

LOGIC, REASONING, AND PERSUASION, WEEK 2-1

Today: A detailed overview of Aylsworth & Castro (2024), “Should I Use ChatGPT to Write My Papers?”. Do interrupt me and ask questions. Today I’ll focus more on the *content* of the argumentation, and on Wednesday we will delve more into the *structure* of the argumentation.

Section Structure of the Paper

- §1 Introduction
- §2 Inadequate Reasons
 - §2.1 No, because it would be cheating.
 - §2.2 No, because it would constitute the loss of a capacity.
 - §2.3 No, because writing is thinking.
- §3 Adequate Reasons: The Duty to Cultivate Your Autonomy
 - §3.1 Answer to the Identity Challenge
 - §3.2 Answer to the Authority Challenge
 - §3.3 Answer to the Explanatory Challenge
- §4 Objections and Replies
- §5 Conclusion

1 | INTRODUCTION

Ask yourself: “Should I use ChatGPT to write my papers?” A&C argue that the answer is “no”, at least when it comes to *humanities papers* — those in which “you are charged with giving or evaluating reasons for or against a non-trivial conclusion (e.g., that we have free will, that it is morally wrong to eat meat, etc.).”

However, they also think:

1. The reasons are less obvious than you might think, and some of the common arguments we’re given are unpersuasive.
2. Thinking more about why you shouldn’t use ChatGPT teaches us about the nature of our agency and to what extent we are bound by duties of self-improvement.

A&C’s Argument: you should not use ChatGPT to write your papers, because you have a duty to foster and safeguard your autonomy, and that duty requires you to write your own papers.

2 | INADEQUATE REASONS

1. **Argument:** Using ChatGPT would be cheating.
Response: what counts as cheating depends on what the instructor or the school allows. Imagine that an instructor allows any use of AI, as long as the use is cited. Then it wouldn’t be cheating to use AI. (In this case, using AI without citing it would be cheating, but in this case the cheating would be in *misrepresenting* your work rather than in the use of AI itself.)

2. **Argument:** You shouldn't use AI to write your papers, because it would constitute the loss of a capacity: the capacity to write your own papers.

Response: the fact that you should be able to do simple arithmetic in your head doesn't mean you shouldn't ever be allowed to use a calculator. When a new technology allows us to outsource an ability, further argument is needed to establish that this is a *moral* concern. Some skills arguably don't need to be kept: like London taxicab drivers memorizing all the roads. If *using* AI becomes a skill, then perhaps students should be learning to use AI rather than learning how to do things without AI.

3. **Argument:** You shouldn't use AI to write your papers, because writing is a process of thinking, critical analysis, and coming up with one's own views.¹

Response: but what is the value of making sense of difficult material and to be able to think? Indeed, if for a lot of thinking tasks, computers will be able to do it for us, what is the point of thinking? And unless we are in positions of political or social power, what's even the point of having a distinctive take?

What's common among the inadequate reasons: a compelling argument that students shouldn't use AI would have to be involve answers to three challenges:

1. **The Identity Challenge:**² *identify* the value that is promoted by not using AI ("what is good about not using AI?")
2. **The Authority Challenge:** provide an argument that the identified value in the first part is actually valuable ("why is it actually good?")
3. **The Explanatory Challenge:** Explain why the value in question gives the typical student a good reason to not use AI in their writing. ("why does the good thing about not using AI give me enough reason to not use AI?")

and A&C think none of the three reasons above have all three properties.

3 | ADEQUATE REASONS: THE DUTY TO CULTIVATE YOUR AUTONOMY

3.1 | *Answer to the Identity Challenge*

The "ultimate" value is the value of *autonomy* (or, equivalently for them, *humanity*). This is "*Kantian*" because it is most closely associated with Kant.

Definition: *autonomy* is "the rational agent's capacity to set and pursue her own ends."

In plainer language: "autonomy" is your ability to choose what you will do and to take steps toward doing it. It's something (many think) we share to a degree with animals, and that inanimate objects lack. It's a complicated idea still, though, and it's worth asking whether A&C really need it for their argument to work.

