

Assignment #6

1. Searle's "Chinese Room" argument

John Searle published his essay entitled "Minds, Brains, and Programs" in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* in 1980. In the years that followed, Searle's essay became "the most influential target article" ever published in the journal and still ranks as the one that has received the most comments, even though the journal editor Stevan Harnad notes that "the overwhelming majority still think that the Chinese Room Argument is dead wrong."

Suppose that you were among that group of people who were so strongly moved (negatively or positively) by Searle's essay that you felt that you had to write a letter to the editor of *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* for publication in the issue that followed the original appearance of the article. Letters to the editor can be a tough medium, because they have to be short enough for publication (we'll assume a 300-word limit here) and yet have enough content to have an impact. But since the number of words you're allowed is more than twice the number of characters you get on Twitter, surely this generation is up to the task.

Write a letter to the editor in no more than 300 words in which you single out the point that you think is either strongest or weakest in Searle's paper and then offer your support or refutation.

A note on sources: The idea here is that your letter would have appeared just after the appearance of Searle's essay in 1980. Thus, it would be acceptable to cite arguments by others that appeared in that issue or in earlier works, but not to cite arguments that others have made later.

2. Different views on the "Singularity"

The readings from Ray Kurzweil and Bill Joy both imagine a future in which progress in AI has machines exceeding the capabilities of humans—an event that the computer scientist and science-fiction author Vernor Vinge named the "singularity." While Kurzweil is excited by this possibility, Joy is decidedly less positive. Write an essay of not more than 500 words in which you outline which of these perspectives comes closer to your own view and why.