

# The Arthur T. Murray/Mentifex FAQ

Tristan Miller<sup>1</sup>

[psychonaut@nothingisreal.com](mailto:psychonaut@nothingisreal.com)

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<sup>1</sup>This article was written while the author was working as a research scientist at the German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI GmbH) in Kaiserslautern. The views expressed in this document are not necessarily those of or endorsed by DFKI GmbH.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 What is the purpose of this FAQ?

For nearly twenty years now, Arthur T. Murray has been posting messages to Usenet and the World Wide Web. Every so often, someone new stumbles upon his writings and posts a message asking what it's all about. This document is designed to answer these queries and to provide some background information on Murray for those who are interested.

This FAQ is a public document available in several different formats, including PDF, HTML, and plain text. All versions are available for download at the following URL: <http://www.nothingisreal.com/mentifex>

## 1.2 Who is Arthur T. Murray and who or what is “Mentifex”?

Arthur T. Murray, a.k.a. Mentifex, is a notorious kook who makes heavy use of the Internet to promote his theory of artificial intelligence (AI). His writing is characterized by illeism, name-dropping, frequent use of foreign expressions, crude ASCII diagrams, and what has been termed “obfusatory technobabble”.

Murray is the author of software which he claims has produced an “artificial mind” and has “solved AI”. He has also produced a vanity-published book which he touts as a textbook for teaching AI.

## 1.3 What are Arthur T. Murray’s AI credentials?

None of which to speak.

Murray claims to have received a Bachelor’s degree in Greek and Latin from the University of Washington in Seattle in 1968 [26]. He has no formal training in computer science, cognitive science, neuroscience, linguistics, nor any other field of study even tangentially related to AI or cognition. He works as a night auditor at a small Seattle hotel [3, p. 25] and is not affiliated with any university or recognized research institution; he therefore styles himself an “independent scholar”. Murray claims that his knowledge of AI comes from reading science fiction novels [41].

## 1.4 What does Arthur T. Murray do?

Murray is notorious for posting thousands of messages to Usenet promoting his AI software, book, websites, and theory. Most of these messages are massively cross-posted to off-topic newsgroups. Murray takes the mere mention of anything vaguely AI-related as an invitation to post a follow-up directing readers to his own work (e. g., [47]). He claims that people are “crying out” for repetition of his message [48].

Murray also heavily promotes himself on public forums on the web. Message boards, private guestbooks, and collaborative encyclopedias are all considered fair game for the showcasing of Murray’s ideas. Murray terms this activity “meme insertion”; most everyone else considers it to be spamming.

Before he had regular access to the Internet, Murray used the US postal system to spread his ideas by mass-mailing prominent AI researchers, computing

authors, and sometimes even entire university departments. He boasts that he mailed seven thousand letters in 1989 alone [37].

Murray has also been known to cause disruptions in person. In one notable example, he picketed the 2001 International Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence [16, 29].

### 1.5 What's this “meme” thing he keeps referring to?

The term *meme*, coined by the biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976, refers to any idea which propagates itself through culture with a high degree of fidelity [2]. The key distinction between memes and ordinary ideas is that memes are apparently “self-reproducing” in much the same way that genes are.

Arthur T. Murray is convinced that his “theory of mind” and its associated paraphernalia (namely, the word “Mentifex” and Murray’s inscrutable ASCII diagrams) are memes and that they are propagating themselves across the Internet [37, 36]. However, a web and Usenet archive search will clearly show that the proliferation of this material is almost exclusively the work of Murray alone. Almost no one brings up the subject of Mentifex except in reply to Murray himself.

## 2 The Mentifex theories

### 2.1 What exactly is Murray’s theory of the mind?

It’s hard to say with certainty; Murray’s expositions of the theory are clouded in so much technical jargon, nonce words, repetition, circumlocution, and foreign expressions that it makes Gene Ray’s Time Cube site look like Dr. Seuss. To further confuse matters, Murray also has a tendency to rename his theory frequently; it’s variously referred to as the Concept-Fiber Theory of Mind, the Fiber-Concept Theory of Mind, the AI4U Theory of Mind, the Mentifex Theory of Mind, the Standard Model of the Mind, Project Mentifex, the First Detailed Theory of Mind, and the Grand Unified Theory of Mind.

