Moving the Goalposts

Every time a machine passes a test of intelligence, the test changes. Part 2 of 10.



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He saw the reflex early.

In Broca's Brain he noted that machines were being put down because chess was an area where humans were still superior.

His reply: a machine at middle-range human level is a very capable machine.

> **“You will never be able to make one to do X.”**

ALAN TURING, DESCRIBING THE OBJECTION HE EXPECTED

The line has moved at each one.

- Chess: Deep Blue, May 1997
- Go: AlphaGo, March 2016
- The Turing test: GPT-4.5, 2025, published in PNAS

73%

GPT-4.5, with a persona prompt, was judged to be the human.

Without the prompt, 36 to 38%. The authors call it a test of humanlikeness, not intelligence.

Tesler's theorem has a disputed origin.

Larry Tesler dated it to about 1970 and gave the words: "Intelligence is whatever machines haven't done yet."

"AI is whatever hasn't been done yet" is Hofstadter's version, first in print in 1979.

Warning signs.

- It appears after the machine has passed, with no reason
- It names a method, not a capability
- It applies to the machine only
- No result would ever convince
- It gives no reason beyond "not real"

Five checks.

- Written down before the result, or explained afterwards
- Names a capability the job needs
- Says how many of your own staff would pass
- States what would convince you
- Explains what the old test missed

“Defining human value as whatever machines cannot yet do guarantees a retreat. I would rather decide which human capabilities we want to protect, say why, and test for those, whoever or whatever else passes.”



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NEXT

Part 3: The Terminal That Listens

Sagan imagined therapy terminals in 1979. What changes when the terminal listens back?



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