Subject: Conway and Weizenbaum
Posted by Wayne Parham on Sun, 15 Sep 2024 14:21:01 GMT
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Hats off to these two great minds, Joseph Weizenbaum and John Conway. Both lived lives in service to mankind through mathematics and computing, and both lived until relatively recently: Weizenbaum passed in 2008 and Conway lived until 2020.

The thing that made me want to acknowledge them both is their ambivalence towards the creations they are best known for. Both did many incredible things, and yet were almost embarrassed at the thing they did that was most popular. Each of these men thought their creation was too simple, too trivial, and wanted to be known more for the rest of their work.

But in each case, the thing they made that caught public attention was extremely significant for the future of computing. Their creations created ripples that extend through time.

So hats off to you, Joseph Weizenbaum for your Eliza program, the very first chatbot.

And hats off to you, John Conway, for your Game of Life, the popular cellular automaton you created.

These two programs influenced generations of computer scientists from the 1960s onward and are still relevant today. The computing landscape was influenced heavily by these two men and their creations.