

Can Computers (Really) Think?

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What do we mean by a “computer”? What do we mean by “think”?

Would a computer *really* think or just simulate thinking?

The core assumption of Artificial Intelligence.

Use of intuition pumps in discussing the core AI assumption.

Computers as a useful source of intuition pumps.

Choosing an example.

Minds and brains appear to be somehow related.

What is the relationship between mental events and physical (neurological and biochemical) ones?

A quick reminder of the main schools of thought.

Davidson's Anomalous Monism.

Objections to Anomalous Monism.

Attractions of Anomalous Monism.

Anomalous Monism in the context of Information Technology.

Software as dynamic virtual patterns.

Operating systems evolving towards self-describing dynamic virtual patterns.

Replying to Anomalous Monism objections in the context of Information Technology.

Applicability of Anomalous Monism to modern computers.

Does Anomalous Monism lead to an unusual view of causation?

Virtual patterns and causation.

Does any of this mean anything in the original mind/brain context?

Answering the question posed by the title.

The concluding paragraph of Daniel Dennett's "The Unimagined Preposterousness of Zombies" (*Brainchildren*, Penguin 1998)

Again, let me clarify the challenge. It seems to me that postulating zombies is exactly as silly as postulating epiphenomenal gremlins, and so when a philosopher does it, I blush for the profession. Show me, please, why the zombie hypothesis deserves to be taken seriously, and I will apologize handsomely for having ridiculed those who think so. But I want to see an argument, and not just the nudges and mumbles I have provoked by this question in the past. Tradition doesn't cut it. "If you got to ask, you ain't never gonna get to know" doesn't cut it. "Everybody else believes in them" doesn't cut it. Calling me an instrumentalist or an operationalist or a behaviorist--as if these were obviously terms of censure--doesn't cut it. If the philosophical concept of zombies is so important, so useful, some philosopher ought to be able to say why in non-question-begging terms. I'll be curious to see if anybody can mount such a defense, but I won't be holding my breath.

Philosophical zombies are hypothetical beings behaviourally indistinguishable from us, but lacking consciousness. Dennet characterises them as "a strangely attractive notion that sums up, in one leaden lump, almost everything that I think is wrong with current thinking about consciousness". (Ibid.)

An excerpt from a letter sent by Quine to Chris Hookway in response to Hookway's book "Quine: Language, Experience, and Reality" – quoted by Hilary Putnam in his blog <http://putnamphil.blogspot.co.uk/2014/07/a-letter-1988-from-quine-to-chris.html>

Also I appreciate the utility, even indispensability, of mentalistic language. As you rightly say somewhere, I merely ban it from the austere scientific descriptions and explanations. Thus the "double standard" in WO. I share Davidson's anomalous monism.

My focus on stimulations reflects a divergence in purpose from Davidson. (Your p. 163, foot and 217, foot.) The philosophical focus of his concern with translation is other minds. My concern is partly that, or meaning, but I am concerned to integrate these matters with "naturalized epistemology" in general, that is, the theory of evidence for science. Hence my starting point is the sensory receptors.

A German saying, often quoted by Carl Gustav Jung: "Wirkt, was wirklich ist". Loosely translated: "Actual is that which acts".