The date was July 9th, 2015. Selmer Bringsjord, chair of New York’s Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute’s cognitive science department, had assembled three small *NAO* robots in her robotics lab, each similarly programed and each tasked with solving a puzzle which at its core required an element of self-awareness to solve. The ubiquitous ‘wise men puzzle’ was being simulated among these robots, each one given the information that they had received a one of two kinds of “pills”, a “dumbing” pill which would prevent them from speaking, or a placebo which would have no effect. In reality the effects of these “pills” would be triggered from a button atop the robots heads which when pressed would prompt the beginning of the puzzle, and have the robots believe they were given the pills. From there these robots are asked verbally to deduce which pill they received. The simulation begins quietly as each robot attempts to respond to the question. Naturally only one is able to, the one who was given the placebo. The robot gets up and initially responds with, “I don’t know.” But then, after hearing its own voice it retracts its earlier response and states: “sorry, I know now. I was able to prove that I was not given the dumbing pill.” To someone standing outside the fields of programming or robotics this feat may seem insignificant, but in truth this is a test not many AI have been capable of passing, and on the subject of this project’s significance, Bringsjord herself is assured that “we…[are] talking about a logical and a mathematical correlate to self-consciousness.”

To cite:

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