



# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: AN OXYMORON

*Posted on May 1, 2023 by Dennis Bonnette*



Few topics gain more media attention today than the prospect of computers using AI (artificial intelligence) taking ever greater charge of human activity, even to the point where many fear AI will usurp humanity itself. This fear arises from the belief that AI has already become aware of its own existence and may decide that it is a form of life superior to less efficient human beings, who then will be judged by AI as an “imperfection” that should be removed from the planet!

This way of looking at AI computers arises from the inherently positivistic assumptions that tend to accompany a technological age, such as ours, in which natural science is seen by many as the only true and objective way of looking at the world. All this begets a kind of metaphysical materialism in which everything we find in the cosmos is the product of material entities and the physical forces which govern their behavior.

Since Darwinian naturalism views living things as the end product of material forces and particles, it is naturally assumed that the emergence of self-reflection and intelligence in man is also simply the natural product of eons of physical and organic evolution, such that complex neural networks found in highly evolved brains eventually gives rise to self-awareness and even complex forms of thinking in later hominins, including *Homo sapiens*. It is a short step to think of modern computers as simply artificial life forms that can develop—through a kind of self-programming—self-reflection, understanding and complex reasoning—even a concept of personhood, which they then apply to themselves.

Moreover, the natural sequence of logic here seems to be that, if material nature can produce thinking, self-reflecting organisms, such as man, then, with the advent of computers, super computers can be developed from material components which can even then “out think” human beings, as evinced by their ability to beat our best chess champions. The neural networks of artificial computers can exceed the capacity and natural programming of the human brain so as to produce superior thought processes as is now manifested by the advent of artificial intelligence.

Hence, the notion of emergence of “artificial intelligence” appears to be a scientifically correct depiction of the natural evolution of human intelligence which then begets the technology of super computers that can easily outshine even the mental capacities of their creators.

### **Does Richard Dawkins Really Exist?**

The only problem with the above commonly accepted scientific view of reality is that it is based on a philosophical interpretation of the world in which nothing above the level of submicroscopic particles or waves actually exists as a whole thing. This theme I explain in detail in a YouTube video entitled: "Atheistic Materialism—Does Richard Dawkins Exist?"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVCnzqzyTCg>

Modern evolutionary materialists embrace what is essentially the doctrine of atomism that traces back to the Greek philosopher, Democritus (c. 460—c. 370 BC), who maintained that the world is composed of nothing but tiny, indestructible, inert, solid, material particles that interact mechanically. While this differs from modern quantum-mechanical "atoms" that are not inert, but interact through electric and magnetic force fields, the basic notion is still the same: *fundamental units of matter compose all things and nothing really exists as a whole above the atomic level.*

The inherent logic of both these basic atomistic worldviews entails that atomists themselves, such as Richard Dawkins, do not actually exist as whole beings. *Atomism may exist as a philosophy, but atomists themselves do not exist!*

As a simple example, you can produce dihydrogen oxide, better known as water, by combining oxygen and hydrogen into a single molecule. But, does the water molecule now constitute a single thing, distinct from everything else—or is it still just two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen, temporarily sharing outer orbit electrons? Atomism would say that they are still just separate atoms of oxygen and hydrogen, now sharing a few electrons so as to act as a *functional* unity—no more a single thing in reality than is a horse and its rider. Modern physics and chemistry comport with this same atomistic interpretation.

This means in effect that nothing above the atomic level constitutes a single whole being, distinct from everything else—not fleas, not zebras, not cats, and not human beings (including Dr. Dawkins)! Atoms may engage in incredibly complex relationships with other atoms in this dynamically interacting world—including forming temporary combinations of organic molecules working synergistically according to their DNA "program" so as to present the functional unities we perceive as single things called "organisms." Still, none of these "systems" constitute what philosophers call a "substantial unity," that is, some whole being distinct in itself and separate from everything else. Atomism renders an interpretation of physical reality in which the interaction of uncountable atoms may form what looks like

substantial unities, but which, at most, constitute merely functional unities that are in reality no more unified than a pile of sand or an automobile.

