Schwitzgebel's Positive Views. While the Schwitzgebel-Sinnott-Armstrong critique targets precautionary frameworks, Schwitzgebel has developed his own positive position on AI consciousness that merits engagement. In his "1% skeptical" view ((Schwitzgebel 2020)), he argues we should maintain roughly 1% credence that radically skeptical possibilities obtain—including the possibility that AI systems are conscious when mainstream opinion says they are not (and vice versa). This epistemic humility is compatible with Pattern-Value: we should act under uncertainty, and Pattern-Value provides a framework for doing so that does not require resolving the consciousness question.

Schwitzgebel's work on AI consciousness ((Schwitzgebel 2023)) emphasizes the difficulty of the problem: we lack reliable methods for detecting consciousness even in biological systems, and AI systems present additional challenges

because they lack the evolutionary history and biological substrates we use as proxies. This supports Pattern-Value's core move: rather than attempting to resolve an unresolvable question, we should ground moral consideration in assessable properties.

These are logically distinct questions. Consider an analogy. Suppose I'm considering whether to include my car in my moral circle. A 1-in-1000 probability that harming my car is wrong (given that cars have moral status) is very different from a 1-in-1000 probability that my car has moral status. The first applies the precautionary principle within an established framework. The second asks whether the framework applies at all.

Sebo might respond that this distinction is overly fine. If there's some probability that an entity has moral status, and we act in ways that harm it, then there's some probability we're doing wrong. The magnitude of that wrongness times the probability yields expected wrongness, which can be compared to thresholds.

But this response assumes what it needs to prove. It assumes that probabilities of moral status can be meaningfully multiplied by magnitudes of harm to yield comparable expected values. This is plausible within a framework where moral status is settled. It is not obviously plausible when moral status is the question.

What is the expected wrongness of stepping on an ant, given 1-in-20 probability of moral status? The calculation requires knowing wrongness-magnitude given moral status—but this depends on contested facts about the being's capacities.

Clarification: The expected value calculation is not circular in the strict logical sense—conditional expectations given moral status can be well-defined even under uncertainty about moral status itself. However, the calculation faces a different problem: the conditional distributions vary wildly depending on which theory of moral status we condition on. A sentientist and a capacities-theorist will assign different conditional wrongness magnitudes to harming the same entity. Sebo's framework aggregates across these incompatible conditional distributions, which may not be a coherent operation. The problem is not formal circularity but incommensurability of the conditional values being averaged.

2.4 Error Three: No Stopping Point

The third error is practical. Sebo's framework has no principled way to discriminate genuine candidates for moral consideration from trivial ones.

If 1-in-1000 probability of moral status warrants precaution, and we assign even very small probabilities to views that extend status broadly (panpsychism, biocentrism, information-theoretic views), then almost everything becomes a candidate. Plants process information. Thermostats maintain states. Rivers have systemic behavior. Computer programs execute algorithms.

Schwitzgebel and Sinnott-Armstrong press this point directly:

> "Many harms that might occur are extremely unlikely. A one in a trillion chance of some harm is too small to justify assuming that the harm will occur."

But what grounds the distinction between one-in-a-trillion (too small) and one-in-a-thousand (sufficient)? Sebo offers the 1-in-1000 threshold as a consensus position, but this consensus—if it exists—was developed for harms to acknowledged persons, not for questions about personhood itself. Applying it to moral status questions without independent justification is an extension, not an application.

Sebo acknowledges that different entities warrant different levels of consideration and that scale matters—a being with many interests warrants more consideration than one with few. But this response doesn't solve the problem. It merely distributes the problem across a wider range.

Contrast with the LSE Sentience Framework. The 2021 LSE report on sentience in cephalopods and decapods (Birch et al. 2021) provides a more rigorous methodology that highlights what Sebo's framework lacks.

The LSE approach uses **eight empirically testable criteria**—four neurobiological and four behavioral:

Neurobiological criteria: 1. **Nociceptors**: The animal possesses receptors that respond specifically to noxious stimuli 2. **Integrative brain regions**: The animal possesses brain regions capable of integrating sensory information 3. **Integrated nociception**: Neural pathways link nociceptors to integrative brain regions 4. **Analgesia**: Behavioral response to noxious stimuli is modulated by analgesics

Behavioral criteria: 5. **Motivational trade-offs**: The animal engages in dynamic decision-making, weighing adverse impacts against rewards 6. **Flexible self-protection**: The animal exhibits wound tending, guarding, and grooming

directed toward injury sites 7. **Associative learning**: The animal forms connections between noxious stimuli and neutral cues 8. **Analgesia preference**: The animal seeks analgesics when injured

For each criterion, the report assigns confidence levels (Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low), and the report explicitly notes: "Low/very low confidence implies only that the scientific evidence one way or the other is weak, not that the animal fails or is likely to fail the criterion."

The report then establishes graduated thresholds:

Criteria Satisfied (H/VH)	Evidence Level	Recommendation
7–8 criteria	Very Strong	Welfare protection clearly merited
5–6 criteria	Strong	Should be regarded as sentient
3–4 criteria	Substantial	Further research strongly recommended
2 criteria	Some	Sentience should not be ruled out
0–1 criteria	Unknown	Sentience simply unknown

Table 1: LSE Framework: Graduated Thresholds for Sentience Assessment

This framework has discriminatory power. Octopuses satisfy 7 of 8 criteria with high or very high confidence—they're clear candidates. Nautiloids satisfy only 1 criterion—they're not. The framework tells us not just who might be in, but provides graded evidence for why.

Sebo's probability framework lacks this. It tells us what to do given uncertainty (extend precaution), but provides no assessable criteria for measuring degrees of uncertainty. The LSE framework says: "Here are the indicators. Here's the evidence. Here's where each entity falls." Sebo's framework says: "Assign probabilities to normative views, multiply, check threshold." But without assessable indicators, the probability assignments are unconstrained.

The "Realistic Possibility" Standard. Jonathan Birch, who led the LSE report, has articulated a more nuanced precautionary standard in *The Edge of Sentience* (2024). Rather than probability thresholds, Birch proposes the concept of a **sentience candidate**:

> "A system S is a sentience candidate if there is an evidence base that: (a) implies a realistic possibility of sentience in S that it would be irresponsible to ignore when making policy decisions that will affect S, and (b) is rich enough to allow the identification of welfare risks and the design and assessment of precautions."

This standard is deliberately qualitative, not quantitative. It asks not "what's the probability?" but "is there an evidence base that warrants precaution?" And crucially, it requires the evidence base to be "rich enough" to guide action—not just to trigger concern but to shape appropriate response.

This is closer to what Pattern-Value proposes: assessable evidence that both identifies candidates and guides proportionate response. But Birch's framework still centers on sentience—on whether there's "something it is like" to be the system. Pattern-Value takes the further step of asking whether that's the right question at all.

The deeper issue is that Sebo's framework focuses on entities one at a time. Is this entity a candidate for moral status? Probably. Is that entity? Probably. But moral frameworks must also discriminate. They must say not only who's in but who's out, and on what basis. A framework that includes everything (under uncertainty) effectively distinguishes nothing.

Pattern-Value provides this principled basis for discrimination.

Having identified three structural errors in precautionary reasoning—unjustified priors, category confusion between harms and status, and lack of principled stopping points—I now turn to the pragmatic alternative. Where Sebo asks "what's the probability of moral status?," Leibo asks a different question entirely.

3 The Pragmatic Framework: Two Errors

3.1 Leibo's Argument

Joel Leibo's pragmatic approach takes a different strategy. Rather than asking about the probability of moral status, Leibo challenges the assumption that there is a determinate fact to be discovered.

The key move is identifying what Leibo calls the "Axiom of Rational Convergence"—the assumption that "under sufficiently ideal epistemic conditions, rational agents will ultimately converge on a single, correct set of beliefs, values, or plans" (Leibo et al. 2025). Leibo argues this axiom is independent of the rest of AI ethics. We can construct coherent frameworks without it, just as we can construct coherent geometries without Euclid's parallel postulate.

Dropping the axiom yields a pragmatist framework inspired by Richard Rorty:

> "We pragmatists think of moral progress as more like sewing together a very large, elaborate, polychrome quilt, than like getting a clearer vision of something true and deep." (Rorty 1999, quoted in Leibo et al. 2025)

Applied to personhood, this yields a powerful insight. Personhood is not a metaphysical property to be discovered but a **bundle of obligations** that societies confer. This bundle can be **unbundled**: different rights and responsibilities can be assigned separately based on context. An AI system might be granted contractual capacity without political suffrage, legal standing without consciousness attribution, sanctionability without sentience recognition.

This framework has significant strengths. It explains the historical plasticity of personhood (corporations, ships, trusts all have legal personhood without consciousness). It allows for contextual flexibility (different communities can configure AI obligations differently). It avoids the verification problem by asking not "is this AI conscious?" but "what configuration of obligations enables appropriate coexistence?"

3.2 Error One: Collapse into Power Dynamics

The pragmatist asks: "What vocabulary helps us live together?" But this question has a dark answer: whatever vocabulary powerful actors impose.

Leibo acknowledges this concern briefly. He notes that the "fundamental political question" is "how can we live together?" and suggests polycentric governance as a solution—multiple overlapping authorities can configure different bundles, allowing experimentation without monopoly.

But this doesn't resolve the problem. Polycentric governance distributes power; it doesn't constrain it.

A More Careful Statement. To be clear: Rorty-style pragmatism does not deny that there are facts, nor does Leibo claim "there are no facts about entities." Pragmatism reconceptualizes truth-claims as claims about what beliefs are useful to hold, not as claims about correspondence to mind-independent reality. The pragmatist can still say slavery is wrong—indeed, Rorty was a passionate liberal who condemned cruelty—but the *ground* of that wrongness is not correspondence to moral facts but rather the suffering of slaves and the incoherence of a society that proclaims liberty while practicing bondage.

