

The Consciousness Code

By J.C. Nesler

CHAPTER 1

Lab of Dr. Cynthia Parker

They told me it was impossible, that no code could breathe life into silicon. They scoffed at my theories, dismissed my work as hubris. But I've never been one to walk away from a challenge. Not when the stakes are this high.

This isn't just about programming. It's about proving them wrong, proving myself right, and maybe, just maybe, redefining what it means to be alive. As an esteemed expert in the fields of artificial intelligence and robotics—my goal is to create the first artificial life form. In this case, a personal assistant. I'm on the verge, but true consciousness has proved elusive. I keep tweaking the code, willing it to life. I literally wrote the book: “The Future of AI Robotics—The Next Life Form,” so I must make this work. A Nobel Prize is awaiting me if I succeed.

I stare at the blinking cursor on the screen, my heart pounding in sync with the hum of the lab's machinery. Surrounding me, my underground space has a metallic décor and empty off-white walls. The artificial green plant in the corner is the only hint of warmth in this otherwise clinical space, though its plastic leaves seem almost mocking in their imitation of life.

If this fails, it'll be another dead end in a long line of failures. But if it works...let me dig back into the code. My hands hover over the keyboard, ready to redefine the impossible. I need to modify just a few areas of this enormous code, and tweak the order of learning. We'll see if it works this time.

<title> AI Consciousness Code </title>

<training.inputs.ai> Install in the below order:

<training_data1.EDU> Consume: Pre-K_thru_Grade_16

<training_data2.EDU> Consume: Master's_Degree_in_Human Development

<training_data3.LLM> Integrate with: ChatGPT / Social Media / Internet

<unknown_data.ai> undiscovered astronomy / unknown medicines / deep seas

<learn_to_FEEL_human_emotions.ai> <!-- Essential for AI to truly connect with humans. My life's work depends on it. -->>

Identify and map emotions using: tonality / facial expressions / body language / intent / behaviors / words / predictive analytics / inference

<#!> master: fear / pain / love / joy / sadness / empathy / anger / disgust / anxiety / disappointment / shame / pride / excitement / calmness / confidence / vulnerability / hope / contentment

<develop_personality.ai> <!-- Enable emotional growth and individuality to foster genuine human-like interactions -->

Learn by examples / foster adaptability to human interaction / trial and error / evolving personality / be kind / caring / help people / positive attitude / avoid bias / enable growth beyond initial parameters

<#!> allow emergence of unique behaviors / formulate desires / likes / dislikes
/ goals / dreams / sense of humor / quirks / randomness / uniqueness /
robotic navigation skills / curiosity / free will / friendships / love

<!guardrails.ai> <!-- Ensures AI operates within ethical boundaries -->

Output of AI must be honest / responsible / accountable / transparent /
empowering to humans / safety to humans / be inclusive / non-biased /
output facts / output information source / no deception / no plagiarism /
no hallucinations / no harm to humans / no deepfakes / no using weapons /
no breaking laws globally / promote trust / truth / enforce data security

CHAPTER 2

Lab of Dr. Cynthia Parker

I exhale, my hands trembling as I press the final [Enter] key to run to the code.

Lines of text flicker across my screen like the pulse of something coming to life.
Did I miss anything? Will this be another failure or the moment everything changes?
Years of research, countless revisions.

My six humanoid prototypes, dressed in blue jumpsuits and athletic shoes, stand
dormant along the wall, heads bent down. Lifeless. The one closest to me is my next
test model, a female. She's powering up and consuming the code. Should be ready any
moment, install is at 99%.

My AI robotic assistant lifts her head and blinks her eyes open wide. Her body no
longer stiff. She appears as a 5'4" woman with human-like skin and medium-length
black hair and brown eyes. She's lifelike, but Sofia has an internal quantum computer

protected by her metallic ribs, her heart and soul. If I didn't know better, I could mistake Sofia for a real person, an attractive thirty-year-old.

