DSP ESSAY

Humans are complex. While the use of three words may give the appearance of brevity to this idea, this idea is everything but simple. Rather, the nature of humankind remains to be a mystery even after so many years of existence as a species. Year after year, we discover endless things about the world around us and create advancements that were once thought unimaginable, yet we struggle to find a definition for the word "human." After all, are we not more than homo sapiens? In the article "Mind vs. Machine", Brian Christian explores some potential definitions for the word as he attempts to understand the concept in combination with the "Turing Test." These competitions consist of five minute conversations between a judge and a computer or human. At the end of each conversation, the judge attempts to determine whether the opposite person was a computer and a human. In order to win the competition, Brian Christian finds it necessary to delve into possible definitions of a "human". Though there were many potential definitions, I agree with the one that Brian Christian cites at the end of the competition. "The human race got to where it is by being the most adaptive, flexible, innovative and quick-learning species on the planet (Christian 17)." In other words, to be a human is to be versatile and adaptable.

Over time, we have found that humans are not the only ones that exhibit certain types of behavior. As Christian mentions, there are many animals that share human behaviors such as the ability to react and communicate. For example, Christian describes this dilemma with Daniel Gilbert's "The Sentence" which says "The human being is the only animal that _____ (Christian 4). " This phrase attempts to show that with time, we are unable to find things that humans can do that animals cannot. Even though there are similarities in behavior, unlike animals, humans have different type of reactions to the same behavior which can be influenced by various personalities or the environment. One specific topic that is explored in the article is the style of language. How one even responds to small talk can differ from person to person. For example, when the computer replied to some comments, it replied in a tone that was characterized as "zany, a jokester" (Christian 7). (The computer's reaction can be analyzed as it is meant to emulate a human's personality.) The real human, Cynthia Clay, replied in a very encyclopedic way. These are just two examples in how a human's reaction can differ in the same situation. Just around us, people have various personalities and backgrounds that can affect how they behave. For example, how a celebrity interacts with people may be very different from how a mechanic may interact. Humans can also react in a variety of emotions. Each person may look at a certain piece of news differently: excitement, regret, sympathy, etc. As humans, we are versatile in our responses and behavior. It is impossible to find one single pattern. However, humans are also readily able to adapt to any situation. Not only are humans versatile, they can also change their reactions over time. We adapt to our environment and the situation. Our readiness to change is easily seen in Christian's reaction to the Turing Test. When he found that the conversation style and format was not familiar to him, Christian immediately tried to change his style of speech to something that was more "like spoken English, and less like the written language" in order to gain an advantage over the computer (Christian 10). His ability to quickly change strategy in light of a different environment shows the flexibility of our species. We are constantly creating new advancements to adapt to our surroundings. Some may argue that the Neolithic Revolution was one of the greatest achievements of mankind as it brought forth agriculture and furthered the advancements of civilizations and social structure. It is a great

example of how humans used their surroundings and even adapted to their situations to move forward.

It may be argued that humans may not be as adaptable and diverse as they appear. "Mind vs. Machine" even considers this matter when it talks about situations where the computer seemed to win the Turing Test. It seems that the computer can crack some patterns and display certain personalities like the "zany, jokester" or a vulgar person as portrayed by computer "McGonz" (Christian 7-8). But the fact that computers have still not completely won the competition, proves that humans are not easily defeated. Even after copying some patterns and maybe using some strategies, computers are still unable to keep up with the variety and flexibility of the human mind. The Turing Test has failed to show that computers can essentially act "more human" than a human, themselves.

The diversity and flexibility of the human spirit never ceases to amaze us to this day and proves to be some of the important points of the definition of a human being. By no means, are these the only characteristics of human kind nor are they easy answers to the question of What is a human?, but they are only a beginning to the further exploration of human abilities and capabilities. After all, if we can build computers that provoke us to question the definition of our existence, what else can humankind dream to accomplish?

Works Cited
Christian, Brian. "Mind vs. Machine." The Atlantic. The Atlantic, Mar. 2011. Web. 17 July 2011. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/03/mind-vs-machine/8386/>.