

Pie

The question of what exactly constitutes consciousness is deceptively difficult to answer. Any attempt to do so must take into account a number¹ of similarly complex and difficult sub-questions. Through extensive use of the metaphoric image of a large cherry pie, one may find it easier to understand these various and wholly necessary queries into the deeper nature of the subject.

First, the basic essence of the pie must be understood. It appears to be made of two distinct components: a filling of cherries, and an outer crust that contains the filling. Are these two components ultimately made of the same basic stuff? Are they reducible to one another? Or is the cherry filling intrinsically different from the crust; can the cherry filling never be wholly explained by the rules governing the outer crust? Just so we have human beings and animals who appear to be made of two distinct components: a filling of consciousness (mind, soul, spirit, *élan vital*, what have you), and an outer crust of biological matter that contains the filling. Can the soul be reduced to and explained in the terms of the atoms and subatomic particles that comprise the biological meat? This is the question of whether the world we live in is dualistic in nature, or monistic.

Second, we must understand what the cherry filling is doing in the pie. It is assuredly making the pie more delicious and enjoyable to partake of, and for the purposes of this metaphor it shall be assumed that almost no one dislikes cherry pie filling. The cherry filling is clearly *present*, and it *feels good*, but is it actually *doing* anything? If the cherry filling were removed, would we still have a cherry pie? And it is in just such a matter that we shall consider human consciousness. It clearly appears to be present. I seem to be “conscious” and to have a “mind”

¹ Four, to be precise

and a sense of continuity of self, and this consciousness tends to make me feel good. It is the fact that I am conscious of my pleasures that allows me to experience them in the first place. But is this all that consciousness does? Allows one to feel experience? Could it be removed without noticeably affecting the fleshy container? This is essentially two questions, one seeded within another. Firstly it must be the question of whether or not the cherry filling even exists, or if it is a mere illusion. Once it is granted that the filling does indeed exist, it can be asked what that filling can actually accomplish in the world. This is the question of what consciousness does.

Conscious inessentialism is a curious idea put forth by philosophers which states that a being could conceivably exist that is “physically identical to me, but which has no conscious experience—all is dark inside” (Blackmore 29). The idea is that perhaps consciousness is wholly unnecessary to our being and ultimately does nothing at all. This is a fallacy, however, as can be clearly seen by imagining a cherry pie that is “physically identical” to another pie, but “which has no cherry filling—all is empty inside.” Such an object cannot exist. If something is indistinguishable from myself, then it necessarily must be conscious, for **I** am conscious.

Thirdly, we must consider what the purpose of the cherry filling is. This question is closely linked to the second question. Once we know what it is the cherry filling *does*, we can begin to determine what its purpose is. The cherry filling is making the cherry pie more delicious. The purpose of this can be seen as simple survival through ensured propagation. If the pie is delicious and brings pleasure, then more will be generated that the feelings of joy might be repeated. Thus we see that what the cherry filling *does* is taste delicious, and the *purpose* of this is continued survival of the cherry pie. If no one enjoyed a cherry pie every now and then, they would never be made. Such may be the case for consciousness, not in that it makes us more desirable to eat, but in that it makes us more likely to survive long enough to procreate. Being

conscious, having experiences, and feeling as if there is a continuous self that is linked to all past experiences and able to project and predict future experiences can be a valuable survival-enhancement tool. This is the question of whether consciousness has a specific purpose for existing, or if it is something that came into being and can be used for this or that, but has no intended purpose.

If consciousness held no specific purpose, it would be less aptly compared to the cherry filling and more justly held in juxtaposition to the parts of a baked pie's crust that brown a deeper color than elsewhere. Those brown spots can be thought of as spandrels, parts of a whole that necessarily arose from other parts performing their function. There is no point or use for the darker spots of crust, but one *can* strategically place decorations around them in order to increase aesthetic beauty, but they are clearly not made specifically for that purpose, or for any purpose at all.