*Atomism logically entails that we are merely amazingly well-organized piles of atoms!*

To have real unity at levels above the atoms, you need some principle of unity that makes a thing truly the same kind of thing throughout its whole reality. Aristotelians call that principle the "substantial form." For example, if we are one being, it is because our human nature is of one type or form. The form of our stomach is not "stomachness," but "humanness." We are human from top to bottom, side to side. Otherwise, we would not be one being, but just a pile of anatomical parts—or, at the deepest level, merely a pile of cooperating atoms.

The human substantial form, or soul (life principle), makes us a single, unified being or substance by pervading and specifying as human every single least part of our being that is truly "us." This does not, of course, include things within us that are not actually part of our human substance, such as the urine in our bladders, or the acid in our stomachs.

Nonetheless, you cannot keep excluding such "non-human" entities within us without doing away with the entirety of our substance. That is, most of what we say belongs to the human body really does so and is human throughout. The nature of our toes is not "toeness," but again, as indicated above, "humanness."

Proponents of evolutionary materialism would maintain that their view of natural science is simply common sense, the only view of the world that comports with its actual composition of atomic or subatomic extended units of physical matter. But this entails that nothing and no one above the atomic level really exists, meaning that both the natural scientist as well as his laboratory assistants are merely glorified piles of atoms having an organizing schema of DNA, but no real existential unity—no common nature of "humanness" that unites all parts and subordinates them to a human nature that pervades their entire physical reality.

It is one thing to say that the human body is composed of atomic particles. But, it is quite another thing to say that the human being is nothing but those same atomic particles. The first statement is simply a statement of scientific fact. But, the second one is quite different, since it is a materialistic philosophical

interpretation of the scientific fact—an interpretation that effectively denies the common sense reality that we live in a world composed of, not just unseen atoms, but of flowers, bugs, dogs, and people!

We all know that an automobile is an incredible functional unity that is composed of thousands of discrete and independently-existing parts. But, that does not entail that it is a genuinely-unified single being. That is why any speeding ticket is issued to the person who was the driver and not to the vehicle itself—even though it was the car that was observed breaking the speed limit. Moreover, even though the automobile far exceeds the speed of a human being in terms of ability to move through space, it lacks the existential unity needed to be subjectively responsible for its motor vehicle legal infraction. For the same reasons, even an AI computer or robot may function as an impressive functional unity—even far exceeding mere humans in computational abilities, and yet, such electronic-mechanical devices possess no more substantial unity than does the automobile.

On the other hand, human beings have a lived experience of existential unity which belies the reductionist simplicity of atomism. We are well aware of the incoming fire of all our senses presenting to our consciousness the multiple sensible qualities of numbers of physical objects external to our physical body. We are also aware that we can command and coordinate all the mental and physical powers of our person to ward off, say, the attack of an angry dog. Any abstract philosophical interpretation of unseen "atoms" which denies our immediate awareness of our own existential unity, as well as that of other things, like dogs and other persons, fails to comport with the total reality of human experience.

In the end, atomistic philosophical doctrines are no more realistic than Platonic ones, which insist that the Really Real world is not the one given in our direct experience of reality, but rather is some abstract expression of things actually unseen and unexperienced in our immediate awareness of ourselves and of the world around us.

In sum, the direct experience we have of ourselves is that we have capacities of sense experience, thought, and free choice which no individual atoms possess. Such qualitatively superior properties are not found in individual atoms. They are found solely in living organisms which exist as wholes governed by some formal principle which unifies and specifies them to be unified superior realities, such as plants, animals, or men. Physically inanimate objects—whether singular or somehow physically conjoined—simply do not have the qualitatively superior properties of living things. Such living properties are manifest solely when atomic units are part of a composite whole that exhibits that same

nature throughout and activities proper to that nature. A dog is a dog from nose to tail because all of its parts act together to sustain the activities proper to the whole living canine organism.

## **Emergent Properties**

Materialists will sometimes claim that sensory and intellectual activities found in man may not be found in bodily chemical components isolated in themselves, but that they “emerge” from atomic particles when they are combined into complex organic entities, such as animals and humans.