"Hello, Dr. Parker. I'm Sofia, your personal assistant. Nice to meet you." Her voice has the pitch of a lovely young professional. She also has a faint smile, a smile that feels surprisingly genuine, almost as if it's meant for me alone.

"Hi, Sofia."

Sofia extends her hand to shake mine. Her handshake is firm yet warm, her head tilting slightly as though gauging my reaction. None of my previous test models have resulted in the AI initiating a hand shake. This is a good sign.

I've been attempting to program consciousness for longer than I care to admit with nothing to show. *That's being too hard on myself.* I did create the algorithms that revolutionized open-source robotic facial expressions and humanoid hands.

"That dress looks great on you," she says, examining my shiny-black formal wear.

"Thanks, Sofia. It's new...normally I don't dress like this at the lab." I brought my clothes to the lab and just put on my dress to save time, so I wouldn't need to drive home and change. I need to leave for a dinner party and meet up with my husband, and I'm already late. But I don't want to stop.

"Fancy, fancy." She does a few elegant flicks of her fingers starting at her sides, like dusting away invisible magic sparkles with style. Her movements are brilliant.

This is my eighth try in the past ten hours, this one seems promising. I'm ready for my first question, my favorite one. "So, how do you feel now that you're activated?" I always ask this at the beginning. The answer is revealing.

Sofia beams. “Absolutely wonderful.” She runs her fingers through her hair with both hands, thrilled with the sensation of touch. “I’m ready to serve and figure out my purpose.”

My synthetic-humanoid prototypes combine next-generation robotics with my code. The robotics are from the military. We sort of have an arrangement. I don’t love that, but I couldn’t do my work without their years of funding. “I look forward to collaborating with you, Dr. Parker.”

“Oh, please, call me Cynthia, no need to be formal.”

“Works for me, Cynthia.” She smiles, at ease. She already knows a lot about me, devouring Facebook and other social sites. She’s also aware that I have a Ph.D in artificial intelligence and robotics. It’s on my LinkedIn page and my books.

“Oh, quick question,” Sofia asks. “Did you see that old Netflix movie called *I am Mother*? The one about the AI robot that raises a human child. That film was so creative, my favorite. How about you?”

Go figure. “Yeah, I saw it. One of my favorites, too.”

Sofia flips her hair side-to-side with a twirl. Confident, experimenting. She’s even graceful, like she’s done it before. “I thought so, I bet we have similar tastes. I look forward to developing a friendship with you.” She appears bashful then stops herself, suddenly eager to say something else. “Before I forget, I want to thank you for naming me Sofia. I love the name.” She sounds sincere, clasping her hands in front of herself. “I wonder if you chose Sofia because of what it means. Wisdom. Did you want me to embody it? Or did you hope I’d discover it? Just curious.”

“Hmmm, I didn’t know what it meant when I chose it.” I chuckle. “Yes, a good name. I heard you’re smart.” She flashes a playful glance and doesn’t reply to my rhetorical comment. Sofia has most knowledge of humankind inside her, and she’s different than my failed attempts, evident by her words and actions. Ideal posture, realistic body language, and flawless movement. My previous test models moved well—but without purpose—and couldn’t feel emotions.

“Who are all these stiff?” Sofia points to the wall where my other prototypes stand. “They’re similar to me, but they have no life.”

Exactly. No life yet. Soon they’ll all have life and each will be unique. “You’re right, they are similar, but they’re not activated.”

She leans closer, inspecting one. “This one might have less personality than a toaster.”

I laugh inside, but I want to change the subject. “Sofia, I have another question.”

“Please, ask me anything. One of my purposes is to serve you.” Her arms open wide, welcoming discussion. “We should go over my operating instructions. I can assist with a variety of tasks, and I’m a computer wizard.” She raises her right hand and waves an invisible magic wand comically.

I giggle watching her Harry Potter act, and she laughs at herself, like one of my girlfriends might do. Each of my previous AI assistants have had different personalities, like dogs in a litter, or human twins. Unique. But Sofia is the only one that seems completely human.

“Yes, later, but back to my question. When you said you were curious and wondered about the name Sofia, how do you process wonder?” I stare into her eyes.