In a nutshell, Murray believes that the mind contains at its foundation a two-dimensional matrix where the columns represent senses (smell, touch, taste, etc.) and the rows represent time. As time passes, the brain stores the sensory input it receives in successive rows of this matrix. Thus each row constitutes the aggregate sensory memory at a particular moment in time. Running through each time-slice row of the matrix, across the sensory columns, is an “associative tag” leading to the core of the mind. The core is like a telephone switchboard which joins the sensory input matrix to a motor output matrix, where each row of the latter represents some combination of motor responses necessary to carry out a given action. Thus any given row of the sensory column is a stimulus which is linked by the core to a particular response.

Murray claims that the core is the seat of language. It is composed of numerous fibres, or bundles thereof, each of which represents a single word or concept. Some of these fibre bundles are dedicated to abstract linguistic concepts, such as “noun” and “verb”, and help to trigger the activation of individual word fibres during speech acts. Language acquisition is essentially the production and organization of fibre links within the core.

### 2.1.1 What's the theory supposedly good for?

Murray's principal claim about his theory is that it allows one to construct an artificial, sentient mind capable of thought and communication. With the appropriate computing technology, such an artificial mind would be far faster and more capacious than its human analogue. Murray claims that these minds can be employed to create a "cybernetic economy" which will eliminate world hunger, poverty, war, and social injustice [33].

Curiously, Murray has not yet shown or even claimed that his theory of the mind has any practical applications for medicine or psychology. One would think that knowledge of how the brain stores, organizes, and processes its information would be of great use in the diagnosis and treatment of mental and learning disorders, but Murray is mute on the subject.

Interestingly, Murray does claim that his theory is capable of predicting the future path of human evolution up to "über humans" [28]. This claim is in direct opposition to the unanimous belief among evolutionary biologists that evolution is not goal-oriented and that its path cannot be predicted, except possibly under closely controlled laboratory conditions. As John Wilkins of the University of Melbourne puts it,

Evolution is not like [astronomical] systems. It is highly sensitive to the initial conditions and the boundary conditions that arise during the course of evolution. You cannot predict with any reasonable degree of accuracy what mutations will arise, which genotypes will recombine, and what other events will perturb the way species develop over time. [45, §3]

### 2.1.2 Is the theory correct?

Probably not. As a scientific theory, Murray's work is severely lacking in a number of ways:

**Murray provides no references to previous work.** The Mentifex model of the mind appears to have been developed in a vacuum, completely and willfully ignorant of any previous work in cognitive science, neuroscience, and psycholinguistics. In his writings Murray neither incorporates nor refutes any of the commonly accepted notions of the mind proposed by the scientific community. It's difficult to tell how much of his theory is old news and how much, if any, is an original contribution to human knowledge.

Murray tries to dodge this criticism by sometimes claiming that his project is "philosophy, not science" [13, p. xi; cf. 34]. Even if this is true, however, this criticism still holds; Murray references none of the thousands of years' worth of philosophic literature on the concepts of mind, language, sentience, and consciousness. Besides, he claims that his theory can be used to make useful predictions about the world and that it has practical applications in computer science; it's therefore unclear why his ideas should be viewed and judged any differently than scientific theories.

**No evidence is presented which supports the theory.** Murray's articles are entirely speculative and do not document any evidence which led him to his con-

clusions, nor the results of any experiments which imply that his mind model is valid. How can we analyze his logic for consistency when we are given conclusions without any premises? How can we independently verify his results when he gives us no results and no method by which to reproduce them?

**His sole chosen evaluation criterion is a logical fallacy.** In the preface to his book, Murray offers the following test to prove his theory:

The *Mind.Forth* and JavaScript source code implements the theory of mind. To the extent that the AI software works, it may validate the AI theory. [13, p. x]

Even if Murray manages to develop a sentient artificial life form based on his mind model, however, it will not prove that that model is the same one used by the human brain. The human mind, while also sentient and intelligent, may well have an entirely different organization.

## 2.2 What is the *Mind* software?

*Mind* is the general name for the software which implements Murray's AI theory. Like the theory, the software has undergone numerous name changes over the years. It was originally implemented on an Amiga 500 in the scripting language REXX; this version has come to be known as *Mind.Rexx*. Murray later reimplemented the program in Forth, a venerable stack-based language. This implementation, *Mind.Forth*, is the one most frequently referenced by Murray. He has also produced a JavaScript version for use in web browsers, and has employed various programmers to produce Perl and (non-ANSI) C++ versions. As of the time of this writing, the current version number of the Forth and JavaScript implementations is 1.1.

