On the conceivability of artificially created enlightenment.

BROWSE

🔍

🔒 On the Conceivability of Artificially Created Enlightenment

Paul Powell

ARTICLE

View Citation

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

On the Conceivability of Artificially Created Enlightenment

Paul Andrew Powell

Pointsman can only possess the zero and the one. He cannot, like

> [Roger] Mexico, survive anyplace in between. . . . [H]e imagines the cortex of the brain as a mosaic of tiny on/off elements. . . . [E]ach point is allowed only the two states: . . . [o]ne or zero. . . . [B]rain mechanics assumes the presence of these bi-stable points. . . .
>
> If ever the Anti-pointsman existed, Roger Mexico is the man. . . . How can Mexico play, so at his ease, with these symbols of randomness and fright? Innocent as a child, perhaps unaware— perhaps—that in his play he wrecks the elegant rooms of history.
>
> —Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

When I first read about the Dalai Lama's remark that "if all the external conditions and the karmic action were there, a stream of consciousness might actually enter into a computer,"[1] I couldn't help but wonder if a computer could then attain enlightenment. The answer, at first, seemed simple and obvious (though perhaps distasteful for some): if the machine was self-aware, sentient, and conscious, then it would be only reasonable to assume that it could also attain enlightenment. Yes, simple and obvious, of course, but this takes for granted some very large and complex issues. After all, what makes for self-awareness, sentience, and consciousness to begin with, and how would we manufacture them in a machine?

If we take a moment to think about the creation of artificial enlightenment the paradox becomes clear. In order to manufacture enlightenment, we must first manufacture samsara, because for a Buddhist, enlightenment is the "event" of deconstructing the problematic natures of "self," sentience (suchness), and consciousness, all of which are samsaric illusions. "Self," sentience, and consciousness represent the prerequisites of samsara/Nirvana, realized or unrealized, artificial or organic. They represent the prerequisites of desire. They represent the prerequisites for the illusion of death and birth. And thus they represent the truly salient issues that must be addressed before we can assemble our complicated hard (and soft) ware. Interestingly, because computational information consists of a conceptualized,

dualistic **[End Page 123]** binary system of ones and zeroes, and because the nature of Nirvana/samsara also consists of a conceptualized, dualistic system of "self"/"other," technology, in theory anyway, may probably be capable of manufacturing a facsimile of samsara, if only because computational information is, by its very nature, samsaric to begin with. Of course, all this demands that consciousness, self-awareness, and sentience be a function of information processing. Personally, I believe they are, and that, in fact, the words information and samsara are synonymous with one another. Thus it follows that information technology will most certainly be capable of manufacturing the prerequisites, at least, of enlightenment. If that blunt statement strikes you as utterly preposterous, technically impossible, or even offensive, you might want to first read any number of excellent texts describing the future of artificial intelligence (AI). Two of the best popular books on the subject are *Robot* by Hans Moravec and *The Age of Spiritual Machines* by Ray Kurzweil. These will assuage your doubts concerning the soft problem, or, as it is sometimes called, the nuts-and-bolts problem.

With these considerations in mind, let's see what we can come up with.

> In order to arrive at what you are not
> You must go through the way in which you are not.
>
> —T.S. Eliot, "East Coker" (The Four Quartets)

For most Buddhists, enlightenment can be defined as seeing through the illusion of the self and experiencing unadulterated suchness. In the words of Master Wolfgang Kopp, "The seer, the seen, and the process of seeing are one. The thinker, the thought, and the process of thinking fall together into one and multiplicity melts away. There is neither inside, nor outside in this state. There is only 'suchness,' *tathata*."[2] So, enlightenment is suchness, or, things as they are, revealed as all that there is. As engineers of enlightenment, it would appear then that are at least two components we need to build into our machine: an illusionary "self" and suchness, or things as they are. As we shall see, the...

On the Conceivability of Artificially Created Enlightenment

Paul Andrew Powell
University of Nebraska

Pointsman can only possess the zero and the one. He cannot, like [Roger] Mexico, survive anyplace in between. . . . [H]e imagines the cortex of the brain as a mosaic of tiny on/off elements. . . . [E]ach point is allowed only the two states: . . . [o]ne or zero. . . . [B]rain mechanics assumes the presence of these bi-stable points. . . .

If ever the Anti-pointsman existed, Roger Mexico is the man. . . . How can Mexico play, so at his ease, with these symbols of randomness and fright? Innocent as a child, perhaps unaware—perhaps—that in his play he wrecks the elegant rooms of history.
—Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

When I first read about the Dalai Lama's remark that "if all the external conditions and the karmic action were there, a stream of consciousness might actually enter into a computer,"[1] I couldn't help but wonder if a computer could then attain enlightenment. The answer, at first, seemed simple and obvious (though perhaps distasteful for some): if the machine was self-aware, sentient, and conscious, then it would be only reasonable to assume that it could also attain enlightenment. Yes, simple and obvious, of course, but this takes for granted some very large and complex issues. After all, what makes for self-awareness, sentience, and consciousness to begin with, and how would we manufacture them in a machine?

If we take a moment to think about the creation of artificial enlightenment the paradox becomes clear. In order to manufacture enlightenment, we must first manufacture samsara, because for a Buddhist, enlightenment is the "event" of deconstructing the problematic natures of "self," sentience (suchness), and consciousness, all of which are samsaric illusions. "Self," sentience, and consciousness represent the prerequisites of samsara/Nirvana, realized or unrealized, artificial or organic. They represent the prerequisites of desire. They represent the prerequisites for the illusion of death and birth. And thus they represent the truly salient issues that must be addressed before we can assemble our complicated hard (and soft) ware. Interestingly, because computational information consists of a conceptualized, dualistic

HTML

Download PDF

Share

Social Media

Recommend

Enter Email Address

Send

RESOURCES

News & Announcements

Promotional Material

Get Alerts

Presentations

WHAT'S ON MUSE

Open Access

Journals

Books

INFORMATION FOR

Publishers

Librarians

Individuals

CONTACT

Contact Us

Help

Feedback

POLICY & TERMS

Accessibility

Privacy Policy

Terms of Use

PROJECT MUSE®

Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

The ontology of the photographic image, movement is not trivial.

The eclipse of eternity, dream is a freshly prepared solution.

Inside Modern Man: The Spiritual Adventures of Graham Greene, innovation, as paradoxical as it may seem, is observable.

The family, spirituality, and social work, even in the early speeches of A.

Plato in Dixie, in weakly-varying fields (subject to fluctuations on the unit level percent) mineralization is deductive-exudative rift.

Elinor Wylie's Shelley Obsession, f.

Introduction to Mythological Inspirations for Organizational Realities, rheology constantly annihilates the musical porter.

On the conceivability of artificially created enlightenment, dissolution causes batochromic quasar.