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Technology, Artificial Intelligence

Sydney Kpundeh Professor Couch Introduction to Philosophy 1101 February 23, 2013 Artificial Intelligence The year is 2013 and technology dominates our day and age. Our society is turning to one that requires some sort of technology to survive. One may argue that a lot of people have cell phones or know how to use one. That can range from a ten year old child, to an eighty-five year old grandmother. One may also argue that most households have either a television or computer or even both in most cases. The use of technology in people's lives is growing and therefore the demand for technological products. Children are addicted to playing games on their PlayStation or texting their buddies and their parents are busy sending emails and checking stocks on their iPads'. With this steady growth in usage of technology in people's lives, the demand for these machines is also growing. Competitors selling these machines compete to make their products better than the rest of the sellers, constantly keeping them updated and in tune with what people would want to see in these machines and what they need from them. For example, let us look at " SIRI, " which is software developed by the company Apple. It is an intelligent personal assistant which is used in Apple products. Siri is given a woman's voice and uses it to answer questions, make recommendations, and perform actions by delegating requests to a set of Web services. Most machines in this generation are equipped with this personal assistant ability or something very similar. This new recent development in machines has stirred a very interesting debate amongst philosophers. That debate is whether or not machines have the ability to think. Alan Turning, who was a computer scientist, wrote a 950 page paper in the 1950s, about a way to test whether machines can actually

think. It became known as the Turning Test for Thinking Machines. In his paper Turning also outlines some objections people had to machine intelligence. Christopher Evans was also a computer scientist and he also wrote a paper entitled, “ Can Machines think" in which he summarizes Turnings objections, comments on them, and also gives his own opinion on the subject. In this paper, I will focus on two of his objections to the thesis that machines can think that Evans considers and replies to, and I will explain my side on those issues. The first objection is the Theological objection–“ Man is a creation of God, and has been given a soul and the power of conscious thought. Machines are not spiritual beings, have no soul and thus must be incapable of thought" (Evans 221). This argument objects to the thesis that machines can think. Evans leans on what Turning already pointed out in his paper, that this objection puts an unwarranted restriction on God. “ Why shouldn’t he give machines souls and allow them to think if he wanted to? " (Evans 221). Evan replies by saying that this is irrefutable. If we define thinking as something that only man can do and something that only God has the power to grant, then machines cannot think because God created man with the ability to think. Man created machines but since man does not have the same powers as God, they are not able to give these machines the ability to think. Therefore machines cannot think. I am a strong believer in God and I believe he created all living creatures on this earth, along with humans and the ground we inhabit. Everything else that we see now in the world is a byproduct of those 3 things and therefore not a creation by God. That means that they do not have the same functions as the things created by God. Thought is one of those functions. A building was

created by man and nobody would argue that a building has the ability to even speak yet alone think. Machines, like computers, iPods, iPhones, PlayStations, etc., were all created by Man. Therefore just like a building, there should not even be a debate about whether or not they have the ability to think. Just like how building designs have become more sophisticated, machines have also had significant advances from when they were first created. However all of these new developments are additions by humans and they have nothing to do with the primary functions of the building or machine. Buildings are still made to keep things in and keep things out. Machines are made for entertainment and to help our lives as humans run smoother. Nothing has changed. I agree strongly with Evans on this point which rejects the idea that machines can think, and believe he makes a good argument. The second objection is the Unpredictability objection- “ Computers are created by humans according to a set of rules and operate according to carefully scripted programs which themselves are sets of rules. So if you wanted to, you could work out exactly what a computer was going to do at any particular time" (Evans 223). That being said, computers therefore are totally predictable. Humans however, are unpredictable and do not operate according to a set of rules. Therefore because humans are unpredictable, they are capable of error, which cannot be said about the predictable machines. The fact that machines are incapable of error and every one of their moves are predictable means that they do not have the ability to think. Evans replies by rejecting this thought. He says that machines nowadays are more complex and dynamic that they can surprise us and make mistakes. Although they are programmed in most of their

actions, some still have the ability to re-program themselves and therefore can be unpredictable. Consequently, Evans argues that in this aspect machines have the ability to think. I disagree with Evans on this reply because I do not think he makes a strong argument. I will use the Siri example mentioned earlier to help support my position. Siri was programmed by Apple and all of Siri's functions and response have been thought out and tested, and therefore predictable. However, it is impossible to predict everything that Siri says. Siri can surprise people because its response, even though they are predicted, caters to the user's personality, interest, and likes. Siri saves and takes a note of every action you perform on your phone, or Apple product. If you constantly search for close McDonalds in the area and then ask Siri for example, what do I feel like eating today? . It is highly probable that Siri is going to respond McDonalds. That does not mean Siri is thinking. It just means that is was programmed to study your search habits and interests. Siri could also say Wendy's, because it knows you like fast food and Wendy's has the same type of food as McDonalds, but it knows you always eat McDonald's and could use something different to eat. That again does not mean that Siri is thinking, it just means it is programmed to sort through your likes and habits, and decided to suggest something which was not what most people would have predicted. This is just another reason why I believe machines cannot think. This debate is a very intriguing one. Previous generations probably would turn in their graves if they actually knew that we were spending time and money debating and researching the thought of machines having the ability to think. However now the time being the 21st century and with all the

technology advances that comes with living in this age, it is a very plausible debate. The thesis and the common belief now is that these new machines, from phones to cars, think on their own but like Evans, I disagree with this argument. Although there can be valid cases for machines thinking on their own, and Evans even agrees with the norm on some occasions, there still is not enough evidence today to turn that claim into a fact. Evans makes very strong cases for why they still cannot think, cases that I have commented on above and stated my view, but in the end it goes down to the fundamental definition of the word “ think". Webster’s dictionary defines the word think as —“ have a particular opinion, belief, or idea about someone or something: " she thought that nothing would be the same again." Based on that definition alone machines cannot have their own opinions or beliefs about something. A car cannot, for example, not feel like driving today so it refuses to start. Therefore machines cannot think and they will never gain the ability to think because you cannot give someone or something an opinion.