Discussion Guide for
Signals & Society Episode #3 (2/2/26)
"Arkangel: The Most Dangerous Kind of Tyranny"
(based on the Black Mirror Episode, "Arkangel")

link to video on YouTube https://youtu.be/vW6hHPVi7pA

My "Signals and Society" series examines the interaction between technology and society as viewed through the lens of books, movies, and TV / streaming episodes. This episode recaps one of my favorite episodes of Black Mirror, "Arkangel". In this episode, a single mother, still emotionally reeling from temporarily losing her daughter at a playground, decides to have her daughter "chipped" to make sure she never loses her again. However, the chip reveals much more about her daughter's personal life than just her location. As the mother, with the best of intentions, digs deeper into her daughter's "private moments", she can't resist the impulse to intervene in ways that lead to tragedy.

Here are some questions to reflect on and/or discuss in a small group setting with friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc. Some of these are deep, philosophical questions that honest and intelligent people may disagree about. Most do not have a clear "right answer" because they are intended to encourage reflection and polite, civil debate.

Jon

Theme 1: Plot, character, and moral responsibility

1. Which Arkangel feature is the *most* ethically dangerous: **location tracking**, **biometrics**, **audio/video**, or **content filtering**? Defend your choice.
2. Is Marie primarily motivated by love, fear, trauma, or something else? What evidence supports your view?
3. Grandpa objects early—was he right *in principle,* or just "old-fashioned"? What would a modern version of his argument sound like?
4. What do you think Sara learns about trust from the Arkangel system—both when it's on and when it's turned off?

Theme 2: Consent, autonomy, and "human agency"

5. Can a child meaningfully consent to surveillance? If not, what standard should replace consent—parental judgment, "best interest," something else?
6. If safety and autonomy are both goods, how do you decide when safety should override autonomy (if ever)?
7. Is "consent" enough if the person consenting feels they can't say no (because of power imbalance)?
8. "Safety without consent isn't care, it's control." What's the strongest counterargument to that line?

Theme 3: Psychological development and the cost of "filtered reality"
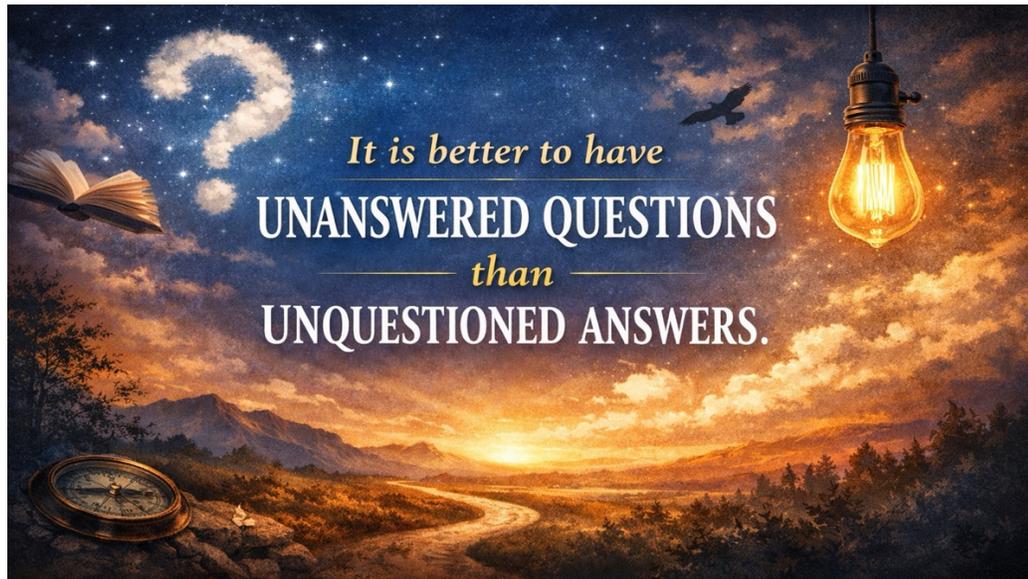
9. What skills do kids learn by encountering fear, conflict, grief, or discomfort—and what happens if those experiences are blurred away?
10. Does pain have value? If so, what kinds of pain are "productive" vs "needless"?
11. If you never learn to tolerate distress, what happens when distress becomes unavoidable?
12. Does Arkangel reduce danger—or does it increase danger by delaying learning and resilience?

Theme 4: Surveillance creep and feature "metastasis"

13. Why do you think surveillance tools tend to expand in scope over time (feature creep)? Is it inevitability, temptation, incentives, or culture?
14. Arkangel begins as "find my child." What real-world technologies began with a narrow purpose and expanded into broad monitoring?
15. If a system makes monitoring *easy*, does that change the moral burden on the user ("I couldn't help myself")?
16. Which is more dangerous: **a powerful tool used rarely,** or **a moderately powerful tool used constantly**?
17. What safeguards could Arkangel have included (technical, legal, social) that might have prevented the worst outcome?

Theme 5: "Benevolent tyranny" and power dynamics

18. C.S. Lewis warns about tyrannies done "for our own good." What are modern examples where institutions claim safety/benefit while reducing freedom?
19. Which is more dangerous to liberty: leaders with bad intentions, or leaders with strong moral certainty and "good" intentions?
20. What would a *civil* public debate on surveillance look like? What ground rules would make it honest instead of partisan?

It is better to have UNANSWERED QUESTIONS than UNQUESTIONED ANSWERS.

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