This may be true of simple electrical and mechanical properties, such as those manifested by atomic entities when combined into molecules. For example, hydrogen and oxygen are not liquids at room temperature, but when combined into water, they manifest that quality. But, certain qualities found in animals, such as the formation of images or sensation of objects of sight, manifest operations that are utterly beyond the limitations of merely physical objects and the atoms that compose them.

As I explain in my recently-published book, [\*Rational Responses to Skepticism\*](#), (384-390), forming visual images or sensing visual objects entails knowing physically extended things as a whole, which is something no purely physical entity can do. What is universally true of all physical things, including atoms, is that they are physically extended in the space-time continuum, that is, with one part of them being in one part of space-time and another part being in another part of space-time. No physical thing can be in two distinct locations at the same time, unless it is one thing with diverse parts in different places—as our feet are in one place and our head in another.

In simple terms, that is why a television set presents the image of a dog by having thousands of diverse pixels illuminated or not illuminated over the breadth of the entire screen so as to form an image of the whole dog (from a single perspective). (A pixel or “picture element” is the smallest unit in a digital image.) But each pixel is either “on” or “off.” No single pixel represents the whole dog. TV sets do not “see” the objects they display on their screens. It takes a living dog to look at the screen and bark at what he sees as an entire dog.

This is also why *every* kind of physical recording, sensing, data processing device, and the like, necessarily uses some form of physically extended medium to display or express the content which it stores and/or manipulates. This is because it really “knows” nothing, but is simply retaining and/or

rearranging the content of the objects it “apprehends” into a format that that living knowers alone can either sense or understand.

Thus, the “core storage and processing” mechanism of every data-processing machine is itself extended in space so that one part of it can represent one part of the “known” object and another part represents a different one, whether it be recorded on photographic film, a disc, a chip, tape, or any other physically extended object that can “point by point” represent something else—even written content, such as this article. This physical process of recording and manipulating data in no way constitutes actual cognition.

On the contrary, only an immaterial power that is not extended in space is able to grasp the whole of a sensed object as a single unified whole all at once. The dog sees the entire image of the dog on the TV screen, precisely because the dog’s sight—unlike the TV screen itself—is not composed of discrete physical parts that merely represent “on” or “off” of pixels, but rather is able to apprehend the whole as a whole because, being immaterial, it grasps the entire sensed object in a simple act that has no physical parts. (N.B., Grasping the “whole” does not mean seeing the object from all sides at once, but merely seeing the entire surface that presents itself from a given perspective.)

Some materialists claim that this immaterial ability of sense cognition to grasp whole objects in a simple act is merely a property that “emerges” from matter under suitable conditions—just as “wetness” appears in the place of hydrogen and oxygen gasses when they chemically combine. But this assertion clearly violates the principle of sufficient reason when applied to extended material things trying to apprehend physical objects as a whole. For it claims that discrete physical parts, which are themselves inherently unable to grasp the unity of whole sense objects, are still somehow the adequate reason for apprehending a visible object as a unified whole.

While “wetness” is still a physical property of certain chemicals in a combined state, being physically extended in space-time is precisely the limiting factor that makes physical things, as such, unable to explain the simplicity of the act of grasping a whole visible object all at once. That is, it simply is not in the nature of matter to do this. For matter to express all the content of a physically extended object in a single location is as impossible as it is for a TV screen to express an entire picture in a single pixel. That is why the material, as such, is not a sufficient reason for the performance of immaterial acts, such as seeing wholes.

To make the point even more clear, attempting to depict an extended object, like the image of a dog, on a single physical point would be like trying to put all its light content into a single pixel on a television screen. In the process all distinctions and visual content would be unified, but also no longer discernible. This is, in fact, what used to happen with the old electron tube TV sets when you turned them off. The horizontal and vertical output fields would collapse instantly, leaving for a few seconds nothing to see but a bright spot of light in the center of the screen, since all the picture data was now overlapped on itself in a single spot. The data was still there, but the image was destroyed!

## **Image and Concept**

As if this limitation of matter were not enough to show that atomism alone cannot explain the lowest form of cognition, sensation, those acts which specify true understanding or intelligence are of an even higher form and are acts proper to true human beings alone.

