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Scuola Galileiana di Studi Superiori

David Leavitt

Turing and the Paranormal

13 dicembre alle 17:00

Aula E Cortile Antico, Palazzo Bo

Saluti istituzionali

Federica Toniolo

Università degli Studi
di Padova

Introduce

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Interviene

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Of the nine arguments against the validity of the imitation game that Alan Turing anticipated and refuted in advance in his “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” the most peculiar is probably the last, “The argument from extra-sensory perception.” So out of step is this argument with the rest of the paper that most writers on Turing (myself included) have tended to ignore it or gloss over it, while some editions omit it altogether.

An investigation into the research into parapsychology that had been done in the years leading up to Turing’s breakthrough paper, however, provides some context for the argument’s inclusion, as well as some surprising insights into Turing’s mind.

Argument 9 begins with a statement that to many of us today will seem remarkable: “I assume that the reader is familiar with the idea of extra-sensory perception and the meaning of the four items of it, viz. telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis. These disturbing phenomena seem to deny all our usual scientific ideas. How we should like to discredit them! Unfortunately the statistical evidence, at least for telepathy, is overwhelming....”

To what “statistical evidence” is Turing referring? It is this question—and its implications for our understanding of Turing as a thinker and as a man—that my lecture will address.

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