

# IF YOU CAN'T TELL, DOES IT MATTER?

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Coming from the tech industry, I'm always surrounded by the idea that the smarter the better. How can we get our chess bots to be faster and smarter than human chess players? How can we get our houses to learn our living patterns? Our cars to drive themselves, our digital assistants to guess our needs. I firmly believe that technology has a place in our world and an immense power for good, and from a perspective of curiosity and the desire for knowledge I think there should be no limit to what we try. I think, in a perfect world, that we should build to the ends of the earth just to see if we could. For example, for the sake of science we should see how powerful and efficient we can make nuclear power. But just as part of the science community pursues nuclear disarmament for the sake of saving us from our own destruction, I think we should tread very, very carefully when it comes to artificial intelligence and the attempt to get robots to be as human as possible. At the moment, the Turing Test stands as the mark to beat – can we get to the point where a human and a machine are indistinguishable in conversation? It is naïve to say we will never get there. It is also naïve to say we won't ever be able to achieve perfect human-like aesthetics in a robot, or that we will not be able to make machines incredibly smart. It's only a matter of time. But when that time comes, what happens? Will we be able to stop? Will we be able to resist making them more perfect, more smart than us? It is not unbelievable to say they will develop an agency of their own, and perhaps that agency will be to cause harm towards us. But beyond that, there are complicated ethics, I think, of smart, indistinguishable-from-human robots. If they are perfect, and we can create the kind of perfection we desire, it creates a slippery slope. Will we value less the imperfections that make us human? In turn, will we seek perfection in ourselves and others, perfection that is only attainable as a pure machine? I don't think we understand the full implications of playing god yet.

Our brains, as incredibly complex as they are, are electrical circuits. And some say that if we can replicate the circuits that comprise our thoughts then we can replicate what makes us human. Even if we did so, even if we created a robot that was conscious, that was intelligent by whatever metric the scientific community chose, that looked and talked and acted like us, I would say there's still *something* missing. I don't think I can tell you what that something is, because I don't know if we fully understand yet what it means to be human. But there's a part of me that refuses to believe that everything we are – our choices, our emotions, our fear and our love – can be reduced to a set of algorithms. In *Westworld*, a show about a technologically advanced amusement park populated by remarkable human-like androids, a man asks a woman if she is real. She replies, "If you can't tell, does it matter?"

I want to say it does.

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