

In this amiable little book Matson contributes to the recent trend of softening the contours of the materialistic theory of mind, in particular by attempting to combat one of the few remaining reductionist themes in current materialism: the claim that if conscious human beings are just material objects obeying the ultimately «mechanistic» laws of nature, their intellectual capacities are in principle duplicatable by a digital computer, a universal Turing machine that can in principle duplicate the behavior of any mechanism. Matson accepts the antecedent of this conditional but holds that since human beings (and all animate life from amoebas on up) are capable of *sentience*, a capacity no discrete state machine can enjoy, there is — must be — a class of material objects that are not (equivalent to, simulatable by) Turing machines.

The attempt by philosophers to describe human feats beyond any computer has a career as long and checkered as the rival pressagency of the artificial intelligencia, and the anti-computer side of this mug's game has typically been motivated by one or another anti-materialist desire to save people's souls — if not their bodies — from the imperialistic advances of science. Since Matson is an uncompromising and unabashed materialist and a friend of science, he enters the fray more circumspectly than some earlier combatants. What indeed, save the love of truth, could motivate one to try to prove such a thesis?

Matson opens with a defense of the thesis that sensations are *necessarily* brain processes. His arguments for necessary identities are developed with only a sidelong glance at Kripke's, and are, in some respects, more convincing, in particular because they illuminate some seductive errors in the thinking of earlier mind-body identity-theorists. When he turns to the defense of his main thesis, however, his arguments exhibit familiar frailties. Matson acknowledges a debt to his colleague Hubert Dreyfus, who «first interrupted» Matson's «analytic slumber», and he makes enthusiastic use of some of the claims and arguments advanced in Dreyfus' *What Computers Can't Do* (1972). Like Dreyfus, Matson pits an impressionistically characterized human talent — Dreyfus' «zeroing in» becomes Matson's «sizing up» — against the engineers, and also like Dreyfus, Matson exhibits some indecision about whether he is claiming that computers cannot *in principle, in fact, or merely yet* be sentient. Matson makes a stalwart attempt to bring «sizing up» into clear enough focus to support an argument against computer sizing up, but his final characterization of the talent (p. 150) contains too many debatable elements: can a computer recognize (*really* recognize) elements as *important*; can a computer have interests of its own? The argument ought to *settle* such questions instead of having to depend on favorable verdicts.

I do not think those unconvinced by Dreyfus' case will find Matson's

attempt any more persuasive, for although it does develop interesting new lines of thought on the issue, it rests too uncritically on much that was weak in Dreyfus. There may be a good argument to show that people transcend computers intellectually — the thesis that they do is not antecedently implausible — but, to echo an *ad hominem* ploy found in both Dreyfus and Matson, the failure of such clever people after so much time and energy to come up with a good one fosters skepticism, and not unreasonably. Still, the book has more than its share of deft formulations and arresting and illuminating observations, and is enlivened by a singularly graceful use of scholarship. Anyone interested in the philosophy of mind should find it a profitable and pleasant book to read.

Tufts University

D. C. DENNETT