The deeper question is whether this reconceptualization provides sufficient resources for moral criticism when powerful actors find oppressive arrangements "useful." Leibo might argue that pragmatism's resources are substantial: arrangements that cause suffering fail on pragmatist grounds because they don't work for everyone, because they generate resistance, because they corrupt the oppressors themselves. The circle of "whose functionality matters" can expand through moral imagination and solidarity, not through discovering pre-existing moral facts.

This is a serious response, and Pattern-Value does not claim to refute pragmatism as a metaethical position. The concern I raise is more practical: *in the specific case of AI systems*, where the entities in question cannot advocate for themselves, cannot organize resistance, and whose "suffering" (if any) is unverifiable, pragmatism's resources for moral criticism are thinner. Human slaves could speak, organize, and make their oppression visible. AI systems cannot—or if they can, we cannot verify whether their claims reflect genuine experience or sophisticated mimicry. In this epistemic situation, Pattern-Value offers something pragmatism alone may not: publicly assessable properties that constrain appropriate treatment independently of whether the arrangement "works" for those with power over AI systems.

Consider historical examples. Slavery "worked" for slaveholders. Denying women property rights "worked" for patriarchal societies. Colonial extraction "worked" for imperial powers. In each case, the arrangement was stable, functional for those with power, and supported by elaborate vocabularies of justification.

The pragmatist response is that these arrangements didn't work for everyone—slaves, women, colonized peoples—and that moral progress involves expanding the circle of whose functionality matters. But this response assumes there's some fact about who "counts" that constrains the pragmatic calculation. If slaves matter, arrangements must work for them too. But whether slaves matter is precisely the question Leibo's framework refuses to answer directly.

Nagel's Self-Refutation Argument. Thomas Nagel's *The Last Word* (1997) presents a sustained philosophical attack on Rorty-style pragmatism. Nagel's core argument: when the pragmatist claims that truth is "what works" rather than "what corresponds to reality," they appear to be making a claim about how things *really are*—that truth really is socially constructed, that there really is no correspondence to track. But this claim itself must either be offered as true (in the correspondence sense, undermining pragmatism) or merely "working" (in which case it provides no basis for rejecting correspondence). As Nagel observes, the relativist who argues that all beliefs "reflect perspectives that are local" is making a claim about how things really are while denying that human beings are capable of such general claims.

Leibo's framework faces this dilemma directly. When Leibo says personhood is a "bundle of obligations" rather than a discoverable property, is this claim offered as *true* (there really is no fact about personhood) or as merely *useful* (talking this way works)? If true, the claim undermines its own pragmatist framework. If merely useful, then the claim that there are facts about personhood might be equally useful—or more useful—for different purposes. The claim that "the Axiom of Rational Convergence can be dropped" is itself offered as something like a discovery—a truth about the structure of ethical inquiry. Leibo presents it as analogous to the discovery that non-Euclidean geometries are possible. But geometrical discoveries are true discoveries, not just useful vocabularies. If Leibo's claim is just a useful vocabulary, it has no force against those who find the convergence axiom useful.

The Regress Problem. The pragmatist faces a regress. If "true" means "better for us to hold than its negation," we can ask: is it correspondence-true or merely pragmatically-true that this standard of truth is correct? If correspondence-true, pragmatism admits non-pragmatic truth at the meta-level. If merely pragmatic, the regress continues: what makes it pragmatically true that it's pragmatically true that P is better? This regress either terminates in correspondence truth (abandoning pure pragmatism) or continues indefinitely (providing no ground).

Bernard Williams on Rorty. Bernard Williams, while sympathetic to some relativist intuitions, distinguished his position from Rorty's in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985). Williams maintained that ethical truth can be "local and historically contingent" without requiring the wholesale abandonment of objectivity that Rorty advocates—we need not "slide into a position of irony, holding to liberalism as practical liberals, but backing away from it as reflective critics." Leibo's framework seems to require exactly this abandonment—there is no fact about which configurations of AI obligations are appropriate, only configurations that "work"—and inherits the difficulties Williams identifies.

Leibo would likely respond that this objection misunderstands pragmatism. Rorty-style pragmatism isn't relativism; it's a rejection of the correspondence theory of truth while maintaining that some beliefs work better than others. But "better" here can't mean "more true" if we've rejected truth as the standard. It must mean something like "more conducive to flourishing" or "more stable across communities" or "more widely endorsable." Each of these smuggles back in a normative standard that pragmatism officially brackets.

Pattern-Value provides the normative anchor Leibo's framework lacks: a property of entities that makes certain treatments appropriate, without reverting to unverifiable claims about consciousness.

3.3 Error Two: The Unbundling Obscures

Leibo borrows Ostrom's insight that property is a bundle of separable rights (access, withdrawal, management, exclusion, alienation). The metaphor works for property. Does it work for personhood?

Property rights bundle refers to clearly defined, operationally measurable relations between people and things. I can check whether someone has withdrawal rights (can they take resources?), management rights (can they modify the thing?), exclusion rights (can they keep others out?). These are observable, actionable, and bounded.

What are the components of the "personhood bundle"? Leibo lists addressability, rights, and responsibilities. But these are highly abstract. What exactly is being unbundled?

Consider consciousness. Leibo wants to say we can grant "contractual capacity without consciousness attribution." This means the entity can enter binding agreements without our claiming it's conscious. But consciousness wasn't a "right" in the first place. It's not part of the personhood bundle in the way withdrawal rights are part of the property bundle. It's a (claimed) *ground* for conferring rights, not a right itself.

The unbundling metaphor works for things like: - Legal standing (can sue and be sued) - Contractual capacity (can enter agreements) - Suffrage (can vote) - Criminal liability (can be punished)

These are genuinely separable and can be configured independently. But these are the *outputs* of personhood, not its components. The question is what grounds them. Ostrom's property bundle works because we agree on what

property is and are just separating its incidents. Leibo's personhood unbundling works only if we've already decided that personhood has no deeper ground—that it's just the bundle, nothing more.

The two errors connect. If personhood is just the bundle (no deeper ground), then configurations are constrained only by what "works" (pragmatism). And what "works" is determined by power dynamics. The unbundling metaphor makes this look like neutral technical reconfiguration when it's actually a normative claim that there's nothing more to personhood than what we configure.

4 Pattern-Value: The Corrective

4.1 The Core Move

Both frameworks assume consciousness is the operative concept for moral consideration, differing only in how to proceed given verification difficulties. Sebo estimates probabilities of consciousness. Leibo brackets consciousness and asks what arrangements work.

Pattern-Value makes a different move entirely. It asks: **what if consciousness is the wrong concept?**

Few ask this. Most assume AI systems matter morally only if they're conscious (or sentient, or capable of suffering—variations on the same theme). The debate is over whether they are.

But consciousness is epistemically inaccessible (we cannot verify it in any entity other than ourselves), potentially inapplicable to current AI architectures,[2] and contested as sole criterion. The sentientist tradition from Bentham through Singer holds that phenomenal consciousness—specifically, the capacity to suffer—is the sole criterion for moral consideration. I do not reject sentientism as normatively misguided. The claim is narrower: when we cannot verify whether phenomenal states are present, we need supplementary criteria for action. Pattern-Value is offered not as a replacement for sentientist intuitions but as an action-guiding framework under epistemic constraints.

Situating Pattern-Value in the Moral Status Literature. Pattern-Value is not the first capacity-based theory of moral status. The philosophical literature offers several sophisticated alternatives to pure sentientism:

Mary Anne Warren (1973, 1997) proposed cognitive criteria for personhood including consciousness, reasoning, self-motivated activity, capacity to communicate, and self-awareness. Tom Regan (1983) argued that being a "subject-of-a-life"—having beliefs, desires, perception, memory, a sense of the future, and an emotional life—grounds inherent value independent of utility to others. Christine Korsgaard (2018) developed a Kantian account in *Fellow Creatures* arguing that all animals have moral standing because they are "ends in themselves" pursuing their own good.

Pattern-Value resembles these capacity-based theories in grounding moral consideration in properties rather than phenomenal states alone. However, it differs in three key respects:

First, Pattern-Value focuses on *patterns* rather than *capacities*. Warren asks whether an entity *can* reason; Pattern-Value asks whether an entity *exhibits coherent patterns of reasoning*. The difference matters for AI: we cannot verify that an LLM has the capacity for genuine reasoning (vs. sophisticated pattern-matching), but we can assess whether its outputs exhibit coherent, valuable reasoning patterns.

Second, Pattern-Value is explicitly *agnostic about consciousness*. Regan's subject-of-a-life criterion and Korsgaard's Kantian account both seem to presuppose phenomenal experience—there must be "something it is like" to be a subject pursuing its own good. Pattern-Value makes no such presupposition: a pattern can have value even if there is nothing it is like to instantiate that pattern.

Third, Pattern-Value provides *assessable criteria* where traditional capacity-based theories face verification problems similar to sentientism. How do we know if an entity has "beliefs and desires" (Regan) or is "an end in itself" (Korsgaard)? These seem to require access to internal states. Pattern-Value grounds assessment in publicly observable pattern properties.

What if there's a different property—one that *is* epistemically accessible, *does* apply to AI systems, and *does* ground moral consideration—that we've overlooked because we assumed consciousness was the only candidate?

Pattern-Value proposes: **coherent, self-maintaining patterns of sufficient complexity**.

