

Phasmids

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AI won't be conscious and here is why

What's the difference between artificial intelligence and artificial sentience? There is no doubt artificial intelligence is real. It is here, and soon we could have AI that is more intelligent than human beings. But the question is, will that intelligence be accompanied by inner experience the way the data processing in humans' brain is accompanied by inner experience? Being human is to be conscious and sentient. Is there something it is like to be an AI—a silicon computer that has measurable intelligence? That's the question we will deal with.

Is your thermostat conscious?

Intelligence does not come naturally paired with sentience. Intelligence is smart data processing for the achievement of a certain goal. Sentience may be smart or may not be. Maybe bacteria are sentient. And they are, but not very much.

The more I thought about it over the years the clearer it became to me that whatever I did to design, I would only change structure and function. And nothing about structure and function would get me any closer or any further away from believing that such a thing is conscious. And it took me a couple of years to realize this, but the conclusion was inevitable. I was making some assumptions that didn't hold, because that's the only way you find yourself in an alley without an exit. You took a long turn somewhere, and that long turn was the notion that material arrangements somehow generate experience.

That assumption in my mind today is absolutely self-evidently and obviously wrong. But the key point here was this: if an epoxy—melted sand and metal—can be conscious, then what cannot? We keep asking questions about whether AI is conscious. Why not your home thermostat? The reason we use electrons in electronics—relying on their motion—is simply a matter of convenience, because computers primarily operate using logic gates and memory elements. You can also build logic gates and mem-