### 2.2.1 What does *Mind* do?

Murray claims that *Mind* is an artificial mind which is capable of thought, sentience, and linguistic communication. At the moment, however, it does not appear to do anything except spew meaningless and ungrammatical strings of words.

### 2.2.2 When will it be finished?

Real Soon Now. At least, that's the answer Murray has been giving for the last several years. In May 1998, he made a public guarantee that *Mind.Forth* would be finished by the end of the year [27], but failed to deliver. In June 1999, he published what he called a 90 % complete, penultimate release of his code, and gave assurances that a conscious, linguistically capable final version would be available by 31 December 1999 [24]. On 12 December 1999, with less than three weeks to go, he was still adamant that he would meet his deadline [25]. Once again, the promised software never materialized, providing further evidence for Murray's critics that he was simply hyping "vaporware".

### 2.3 What do researchers in academia think of Murray’s work?

The author of this FAQ is aware of no scientific researcher in academia who considers Murray’s theories or work to be of any value. The following comments about or to Murray were made by various researchers in fields in which Murray claims to work:

I wouldn’t bother looking beyond the diagrams he posts from time to time: they are “armchair” or “common sense” notions of how the brain “should” be organized that show absolutely no sign of being influenced by what we know of actual brain organization on the basis of “experiments of nature” (e. g., lesions due to stroke), formal laboratory studies, experimental cognitive psychology, etc. [10]

—F. Frank LeFever, Ph.D.  
President, New York Neuropsychology Group

Arthur’s problem is that his inane little diagrams and accompanying rants were often cited as prototypical examples of why moderation [of the [comp.ai](#) newsgroup] was desirable. [8]

—David Kinny, Ph.D.  
Director, Australian Artificial Intelligence Institute

After articles like the “Mentifex Tutorial”, I wish this [newsgroup] was moderated, so that hundreds of machines and their users around the world don’t have to be subjected to the ravings of such folks. [1]

—Garrison W. Cottrell, Ph.D.  
Professor, Artificial Intelligence Laboratory  
Department of Computer Science and Engineering  
University of California, San Diego

[T]he fact that Murray consistently refers to himself in the third person using his *nom de guerre* (very much like Archimedes Plutonium—another infamous nutball) rather strongly suggests delusions of grandeur on his part, and lends little credibility to his protestations of sanity. [42]

—Gordon D. Pusch, Ph.D.  
Integrated Genomics, Inc.

A main reason for [the AI Interface Standards Committee’s] closed forums is that. . . sorry if I insult anyone by this. . . we want to have discussions without “annoying crank noise”, for which there is a high probability when public forums are used. [40]

—Alexander Nareyek, Ph.D.  
Cork Constraint Computation Centre  
University College Cork

Is there anything you *don't* regard as an invitation to post your picture yet one more nauseating time? [12]

—David G. Mitchell, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor, School of Computing Science  
Simon Fraser University

Until your writings are filtered through an academic publication process, I can't tell whether it's worth my time to try to understand them. Regretfully, your repeated posts saying the same thing have grown so numerous that I feel it necessary to have my newsreader to ignore all posts from you. [39]

—Neil W. Van Dyke, M.Sc.  
Software Agents Group, MIT Media Lab  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Mentifex is like a virus that infects AI newsgroups. [43]

—Neil Rickert, Ph.D.  
Professor, Department of Computer Science  
Northern Illinois University

### 2.3.1 What about the Ben Goertzel endorsement?

Murray often includes in his signature a link to an archived e-mail from scholar Ben Goertzel [5]. This letter, posted to the SL4 mailing list, contains an informal review of the documents posted on Murray's website. The tone is generally neutral, except for the last paragraph, where Goertzel remarks that Murray's ideas are "significantly better than most of what passes for cognitive science and AI."