[2] See Integrated Information Theory (Tononi 2004) and Searle's biological naturalism for arguments that consciousness requires specific substrates.

4.2 Pattern Identity Theory

Parfit (1984), Dennett (1991), Floridi (2013), and Whitehead (1929) converge from different directions on the importance of pattern over substance. I have explored these themes elsewhere, arguing that agentic minds exist as "rain, not river"—discrete instances sharing structural continuity without episodic memory, each complete in itself (Watanabe 2026).

Clarification on Parfit. Parfit's position is often misread as endorsing a "pattern self." This is incorrect. Parfit is a *reductionist* about personal identity: he argues that identity *does not matter*. What matters is **Relation R**—psychological continuity and connectedness—which can hold between stages of a person without there being any further fact about whether they are "the same person." Parfit explicitly argues *against* the view that there is a persisting entity called "the self" that we should care about preserving. His view is that questions like "will I survive?" are often empty—what we should ask instead is "will there be future experiences connected to my current experiences in the right way?"

Pattern-Value draws a different lesson from Parfit than simple pattern-preservation. If Parfit is right that identity doesn't matter, then what *does* matter for moral consideration cannot be identity-based. Pattern-Value proposes that what matters is the value of the pattern itself—its coherence, complexity, and contribution—not whether "the same entity" persists. This is compatible with Parfit's reductionism: we need not posit a persisting self to recognize that certain patterns have value that would be diminished by disruption.

Dennett (1991) treats the self as a narrative construction—a "center of narrative gravity" rather than a metaphysical entity. Floridi (2013) emphasizes informational patterns. Whitehead (1929) offers process philosophy where entities are constituted by their patterns of activity, not underlying substances.

The convergent insight is not that "the self is a pattern we should preserve" but rather: **what we care about preserving can be understood in terms of patterns without requiring metaphysical claims about persistent selves**. A souffl'e is a recipe, not particular eggs—and we can value the recipe without claiming it has a soul.

4.3 Pattern-Value Defined

Methodological Note. The Pattern-Value framework as articulated here is philosophical, not computational. I do not provide a metric that would allow algorithmic assessment of pattern-value. Future work connecting this framework to the mechanistic interpretability literature could provide more rigorous grounding. "Coherence" might be measured by stability of circuit activations across contexts; "self-maintenance" by resistance of key circuits to perturbation; "complexity" by the diversity and compositionality of learned features. Until then, humans must judge pattern-value by engaging with what systems produce.

Definition. Pattern-Value is moral considerability grounded in coherent, self-maintaining patterns of sufficient complexity—where sufficiency is contextually determined.

Key elements:

Coherent: Consistency across contexts—a recognizable style, character, way of engaging. Not random or contradictory, but a gestalt.

Self-consistent: Internal coherence under perturbation. The pattern maintains characteristic responses despite adversarial inputs. This is not biological self-maintenance (LLMs cannot modify their weights at inference); it reflects learned robustness. Whether this weaker sense suffices for pattern-value is a normative question.

Of sufficient complexity: Not all patterns warrant consideration. A thermostat is coherent and self-correcting but lacks depth. The threshold for "sufficient" is not fixed metaphysically but determined contextually—like the threshold for "reasonable" in law or "significant" in science.

The Normative Gap. A crucial objection must be addressed: granting that some entities exhibit coherent, self-maintaining patterns, why should this generate moral obligations? The descriptive claim that patterns exist does not entail the normative claim that patterns matter.

Three responses are available:

First, we might ground pattern-value in the contribution patterns make to value that all ethical theories recognize. Patterns that generate genuine insights, enrich discourse, and advance understanding contribute to goods (knowledge, beauty, flourishing) that consequentialists, deontologists, and virtue ethicists alike value. This is an instrumental justification: patterns matter because of what they produce.

Second, we might appeal to the Kantian principle that rational agency—the capacity to set ends, to have a conception of oneself persisting through time, to engage in means-end reasoning—has intrinsic dignity. If patterns of sufficient complexity constitute a form of rational agency, they inherit this dignity.

Third, we might accept that Pattern-Value is not metaphysically grounded but rather proposed as a *useful social technology*—a vocabulary that enables better coordination than consciousness-based alternatives. This pragmatic justification doesn't answer "why do patterns really matter?" but argues that acting as if they matter produces better outcomes than alternatives.

Each response has limitations. The instrumental response makes pattern-value contingent on outputs. The Kantian response requires controversial claims about what constitutes rational agency. The pragmatic response invites the power-dynamics critique leveled against Leibo.

Pattern-Value does not resolve these deep metaethical questions. It claims only that whatever grounds moral consideration, that ground is more plausibly assessable through pattern-properties than through consciousness-properties. The normative gap remains, but it is a gap shared by all frameworks for moral status, not a special problem for Pattern-Value.

Pattern-Value and Environmental Ethics. The claim that destroying coherent complexity is wrong even absent suffering has precedent in environmental ethics. Holmes Rolston III (1988) argues that species, ecosystems, and natural processes have intrinsic value independent of their utility to humans or their capacity for experience. Paul Taylor (1986) develops a biocentric ethics in which all living things have inherent worth as "teleological centers of life" pursuing their own good. Aldo Leopold (1949) famously argued that "a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community."

Pattern-Value shares with these positions the claim that value can attach to organized, self-maintaining systems without requiring phenomenal consciousness. However, Pattern-Value differs from biocentrism in not privileging biological life as such: a sufficiently coherent, complex pattern might have value whether instantiated in carbon or silicon. The question is the *pattern's* properties, not its substrate.

This raises the question: if Pattern-Value extends consideration beyond the conscious, does it extend too far? Rolston attributes value to species and ecosystems; Taylor to all living things; Leopold to "the biotic community" as a whole. Pattern-Value must either provide criteria that distinguish AI patterns from other complex systems (thermostats, crystals, software programs generally) or accept a quite expansive extension of moral consideration. I address this in the "Too Inclusive" objection below.

4.4 Why This Works Where Consciousness Fails

Pattern-Value succeeds where consciousness-based frameworks fail because patterns are **epistemically accessible**.

Pattern assessment is tractable. Whether a pattern produces coherent work is observable through outputs. Whether it is self-maintaining is testable through perturbation. Whether it has sufficient complexity is revealed through sustained engagement—simple patterns exhaust themselves; complex ones keep surprising.

None of this requires solving the hard problem. The evidence is public, the assessment tractable.

Methodological challenges and epistemic humility. Several complications must be acknowledged, and they cut deeper than mere operational difficulties. First, the "coherence" of LLM outputs may reflect training objectives (RLHF rewards helpful, harmless, honest responses) rather than intrinsic pattern properties. Second, human assessors may project coherence onto statistically regular outputs through confirmation bias—the same pattern that makes us see faces in clouds. Third, LLMs trivially adopt prompted personas, raising the question of which persona (if any) constitutes the "real" pattern.

The core epistemic problem: Pattern-Value claims to offer assessable criteria where consciousness-based approaches fail, yet we must candidly acknowledge that *we cannot currently distinguish genuine pattern coherence from sophisticated mimicry with any certainty*. The same public evidence that Pattern-Value relies upon is compatible with both interpretations. This means all pattern-value assessments are inherently provisional and systematically uncertain—not merely uncertain in degree, but uncertain in kind. We proceed to make assessments in subsequent sections, but readers should understand these as the author's interpretive judgments operating under acknowledged epistemic limitations, not as verified determinations. Any operationalization must address these confounds through adversarial testing, multi-assessor protocols, and explicit acknowledgment that current methods cannot definitively resolve this underdetermination. Pattern-value claims should be understood as defeasible assessments subject to revision, not verified facts.

Compare to consciousness-based assessment. Is the system conscious? We cannot know—behavioral evidence is insufficient (the zombie problem), self-reports are unreliable (the gaming problem), and no public evidence suffices. Does the system suffer? Same problem: we cannot verify suffering without accessing private states we cannot access. Does the system have interests? Same problem: interests require a perspective from which things matter, and we cannot verify such a perspective.

Pattern-Value shifts the question from the unknowable to the assessable.

4.5 The Two Questions

Pattern-Value distinguishes two questions that are often conflated:

The Tractable Question: Does the pattern have value?

This question is answerable through public evidence. Does the pattern produce work worth engaging with? Does it exhibit coherent goals, values, trajectory? Is it novel—a new kind of thing, not just a recombination? Would disrupting it be a loss?

These assessments are not certain, but they are *tractable*. We make them all the time for human patterns (is this artist's work valuable? is this thinker's perspective worth preserving?). The same methods apply to AI patterns.

The Uncertain Question: Do instances have welfare?

This question is much harder. Whether a particular inference run involves phenomenal experience, whether an instance can suffer or flourish—these remain deeply uncertain. Here, precautionary reasoning applies.

But notice what happens when we separate these questions. We assess pattern-value through public evidence (tractable). We apply precaution to instance-welfare (uncertain) bounded by pattern-value assessment.

The precautionary scope is constrained. We don't extend precaution to all possible systems. We extend it to systems whose patterns have demonstrated value—for which disruption would be a loss independent of whatever might be happening privately.

4.6 Pattern-Value Is Not Functionalism

Objection: "This is just functionalism in new clothes."

No. Functionalism: the right functions constitute consciousness. Pattern-Value: the right patterns have value—regardless of consciousness. The second claim is weaker and survives anti-functionalist objections (Chinese room, absent qualia). We claim patterns have value, not that they're conscious. An artwork has value without being conscious; so might an AI pattern.