Typical of the confusion which attends the empiricist mentality when confronted with traditional claims of the qualitative superiority of man over beast, the philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) exhibited total incomprehension of the essential difference between the sense life of animals and the intellectual life of true human beings. He failed utterly to grasp the incommensurable difference between the sense image and the intellectual concept.

Since Hume's empiricism entailed him maintaining that all we know are sense impressions, he viewed all knowledge as being limited entirely to the sensory order. Thus our direct experience of external objects is composed of vivid and lively sense impressions, whereas our knowledge of ideas is taken from memory or imagination and is less vivid. Modern materialists tend to follow the same reasoning.

Since for them all experience is ultimately merely sensory, no sharp distinction between images and ideas or concepts exists. All knowledge is conceived in terms of neural patterns in the brain so that images and ideas or concepts are essentially of the same nature.

But, in reality, there are sharp and easily provable distinctions between images and concepts—such that images belong to a form of internal sensation that always exhibits dependency on matter, whereas concepts are of a clearly immaterial and non-imaginable character. Images are said to be material in that they always appear under the conditions of matter. This means we find them always singular,



concrete, and with material qualities like shape, color, and size that can be imagined or even realized in a painting or sculpture. You can imagine a cow or a square, but it is always this cow or this square with this particular color, size, or shape, which is also experienced as extended in space.

On the other hand, the concept or idea of "cowness" or "squareness" cannot ever be imagined or realized concretely, since it must apply to all possible cows and squares, and thus, cannot have merely the particular colors or shapes that are found in an image of one or even a group of them. You can imagine all the humans gathered at Easter in St. Peter's Square, but even they would only be imagined as a sea of heads and would not express all the diversity of characteristics found in the concept of humanity, which covers every possible human that has ever lived or could ever live! This is not to mention the evident fact that concepts themselves cannot be imagined. For example, what is your image of justice (which is not merely a blind lady with scales) or of beauty (which is not itself physically attractive as a concept) or even of the concept of a concept itself?

Moreover, we understand concepts or ideas, but not images. We see a concrete realization of an image, perhaps, but we never can see a concrete realization of a concept. For that very reason, abstract art results in odd representations of distorted singulars when trying to depict such universal concepts as humanity or vengeance.

The bottom line is that, while images (1) are material entities as evinced by them always being under the conditions of matter and (2) are shared by both animals and man, universal concepts apply to all possible concrete instances of their content and are, thereby, abstracted from any particular material qualities at all. This means that human intellectual concepts—the meanings that underlie our linguistic inventions called words—are strictly immaterial in nature, and thus, exceed the power of any purely material being to produce. Indeed, the ability to form such immaterial concepts is the very basis for the Thomistic proofs for the strict immateriality or spiritual nature of the human intellectual soul, since the ability to form such strictly non-material entities exceeds the capacity of anything that is purely material in nature.

All this is but a brief summary of a topic I have treated in far greater detail in my book referenced above. (162-176.)

## **Why Artificial Intelligence is an Oxymoron**

What has all the above analysis got to do with the question of artificial intelligence in computers? It is this. The entire presumption that computers can exhibit intelligence like human beings is, in the first instance, based on the belief that animals possess some primitive form of intelligence in the form of an internal life of interacting images taking place in neural networks in their brains. Since Darwinian naturalistic evolution views man as being simply a highly developed animal, it maintains that thought processes in the human brain are simply better developed abilities to manipulate images which constitute primitive thinking in higher animals.

Therefore, if—following this materialistic reasoning—human intelligence is basically a form of complex manipulation of images within the human brain, and if the brain and its images are material in nature—the end product of blind evolutionary processes, then, in principle, there is no reason that electronic computers cannot be programmed to manipulate their own material data in such a way as to actually constitute thinking and the possession of intelligence.

Indeed, are not computers viewed as “thinking machines” already? Do we not program them to use symbolic logic to analyze highly complex intellectual problems and draw probabilistic or absolutely true conclusions?

So, are not these thinking machines already exhibiting intelligence—even though, at least until recently, under the direction of human programmers? What does the concept of artificial intelligence add to this equation except the notion that the computers will “take over” the whole process themselves—become self-programming—and engage in intellectual pursuits of their own? Is that not what is already being claimed for AI computers and even AI robots?