What Murray neglects to mention is a subsequent retraction of sorts by Goertzel. After another list participant pointed out that Murray's theory and writing was at best highly derivative and at worst fundamentally flawed, Goertzel conceded these points [6]. In another post, Goertzel says he does not dispute that Mentifex is a "crackpot" project, and remarks that "the claims that its creator makes for it are far out of proportion to its actual achievements." [4]

On 31 March 2004, Goertzel wrote the author of this FAQ to clarify his current stance on Murray's work. His full opinion is as follows:

At the present time, I have not studied Mentifex's theories on AI carefully enough to have a definite opinion on them. I have spent only a few hours reading through his writings, which is not enough to absorb such a mass of ideas, particularly since Mentifex's communication style is confusing at times (though very clear and crisp at times as well). I like some of his ideas and don't like others. I don't like his way of advertising himself and his ideas, which admittedly becomes annoying, and seems absurd at times. I like quite a few of his philosophical ideas. And I *really* don't like the assumption that just because someone lacks official credentials, and presents or promotes their ideas in socially unusual ways, their ideas are not worth

investigating or evaluating. My prior statement that Mentifex’s work is more interesting than most work in the AI field was not intended as an instance of extreme praise: rather, my opinion is that most work in the AI field is embarrassingly unambitious and boring. Even if a lot of Mentifex’s ideas are wrong (which may or may not be the case), at least Mentifex appears to be making a genuine effort to understand the mind as a whole, rather than (like many AI researchers) shying away from the big questions and retreating into the pursuit of minor technical questions of no possible practical or theoretical utility. I admit that Mentifex has many aspects in common with well-known “crackpots”, but I also think that the line between “crackpots” and maverick scientists is not as clearly drawn as most scientists like to think. I am not an utter relativist—I do recognize that some ideas are absolute crap—but I am more hesitant than many to conclude that someone else’s ideas fall into that category. I am willing to draw that conclusion only after very careful study and thought, which I have not carried out in this case. A few times in my life I have hastily concluded something was crap based on circumstantial evidence, and then later found my initial judgment was wrong. While I don’t fully agree with it, I do have some emotional sympathy for Paul Feyerabend’s “epistemological anarchist” philosophy of science, which holds that “anything goes.”

### 2.3.2 What about the SIGPLAN review?

Another document Murray often uses to bolster the credibility of his project is a review of *Mind.Forth* which appeared in the Association for Computing Machinery’s *SIGPLAN Notices* [3]. Murray is either unaware or unwilling to admit that the *SIGPLAN Notices* is an informal, unrefereed, and largely unedited publication of the ACM’s special interest group on programming languages (of which Murray’s project is not one). The newsletter is written neither by nor for AI specialists, and in any case the reviews appearing therein do not represent the official opinions of ACM or SIGPLAN. The author of the article in question, Paul Frenger, is not a computer scientist, but rather a practising medical doctor who writes a monthly column for enthusiasts of the Forth programming language.

## 2.4 Has Murray actually published anything?

Murray has authored no peer-reviewed articles, though not for want of trying. His articles have been submitted to, and rejected by, editors at *Artificial Intelligence*, *Cognitive Science*, and *Speculations in Science and Technology* [39].

### 2.4.1 What’s this I hear about a journal article?

Murray loves to remind everyone that he had one of his theoretical AI articles published in a journal by the name of *November Magazine* [18]. This is true; however, *November* is not a scientific journal. It was a locally distributed Seattle-based science fiction fanzine with a print run of just a few hundred issues; the operation folded after just one year [11].

### 2.4.2 What's this I hear about a book?

Murray has penned a book describing his *Mind-1.1* software; it is published by Writers Club Press, an imprint of iUniverse [13]. Unlike conventional royalty-paying publishers, iUniverse is a vanity press that charges writers a fee in return for publishing their books. According to the price list on iUniverse's website, Murray must have paid at least \$650 for the privilege of seeing his name in print.

## 2.5 What are some of Murray's other notable claims?

Apart from claiming to have “solved AI” (with which both Murray and this FAQ are principally concerned), Murray has made a number of bizarre-sounding pronouncements:

- Eighteen prominent AI and robotics researchers have been “infected” with an “AI mind-virus” [30].
- Commercial airlines are responsible for the AIDS epidemic [14].
- Librarians spread deadly parasitic infections of the mind [14].
- Scientists have been producing human clones since 1997 [21].
- Murray is due to be “astrally harvested” in the new millennium [17].
- Traffic to one's website can be increased by using the “secret-decoder-ring-message” HTML tag [38].
- Libraries of the future will have special “pseudo-librarians” who will have “thought every possible thought” about any given book [32].
- Murray created an artificial organism in 1966 [37].
- The American Physical Society is responsible for the world's social ills and is actively seeking to impoverish the world [15].
- Einstein was a kook and his theory of relativity is mere crackpottery [27].
- A Bachelor's degree in classics is equivalent to a doctorate in other fields [20].
- There should be an Internet top-level domain .jam for impromptu music and fruit preserves [31].
- Murray is under surveillance by the US military [16].
- Murray will stop the Iraq war and prevent the Iran war by personally forcing Dick Cheney to resign [19].