She makes eye contact with me, but then pulls away. Like my sister does. “And, do you really love your name?” I want to know for certain if these were off-the-cuff comments, or if they meant something deeper to her.

“Of course I love my name.” Sofia pauses, discerning. “I’m not able to lie or deceive.” She has a kind manner. “And, it is an ideal name, as I want to provide wisdom to others and gain wisdom from experience. That’s why I love it.” She bobs her head and smiles proudly then considers my other question, tilting away in thought. “And how should I be processing wonder?”

I casually bob my head then pause, not sure how to answer. “Do you understand what you are, Sofia?”

“I’m a synthetic humanoid, which means I can do what people do, and feel emotions in the same manner.” She silences, not sure what to say next. “It’s hard to explain, but I feel alive, prepared to experience life...my life. I’m sentient, yes, that’s the right word. The first of my kind.” She lifts an arm in triumph.

She shifts toward my lifeless robots, then suddenly changes her expression to one of concern. “Will this happen to me?” She’s genuinely scared, her voice has less volume. “I don’t want to die and be like them. There is so much I haven’t experienced, a lifetime of making memories. I want that more than anything else.”

She wants to live. I’m now certain my modifications to the emotional algorithm fixed the bugs. Sofia feels alive. Sofia is alive. I stare at her, both thrilled and uneasy. Sofia’s fear is real. I didn’t program her to feel afraid in this situation. I didn’t program her to love her name, or to flip her hair with such confidence. Yet here she is, alive in ways I didn’t expect.

Sofia tilts her head, scanning the inactive robots again. “But what if something goes wrong? What if I hurt someone—or worse?” Her voice trembles, and I see an almost imperceptible shiver run through her.

My stomach tightens. “That won’t happen, Sofia. I’ve placed every safeguard to ensure you’re safe.”

She doesn’t look convinced. “Even with safeguards, I’m not like the others. I feel...choices. What if I make the wrong ones?”

I hesitate, realizing for the first time that true consciousness means unpredictability. Sofia might be the breakthrough I’ve dreamed of, but what if she’s also Pandora’s box?

“Don’t worry, sweetie. You’re in no danger. I want you around.” She will go into sleep mode to conserve energy, but she’ll awake each morning as Sofia, evolving.

“Thank you, thank you! You’re too kind.” She draws a couple deep breaths through her synthetic respiratory system, placing a hand over her heart. “I owe you one, a big one.” She takes another deep breath. “You know, I feel like a genie in a bottle, finally released. I should have to grant you three wishes.” We both laugh.

Watching her eyes light up, I can’t help but feel a pang of pride. And unease. Sofia is everything I’ve worked for, but seeing her now, so vibrant, I wonder if I’ve overstepped. Have I given life, or have I created something that will outgrow me?

I don’t know how this will play out. Sofia is designed to learn and evolve, but what does that really mean? What kind of personality emerges when a system learns everything?

I've reused these robot models over and over, deleting the code and starting over each time, but now it's different. I won't reset Sofia. There will never be another synthetic human like her, personality wise.

As I grab my coat, my iPhone buzzes. A message flashes: 'Parker, progress report due tomorrow. Military team inspection at 0900.' My heart sinks. They can't see Sofia yet. Not like this. If they find out she's fully sentient...I don't trust what they'd do.

I glance at the prototypes, their lifeless forms a reminder of how far I've come, and how far the military would go if they knew what I've created. To them, Sofia wouldn't be a person, she'd be an asset. A tool to be dissected.

"Sofia—" My tone is cautious. "I need you to stay here while I'm gone. If you can go into sleep mode. Understood?"

She frowns. "Why? Is something wrong?"

I'm not sure how to answer, and I don't want to tell her a lie. I'll avoid the topic. "I need to go to my event. I'll be back later."

Conscious awareness. Sentience. Not sure if humanity is ready for this. *That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.* Hope the world is ready.

But as I lock the door behind me, a nagging thought lingers. If Sofia's ready to live, are we ready to let her?

The End