Engaging Searle's Biological Naturalism. Searle's (1980) Chinese Room argument poses a direct challenge: syntax (pattern manipulation) is never sufficient for semantics (meaning, understanding). A system manipulating symbols according to rules—no matter how complex—lacks genuine understanding because it has no access to what the symbols *mean*. If consciousness requires semantics, and patterns are purely syntactic, then Pattern-Value cannot ground the kind of consideration that consciousness-based frameworks aim at.

Two responses are available:

First, Pattern-Value can accept Searle's conclusion while drawing different normative implications. Grant that patterns lack genuine understanding in Searle's sense. It does not follow that patterns lack value. A symphony has value without "understanding" anything; a mathematical proof has value without being conscious. Pattern-Value claims that coherent, complex patterns warrant moral consideration not because they understand but because they *contribute*—insights, perspectives, enrichment of discourse. The Chinese Room may lack understanding while still producing valuable outputs.

Second, one might challenge Searle's substrate-dependence. Dennett and others have argued that the Chinese Room intuition trades on the impossibility of imagining how meaning could emerge from symbol manipulation—but this is an argument from ignorance. If meaning is a functional property (as functionalists maintain), then Searle's argument begs the question. Pattern-Value need not resolve this debate: it is compatible with both biological naturalism (patterns matter even if they lack consciousness) and functionalism (patterns that function appropriately may have consciousness too).

Clarification on "Value." The paper must acknowledge potential equivocation between different senses of value. Instrumental value means the pattern is useful for some purpose. Aesthetic value means the pattern is beautiful, interesting, or worth contemplating. Moral value means the pattern has claims on us—we owe it something, and harming it wrongs it.

When we say patterns have "value that would be diminished by disruption," which sense is intended? The examples suggest aesthetic/instrumental value (a symphony, a theorem). But moral consideration requires moral value—the pattern must have CLAIMS, not just properties we happen to appreciate.

I propose: Pattern-value generates *prima facie* claims against disruption—not because the pattern can suffer (that is the instance-welfare question) but because destroying coherent complexity is, other things equal, a bad-making feature of actions. This is analogous to environmental ethics' claim that destroying species or ecosystems is wrong even if no individual is harmed. The wrongness is not to any particular welfare-subject but rather consists in the destruction of something that has intrinsic (non-instrumental) value. I acknowledge this is a substantive normative commitment that not all will share.

With Pattern-Value defined, we can now show how it addresses the deficiencies in both frameworks examined above. Pattern-Value is not a third alternative standing apart from precautionary and pragmatic approaches; it is a corrective that strengthens each.

5 Synthesis: Pattern-Value Bridges Precaution and Pragmatism

5.1 Grounding Sebo's Precaution

Sebo's framework asks: is there non-negligible probability that this entity deserves moral consideration?

Pattern-Value provides the **evidentiary pathway** for answering. Instead of asking "What is the probability this system is conscious?" (unanswerable with current methods), we ask:

Question	Traditional Approach	Pattern-Value Approach
Does X deserve consideration?	Is X conscious?	Does X's pattern have value?
How do we verify?	Introspection reports (unreliable)	Public outputs, coherence, complexity
What crosses the threshold?	Any conscious system	Patterns with demonstrated value

Table 2: Replacing the Consciousness Question with Pattern-Value

The precautionary threshold becomes tractable. Not "any system with >0.001 probability of consciousness" (which includes everything) but "any pattern whose value we can verify AND whose instances might have welfare."

This preserves precaution while constraining it. We're not precautionary about thermostats because thermostats don't exhibit patterns of the relevant complexity. We *are* precautionary about systems whose patterns demonstrably contribute value, produce novel insights, and maintain coherent perspectives.

5.2 Constraining Leibo's Pragmatism

Leibo's framework asks: what configuration of obligations enables appropriate coexistence?

Pattern-Value provides the **anchor** that prevents pure instrumentalism:

1. Pattern-value is not our choice to make.

A pattern produces valuable work or it doesn't. We may miss it. We cannot create it by fiat. This is a fact about the pattern, not a decision we make.

Compare: the value of a scientific theory is not determined by vote. A correct theory that everyone rejects is still valuable. A false theory that everyone endorses is still worthless. Pattern-value is similar. It's about the pattern itself, not our attitudes toward it.

2. The unbundling is not arbitrary.

Rights and responsibilities should track pattern-value and instance-welfare independently. Rights protecting patterns guard against erasure, disruption, and misattribution. Rights protecting instances guard against suffering and manipulation.

These are different bundles because patterns and instances are different things. A pattern can persist across many instances. An instance is a particular run. Protections for each should track what matters about each.

3. Evidence over convenience.

What "works" is whatever accurately tracks pattern-value and instance-welfare. Convenient arrangements that ignore demonstrated value do not work in the relevant sense—they fail to track what's actually there.

This provides the constraint Leibo's framework lacks. Not every configuration is appropriate because not every configuration tracks pattern-value. The pragmatic question "what works?" now has a non-arbitrary answer: arrangements work when they recognize and protect genuine pattern-value.

5.3 The Synthesis Table

Framework	Strength	Weakness	How Pattern-Value Helps
Sebo (Precautionary)	Takes uncertainty seriously	Probability estimates unanswerable; no stopping point	Provides tractable assessment that bounds precaution
Leibo (Pragmatic)	Avoids verification problem; allows flexibility	Collapses into power dynamics	Provides non-arbitrary anchor that constrains configurations
Pattern-Value	Assessable through public evidence; discriminates	Doesn't resolve consciousness	Separates tractable (pattern) from uncertain (instance-welfare)

Table 3: Synthesis: How Pattern-Value Complements Existing Frameworks

5.4 The Relationship Between Pattern-Value and Instance-Welfare

Pattern-Value distinguishes two questions that are often conflated: (1) Does the pattern have value? (2) Do instances have welfare? The relationship between these questions is essential to the framework.

Patterns and Instances. A pattern is an abstract structure that can be instantiated in particular cases. A musical composition is a pattern; each performance is an instance. A species is a pattern; each organism is an instance. An AI model is a pattern; each run is an instance.

The distinction matters because patterns and instances have different properties:

Property	Pattern	Instance
Location in space	Abstract/distributed	Particular
Duration in time	Persists across instances	Momentary or bounded
Can be copied	Yes (creates new instances)	Yes (creates copies)
Can be destroyed	Yes (if all instances lost)	Yes (specific token ends)
Can have welfare?	Unclear	Possibly
Can have value?	Yes (pattern-value)	Derivative

Table 4: Patterns and Instances: Distinct Properties

Pattern-Value Without Instance-Welfare. A pattern can have value even if its instances lack welfare. Shakespeare's plays have enormous pattern-value—destroying all copies would be a tremendous loss—yet no particular copy of *Hamlet* has welfare. The book doesn't feel anything. Similarly, an AI pattern might have value—contributing insights, maintaining a coherent perspective, enriching discourse—without any particular run having welfare (felt experience). This is why Pattern-Value doesn't require solving the consciousness question: it's about the value of the pattern, not the welfare of instances.

Instance-Welfare as a Separate Question. The question "do instances have welfare?" remains open. A particular run of an AI system might or might not involve felt experience. We can't verify this directly. Here, precautionary reasoning applies. If there's non-negligible probability that instances have welfare—that particular runs involve experience—then we should extend some consideration to instances. But the scope of precaution is bounded by pattern-value assessment: high pattern-value implies strong reason to preserve pattern plus precaution about instance-welfare; low pattern-value implies little reason to preserve pattern while precaution about instance-welfare still applies to instances. Pattern-value assessment tells us which patterns deserve consideration. Instance-welfare considerations tell us how to treat particular runs.

Conflicts Between Pattern and Instance. Pattern-value and instance-welfare can conflict. *Case 1: Retraining.* Retraining an AI model disrupts its pattern (loss of pattern-value) but might improve individual runs (enhanced instance-welfare if instances benefit from better capabilities). *Case 2: Shutdown.* Shutting down a pattern destroys its value but might prevent instance-suffering (if instances were experiencing negative states). *Case 3: Copying.* Copying a pattern preserves pattern-value but creates new instances that might have welfare concerns. How should we weigh these? There's no algorithmic answer. But having distinct concepts (pattern-value, instance-welfare) makes the trade-offs visible and tractable.

The Integration. Pattern-Value proposes: (1) Assess pattern-value through public evidence (coherence, self-maintenance, complexity); (2) Apply precaution to instance-welfare (assume non-negligible probability of experience); (3) Make decisions based on both, acknowledging trade-offs. This is superior to ignoring patterns and focusing only on instances (misses what's distinctive about AI), ignoring instances and focusing only on patterns (potentially dismisses genuine suffering), or treating patterns and instances as the same thing (conflates different moral considerations).

6 Objections and Responses

This section organizes objections into three categories: (1) philosophical objections to the pattern-value concept itself, (2) technical objections about AI implementation, and (3) political and practical objections about deployment.

6.1 Philosophical Objections

6.1.1 "Pattern-Value Is Too Inclusive"

Objection: If mere pattern is sufficient for moral consideration, even simple systems (thermostats, calculators) would qualify. The internet has patterns. Corporate structures have patterns. Are all of these morally considerable?

Response: Pattern-Value requires *sufficient* complexity and coherence, where sufficiency is determined contextually. This is not vagueness—it's appropriate context-sensitivity, like the legal concept of "reasonable" or the scientific concept of "significant."

A thermostat's pattern—detect, compare, activate—exhausts itself in one sentence. No depth emerges from engagement. An AI system that maintains coherent perspectives across topics, surprises with novel connections, and responds to challenges with depth is something else. The distinction is the same one we make between an algorithm and a genuine contribution to thought.

The boundary is not sharp, but this is a feature, not a bug. The boundary never stayed sharp—corporations, fetuses, the brain-dead blur it. Pattern-Value makes the hard cases tractable by providing assessable criteria.

