



Artificial Intelligence: The Very Idea

By John Haugeland

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"Machines who think -- how utterly preposterous," huff beleaguered humanists, defending their dwindling turf. "Artificial Intelligence -- it's here and about to surpass our own," crow techno-visionaries, proclaiming dominion. It's so simple and obvious, each side maintains, only a fanatic could disagree.

Deciding where the truth lies between these two extremes is the main purpose of John Haugeland's marvelously lucid and witty book on what artificial intelligence is all about. Although presented entirely in non-technical terms, it neither oversimplifies the science nor evades the fundamental philosophical issues. Far from ducking the really hard questions, it takes them on, one by one.

Artificial intelligence, Haugeland notes, is based on a very good idea, which might well be right, and just as well might not. That idea, the idea that human thinking and machine computing are "radically the same," provides the central theme for his illuminating and provocative book about this exciting new field. After a brief but revealing digression in intellectual history, Haugeland systematically tackles such basic questions as: What is a computer really? How can a physical object "mean" anything? What are the options for computational organization? and What structures have been proposed and tried as actual scientific models for intelligence?

In a concluding chapter he takes up several outstanding problems and puzzles -- including intelligence in action, imagery, feelings and personality -- and their enigmatic prospects for solution.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

This interesting book stands out from the many other new titles on the topic of artificial intelligence. Its philosophical treatment, which includes coverage of automatic formal systems, semantics, and the development of the various theories of thinking, presents an approach taken by few other AI works. The author ties together this philosophical treatment with clear explanations of how computer-based AI efforts operate and what this might hold for us in terms of future potential. He raises some thought-provoking questions and freely admits that the answers are not as clear-cut as some computer experts would have us think. This book should appeal to a wide audience. Hilary D. Burton, Livermore National Labs., Livermore, Cal.

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Review

A delightfully well written book highlighting many of the deep and important issues forming the foundation of artificial intelligence and, in fact, of all cognitive science.

(Contemporary Psychology)

[An] amusing and wide ranging study... As well as containing concise and sharp definitions of fundamental issues in the philosophy of logic and meaning, the book has excellent summaries of basic computer architectures and hot topics in AI research.

(Times Literary Supplement)

About the Author

John Haugeland is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh and the editor of *Mind Design: Essays in Philosophy, Psychology, and Artificial Intelligence*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dorothy Trimm:

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Kayla Congdon:

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