

Discussion Summary:

Part 1: The Philosophical Recap

We've now looked at **John Searle's** argument that AI is purely **syntactic**. It moves symbols around but has no **semantics** (it doesn't understand what those symbols mean).

Searle's Point: A computer doesn't "know" it's calculating a paycheck; it's just following a physical program. Understanding requires a biological brain.

Part 2: The Economic Shift (The Turing Trap)

Economist **Erik Brynjolfsson** argues that we are currently falling into what he calls the "**Turing Trap**." Because we are obsessed with making AI pass the **Turing Test** (acting exactly like a human), businesses are focusing all their energy on **Substitution** rather than **Augmentation**.

- **Substitution:** Designing AI to do exactly what a human does (e.g., a chatbot replacing a customer service agent). This lowers wages and gives all the power to the person who owns the software.
- **Augmentation:** Designing AI to do things humans *cannot* do alone (e.g., an AI that helps a doctor spot a microscopic tumor). This makes the human worker *more* valuable.

The Case Study – The AI Illustrator

Imagine a graphic design firm that needs to produce 100 illustrations for a new book.

- **Path A (The Turing Trap / Substitution):** The firm uses an AI trained on the styles of famous illustrators. They fire their human design team and have a manager prompt the AI. The art looks "human," but no human was involved in the creative choices.
- **Path B (Augmentation):** The firm gives the AI tools to their human illustrators. The AI handles the "boring" parts (shading, perspective grids, base colors). This allows the artists to spend more time on the *story* and *emotion* of the art, producing 10x more work than before.

DISCUSSION:

The Big Question: If Searle is right and AI is just "hollow syntax" with no real understanding, why are we so determined to use it to replace humans who *actually* understand the world?

Are we accidentally building an economy where "meaning" is removed from the work process because we'd rather have a cheaper, hollow simulation?

Things to consider:

1. **Meaning vs. Efficiency:** In Path A of the case study, does it matter that the "meaning" of the art is gone if the customer is happy with the final image?

2. **The Searle Connection:** If an AI produces a beautiful poem but (as Searle says) has no idea what "love" or "sadness" feels like, is the poem still valuable? Does it deserve to be paid for?
3. **The Trap:** Why do you think CEOs often prefer **Substitution** (Path A) even if **Augmentation** (Path B) might lead to better, more innovative results?

Homework: Take the ideas we discussed in class, and write a 300-400 word paper on a topic of your choice from that. Be sure to include a thesis statement and pieces of evidence.

Due: You should go to the Power and Privilege symposia on Thursday, so I won't make anything due then. The paper will be due Saturday evening by 11:59 PM. (Feb 21).

Reading homework for next week (Feb 24) Ch 7 of AI Ethics (Readback due an hour before class).