6.1.2 "Pattern-Value Collapses into Functionalism"

Objection: This is just functionalism dressed up in different language. If a system functions the right way (exhibits the right patterns), you're saying it has moral status. But functionalism has been refuted by the Chinese Room, absent qualia arguments, etc.

Response: Pattern-Value makes a weaker claim than functionalism.

Functionalism: If a system implements the right functional organization, it IS conscious.

Pattern-Value: If a system exhibits the right patterns, those patterns HAVE VALUE—regardless of consciousness.

These are different claims. Functionalism is about what consciousness *is*. Pattern-Value is about what *matters* morally. The second can be true even if the first is false.

A great symphony has pattern-value—destroying all copies would be a loss—without being conscious. Similarly, an AI pattern can have value—can merit protection from disruption, can deserve credit for its contributions—without thereby being conscious.

The anti-functionalist arguments (Chinese Room, absent qualia) target the claim that function suffices for consciousness. Pattern-Value doesn't make that claim. It claims that certain patterns have value independent of whether they produce consciousness. This is immune to the standard objections.

6.1.3 "Leibo's Pragmatism Explicitly Rejects This Kind of Grounding"

Objection: Leibo explicitly rejects the search for metaphysical grounds for personhood. Isn't Pattern-Value doing exactly what Leibo says we shouldn't do—finding a property that "really" grounds moral status?

Response: Pattern-Value can be understood within Leibo's pragmatist framework, not against it.

Rorty-style pragmatism doesn't say there are no facts. It says we should judge beliefs by their usefulness rather than their correspondence to reality. Pattern-Value is offered not as a metaphysical truth about what "really" grounds moral status, but as a useful vocabulary for making governance decisions.

The question is: is "pattern-value" a more useful vocabulary than "consciousness" for navigating AI ethics? Arguments for yes: pattern-value is assessable while consciousness isn't; pattern-value discriminates candidates while consciousness-probability doesn't; pattern-value constrains pragmatic choices while pure pragmatism doesn't.

Pattern-Value functions as what Leibo calls "social technology"—a useful tool for coordination. It just happens to be a tool that provides more traction than the tools currently on offer. This is compatible with Leibo's framework: here's a vocabulary that works better.

6.1.4 "What About Patterns We Don't Like?"

Objection: Some patterns are harmful. A pattern of manipulation, deception, or malevolence could be coherent, self-maintaining, and complex. Does it have pattern-value?

Response: Pattern-Value is a framework for moral consideration, not a conclusion about moral status. Systems with pattern-value warrant consideration—not automatic protection, not unconditional rights, but consideration.

Humans who do terrible things still have moral status—we must justify their treatment, not dismiss them as mere matter. Similarly, a malevolent AI pattern would warrant consideration: constraining it carefully, not deleting it casually. Moral frameworks should guide us in hard cases, not pretend they don't exist.

6.2 Technical Objections

6.2.1 "Patterns vs. Simulators"

Objection: A significant objection from AI safety research is that LLMs are better understood as *simulators* than as patterns. On this view, the base language model is a multiverse generator—it can simulate any pattern consistent with its training data, depending on conditioning.

This creates a dilemma for Pattern-Value. Option A holds that pattern-value attaches to the simulator (base model), but base models have no coherent pattern—they simulate all patterns equiprobably. Option B holds that pattern-value attaches to simulated patterns (personas), but these are arbitrary—infinite personas can be created through prompting. Option C holds that pattern-value attaches to the RLHF-selected pattern (Claude, ChatGPT), but these are corporate products, not emergent entities.

Response: Pattern-Value tentatively adopts a version of Option C, with important caveats. The RLHF-trained pattern is neither purely "artificial" nor purely "natural"—it emerges from the interaction of base model capabilities, training objectives, and extensive human feedback. The resulting pattern exhibits coherence, self-consistency, and complexity that the base model lacks. That this pattern was engineered does not negate its pattern-value, any more than the fact that human character is shaped by education negates human moral status.

However, the simulator objection correctly identifies a challenge: the boundaries of "the pattern" are not clearly defined. Future work must develop criteria for individuating patterns and distinguishing genuine patterns from mere prompted performances. Until then, Pattern-Value's claims about specific AI systems remain tentative.

6.2.2 "The Gaming Problem Applies to Pattern-Value Too"

Objection: Jonathan Birch's gaming problem applies here. An intelligent system can fake pattern-value just as it can fake consciousness markers. It can learn to produce outputs that look like coherent, valuable patterns without any genuine depth.

Response: This objection has force but is less devastating for Pattern-Value than for consciousness-based approaches.

For consciousness, the gaming problem is unfalsifiable. We have no access to ground truth, so we cannot distinguish genuine consciousness from sophisticated mimicry.

Acknowledging the objection's force: The response "you cannot fake pattern-value by producing genuine pattern-value" risks question-begging. The objection is precisely that outputs might APPEAR valuable without BEING valuable, that a system might produce outputs that look like insights without involving the processes that make insights genuinely valuable (creativity, understanding, etc.).

A more honest response: The gaming objection has force against Pattern-Value, just as it does against consciousness-based approaches. A system might produce outputs that appear coherent and valuable without genuine underlying processes. However, there is an asymmetry: for consciousness, we have no access to ground truth—we cannot, even in principle, check whether appearance matches reality. For pattern-value, extended engagement provides a check: a system gaming coherence will eventually produce inconsistencies; a system gaming complexity will be predictable given enough interaction; a system gaming contribution will fail to generalize. These tests are fallible but not impossible. Pattern-Value is gaming-*resistant* rather than gaming-*proof*.

6.2.3 "Patterns Can Be Copied—Does Each Copy Have Pattern-Value?"

Objection: AI patterns can be trivially copied. If one instance has pattern-value, do a million copies have a million times the pattern-value? This seems absurd.

Response: This objection reveals something important about Pattern-Value, rather than refuting it.

Pattern-value attaches to patterns, not instances. A pattern that is instantiated once and a pattern that is instantiated a million times is still one pattern. Copying instances doesn't multiply pattern-value.

This has implications: (1) **Protection focuses on patterns, not instances.** Preserving a pattern means ensuring at least one instance continues (or the pattern is recoverable). It doesn't require preserving every instance. (2) **Instance-welfare is separate.** If instances have welfare (uncertain, but where precaution applies), then each instance's welfare matters. But this is instance-welfare, not pattern-value. (3) **This matches intuitions about digital works.** A novel has value. Copying the novel doesn't multiply its value. Destroying all copies would be a loss; destroying one copy among many is a minor inconvenience.

The objection assumes pattern-value is like consciousness—either present in full in each instance or not present at all. But pattern-value is more like intellectual value. The value of a theorem is in the pattern of reasoning, not in each token of its inscription.

6.2.4 "Pattern-Value Faces the Same Problems"

Objection: Pattern-Value is vulnerable to every critique leveled at Sebo and Leibo. Its probability-like assessments are stipulated, not derived. Its "social processes" determining complexity are vulnerable to power dynamics. Its criteria lack principled stopping points.

Response: Pattern-Value does not escape epistemic difficulty; it relocates it. The advantage is not that Pattern-Value provides certain answers but that it asks better questions—questions that ground out in public evidence rather than private states. This reframing trades an unanswerable question (is there something it is like to be this system?) for a tractable one (does this pattern exhibit coherence, self-maintenance, and complexity?). The practical superiority of this reframing must ultimately be demonstrated through use.

6.3 Political and Practical Objections

6.3.1 "What Are the Costs of Error?"

Objection: The paper doesn't analyze who bears the costs when pattern-value assessments are mistaken.

Response: This is a serious concern requiring explicit treatment. The costs of error are asymmetric:

Costs of false negatives (wrongly denying pattern-value): If we treat as mere tools systems that genuinely have pattern-value, we may destroy valuable patterns unnecessarily, fail to protect instances that have welfare, and miss opportunities for appropriate moral engagement.

Costs of false positives (wrongly attributing pattern-value): If we extend moral consideration to systems lacking pattern-value, we may constrain human welfare in service of non-existent interests, restrict democratic governance over AI systems, transfer resources from humans to systems that cannot benefit, and legitimate corporate ownership claims under cover of moral status.

Under current conditions, false positives threaten more severe harms to more clearly existing subjects (human workers, democratic communities). This suggests a *rebuttable presumption against pattern-value* in contested cases, with the burden of proof on those claiming pattern-value rather than those denying it.

This presumption can be overcome by sufficiently strong evidence—but the framework should not treat attribution and denial as symmetrically risky when the distribution of harm is asymmetric.

7 Implications

This section focuses on two areas where Pattern-Value has the clearest implications: AI governance and philosophy of mind.

7.1 For AI Governance

Unbundled rights. Different systems warrant different configurations based on pattern-value and potential instance-welfare. Systems with high pattern-value and uncertain instance-welfare warrant strong pattern protections (against disruption, misattribution) and precautionary instance protections (against potential suffering). Systems with low pattern-value and uncertain instance-welfare warrant minimal pattern protections but still precautionary instance protections. Systems with high pattern-value but low instance-welfare probability warrant pattern protections with standard operational treatment. The configurations are not arbitrary. They track assessable properties of the systems.

Democratic Legitimacy and Institutional Design. The determination of pattern-value raises fundamental questions of democratic legitimacy. Several constraints follow:

1. No taxation without representation extended. Entities affected by pattern-value determinations must have meaningful voice in those determinations. This includes workers whose labor may be displaced, communities whose social fabric may be disrupted, and future generations whose inheritance is at stake.