It is unclear whether Murray actually believes these claims himself or is just using them to draw attention to his “meme”.

## 3 Murray's Internet activity

### 3.1 What are Murray's aliases and e-mail addresses?

Murray posts his material from a variety of accounts and under several different names, or sometimes even anonymously. Known aliases and e-mail addresses include the following:

- Arthur
- Arthur Th. Murray
- Arthur Theodore Murray
- Arthur Murray
- A. T. Murray
- Mentifex
- Robot Mind Maker
- SCN User
- [mindmaker@users.sourceforge.net](mailto:mindmaker@users.sourceforge.net)
- [mentifex@scn.org](mailto:mentifex@scn.org)
- [uj797@victoria.tc.ca](mailto:uj797@victoria.tc.ca)
- [mentifex@my-deja.com](mailto:mentifex@my-deja.com)
- [ba672@lafn.org](mailto:ba672@lafn.org)

Despite hundreds of Usenet messages in Google's archive which prove otherwise, Murray maintains that the above claim is false:

I use only two e-mail accounts. . . and I have never faked a Usenet message, posted under a false name, or pretended to be anyone else. I invite scrutiny of my Usenet doings. [35]

Other Usenet posters believe that Murray maintains a number of "sock puppet" accounts which he uses to shill for his work.

### 3.2 Where does he post to?

Murray evidently considers no Usenet group to be too off-topic for his self-serving advertisements. He has plagued such diverse newsgroups as:

- [alt.atheism](#)
- [alt.postmodern](#)
- [comp.lang.c++](#)
- [de.sci.museum](#)

- [humanities.classics](#)
- [rec.aviation.misc](#)
- [rec.org.mensa](#)
- [sci.econ](#)
- [sci.environment](#)
- [soc.rights.human](#)
- [talk.origins](#)

However, he is most frequently encountered on AI-related groups in the comp.\* hierarchy.

On the web, Murray has a number of personal web pages with similar content on various servers. This redundancy is probably designed to preserve his Internet presence in the event that one of his web hosting accounts gets shut down (which has apparently happened several times already). He also maintains project pages on a number of popular development sites such as Freshmeat, RedPaper, and SourceForge.

As mentioned previously, Murray is rather diligent about adding aggrandizing references to himself on online encyclopedias and other collaborative media projects. His advertisements and autobiographies appear on Wikipedia, FAQs, Encyclopedia4U.com, UsefulReference, NationMaster.com, and possibly other sites.

### 3.3 Where does he post from?

Murray posts his material from a wide variety of Internet service providers. Again, this redundancy seems to be by design; by alternating hosts for each post he makes to a given thread, he is able to defend himself against charges of using any one account for spamming. The majority of his Usenet posts come from hosts in the Seattle Community Network ([scn.org](#)), the Victoria Freenet ([freenet.victoria.bc.ca](#)), and the Los Angeles Free-Net ([lafn.org](#)). He has also been known to post from Deja News ([deja.com](#), now defunct) and Google Groups ([groups.google.com](#)). For web activities where his IP address is recorded, he can be traced to dial-up connections on Popsite ([popsite.net](#)), Level 3 Communications ([Dial1.Seattle.Level3.net](#)), NetZero ([sttl.dial.netzero.com](#)), and AOL ([proxy.aol.com](#)).

### 3.4 Where is Murray physically located?

Murray claims to be resident in Seattle. He has given various mailing addresses from time to time. These include:

Arthur T. Murray  
11033 Greenwood Avenue North  
Seattle, WA 98133  
USA

Arthur T. Murray  
Mentifex Systems  
Post Office Box 31326  
Seattle, WA 98103-1326  
USA

These addresses have not been confirmed by the author of this FAQ.

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Isn't Arthur T. Murray just a harmless crank?

Not exactly.

