The Chinese Room Argument

In this lecture we consider some of the implications of the Chinese Room Argument; we answer the most common arguments against it; and we end with a solution to Descartes' mind-body problem. We begin with the distinction between the problem of consciousness and the problem of Intentionality. Many people in AI, even the Strong AI, concede that computers are not conscious, but they think consciousness in unimportant anyway. What matters is Intentionality, and computers can have Intentionality. One advantage of the Chinese room is that it does not depend on consciousness. It applies to Intentionality as well.

I.   Intentionality is defined, and the distinction between consciousness and Intentionality is clarified.

II.   The Chinese Room Argument has the simplicity of an obvious counterexample, but in fact, it has a precise logical structure that can be stated in four steps.

      A. Programs are syntactical.
      B. Minds have semantic contents.
      C. Syntax is not sufficient for semantics.
      D. Therefore, programs are not minds.

III. Attacks on the Chinese Room (continued)

      A. There is a large number of attacks on the Chinese Room Argument. There must be over two hundred published attempted refutations. In this lecture, I answer the main types of these arguments.

1. The Brain Simulator Reply—If the program were implemented in an actual robot, it would understand Chinese.
2. The "Can't Do It" Reply—In real life, it would be impossible to program a human being so that he would pass the Turing test.
3. The "Wait 'til net year" Reply—Maybe better computer technology will enable us to build thinking computers.
4. The analogy with light and electromagnetism reply.
5. The "it's not really computation if done consciously: reply.

B. I answer each of these in detail and discuss the implications of the debate for larger issues in the philosophy of mind.

IV. The Solution to the Mind-Body Problem.

A. Brains cause minds.
B. Minds are features of brains.
C. Conclusion: We should teat the mind as a biological problem, as biological as digestion.