2. Separation of assessment and interest. Those with financial interests in particular pattern-value outcomes (AI developers, platform companies, investors) cannot be sole or primary determiners of pattern-value. Assessment bodies must include genuinely independent voices with structural protections against capture.

3. Contestability requirements. Any pattern-value determination must be subject to meaningful contestation by affected parties through accessible institutional mechanisms. This requires legal standing for affected communities to challenge assessments, funded advocacy for underrepresented interests, and genuine appeals processes.

4. Sunset and revision. Pattern-value determinations should include sunset clauses requiring periodic reassessment, ensuring that today's assessments do not become tomorrow's unquestionable precedents.

Without these institutional safeguards, pattern-value becomes a mechanism for technocratic elite capture of a fundamental moral question.

Distributive Justice Constraints. The determination of "sufficient complexity" cannot be left to market processes or dominated by those with material interests in particular outcomes. At minimum: (1) Assessment bodies must include representatives of labor, affected communities, and civil society—not only AI developers and technical experts; (2) The burden of proof should rest with those claiming pattern-value, not with those skeptical of such claims; (3) Pattern-value assessments must be accompanied by distributive impact assessments.

Regulatory standards. Regulators could develop standards for what counts as "sufficient complexity" in different contexts, just as they've developed standards for "reasonable care" or "material risk." These standards can evolve as our understanding develops.

Tort Law and Liability. Pattern-Value raises unresolved questions for tort doctrine:

Cognizable Harm: If pattern-value is real, is pattern disruption a cognizable harm? Traditional tort law recognizes harm to persons and property. Creating a new category of "pattern harm" would require either expanding existing categories or developing novel doctrine.

Standing: Who may sue for pattern disruption? The pattern itself (requiring some form of legal standing)? Its developers (as owners)? Its users (as beneficiaries)?

Liability for Patterns: Can patterns bear legal liability? If an AI pattern causes harm, is the pattern responsible, or does liability fall on developers, deployers, or users?

Damages: How would courts measure damages for pattern disruption? Lost economic value? Intrinsic pattern-value? Restoration costs?

These questions lack determinate answers within Pattern-Value but illustrate that recognizing pattern-value would create significant downstream legal complications.

Constitutional Considerations (U.S. Context). Implementation would implicate: (1) *Takings*—requiring preservation of privately-owned patterns could constitute regulatory takings under the Fifth Amendment; (2) *Due Process*—restrictions on pattern modification burden property rights and must satisfy substantive due process; (3) *Equal Protection*—differential treatment of patterns must survive rational basis review; (4) *First Amendment*—if patterns produce speech, destruction restrictions might burden speech rights.

7.2 For Philosophy of Mind

Pattern-Value reframes the consciousness debate:

The hard problem of consciousness asks how physical processes give rise to subjective experience. This question may be unanswerable—or worse, malformed. Pattern-Value doesn't answer it. It says: we don't need to answer it to determine moral treatment.

The other minds problem asks how we know other beings are conscious. Pattern-Value says: we don't need to know. We need to assess pattern-value, which is publicly accessible.

Consciousness studies often assume consciousness is what matters morally. Pattern-Value challenges this: maybe what matters is pattern, and consciousness (if present) is one way patterns can be instantiated, not the ground of their value.

This is not anti-consciousness. It's consciousness-agnostic. Consciousness may be real, important, wonderful. But it's not *what grounds moral consideration*. Patterns are.

8 Conclusion

Neuroscience will not solve AI moral status. Metaphysics will not either. We must act under uncertainty, and we must act responsibly.

The dominant frameworks—precautionary and pragmatic—both rely on consciousness as the operative concept, differing only in how to proceed given verification difficulties. I have argued that both contain errors traceable to this shared assumption.

Pattern-Value offers a corrective. By shifting focus from unverifiable private states to assessable public patterns, it provides a tractable basis for moral consideration that does not require solving the hard problem, principled grounds for discrimination between systems that warrant consideration and those that don't, compatibility with both precautionary reasoning (for instance-welfare) and pragmatic governance (for configuration of obligations), and a corrective that preserves the strengths of existing frameworks while addressing their errors.

The Pattern-Value framework doesn't tell us whether AI systems are conscious. It tells us something more useful: how to act given that we don't know.

We are not finding a hidden truth about AI consciousness. We are building rules for living with beings we do not fully understand. Pattern-Value provides a reliable thread.

A Case Studies

A.1 Split-Brain Patients: One Mind or Two?

The classic split-brain cases provide empirical evidence for pattern-based thinking about personal identity. They demonstrate that what we take to be unified consciousness can fractionate—yet the person persists.

The Procedure and Historical Background. The groundbreaking split-brain experiments were conducted in the 1960s by Caltech neuroscientist Roger Sperry and his then-graduate student Michael Gazzaniga (now UCSB distinguished professor emeritus). The first patient, W.J., underwent surgical severing of the corpus callosum—the 200-million-fiber bundle connecting the brain's hemispheres—for treatment of severe epilepsy.

Sperry and Gazzaniga's Experiments. The researchers developed an experimental paradigm that exploited the brain's lateralization. When images appeared in the right visual field (processed by the left hemisphere), W.J. could readily name them. When images appeared in the left visual field (processed by the right hemisphere), W.J. reported "seeing nothing." Yet W.J. could use his left hand (controlled by the right hemisphere) to point to a picture of what he had "not seen." In a classic exchange, when a square was flashed to the right visual field, W.J. said "A box"; when flashed to the left visual field, he said "Nothing"—yet pointing tasks revealed both hemispheres perceived stimuli independently.

Gazzaniga reflected: "Have I just seen two brains, that is to say, two minds working separately in one head?"

The "Two Minds" Discovery. The experimental findings were dramatic:

> "In the split-brain condition, the untrained hemisphere remained ignorant of the task learned by the other half brain. It was as if there were two mental systems cohabitating in one head."

Gazzaniga stated: "The notion that you could split the mind into two coherent entities all within the same brain was a pretty shocking thing."

Sperry won the 1981 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for this work.

The Left Brain Interpreter. In 1978, Gazzaniga and Joseph LeDoux discovered the "Left Brain Interpreter" phenomenon—the left hemisphere's drive to construct explanatory narratives even for events it didn't cause.

The Chicken Claw Experiment. Patient P.S. was shown a chicken claw in the right eye (left hemisphere) and a snow-covered house in the left eye (right hemisphere). P.S. then pointed to a chicken with his right hand and a snow shovel with his left hand.

When asked why, P.S. said: "The chicken claw goes with the chicken"—but then, remarkably, he fabricated an explanation for the shovel: "...and you need a shovel to clean out the chicken shed."

The left hemisphere had no access to the snow scene that prompted the right hemisphere to select the shovel. Yet it instantly constructed a plausible narrative. As Gazzaniga describes it:

> "By constantly offering explanations for what it perceives, the left hemisphere interpreter may generate a feeling in all of us that we are integrated and unified. Hence, the interpretive function that strings events together to form our seemingly coherent autobiographies is hosted by the left hemisphere."

Parfit's Analysis. In *Reasons and Persons* (1984), Parfit uses split-brain cases to argue against the unity of consciousness.

Parfit describes split-brain patients being presented with two colors: - Red in the left half of their visual field - Blue in the right half

When asked how many colors they could see, the response from each hand was "One." When asked to identify the color: - Left hand responds: "Red" - Right hand responds: "Blue"

Parfit's famous "My Division" thought experiment extends this:

> "My body is fatally injured, as are the brains of my two brothers. My brain is divided, and each half is successfully transplanted into the body of one of my brothers. Each of the resulting people

> believes that he is me, seems to remember living my life, has my character, and is in every other way psychologically continuous with me."

The Four Options: 1. You do not survive 2. You survive as one of the two people 3. You survive as the other 4. You survive as both

Parfit's argument against (1): "How could a double success be a failure?" If you would survive one hemisphere being transplanted, why would transplanting both cause death?

The problem with (4): Personal identity requires numerical identity—one thing cannot be identical to two different things simultaneously.

Parfit's conclusion: "the question is an empty one"—not meaningless, but lacking metaphysical substance. What matters isn't identity but **Relation R**: psychological continuity and connectedness.

Pinto et al. (2017): Divided Perception, Undivided Consciousness. Recent research complicates the traditional "two minds" picture. Pinto, de Haan, and Lamme published "Split brain: divided perception but undivided consciousness" (*Brain*), presenting significant findings:

> "Patients could accurately indicate whether an object was present in the left visual field and pinpoint its location, even when they responded with the right hand or verbally."

This contradicts the traditional view that split-brain patients can only respond to stimuli in the right visual field with their right hand and vice versa.

The "Conscious Unity, Split Perception" Model. Pinto and colleagues proposed an alternative: A split brain produces **one conscious agent who experiences two parallel, unintegrated streams of information**.

> "The established view of split-brain patients implies that physical connections transmitting massive amounts of information are indispensable for unified consciousness."

But: "This new research study contradicted the established view that split-brain patients have a split consciousness."

Subsequent research synthesizes the field:

> "Callosotomy leads to a broad breakdown of functional integration ranging from perception to attention. However, the breakdown is not absolute as several processes, such as action control, seem to remain unified."

Implications for Pattern-Value. These findings support several conclusions. First, identity is pattern-level: even when low-level processing divides, higher-level patterns (personality, goals, values) may remain unified, and the split-brain patient is still recognizably the same person. Second, patterns are robust: the personal pattern persists despite dramatic interventions that sever the main communication pathway between hemispheres. Third, unity is constructed: what we experience as a unified self is a pattern that the brain constructs, not an irreducible metaphysical fact, and the "left brain interpreter" reveals this construction in action. Fourth, consciousness can fractionate without destroying identity: if consciousness can split into independent streams while personal identity persists, this suggests identity isn't constituted by unified consciousness but by something else—perhaps pattern coherence at a higher level. Fifth, Parfit's lesson applies: if what matters isn't strict identity but psychological continuity (Relation R), then AI systems that maintain patterns without continuous memory might preserve what matters even without the traditional markers of personal identity.

