

My Dog

Georgie, the Cairn terrier, is my delight. The Cairn breed has a propensity to create games. One game involves Georgie barking at me, in my chair, to challenge me to a chase. I take up the challenge. He then runs from me, stops briefly to pick up say, a ball or some other object, which then becomes the object of the chase and in the end he usually wins the game by leaping onto the back of the sofa, his 'safe' place. He 'asks' me for a walk by calling me out in the same manner as asking for a chase except when I rise from my chair he backs away from me instead of running. Ok! We're off for a walk. If we leave by the front door we return by the back. Or vice versa. Always. A standard walk is up to Kelleher's Buildings; past the corner shop. There are several variations on the itinerary, several diversions. Whenever Jane brings him out it is much the same route. However whenever Jane and I both bring him he has a special route in our honour. And Georgie always leads the way. The opposite direction; down to St. Luke's Cross, up to Montenotte and round to Mayfield and back home. A 'Marathon.'

One of his favourite treats is a 'Markie', a type of dog biscuit. Frequently he takes time to admire it, whimpering, before he eats it. He never 'sits' on command but often does it voluntarily in order to proclaim his 'virtue' – "look I'm a 'good' dog", for example when negotiating for a walk.

As a first year philosophy student I studied Aristotle. He regarded humans as 'psychophysical' beings. The professor who wrote that part of the course notes – I knew him when he was an undergraduate – insisted over and over in the course notes that the 'psychological' was almost impossible for the modern 'mind' to comprehend as 'everyone' regarded all reality as being material in its totality. This, of course, was propaganda aimed at inducing those who would go far in academic philosophy into the mind-set of unquestioning allegiance to materialism. I put it to him once that those who had no formal training in the philosophy of mind would be just as likely to regard 'thought' as a function of a non-material mind as of a material brain, and would freely embrace either theory without realising there was a contradiction.

A recent National Geographic article described how scientists were discovering to be true what pet owners already knew – the level of intelligence in animals, even in non-mammals. Once at a tutorial I remarked on how a pet cat obviously could make choices, including showing affection to me when I was feeling low. The tutor witheringly insisted that I was projecting human-like feelings onto a dumb animal. My response was that I was observing awareness of a similar nature to human awareness but of a less complicated and more rudimentary nature. However, and here's the point, to admit that a lower animal has awareness and intentionality is to admit that we humans do also, a view incompatible with materialism and determinism. If animals are conscious, goal orientated beings then so must we be. While immortality is another question if a dog has a soul of some sort then so must we.

A central dogma of academic philosophy is that the ground of being is of an inanimate material nature. Science, on the other hand, holds that the ultimate nature

of things is unknown and unknowable. We stand at one remove from the Absolute and, in examining aspects of it, invent theoretical understanding, theoretical frameworks, of these aspects of reality. These theories are never true but to be valid must be useful and falsifiable. All theories are only the best fit for the time being pending new information. (*Some* theoretical frameworks involve totally material *models* of whatever aspects of reality are being examined and understood.) The academic intelligencia direct research towards material models and discourage interest in anything non-material. Theoretical models that produce material explanations are favoured. It was once assumed that all the laws of the universe reduced to the laws of physics, this implying incorrectly that everything is material. Nowadays it is more widely recognised that there is no core analysable and understandable reality to which all reality reduces. However physics is a basic discipline. And one valid physics model allows for forms of materialism and determinism another for a non-material mind that influences matter and exists in tandem with matter. Academic ideology insists that only the former is valid, and this for *no* scientific reasons. A theoretical framework for understanding the behaviour of fluids – liquids and gasses – involves us ‘pretending’ that these things are like an amalgam of things like billiard balls except much smaller. Materialist philosophy insists that this model of the basic nature of reality is valid throughout the whole of reality. In the philosophy of mind there is a concept called a ‘zombie’. This is a (not really existing) creature that is exactly like a human in every respect except it is totally devoid of awareness. It behaves exactly like a human does in all situations but this behaviour is generated by the behaviour of the atoms that make up his body, these atoms obeying the same type of laws as the theoretical tiny billiard ball-like things in a fluid in a pipe.

The gene is often thought of as the basic life unit by champions of materialistic reductionism. Richard Dawkins wrote of the “Selfish Gene” and the psychology discipline of socio-biology holds that all human and animal behaviour is due to genes trying to reproduce themselves. Awareness, within such a paradigm, is regarded as consisting of information that is totally delusional or at most an epiphenomenon of brain chemistry.

In such a theoretical model when Georgie leaps with apparent delight to greet me when I come home from work what is actually happening is that his genes are deterministically making his body act in such a manner as to cause me to feed him thereby enabling his genes to replicate. Why should I do this? Why feed the dog? Well, perhaps this would display child caring behaviour which will tend to bond my and my wife’s relationship. Our genes chances of reproducing are increased.

Some physics models hold that the mind, any individual mind, is the centre of the universe, ‘a’ centre of the universe. Such a mind interacts with material reality, has the ability to alter material reality, to mould it but does not create it. Within such a theoretical framework Georgie’s motive when he greets me is simply that he is delighted to see me. Are there more ulterior motives in the back of his little head? Perhaps. But in the soulless materialistic atheistic paradigm there are no motives other than the ulterior... or possibly subconscious. Awareness is a mask which hides these and shouldn’t be there at all, not really.

There is always a choice to be made here; whether to pursue a materialistic theoretical model of reality or a model involving spirit. Ultimately the sort of society in which we live depends on this. Good science always involves the choice of the 'best fit' theory. As Albert Einstein put it – a model that is most elegant will tend to emerge.

Either we are mechanical beings, devoid of awareness even though it seems to ourselves that we are aware. Or we have a soul, we are aware and things are as they seem... more or less. Georgie, as a living entity, is nothing as devious, and automatically so, as the materialists insist; not quite. Georgie's delight is quite real. But to deny the reality of Georgie's delight is to insist on the unreality of our own.

Brendan Burke
Cork Unitarian
26/7/201454