

Chinese Room Argument

The 'Chinese Room Argument' is a philosophical yet logical view to the question of whether a computer can have understanding and consciousness. John Searle points out a subtle difference between meaning(semantics) and structural simulation(syntax) to put forth his argument.

As per the argument, a person who possesses a list of Chinese characters and instructions to decode them can converse with a person from behind a closed room as if he really understands Chinese. Replacing the person in the room with a CPU, it would be able to converse in a similar manner. However, in both these cases, neither the person nor the CPU truly understands Chinese meaningfully. Since, all computers would eventually follow a set of instructions through a program, they can never truly learn Chinese.

The argument, however, never proves that the mind doesn't follow some set of instructions to interpret Chinese and thus leaves the concept of 'understanding' ambiguous.