

On Rachel Jones' article, "*On the Value of Not Knowing: Wonder, Beginning Again and Letting Be*"

by Jess H. Brewer

Well, she certainly seems to *know* what she's talking about. ;-) Sorry, it was irresistible. Philosophical treatises, in their seriousness, always invite compensatory levity.

One of my problems with great thinkers like Descartes and Kant is their insistence on explicitly defining Mind as a sort of supernatural (or at least super**physical**) essence strictly separate from Body. Kant even goes so far as to declare, '[N]othing that can be an object of the senses is to be called sublime,' effectively denying the existence of Emergence. This is a very popular position, especially when it comes to Artificial Intelligence, which the majority of people believe could never achieve actual consciousness, because... well, because they are *just machines*, and have no souls.

Suppose it comes to pass that an AI studies all the great art of history and today, reads and digests all the literature on the subject, and comes up with an algorithm that produces art which arouses in many that sense of wonder that Rachel describes. Shall we declare everyone who feels wonder at the AI's art a fool, tricked by an evil machine? This might put us in a vulnerable position, as (I think) everyone would eventually be "fooled". It is safer to relinquish our anthropic privilege and declare, "If it *works*, it's *real*."

Of course, that creates another vulnerability: if a robot passes the ultimate Turing test and passes successfully for a human being, are we not obliged to *treat* it like a human being, complete with consciousness and "rights"? Most people are adamant that this is crazy talk, if not blasphemous.

My point is that Emergence is a dangerous concept. If we accept the fractional quantum Hall effect as true Emergence, then so is a murmuration of starlings, and so is cybernetic art and Machine Awareness. We can't choose where to slam the door on Emergence, but the alternative is Reductionism unleashed.

I'd also like to mention the irony of Rationalists rejecting Emergence (a.k.a. "magic") when their own ability to "think rationally" is *itself* so obviously an *emergent* property of large networks of interconnected neurons.