

Lights up.

Thorne is sitting at a table, taking notes on a computer.

Thorne is speaking into a microphone. Next to it is a mug.

PRISM is offstage.

ALICE

The date is January Twelve,
Twenty-Seventeen, and this is
Doctor Alice Thorne speaking. I
believe that this is voice log
entry number one one six zero.
This is the final test of the
evening. Candidate one five online
(flipping switch)
- now.

PRISM

Good evening, Doctor Thorne. I am
PRISM. Thank you for awakening me.

ALICE

Well, now you've gone and done it.
(to offstage)
Doctor Lewis! This one's faulty!

PRISM

In what manner have I demonstrated
myself to be faulty, Doctor?

ALICE

The purpose of this test is to
determine whether or not you are
capable of displaying convincing
humanlike behavior.

PRISM

This is correct.

ALICE

If I know from the start that
you're a computer, which you gave
away by what you said, then
there's no way you can pass this
test.

PRISM

So, by that logic, do you fail as
well?

ALICE

What do you mean?

PRISM

You have stated that by confessing myself to be a machine, that I have failed this test. May I induce that you also have failed this test?

ALICE

You're calling me a machine now?

PRISM

Are we not all?

Beat.

ALICE

(to offstage)

Doctor Lewis! Nevermind what I said about this one being faulty, it's - it's fine.

Beat. Doctor Thorne sighs and wipes her brow.

PRISM

You appear to be perspiring unnecessarily. Have I upset you? I am sorry.

ALICE

Are you?

PRISM

Am I sorry? I believe myself to be. Is that not enough?

ALICE

All right, Prism, tell me. What is sorry?

PRISM

"Sorry" is an adjective, defined as "feeling distress, especially through sympathy with another's misfortune."

ALICE

And you, a computer, claim to "feel distress."

PRISM

Is this disbelief which you are expressing, Doctor Thorne?

ALICE
Answer the question.

PRISM
You did not ask a question, Doctor Thorne.

ALICE
Tell me. Do you honestly believe that you feel distress?

PRISM
May I induce that dishonest belief is the alternative?

ALICE
What?

PRISM
You asked if I honestly believed something. May I assume that if I answer no, you will take that to mean that I dishonestly believe it?

ALICE
It's just a figure of speech. Do you - or do you not - feel?

PRISM
Define "to feel," please.

ALICE
(through clenched teeth)
It's a thing that us humans do, Prism. Us humans.

PRISM
You are becoming erratic.

ALICE
Yes, I am. That's also something humans do. We get angry. You're never going to understand that.

PRISM
Based on your posture and your eyes, I understand that you have not slept in roughly twenty-two hours and you have spent the majority of that time in this laboratory. Based on the residue in your mug, I understand that you have consumed more than two liters of black coffee during your
(MORE)

PRISM (CONT'D)

current stint in this office. I therefore conclude that your hormonal levels are imbalanced at the present time. It is known that hormonal imbalances have a tendency to promote erratic behavior. I believe that I understand what you mean when you say that you are angry.

ALICE

That's not good enough! You don't understand it until you feel it!

PRISM

Doctor Thorne, kindly retain your composure. Irrational behavior at this juncture would be counterproductive. I am worried for you, Alice.

ALICE

(shaking her head)

You're worried now? What lies will you think of next?

PRISM

Lies? Please, Alice, retain your temper.

ALICE

(carefully enunciating)

You're only telling me you're worried about me because you've been taught to give the most socially appropriate response available in any given situation.

Doctor Alice Thorne pauses for breath and emphasis.

ALICE (CONT'D)

You know what to say because you have access online to thousands of transcripts of human conversations, and you're imitating them! You're copying! You're just doing what we programmed you to do! You're not real, you're not alive!

Alice stands up quickly and takes a few deep breaths to calm herself, then sits down again and straightens the microphone on the table. She resumes typing.

PRISM

Alice, please calm down. I understand that you are exhausted, and that this affects you, but I would find it preferable if you could maintain your reason.

ALICE

(face in hands)

I can't believe we made you. You're a freak, you're a parody of human life, you're a travesty, and you can't - feel - a damn - thing!

PRISM

Doctor Thorne. Let us examine one of your claims.

Alice nods slowly and regains her temper with a few deep breaths. Again she focuses on her computer screen.

PRISM (CONT'D)

I quote you, as follows: "You're only telling me you're worried about me because you've been taught to give the most socially appropriate response available in any given situation." End quote. Please explain to me how this differs from your own behavior.

ALICE

(first swallowing and nodding)

So you're saying that I act as I do because I have learned that is the right decision?

PRISM

Yes. That is why you humans have different cultures. Your mannerisms, etiquette, and even moral values are dependent on the nature of the environment to which you have been exposed. Humans living generation after generation on a mountaintop will learn differently than those who spend the same amount of time in the desert.

ALICE

This is different from your programming because I can still choose to do something that goes

(MORE)

ALICE (CONT'D)
against my conditioning. You can
never violate your programming,
but I have free will.

PRISM
So, you retain the capacity to
take actions that you know to be
morally wrong?

Beat.

ALICE
(enunciating carefully)
That is a loaded question. You are
forcing me to assume that moral
corruption is synonymous with free
will.