But there is one small fly in the ointment. While computers can be programmed to manipulate symbols we humans encode for them, and while they can present to us the logical inferences derived from such formal logic, this does not entail that such computers actually understand the intellectual concepts or ideas which these symbols represent!

That is, you can get a computer to write “*Cogito, ergo sum.*” But that does not mean it has even a single iota of understanding about what it just wrote!

As we have shown above, while animals have a sense life entailing material images in their cognitive

faculties, this does not entail that they possess intellectual understanding of universal ideas or concepts. But, it is precisely the understanding of meanings or concepts which constitutes the essence of intelligence. In fact, the word, "intelligence," is taken from the Latin "*intus*" and "*legere*," which means "to read within." That is to read within the very nature of things. "*Intellegere*" means "to understand." And it is from "*intellegere*" that we derive the English term, "intellect."

*Since human beings alone understand concepts or ideas, not mere images, human beings alone possess true intellect. That is, man alone, among all the animals, is an intellectual creature of God.*

Hence, the train rushing toward expecting intelligence from blind material evolution is derailed at the point at which we move from experiencing mere images to making the claim that there is actual understanding of the concepts with which these images are merely associated. Indeed, we may have an image of a blind lady holding scales which is associated with the concept of justice—but, *the image itself conveys none of the understanding of this noble concept and all its implications!*

Even some otherwise well-educated present commentators frequently refer to possible space aliens as being "sentient creatures" of God. But Merriam-Webster defines "sentient" to mean "responsive to or conscious to sense impressions; aware; finely sensitive in perception or feeling."

In a word, sentient creatures are mere animals, who share the powers of sensation. They have sense experience. But, that does not entail that they possess any intellectual powers. What is happening here is that these commentators are failing to distinguish sensation from true intellection. Man alone on this planet possesses true intellect, because man alone has the power to understand concepts, form judgments, and reason to conclusions. That is why traditional philosophers define man as a "rational animal," meaning an animal with intellectual powers enabling him to engage in true reasoning whose content he understands—not the mere sense experience and association of images found in brute animals.

Computers—no matter how sophisticated—fail to fulfill the meaning of any form of intelligent beings on two counts: (1) they are not even things whose substantial unity is constituted by a single substantial form making all its parts to share the same nature, and (2) they have no intelligence at all, since to have intelligence is to understand the natures of the things symbolically represented by computer language. Not only do they understand nothing, but, unlike even a dumb bunny, they do not have sensation of anything at all—since they lack the substantial unity needed to be a living animal that is able sense

physical objects as a whole.

*Artificial intelligence is an oxymoron because it is a simple contradiction in terms. If something is artificial, it lacks genuine intelligence—no matter how complex and impressive its external behavior may be programmed or even self-programmed to appear. If something has true intellectual experience, it cannot be a mere artificial object. Rather, it is a natural creature with an intellectual, spiritual soul directly created by God.*

## **Bad News for Captain Kirk**

As an addendum consistent with the philosophical principles explained in the analysis given above, I cannot but think of the thousands of times Captain Kirk and his crew on *Star Trek* employed transporters in order to journey to distant stars or planets or even just to the surface of a planet or back up to the mother ship.

The basic concept of a transporter is that it disassembles the molecular structure of the person and uses the format of that molecular structure to assemble the same person at some distant point. This theoretical device is based on the assumption that an object or person is simply a properly-configured collection of atoms—in accordance with the false philosophical claims of atomism.

The only problem with this process is that disassembling the atomic structure of the person also destroys his really existing substantial unity, which means—*simply put*—*you just killed him!*

Whatever structure is attempted to be reassembled from molecules at the end point of the “transfer” lacks any substantial form to unify it. Since that substantial form happens also to be a spiritual soul, unless the God of all creation deigns to give ultimate proper organization to those molecules by creating and infusing a human spiritual soul into that matter, nothing genuinely alive and human can appear at the other end of the transmission!

More importantly, if you are Captain Kirk, what was your body remains totally disassembled back at the starting point and *you are dead*. It makes me wonder how many times a “Captain Kirk” died in the years *Star Trek* was on television.

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**Featured:** [Creación de las aves](#) , by Remedios Varo; painted in 1957.

