Alan Turing and the Mind-Body Problem
Paper Assignment #3

Important Dates:
Thu Sep 29: Assignment
Fri Oct 14: Paper due (bring a printed, stapled copy to my office by 10 a.m.)
Thu Oct 20 – Fri Oct 21 Individual conference days (sign-up sheet to be provided)
Thu Oct 27: Revised paper due (bring a printed, stapled copy together with your original draft to class)

Goals: This paper will give you practice in writing an argument which takes a clear position on a notable philosophical debate and advocates a specific personal point of view, or conclusion that you have drawn from your research. You will work on creating credibility by showing that you understand multiple perspectives on the issue and by using sources to help back up your position.

Assignment: Write an essay that explores Turing’s connection to the academic discipline of philosophy of mind, and in particular the issue known as the mind-body problem. Your paper should clearly establish the background context (i.e., define the relevant terms), establish Turing’s place in that context, explain his theories, and carefully explain one competing theory of the mind-body problem, as expressed by one specific proponent of that theory. Then compare and contrast this person’s ideas of mind-body with Turing’s. Finally, your work should take a clear position advocating one particular theory that you have described, building a clear, convincing argument for your case.

Begin your research with the background information from the book Cognitive Science, by Jay Friedenberg and Gordon Silverman, provided as a PDF file on the class website and on reserve in the library. This reading will give you an excellent introduction to the context of the problem, though Turing specifically is not included. This will lead you very quickly to other resources that explain and expand on different theories, and particularly locate Turing within them. Obviously, the material that we have already read (and will soon be reading) will also be invaluable to your research. From this resource you will also derive several options for a competing theory to investigate, along with a proponent of that theory.

As you conduct your research, plan your argument. A clear, written outline is a necessity. In addition, the Online Writing Lab provides numerous suggestions for the planning process. Do not skip the planning phase. You are welcome (and encouraged) to discuss your ideas with me during this process.

As before, your introduction will draw in the reader’s attention with a catchy beginning and will present a clear thesis statement delineating your position by the end of the paragraph. In the course of the paper, you will demonstrate that you understand the
complexity of the issues involved and also the reasons why others might disagree with you. You will ultimately make a strong, supported argument based on the readings we have done and your own research for your position on the mind-body problem. Your paper should end with a conclusion that not only restates your thesis, but also gives your audience—which consists of me (your professor) and your Furman freshmen classmates—a reason to remember your argument and to care about this issue.

We will once again use the MLA format for acknowledgement and citations. Please note that you are required to document sources correctly using this format in order to receive a passing grade on this paper. You are encouraged to review the OWL discussion of MLA documentation as soon as possible.

Notes:

1. Another source that I recommend you seek out is A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind: Readings With Commentary, by Peter A. Morton. This book features an entire chapter on Alan Turing. I have placed this book on 3-hour reserve in the library for your use. (As noted, I’ve also reserved the Cognitive Science book from which I scanned the PDF, in case it’s useful to you.)

2. To assist with your individual research efforts, we will work together as a class exercise to build an annotated bibliography for this assignment. We’ll start this process in our library session in class.

3. We have talked in class about how Turing’s theories pertain to two subtly different problems – the nature of mind (whether or not it is a machine) and the nature of machines (whether or not they can be intelligent). Both problems can be relevant to this paper and Turing’s thoughts are worthy of research and explanation. However, I want to caution you in advance not to mix them up. Keep them clearly distinguished in your paper and use them as different methods of arguing Turing’s overall point.

4. Andrew Hodges frequently mentions another mathematician/philosopher named Roger Penrose. That’s a name worth considering as you do your research as well. (His book, The Emperor’s New Mind, in which he discusses his thoughts on Turing’s theories, is also on reserve at the library.)

5. Be sure to use the OWL liberally during this process. In particular, it has a useful chapter on “The Writing Process.” (See link provided previously.)

6. Remember the format guidelines: Times New Roman, font size 12, 1” margins all the way around, double spaced, no extra space after paragraphs.


8. You probably wouldn’t be surprised to learn that Andrew Hodges has addressed Turing’s philosophical theories. I strongly suggest that you consult some of his work, particularly these passages from his short biography of Turing: