



McGill
University

Foundations & Philosophy of Science Unit

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Prof. Peter Milner,
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Dear Peter,

Thank you for yours of the 1st. Allow me to insist. My main objections to the animal-machine analogy are these:

1. While all machines have been designed by men, no man has been designed by anything--unless of course you rope in the Great Designer.
2. While some human actions are purposeful, goal-seeking machines act by proxy, i.e. they have been designed and built to function on our behalf.
3. No machine is alive, hence none has biological properties (properties peculiar to biosystems). In particular, no machine can have psychological properties or abilities if one postulates that all such properties and abilities are special cases of biological properties and functions.
4. For the above reasons (a) if we want to understand people we must study people not machines; i.e. psychology is based on biology not on engineering.
5. If one wishes to synthesize (manufacture) a being endowed with an ego, he will attempt to assemble a complex animal, not a complex machine. (But of course it is easier and cheaper to beget thinking and willing beings than to assemble them from scratch.) While all machines are artifacts, not all artifacts are machines. For example, a milk cow and a book are artifacts but not machines. A chimp trained to read and write with the help of chips is an artifact but not a machine.

As I said in my previous note, I am afraid that, if one insists on skipping the biochemical and biological levels, one is bound to end up in psychophysical dualism and even mysticism. Remember that the favorite argument of present-day vitalists is precisely the (mistaken) analogy between organisms and machines. Cf. Polanyi.

Sorry to take so much of your time in trying to save your soul.

Cordially,

Mario Bunge
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