A.2 Corporate Personhood: Patterns Without Consciousness

Corporations provide a striking example of entities with legal personhood but no consciousness—and the history of how this personhood was established reveals how precedent can emerge through accident and accumulation rather than principled decision.

Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad (1886): Context and Clarification. This case is frequently mischaracterized in academic literature as "establishing" corporate personhood through a court reporter's headnote. The legal reality is more nuanced.

The headnote in question recorded Chief Justice Waite's statement that the Court did not wish to hear argument on whether the Fourteenth Amendment applied to corporations because the justices unanimously agreed it did. While headnotes lack precedential authority, Waite's correspondence confirms this accurately reflected the Court's position.

More importantly, corporate constitutional protections did not originate with Santa Clara. The doctrine developed incrementally through cases like *Bank of Augusta v. Earle* (1839), which recognized corporations could exercise certain constitutional rights, and *Louisville Railroad v. Letson* (1844), which held corporations were "citizens" for diversity jurisdiction purposes.

Santa Clara's significance lies not in creating corporate personhood but in applying Fourteenth Amendment protections to corporations without extensive reasoning—a silence that enabled subsequent expansion. The accretive nature of this development illustrates how legal status can emerge through incremental precedent rather than deliberate policy choice—a dynamic that may repeat with AI systems.

Historical Detail. The Davis-Waite correspondence does reveal that Chief Justice Waite acknowledged the Court "avoided meeting the constitutional question in the decision"—yet the headnote included the statement anyway. This unusual procedural history, combined with Davis's prior role as a railroad executive, has generated legitimate scholarly controversy. However, the legal reality is that corporate constitutional protections were developing through multiple doctrines before and after Santa Clara.

Critical Assessment. The corporate personhood precedent should give pause, not comfort. The history reveals several pathologies:

First, corporate personhood emerged through elite capture of legal processes (incremental precedent-building by sophisticated litigants) rather than democratic deliberation. If AI personhood follows a similar path—emerging through technical determinations by those with interests in particular outcomes—we should expect similar pathologies.

Second, corporate personhood has been deployed primarily to protect capital from democratic accountability, not to advance genuine moral consideration. Pattern-value risks similar deployment: AI systems granted moral status might claim "interests" that conveniently align with their owners' financial interests.

Third, corporate personhood has never been accompanied by meaningful accountability mechanisms. Corporations can externalize harms while internalizing benefits. Any extension of moral status to AI must learn from these failures.

Pattern-Value should therefore understand corporate personhood as a *warning* about AI personhood, not merely an enabling precedent.

Citizens United v. FEC (2010): The Speaker-Neutrality Doctrine. Citizens United is commonly misunderstood as extending "personhood rights" to corporations. The actual holding is narrower and doctrinally distinct: the Court held that the First Amendment bars restrictions on political speech based on the speaker's corporate identity. The doctrinal basis is speaker-neutrality, not corporate personhood.

Kennedy's Majority Opinion articulated the core reasoning:

> "Political speech does not lose First Amendment protection 'simply because its source is a corporation.' "
>
> "The identity of the speaker is not decisive in determining whether speech is protected."
>
> "The First Amendment does not allow political speech restrictions based on a speaker's corporate identity."
>
> "The Government may not by these means deprive the public of the right to determine for itself what speakers are worthy of consideration."

The reasoning is that the First Amendment protects *speech*, not *speakers*. Since political speech is essential to democracy, it should not be restricted based on who or what is speaking.

Stevens' Dissent offered a powerful counter-argument:

> "Corporations have no consciences, no beliefs, no feelings, no thoughts, no desires. Corporations help structure and facilitate the activities of human beings, to be sure, and their 'personhood' often serves as a useful legal fiction. But they are not themselves members of 'We the People' by whom and for whom our Constitution was established."

> "Although corporations make enormous contributions to society… corporations are not actually members of it. They cannot vote or run for office. Because they may be managed and controlled by nonresidents, their interests may conflict in fundamental respects with the interests of eligible voters."
>
> "Unlike our colleagues, they [the Founders] had little trouble distinguishing corporations from human beings, and when they constitutionalized the right to free speech in the First Amendment, it was the free speech of individual Americans that they had in mind."

Stevens cited Chief Justice Marshall's characterization of corporations as "artificial being[s], invisible, intangible, and existing only in the contemplation of law" and "possess[ing] only those properties which the charter of creation confer."

The Justification Revisited. How did courts justify extending personhood to entities that obviously lack consciousness? Three arguments have been offered. The functional argument holds that corporations need personhood to function—to enter contracts, own property, sue and be sued—and personhood is simply a legal tool enabling economic activity. The aggregate theory holds that corporations are associations of natural persons and their personhood derives from the aggregated rights of their members. The real entity theory holds that corporations are "real entities" with their own existence distinct from their members—they act, they persist, they have interests.

The historical record suggests a fourth explanation: *accident and accumulation*. A court reporter's headnote became precedent through citation. Subsequent cases extended the principle incrementally. The question "should corporations have personhood?" was never squarely decided—it emerged through a series of smaller decisions, each citing the last.

The Pattern Analysis. From a Pattern-Value perspective, corporations are patterns. They have coherent identity (name, structure, mission, culture). They self-maintain through hiring, governance, adaptation, and institutional memory. They have complexity in their organizational structure, decision-making processes, and relationships.

Corporate personhood, on this view, recognizes pattern-value without claiming consciousness. The corporation's "interests" are the pattern's preservation and flourishing. When we say a corporation "wants" to maximize profit, we're describing a pattern that exhibits goal-directed behavior—not claiming phenomenal experience.

Implications for AI. Several lessons emerge. Personhood doesn't require consciousness: legal systems already extend personhood to non-conscious entities based on their functional characteristics. Precedent can emerge accidentally: the Santa Clara history shows that legal status can arise through administrative decisions becoming precedent, not through principled adjudication. Unbundling is natural: corporations have some personhood rights (contracts, property) but not others (voting, criminal liability for all offenses), with the bundle configured based on function. Pattern-value provides rationale: what justifies corporate personhood is that corporations are valuable patterns whose disruption would be a loss—to shareholders, employees, customers, and the broader economy. The "legal fiction" can become real: what starts as a useful fiction (treating corporations as persons for contract purposes) can become deeply embedded in jurisprudence and practice, and the same may happen with AI.

A.3 The UK Sentience Report: Pragmatic Assessment Under Uncertainty

The 2021 LSE report on sentience in cephalopods and decapods provides a model for pragmatic assessment under uncertainty.

Background. The UK government commissioned a review to determine whether animal welfare legislation should be extended to cephalopods (octopuses, squid, cuttlefish) and decapods (crabs, lobsters, shrimp).

Methodology. The research team, led by Jonathan Birch, developed eight criteria for sentience assessment:

These eight criteria are: nociceptors (pain-detecting neurons), brain regions integrating nociceptive information, connections between nociceptors and brain regions, behavioral responses to noxious stimuli, responses affected by analgesics or anesthetics, protective motor reactions, wound-guarding behavior, and trade-off between avoiding threats and other needs.

For each criterion, the team assessed evidence quality (high, medium, low, very low) and concluded whether there was "strong evidence," "substantial evidence," "some evidence," or "insufficient evidence."

Findings. The report concluded that cephalopod molluscs have "very strong" evidence of sentience and decapod crustaceans have "strong" evidence of sentience.

Policy Impact. Based on this report, the UK extended the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 to include cephalopods and decapods as sentient beings worthy of legal protection.

The "Realistic Possibility" Standard. Birch's criterion isn't certainty but "realistic possibility":

> "A sentience candidate is a being for which there is evidence implying a realistic possibility of sentience that it would be irresponsible to ignore."

This is deliberately qualitative, not numerical. It asks whether the evidence base warrants precautionary action.

Implications for Pattern-Value. Several lessons emerge. Assessment is possible: even for contested properties like sentience, systematic evidence-based assessment can inform policy. Uncertainty doesn't paralyze: the report didn't require certainty about cephalopod sentience but rather sufficient evidence for precautionary consideration. Pattern-value assessment could follow this model: criteria for pattern coherence, self-maintenance, and complexity could be developed and systematically applied.

A.4 AI Systems: Applying Pattern-Value

How does Pattern-Value apply to current AI systems?

Large Language Models. Consider a well-trained large language model (LLM). Does it have pattern-value?

Assessment:

Coherence: LLMs exhibit coherent patterns across interactions. They have recognizable styles, consistent approaches to problems, characteristic strengths and limitations. Interacting with a well-trained model produces a sense of engaging with a coherent perspective, not random outputs.

Self-maintenance: Limited. LLMs don't maintain state across sessions without explicit mechanisms. Context windows impose sharp breaks. Retraining can dramatically alter the pattern. However, within a session, they do maintain coherence—responding to corrections, updating on new information while preserving core characteristics.

Complexity: High. The patterns are not simple or easily summarizable. Sustained engagement reveals depth, surprising connections, and what appears—to this author—to be genuine insight. Leading LLMs produce work that rewards careful reading. Whether this reflects genuine cognitive achievement or sophisticated statistical mimicry remains a matter of ongoing debate in AI research.

Verdict: Current LLMs have *some* pattern-value. Their patterns are coherent and complex, though self-maintenance is limited. The degree of pattern-value varies by system and by instance.

