

The theoretical theory of theory as a theory.

By: Kosta Grammatis

There is a cat, his name is Schrödinger. He lives in a box and he was put there by a group of scientists conducting an experiment. From within his box he can see four square walls around him. He can also see a strange machine, a can of poison linked to a radiation detector perched precariously above a single atomic nucleus. The scientists can't see inside of Schrödinger's box, they can't see if he is alive or dead, breathing or not, sleeping or pacing. We can assume that he is in the box however, because we put him there.

We know that the atomic nucleus inside the box has some very distinct properties. For example, within one single hour the atom inside the box will either decay or not, there is a fifty percent chance that it will, a fifty percent chance that it will not. If it decays, the detector will take notice and promptly release a noxious poison which will kill our poor cat Schrödinger. If it doesn't, Schrödinger will live.

Here lies the problem: When one hour is up and the experiment is over, is Schrödinger dead or alive? Has the random decay of an atom ended his life or has that atom decided to remain whole sparing Schrödinger's life? To assume anything would be catastrophic, to make wagers would be appropriate, and to leave it up to God has its own ramifications.

When the experiment has ended, after one whole hour has lapsed, we haven't a clue as to what state of life Schrödinger may be in. Because we have not observed the death of Schrödinger there is no evidence to support that he is dead. Because we have not seen Schrödinger alive, there is no evidence to support that either. The unobserved state is something that one cannot, with dignity at least, make any assumptions about.

Due to the precarious spot that science has left our cat there is no definitive way to speculate, guess, or assume whether Schrodinger is dead or alive. The only thing that you can say about Schrödinger, while he is in his state of being unobserved, is that he is both dead and alive. Only when we open the box and partake in a grand observation of Schrödinger's fortune, only then can Schrodinger move from a state of in between to a quantifiable dead or alive.

This paradox is the basis for Quantum theory, the theory of the very small and finite world of atoms, particles, light and how they behave. The paradox of Schrodinger also nullifies any notions of something I call: the reasonable conclusion.

A blind man named Ishmel walks in from the cold and wet and sits down. His arse finds itself upon something firm, and to him it seems comfortable. He passes his hand across a smooth surface looking for the sharp edges of a utensil. A breeze blows past him as the sounds of rubber squeak against a hard floor. He asks the breeze how her day has been; he knows it's her because he can smell her distinctly feminine scent, lilacs.

She responds, “Dreary.” After a short reflectory pause an interjection, “Would you like a menu?” As she taps her pencil against her waiters wallet she gestures towards the cook to bring the man a menu.

What is a menu to a blind man? What is a sunset to a blind man? What is the color blue to a blind man? By definition of the sighted a menu is a list of the dishes served at a meal or a bill of fare. But to a blind man what good is a list of dishes if he cannot read it? To him a menu is something that must be felt or heard in order to be understood. To a dog what is a menu, it is a piece of paper to chew on.

The cook, reeking of grease, places a slightly soiled menu in front of Ishmel. The waitress exits and Ishmel stares blankly at the parchment placed before him: An infinite selection, an infinity of compromise.

To the blind man what is a menu he can’t read? Perhaps it is a buffet of possibility, perhaps the menu will be the only thing served to him that evening. To the scientist what is a reasonable conclusion to draw about the state of his cat?

Perhaps the scientific homage, the great Theory, will shed some light on all of this ambiguity. After all, it is the theories that help make some sense of this existence in which we live; Right? Let’s review: Gravitational theory keeps us, well, grounded. The theory of evolution does a good job of explaining our heritage, and the big bang theory takes a stab at how it all started. The Heisenberg principle of uncertainty throws a wrench into the idea of the absolute stating that the interactions of matter at the atomic level cannot—*will not* be predictable, no matter how fancy a microscope you buy. Matter enjoys living in its probabilistic soup, unwilling to share what it plans on doing next. These theories are some of the roots, the pillars, of understanding that make up what we as humanity think we know as a whole, but what is a *theory*? Webster, enlighten us:

the-o-ry [**thee-uh-ree**, **theer-ee**], *plural* -ries.