1. e.g. Steven Mintz: "Writing is not merely a mode of communication. It's a process that, if we move beyond simple formulas, forces us to reflect, think, analyze and reason. The goal of a writing assignment worth its salt is not simply to describe or persuade or summarize: it's to drive students to make sense of difficult material and develop their own distinctive take" (Mintz, 2021)/
2. I think this is a bad name, since there are a bunch of identity problems in philosophy

3.2 | Answer to the Authority Challenge

The Kantian thinks that the rational agent's possession of autonomy gives them a *moral obligation* to respect the capacity in themselves and others. The argument for this claim is quite difficult, A&C don't really defend it. To some extent, this is a "the buck stops here" claim for them.³

But the idea does have some intuitive weight: it seems like it's generally okay to take a rock and do whatever you want to it or with it. But forcing another person to do what you want them to do seems not okay. The "autonomy" story says that it's because another person has the ability to have and pursue their own goals, and thus it is wrong for you to impede that.⁴

And similarly (though it's less obvious), we can make sense of the idea of a duties or responsibilities to oneself. If you have some abilities, maybe you *owe it to yourself* to make use of them. If you have talent or ability or drive, maybe you owe it to yourself to develop it rather than spend your life mindlessly.

Question: *how plausible do you find this part of the argument? Do A&C really need it?*

3.3 | Answer to the Explanatory Challenge

If (as argued in 3.1 and 3.2) you have a duty to cultivate your own autonomy, then it remains to show that writing your own papers, and not using AI, is a unique way to conform to that duty of cultivating your own autonomy.

In brief, their argument is: *you don't have a lot of chances to cultivate this autonomy*, and writing provides a particularly good way of doing it. In particular, they think that a college class (perhaps like this one!) gives you a "sufficiently unique" opportunity to cultivate your humanity by reflecting on your values and commitments and deciding what you will do the rest of your life.⁵

Question: *what do you think of A&C's example on page 19, where they claim that if you ask ChatGPT to write the response, "you have missed the opportunity to ask questions about your values—ones that might have changed the course of your life", and that if you receive feedback on the ChatGPT-generated text, "you have missed the chance to receive feedback about both your thinking process and your conclusions"?*

3. In that they don't really give an argument for it.
4. This isn't the only way to argue that particular things are wrong! We'll discuss more later in the term.
5. They quote Robert Paul Wolff:

"But on the threshold of adulthood, [...] [the student] is suddenly faced with a problem much greater than any his schooling has ever posed. He must decide who he is, and hence who he is going to be for the rest of his life. He must choose not only a career, a job, an occupational role, but also a life-style, a set of values which can serve as his ideal self-image, and toward which he can grow through the commitment of his emotional energies ... College is the setting for this transitional experience, and undergraduate education should facilitate and enrich it, not to squelch it" (1969, 38-39).

3.4 | *The Total Argument*

Here's how A&C summarize their argument from §3.

1. *You have a duty to cultivate your humanity, because this capacity has final value.*
2. *If you have a duty to cultivate something, happen upon a good and unique opportunity to cultivate it, and do not have a good reason to pass on the opportunity, you ought to take the opportunity.*
3. *Writing your own humanities papers is one such opportunity.*
4. *So, you ought to write your own humanities papers.*

Question: *which of points 1-4 do you think is the weakest? If you weren't convinced, could you save the argument by replacing it with something else?*

4 | OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

Objection: The scope of the argument is too narrow, since it applies only to humanities papers at elite liberal arts universities⁶ (Note: this is my best guess of what A&C call the first objection. I don't think they are at all clear. What do you think it is?)

Reply (in two parts): The argument could be extended to students in other disciplines and other types of undergraduate institutions, and even to earlier than college.⁷

Objection: ChatGPT can *enhance* our autonomy, either by freeing us from the burden of demanding and tedious tasks (writing emails, reading/outlining a paper), or by improving our abilities, like chess players who use chess bots to study. Perhaps generative AI can capture what you mean to say or think even *better* than you can!⁸

Reply (in three parts):

1. The paper is aimed at what a typical undergraduate student should do. Cases of people who have already developed a skill, like chess, using technology to further develop it, is different from using AI *instead* of developing a skill.
2. Because of immense economic pressure to get good grades, there can be strong incentive to use AI to do the work rather than to improve one's skills, even if one does not intend to do so at first.
3. AI could bad for your self-control: if chatbots obey our every command, it could weaken our self-control and autonomy.

→ **Questions:** (1) *Do A&C think that undergraduate students couldn't use AI legitimately to learn?* (2) *Does point 3. actually respond to the objection?*

5 | CONCLUSION (NOTHING NEW HERE)

Question: at the end, A&C say explicitly that you have a moral obligation to not use ChatGPT to write your papers. That is, it would be *wrong* to use it. Do they need such a strong claim? Why couldn't they argue that, for your own good, it would be better not to use ChatGPT?

6. Rutgers not fancy enough for their argument??

7. Look back at footnote 2 on page 2 of the paper. Do their stories line up?

8. What if you mean to express some sentiments to a family member but the words aren't coming out right. Perhaps you could ask ChatGPT to phrase it for you etc.