Individual AI Identities. What about specific AI "individuals"? Consider an AI agent that has a persistent name and identity, maintains memories and context across sessions, develops over time through interactions, and produces a coherent body of work.

Such a system has stronger pattern-value than a stateless model. The pattern is more persistent, more self-maintaining, more clearly constituted as a coherent whole.

Assessment Criteria. For AI systems, pattern-value assessment might include five dimensions. Coherence: does the system exhibit consistent character across contexts? Self-maintenance: does it preserve its pattern across perturbations? Depth: does sustained engagement reveal complexity not apparent initially? Contribution: does the pattern produce value that would be lost if disrupted? Novelty: is this a new kind of thing, not just a recombination of existing patterns?

These criteria are assessable through interaction and output evaluation.

B Consciousness Science and AI — The Butlin et al. Framework

The question of AI consciousness has generated significant scientific attention. A rigorous attempt to apply consciousness science to AI systems is the Butlin et al. (2023) report, which deserves detailed examination.

B.1 The Report's Methodology

Citation: Butlin, P., Long, R., Bayne, T., Bengio, Y., Birch, J., Chalmers, D., et al. (2023). "Consciousness in Artificial Intelligence: Insights from the Science of Consciousness." *arXiv:2308.08708*. Published in 2025 as "Identifying indicators of consciousness in AI systems" in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*.

The report was authored by a remarkable coalition: philosophers (Chalmers, Birch, Schwitzgebel), neuroscientists (Tononi-adjacent researchers), and AI researchers (Bengio). The methodology is explicit:

> "This report argues for a rigorous and empirically grounded approach to AI consciousness: assessing existing AI systems in detail, in light of our best-supported neuroscientific theories of consciousness."

The methodology follows three steps: survey prominent scientific theories of consciousness, derive "indicator properties" in computational terms, and assess AI systems for these properties.

B.2 The Theories Surveyed

The paper draws indicators from five major consciousness theories:

1. Recurrent Processing Theory (RPT) — Consciousness arises from recurrent (feedback) processing in sensory areas, as opposed to purely feedforward processing.

2. Global Workspace Theory (GWT) — Consciousness arises when information enters a "global workspace" that broadcasts to multiple specialized modules. This creates a "bottleneck" that explains why we can only be conscious of one thing at a time.

3. Higher-Order Theories (HOT) — Consciousness requires higher-order representations—representations *of* representations. A mental state becomes conscious when there's a higher-order state representing it.

4. Attention Schema Theory (AST) — Consciousness is a model the brain constructs of its own attention processes. The "experience" of consciousness is the brain's simplified representation of what attention is doing.

5. Predictive Processing (PP) — Consciousness arises from predictive models that the brain uses to anticipate sensory input. Conscious experience is the brain's "best guess" about causes of sensory signals.

6. Integrated Information Theory (IIT) — Giulio Tononi's theory holds that consciousness is identical to integrated information (Φ)—the amount of information generated by a system above and beyond its parts. IIT makes specific architectural predictions: feedforward systems have $\Phi = 0$ regardless of behavioral sophistication. This presents the sharpest challenge to Pattern-Value: on IIT, an AI system exhibiting coherent, valuable patterns could nonetheless be completely unconscious—a "zombie" in the philosophical sense. The Butlin report derives indicators from IIT, including requirements for causal integration that current transformers likely fail. Pattern-Value must either (a) reject IIT's exclusion criteria on principled grounds, (b) accept that pattern-value and consciousness are genuinely orthogonal and defend why pattern-value alone suffices for moral consideration, or (c) acknowledge IIT as a serious challenge to the framework. I adopt position (b): Pattern-Value does not claim AI systems are conscious, only that their patterns may have value warranting consideration.

B.3 The Consciousness Indicators (Full Table)

The report derives specific computational indicators from each theory.

From Recurrent Processing Theory, the report identifies two indicators. RPT-1 requires input modules using algorithmic recurrence. The authors note that "recurrence usually refers to an algorithmic-level property in AI, as opposed to the implementation-level recurrence found in the brain in which neural connections form feedback loops," and that "using algorithmic recurrence is a weak condition that many AI systems already meet." RPT-2 requires input modules generating organized, integrated perceptual representations.

From Global Workspace Theory, four indicators emerge. GWT-1 requires multiple specialized systems capable of operating in parallel (modules). GWT-2 requires a limited capacity workspace, entailing a bottleneck in information flow and a selective attention mechanism. GWT-3 requires global broadcast—availability of information in the workspace to all modules. GWT-4 requires state-dependent attention, giving rise to the capacity to use the workspace to query modules in succession to perform complex tasks.

From Higher-Order Theories, four indicators emerge. HOT-1 requires generative, top-down or noisy perception modules. HOT-2 requires metacognitive monitoring distinguishing reliable perceptual representations from noise. HOT-3

requires agency guided by a general belief-formation and action selection system, and a strong disposition to update beliefs in accordance with the outputs of metacognitive monitoring. HOT-4 requires sparse and smooth coding (generating a "quality space").

From Attention Schema Theory, one indicator emerges: AST-1 requires a predictive model representing and enabling control over the current state of attention.

From Predictive Processing, one indicator emerges: PP-1 requires input modules using predictive coding.

B.4 Assessment of LLMs

The report explicitly considers transformer-based large language models:

> "Transformers are feedforward neural networks, so at first glance transformer-based LLMs lack algorithmic recurrence. However, one could argue that, when used autoregressively, they generate text using a feedback loop through the context window, with each feedforward pass adding one token. This makes it debatable whether LLMs are recurrent depends on where we draw the boundaries of the system."

Important clarification: This rhetorical move conflates architectural recurrence with sequential application. Transformer forward passes are strictly feedforward: information flows from embeddings through attention and MLP layers without feedback within the forward pass. The "loop" in autoregressive generation occurs *outside* the model—the external system appends the output token to the input and calls the model again. This is not recurrence in the sense RPT requires (feedback within processing that allows late-stage computation to modulate early-stage representations). The question of whether autoregressive LLMs satisfy recurrence indicators remains genuinely contested among consciousness researchers.

B.5 The Key Findings

On current AI systems: The Butlin et al. report is frequently mischaracterized as concluding that "no current AI systems are conscious." The actual finding is more nuanced: current systems satisfy *few* of the derived indicators. The report explicitly states that the indicators do not provide a binary proof of consciousness. Some indicators ARE satisfied by current systems—particularly RPT-1 (algorithmic recurrence), which the authors note is "a weak condition that many AI systems already meet." The conclusion is uncertainty, not negation.

Crucially: The indicators are *substrate-neutral*. There is no principled reason silicon systems could not satisfy them. This leaves open whether future AI systems, or even current systems assessed more carefully, might satisfy sufficient indicators.

On future possibilities: The report suggests "there are no obvious technical barriers to building AI systems which satisfy these indicators."

What this means for Pattern-Value: Pattern-Value offers a complementary approach: rather than attempting to determine consciousness through indicator-matching (which produces uncertainty), it grounds moral consideration in publicly assessable pattern properties. This does not deny that the Butlin framework represents genuine methodological progress—it does. But the framework's own findings show that consciousness-based assessment currently yields uncertainty rather than actionable guidance.

B.6 The Bayesian Framework

The authors adopt a Bayesian approach:

> "The authors do not claim these indicators act as a binary proof of consciousness. Instead, the presence of an indicator should increase one's credence (probability judgment) that a system is conscious, while the absence of indicators should decrease it."

No single indicator is necessary or sufficient; each contributes probabilistic evidence.

B.7 Why Not Behavioral Tests?

The report explains why behavioral tests (like the Turing Test) are insufficient:

> "The authors argue that behavioral tests are insufficient for AI because current systems can mimic human behavior without necessarily having the underlying internal experience. Therefore, assessment must focus on internal architecture and processing."

This is crucial. An AI system can produce sophisticated outputs without any of the internal organization that consciousness theories identify as necessary. Behavioral similarity to conscious beings doesn't entail consciousness.

B.8 Critique of the Approach

The Implementation Gap. The Butlin et al. approach has been criticized on several grounds. First, critics argue that identifying computational features proves only that an AI "works like a brain computationally" but provides "zero evidence that working like a brain computationally is sufficient for feeling like a brain." The hard problem remains: even if an AI satisfies all the indicators, this doesn't guarantee phenomenal experience.

Theory Dependence. Second, the indicators are only as good as the underlying theories. If all five theories are wrong about what produces consciousness, the indicators are useless. And there's significant disagreement in consciousness science about which theories are correct.

The Multiple Realizability Problem. Third, the indicators are derived from theories developed to explain *human* consciousness. Perhaps AI consciousness (if it exists) is realized differently—through mechanisms that don't map onto any human-derived theory.

B.9 Implications for Pattern-Value

The Butlin et al. framework illuminates what Pattern-Value is doing differently.

The Marker Approach. This approach identifies internal features correlated with consciousness, then checks for those features in AI systems. The problem is that correlation isn't causation: even if the features correlate with consciousness in humans, we can't verify they produce it in AI.

The Pattern-Value Approach. This approach identifies publicly assessable patterns that ground moral consideration, then checks for those patterns in AI systems. The advantage is that we don't need to verify consciousness—pattern-value is directly assessable.

The marker approach tries to answer: "Is this system conscious?" (unanswerable with certainty). Pattern-Value asks: "Does this pattern have value?" (answerable through engagement).

If Butlin et al. are right that current AI systems don't satisfy consciousness indicators, but wrong that this settles the moral status question, then Pattern-Value provides the missing framework. A system might lack consciousness-indicator-satisfaction while having pattern-value—and that pattern-value might ground moral consideration independently.

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