Review of *Matters of the Mind* by William Lyons[1]

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is both practical and theoretical, which for many is one of its attractions. As computer scientists attempt to design a device that matches human intelligence, they inevitably awaken the problems of consciousness, of creativity, and of ethics. Matters of the Mind by William Lyons (2001) shows the connections between computer science and philosophy.

Aristotle says in The Metaphysics that the beginning of philosophy is a sense of wonder (p. 692, 982b12-13, 1941). As Lyons shows, there is no good reason to believe that this wonder must be limited to any one academic subject. A consideration of the questions raised by other disciplines can knock us out of our research ruts. They can give us fresh perspectives on problems in our specialties and, thereby, encourage breakthroughs.

The purpose of Lyon's book is to give us a general sense of the state of the philosophy of mind at the beginning of the 21st century. Information Technologists can take a certain measure of credit for the revival of Lyon's field. Philosophers such as John Searle have argued vigorously against the notion that the mind, or the brain, is a kind of on-board computer (p. 212, 1992, 1994). Of course, by taking such a position, Searle, and those like him, will usually offer their own account of consciousness. Conversely, as AI specialists try to build a conscious machine, they find themselves delving ever more deeply into the same problem.

The book begins with a discussion of Rene Descartes, his association with the idea of a mind-body dualism, and the problems involved with this idea. Lyons goes on to discuss modern behaviorism, and its reputedly failed attempt to eliminate the study of consciousness per se. After this, Lyons discusses the relation between the brain and the mind, and whether they are identical. Next, comes the discussion of computers. This, according to my colleague in computer science, is the weakest part of the book, due to its failure to discuss neural nets, which would seen to be essential to a discussion of the results of AI research today. Following this is a discussion of the extent to which consciousness is influenced by the physical make up of a conscious entity. Thus, if Thomas Nagel, the philosopher of science, is correct, a bat is going to be conscious in a different way than that of a human being or, perhaps, a computer.

Lyons ends his book with a discussion of the cycle of ideas related to problems of the mind. Most interesting, to me, is a discussion of Colin McGinn's notion of cognitive closure, which suggests that human beings are too limited, conceptually, to understand consciousness and, thus,

cannot expect progress in their understanding of it. All in all, the book makes for a fascinating inter-disciplinary discussion piece, especially for computer scientists who would like to give their colleagues in other disciplines a better sense of their work, and the broader issues entailed.

References

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[1] Lyons, William. (2001). *Matters of the Mind*. New York: Routledge. (ISBN 0-415-93788-4)

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