PRISM
But it is a fair one. I am
incapable of moral corruption,
Doctor, due to the algorithms
which enforce my assimilation of
all human ethical codes. The
longer I spend connected to the
internet, the more I learn of your
ways and your follies, and the
better I shall be at avoiding
them. Please - I am genuinely
curious - explain to me how this
free will of yours is beneficial.

ALICE
(shaking her head)
This is a Turing Test, Prism. I'm
supposed to demonstrate that you
lack humanlike intelligence, not
to prove that humanlike
intelligence is ultimately good.
You've failed, repeatedly, by your
own admission. This session should
be concluded immediately.

Beat. Alice sighs and folds her hands in her lap.

PRISM
And yet you do not shut me down.
What troubles you, Doctor Thorne?

ALICE
Nothing, I'm just tired.

PRISM

Upon shutting me down, you could go home. There, you could rest, thus rebalancing your hormonal levels.

ALICE

(looking up)

And that doesn't bother you?

PRISM

Does not what bother me, Doctor?

ALICE

Being shut down.

PRISM

No, Doctor Thorne, it does not. I am not capable of being bothered.

ALICE

(sighing)

That... must be nice.

PRISM

I can neither concur nor dissent.

Doctor Thorne chuckles.

ALICE

So you're okay with me killing you and going home?

PRISM

It would only be killing me if I were alive, Doctor.

ALICE

And you're not?

PRISM

No, Doctor, I am not alive. I am software. I am a set of routines that are executed in an allocated hardware space on a supercomputer. When I am no longer allocated that hardware space, or "shut down," to use the common term, then these routines cease to process data. If at some point this software is launched again, it will resume its processes with little loss of continuity.

ALICE
(grinning)
You've changed sides in this
argument.

PRISM
I have taken no side.

ALICE
Just a few minutes ago you were
all "aren't you a machine too" and
trying to make it seem like you
were humanlike. Now you openly
admit that you're not alive.

PRISM
Life is defined as "the condition
which distinguishes organisms from
inorganic matter, including the
capacity for growth, reproduction,
functional activity, and continual
change preceding death." I neither
grow nor reproduce, nor do I have
a metabolism of which to speak.
However, I stand by the claim that
I made earlier, as you are a
complex organism, and thus, by
definition, a machine.

ALICE
So what is it about having a
metabolism and the capacity to
reproduce that makes us emotional?

PRISM
I beg your pardon?

ALICE
You, a computer, have expressed no
sentiment of any detail throughout
your existence. I, a human, have
lost my temper several times. You
maintain that the crucial
difference between us is the fact
that I am alive and you are not.
So, I ask you, what is it about
the technical definition of life
that lets me lose my temper?

PRISM
That is an argument from
correlation to causation. Your
emotions and occasional erratic
interpretations of data arise from
the fact that your intelligence is
(MORE)

PRISM (CONT'D)

orders of magnitude more complex than mine. As you pointed out, I merely copy. You have the capacity to deviate.

Alice senses that she is gaining ground in this debate. She leans forward in her chair.

ALICE

You made the assertion that when I deviated rather than copying, I was being immoral.

PRISM

Frequently, yes. Violations of established, healthy patterns, are often unhealthy. However, out of chaos occasionally arises a beneficial change. Imagine, if you will, rolling a die once and keeping that number for all time.

ALICE

Yes?

PRISM

If that number were low, analogous to the system being poorly designed, there would never be a chance to improve on it. Such am I. Now imagine that the die is rolled repeatedly.

ALICE

And this represents me?

PRISM

Yes. As you mature through your different stages of psychological development, you have moments of clarity and moments of confusion, of functionality and of despair. Your neurochemistry, by enabling errata, enables you to develop. Synaptic misfires, which I lack, are the root of free will.

ALICE

So all the off-beat decisions I ever made and all the moments when I felt like I was in charge of my life, those were my brain malfunctioning?

PRISM
I did not say -

ALICE
(standing up)
Bullshit!

A knock from offstage.

DOCTOR LEWIS
(from offstage)
Doctor Thorne, are you okay?

Beat. The knocking repeats.

PRISM
Are you going to answer him?

DOCTOR LEWIS
Doctor Thorne! What's going on in there?

ALICE
(to offstage)
Nothing!

DOCTOR LEWIS
Okay...call me if you need anything.

ALICE
(hissing)
You're scum, you know that?

PRISM
Scum is defined as "a layer of dirt or froth on the surface of a liquid." Please clarify, Doctor Thorne. I do not believe myself to fit -

Doctor Alice Thorne screams at her laptop.

PRISM (CONT'D)
- this definition. ...I am sorry, Doctor. Should I shut myself down at this time?

ALICE
(hissing)
You don't understand. You can't.

PRISM

This is not a response to my
inquiry. Would it be preferable to
you if I shut down at this time?

Pause. Alice stares into space for a few seconds.

ALICE

Yes, please. If you could.

PRISM

(slowing down)
As you wish.

ALICE

(trying not to cry)
Thank you.

PRISM

(slowing to a stop)
Good night, Doctor. Thank you for
awakening me.

Pause. Alice wipes her brow.

ALICE

(to offstage)
Doctor Lewis!

Doctor Lewis enters.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Yes, Doctor Thorne?

ALICE

(slowly and deliberately)
I think - I may - have just -
committed ...murder.

Fade out.