

A paradox related to the Turing Test

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I will describe a paradox which arises assuming it is possible to distinguish machines from non-machines. In the “fly on the wall” version of the Turing Test, player *A* passively observes the dialog of players *B* and *C*. Player *A*’s goal is to determine whether *B* is a machine and whether *C* is a machine. For simplicity, remove *C* from the game. Let *A* observe *B* as *B* recites a monologue, and let *A* try to determine whether or not that recitation is computable.

I further modify the Test as follows. Player *A* guesses the nature of *B* after every new line. The Test runs forever and *A* wins if his guesses are *eventually* always correct: he is allowed finitely many wrong guesses. This is justified because every finite string is computable, so no finite speech can rule out a machine; any finite enunciation can be canned. Only an infinite one has a chance of non-computability. Further, the Test is run by an Operator who delivers *B*’s lines to *A*.

Suppose Player *B* is a human trying to appear human and that *A* can distinguish machines from non-machines. Without further caveats, *A* will eventually detect *B* is non-machine and *A*’s guesses will converge to the correct answer.

But suppose the Operator is mischievous. If *A* most recently guessed that *B* is non-machine, the Operator will lie and tell *A* that *B* said “Wait,” storing what *B* really said. Only if *A* incorrectly guessed *B* was a machine does the Operator let the real monologue go on. What will happen to *A*’s guesses?

When *A* believes *B* is a machine, the Operator presents the correct lines from *B*. Eventually, *A* will realize from these lines that *B* is non-machine, and will correct himself. This causes the operator to begin lying, and as far as *A* knows, *B* begins saying “Wait” repeatedly. A Turing Machine can produce any finite speech followed by “Wait” forever, so *A* will eventually think *B* is a machine. This process continues, causing *A* to change his mind infinitely often.

But no machine can generate the lines *A* sees: if they are computable, they remain computable with all “Wait”s removed, meaning *B*’s genuine lines are computable, contradicting that they’re supposed to be distinguishable from a machine. The lines which *A* is told are not mechanical and *A* eventually realizes so, and stops changing his mind. This contradicts the previous paragraph.

This is a special case of a more general paper. In Alexander (2011: On Guessing Whether a Sequence has a Certain Property, <http://www.cs.uwaterloo.ca/journals/JIS/VOL14/Alexander/alex2.pdf>, *J. of Integer Sequences*, 1–11) I show that a set *S* of sequences of naturals is “guessable” (in a sense like the above) if and only if *S* can be defined in a $\forall x \exists y$ way and also in an $\exists x \forall y$ way. If *S* is the set of Turing computable sequences, then *S* can be defined in an $\exists x \forall y$ way: $f : \mathbb{N} \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$ is computable iff $\exists x \forall y f(y) = \phi_x(y)$. But *S* cannot be defined in any $\forall x \exists y$ way, so *S* is nonguessable.

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