And finally, the fourth element requires that we look at the pie and ask ourselves a very simple question. Does the outer crust give shape to the cherry filling, or does the filling give shape to the outer crust? If it is the outer crust that gives shape to the filling, it would stand to reason that if we were to fashion the crust from any material, so long as it was still definable as crust, then once it was graced with cherry filling, we would have a cherry pie. But if it is the cherry filling that gives shape to the crust, then the filling would need to exist prior to the crust, and the crust would be formed around it. This is the question of whether our consciousness is generated by our physical shape (specifically our neural architecture), or if consciousness exists unbound and spontaneously generates a shape that can adequately hold it.

Now that we understand the basic questions that go into any solid understanding of consciousness we can consider what the correct answers may be, aided once again by the conceit

of this paper. The cherry filling is clearly made from the same basic material as the outer crust. The container and the thing contained must share a common link in their basic composition. If we do not yet understand the material essence of the mind, soul, consciousness, or spirit, that does not imply that we will never understand. With the proper tools and methods, we will come to see that the filling is reducible to the terms of the crust, and that they are bound by the same laws. A dualistic view of the world generates far more problems than it solves, as it then becomes necessary to explain how, why, and where the second essence of the universe comes to interact with the material universe and thus produce conscious experience. It is more likely that the world is composed of one essential type of stuff, and the limits of that stuff has not yet been fully understood or explored.

The question of what consciousness does is so easily answered I'm afraid I already did so in the third paragraph. Consciousness, or whatever one may call it, provides us with a subjective experience; it allows us to *have* experiences. Objections may be raised to the effect that the apparent experience of consciousness is an illusion of some sort, but even then, the effect of consciousness merely becomes the generation of this illusion, and so the point is rendered moot and academic at best.

The purpose of consciousness is similarly easy to answer. Consciousness provides such powerful and measurable benefits in our world that the notion of it being a spandrel is highly unlikely. The benefit to being able to construct an inner narrative is powerfully conducive to survival and continued living. It allows for the complex relation of various past experiences with current dangerous situations, such as liars, cheats, and potentially lethal natural environments. As conscious entities, we are able to look back upon these experiences in narrative form, gaining the immediate benefit of a greatly generalized vicarious reliving of that past experience to aid us

in deciding how to deal with present situations that are not quite the same but recognizably similar. Consciousness is the tool that allows us to reflect upon our lives, past, present, and future, and then to make judgments upon what we see in our mind's eye, and finally decide to act. The cherry filling is clearly present in the pie for a specific purpose: that of enhancing the pie.

The sensible order of operations for the creation of both pie and consciousness is container first, then the thing that is contained (Epicurious). With both the birth rates of conscious creatures, and their total extant numbers at any given time, varying so wildly from millennia to millennia, it doesn't seem likely that consciousness is a pre-existing substance that either wills a vessel into being, or has a vessel willed into being for it by a higher power. This is a confusion of cause and effect. First a vessel capable of being filled with (or channeling, etc.) consciousness is generated, and then by virtue of its specific existence consciousness arises from the very structure of the vessel, presumably from the neural architecture of the brain. Nature abhors a vacuum, and if a vessel is generated that is capable of supporting consciousness, it will. We can see this in how if one makes a complete pie crust it is perceived to be lacking (and is so by definition) until it is filled with something, and as soon as it is filled with something it is rendered whole: a pie.

Thus it is that if we were to clone a human being, it would be just as conscious as you or I. Likewise, if we were to manufacture a perfect replica of a human being using silicon and metal, that too would become as conscious as you or I. Believing otherwise is similar to believing the fallacy of conscious inessentialism. If the mechanical creature is functionally identical to me, then it must, by definition, be conscious. All of this does not preclude a higher power or deity of some sort; it is entirely possible such a being exists, and if it does it has baked

a truly marvelous and complex pie that functions with a remarkably reliable precision such that we may be contemplating its intricacies, and savoring the flavor, for ages to come.

Ingredients:

Anonymous. Cherry Crumble Pie. *Epicurious.com* 17 May 2004

<http://www.epicurious.com/run/recipe/view?id=103537&kw=cherry+pie&action=filtersearch&filter=recipe-filter.hts&collection=Recipes&ResultTemplate=recipe-results.hts&queryType=and&keyword=cherry+pie&x=0&y=0>

Blackmore, Susan. *Consciousness: An Introduction*. Oxford University Press, Inc.. New York, NY, 2004.