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Buy and Use *Thinking Things Through*

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I thank Selmer Bringsjord and David Ferrucci (1998) for the generosity with which they have described *Thinking Things Through* (Glymour 1992). I trust readers will use the book whenever possible. I have one objection to their review, and, no surprise, it has to do with John Searle's argument.

The Chinese Room argument was an attempt to show that understanding is not realized simply by carrying out a set of instructions: Searle in a room can carry out the instructions for any computer program if he is given the program to follow and adequate paper, even a program for holding conversations in Chinese, but Searle-in-the-room doesn't understand Chinese. So we shouldn't think that just because they execute programs that produce intelligent input-output behavior, machines understand anything.

So I said: Part of both human and machine input-output behavior is the time between input and output. A lip puckering that takes a year isn't a kiss. A hand motion that takes a month isn't a wave. A reply to a sentence that takes a millennium isn't a conversation. And, I further say, for any interesting program, Searle-in-a-room can't read and carry out the machine-language instructions fast enough to produce competent input-output behavior. Understanding isn't just processing the right programs; it's processing the right programs fast enough.

Bringsjord and Ferrucci say: But what if Searle had a computer in the room with him that told him, fast enough, what to do? Then he could produce output from input sufficiently quickly for competence, so Glymour's objection fails.

And I say: Putting the computer in the room would defeat Searle's argument, because the point of the example was to show, by describing a system (Searle-in-the-room) that processes a program and doesn't understand, that just because machines process a program doesn't mean they understand. But if Searle is given a computer that executes the program, the example constitutes no argument that the computer in the room with Searle doesn't understand. Bringsjord and Ferrucci save Searle from the objection only by changing Searle's example so that it begs the point it aims at.

References

Bringsjord, Selmer, & Ferrucci, David A. (1998), 'Logic and Artificial Intelligence: Divorced, Still Married, Separated. . . ?', *Minds and Machines* 8, pp. 273–308.

Minds and Machines **8:** 309–310, 1998.
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