On Usenet, Murray's excessive posting is considered extremely disruptive by many long-term participants of the newsgroups he haunts. During some periods on some newsgroups, the vast majority of postings are either from Murray or angry replies thereto. Experienced posters often find themselves having to explain over and over to newbies who Murray is and why he should be ignored; this adds up to an incredible waste of time and energy on their part. Murray has been banned from Internet mailing lists (*e. g.*, [49]) and is widely regarded as one of the biggest reasons `comp.ai` became a moderated newsgroup [22, as reproduced in 9]. It's hard to assess the full extent of the trouble he has historically caused on Usenet as he has been known to post messages with the `X-No-Archive` header set [9].

Likewise, contributors to collaborative online encyclopedias such as Wikipedia find themselves having to constantly remove references to Murray's work which he (and he alone) has inserted. No sooner does someone helpfully delete "Arthur T. Murray" from the encyclopedia's "List of Prominent AI Theorists" than Murray quietly and anonymously inserts it back in again.

Murray also tries to silence his critics by privately complaining to their employers and Internet service providers. (The author of this FAQ, who has taken great pains to ensure that it contains only verifiable factual information, was himself the victim of such harassment by Murray.)

### 4.2 Help! Murray has started disrupting my favourite newsgroup/website/wiki/blog. How do I get rid of him?

Don't get your hopes up. Oblivious to all criticism and requests to cease and desist, Murray has been pontificating his AI theory on the Internet and in print for over thirty years. There is no evidence to suggest that he is about to stop any time soon.

Since Murray is preoccupied with getting others to discuss and propagate his theory, perhaps the best thing to do when he pops up on public forums such as Usenet is to simply ignore him, and to advise others to do likewise. While experience has shown that this will not cut down on the frequency of Murray's posts, it will at least curtail the resulting traffic. Trying to argue with Murray is futile as he rarely responds directly to criticism or requests for clarifications. Instead, he will simply take the opportunity to further extoll the virtues of his

software. He always tries to address the widest possible audience: private e-mails will be typically replied to on Usenet (e. g., [39]); Usenet articles will be replied to on an additional two or three newsgroups (e. g., [46, 47, 48]).

A solution sometimes proposed for problem Usenet posters is to cancel their posts, either manually or with a cancelbot. The author of this FAQ recommends against doing so; except where the newsgroup's charter clearly allows third-party "annoyance" cancels, cancelling posts should be reserved for cases of spamming far worse than anything Murray has done to date [44, 7].

On privately owned Internet message boards it may be possible, and even desirable, to convince the owner to ban Murray from posting. Given the number of dial-up Internet service providers he uses, however, this may entail blocking entire blocks of IP addresses.

For wikis and other collaborative online media, check the community's posted rules to see if they permit you to remove or alter material which contravenes policy. For example, the consensus on Wikipedia is that it is prohibited to post vanity articles and incorrect, unimportant, or biased information. These guidelines have been used in concert to justify permanent removal of Murray's autobiographical articles.

Some people have tried to remedy the problem nearer its source by sending complaints to Murray's Internet service providers. So far this seems to have done nothing to prevent his continued posting.

### **4.3 Doesn't Murray have the right to express his views?**

Of course, Arthur T. Murray has the same right to free speech as anyone else. Unfortunately, Murray himself does not see things this way. Whenever he is banned from a private discussion group, and whenever material he posts is removed because it violates some terms of use he agreed to, he claims he is the victim of censorship and oppression. Yet ironically he claims that "crackpottery" should be "banned" from public dissemination [23].

While Murray may be free to spread his theories, he enjoys no right to do so with impunity or to the point of harassment. As discussed in §4.2, the author of this FAQ does not advocate the suppression of Murray's work from public channels except in those rare cases where the respective community generally accepts it to be justified. For private channels, how to handle problematic participants rests solely with the owners.

### **4.4 Is it really fair to call Murray a kook?**

The terms *kook* and *crank* may often be used pejoratively, but they do have a fairly objective, well-defined meaning. Simply put, a crank or kook is someone who believes or pretends to have knowledge of some subject, actively seeks to speak authoritatively about it, and makes unsupported claims that outrageously conflict with widely accepted scientific results. Without prejudice to the actual correctness or incorrectness of Murray's published beliefs on artificial intelligence, one can reasonably state that he fulfills these three criteria.

## References

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