- A set of statements or principles devised to explain a group of facts or phenomena, especially one that has been repeatedly tested or is widely accepted and can be used to make predictions about natural phenomena.
- An assumption based on limited information or knowledge; a conjecture.

“An assumption based on limited information or knowledge.” Newton must be turning in his grave!

How can this be?!

I have a theory as to why. My theory is that there is nothing factual, definitive, truthful, and that the ever so thoughtfully perceived understanding is in fact, a misunderstanding. I theorize that to classify anything as fact is to in fact make an assumption about the fact in question, thus nullifying said fact. A theory is merely an idea waiting to be told that it’s wrong.

The crunch crunch crunch of gears, the hum of motors, and the squeal of tight belts: They scurry, they rush. A gentleman, clad in a blue apron frantically rushes from machine to machine—wrench in hand he weaves between fast moving belts, ducks between dipping and diving armatures and slips into the guts of a beast.

Inside he searches for the soul of the machine, a single bolt that needs constant attention. Without it the whole contraption comes to a screeching halt, but tighten it too much and the gears will choke and the motors will sputter. Forever it has needed tightening at consistent intervals. He knows it is time to tighten by the sounds the enormous machine is making. Its whine has gotten louder, it is whining for attention.

As he frantically passes under pipes carrying molten grease, over thick wires that monitor and control the beat of the machine, through humid air that carries with it the acrid smell of progress, he winds around a corner and stops to catch his breath.

Deep within the bowels of mechanized endurance a moment of human silence is observed while the machine rumbles on all around him. A single moment where the man stops and reflects upon the task at hand: I created this machine, yet I am slave to it. Onward he rushes, progress is now.

The final stretch is upon him and he dashes to meet his mark. Crankshafts spin as pistons brace themselves for explosions. Gasoline drains into gaping valves and is immediately consumed, then belched out in an entirely different form. He spies his bolt thirty feet ahead of him and he quickens his pace, it is dancing in its socket, seconds away from unseating itself and bringing the whole operation to a halt.

As his legs lengthen in long strides, as he chokes down air, a spray of scorching liquid finds itself upon his face and before he can scream he is flying.

Through the air and over the grease spill he travels upwards and forwards. His arms helplessly reach out for something to grab onto. Deep within fast moving belts they find themselves. Immediately he is caught and upward further he is jerked. He soars 20, 30, 40, 50 feet. He pleads and curses the machine but it's not listening.

The cogs are ahead. 64 feet is the altitude of the first set of pulleys. The machine was specifically designed to have pulleys at 64 feet. All machines are specifically designed. Not an inch before 64 feet did the gentlemen in the blue apron find his hands, which were specifically designed also, between the tight space between a thick rubber belt and sharp pulley. This situation is off nominal.

In one instant the skin and ligaments of his wrists were being torn into. In the next instant the bones of his wrist crackled then snapped. Shortly after, the belt met the apex of the pulley, complete separation. Without the slightest interest in self preservation the machine and its belts and pulleys screamed on as the machinist screamed in chorus.

And then he tumbled back down. His hands continued on their journey through the machine but the gentlemen pummeled down 64 feet towards the ground, a warm mist of blood filling the air. Meat slaps concrete, scalding hot oil sears skin, blood—thinner than oil sinks and oil languishes in its victory. The bolt, with the most ironic of timing, unseats itself and the machine comes grinding to a complete and total stop. Crimson silence—an awkward reality for the living, daily life for the dead.

The ramifications of rounding a bend to do ones job can be disastrous.

The uncertainty of a man's life, dashed to bits by the certainty that is machine. The notion of control exercised by the act of human creation—I will make this machine to do specifically this, I will design this experiment to show me exactly this. I have written this theory that proves that there is no such thing as proof. I am a menu and have been designed to tell some people exactly nothing. I am human, I am in control. I am human I create. I am human I exist. I think, therefore I thought. I thought and now what? I assumed and I was wrong. I lived therefore I died.

A blind man couldn't tell you if Schrodinger was dead or alive. A dead man couldn't tell you if Schrodinger was breathing or aspiring to meow. A machine—man made indifference—could care less.

Certainty is nothing more than the assurance of uncertainty; uncertainty is nothing more than life itself. And I can prove this by the simple fact that I can prove nothing at all.