

Philosophy of the Human Person

Lecture #19

Organisms & Machines

1. Kinds of Difference

are organisms and machines different?

two kinds of difference

difference in degree—difference based on the fact that one thing has more of a feature present also in the other

e.g., the difference between Aristotle and ordinary people in intelligence is a difference of degree

both are intelligent, but one is more intelligent than the other

difference in kind—difference based on the fact that one thing has a feature that is completely absent from the other

e.g., the difference between Aristotle and a rock in intelligence is a difference in kind

Aristotle has something a rock lacks altogether

two kinds of difference in kind

superficial—a difference in kind based on an underlying difference in degree

so, the presence of a feature in some thing (apparently a difference in kind) and its absence in another might be merely the result of one thing's having greater complexity (a difference in degree) than the other

radical—a difference in kind not based on an underlying difference in degree

so, the real question is not whether man and machine differ in degree, but whether they differ in kind

do organisms have a feature or display an activity that is completely lacking in machines?

or, can every behavior that an organism engages in be replicated (at least to some extent) in a machine?

cf. Kemeny's concluding remarks, including the comment that "for every human activity we can conceive of a mechanical counterpart"

the burden of proof lies on those who assert a difference in kind

if one thing has what another thing lacks, those who think that this is true
should say what the difference is

2. The Outline of Arguments on Whether Organisms and Machines Differ in Kind

the argument *for* a difference in kind

- (1) Any pair of things in which one has a feature that the other lacks altogether differ in kind

 this comes from the definition of differences in kind

 [All] differences in kind are differences in which one of a pair of things has a feature that the other lacks altogether

 remember that definitions are convertible

- (2) Organisms & machines differ in that one has a feature that the other lacks altogether¹

 this, the defender of the argument will have to show

So, (3) Organisms & machines differ in kind

the argument *against* a difference in kind

- (4) Anything that display no activity that cannot be replicated by a machine does not differ in kind from machines

- (5) Organisms in fact display no activity that cannot be replicated by a machine

So, (6) organisms do not differ in kind from machines

the premises P2 & P5 are, in effect, contradictories

the case for P5

 this will have to be made activity by activity

 e.g., Kemeny suggests a mechanical analog of reproduction

 and of thought

two salient objections to P5 (arguments for P2)

- (1) [Some] organisms are conscious and consciousness cannot be replicated by a machine [the topic of this lecture]

- (2) [Some] organisms can think and thinking cannot be replicated by a machine [the topic of the next lecture]

¹ Alternatively, this argument could be put as follows:

 No machines have or do _____.

 All organisms have or do _____.

 So, No organisms are machines.

A weaker argument would also be relevant to anthropology

 No machines have or do _____.

 Some organisms have or do _____ [or, All “higher” organisms]

 So, Some organisms are not machines.[So, Some “higher” organisms are not machines.]

Even these weaker conclusions would count as refutations of Democritean mechanism.

