

Members Weekend, August 2018

Background notes to the paper given by Ann Long

In my paper I will be making three points. The second two will reference philosophical material which will be *either* already familiar to you *or* readily accessible in the public domain. The first point, however, will be neither. In it I'll be referencing the ontological model I'm using to situate my understanding of causation. And it's a model which, anyway to my knowledge, is neither so familiar nor so accessible. In the book I'm writing I'm trying to remedy that: its first four chapters consist in a detailed explication of the model. But as you'll appreciate, getting four chapters worth of material into one ten-minute point is not easy! So I've added this handout as a no doubt still pretty inadequate way of presenting it to you.

As not much more than 'stated' in the paper, the model I'm thinking with envisages **one** reality, existing in **two** modes, at **three** levels, with causation operative throughout. The three levels are that of the **universe**, that of the **biosphere** and that of the **world**. They come into existence sequentially. But succeeding existences do not *replace* previous ones. Instead they emerge *from* previous ones: the biosphere as a *transformation* of a *part* of the universe; the world as a *transformation* of a *part* of the biosphere.

Change, both caused and causing, exists at all three levels. But change itself changes. Its characteristic form at the level of the inorganic universe is **expansion**. Its characteristic form at the level of the organic biosphere is **evolution**. And its characteristic form at the level of the personic world is **development**. Humans exist as both 'organic' entities making up *a part* of the biosphere (the 'human-animals' part) *and* 'personic' entities making up *all* of the world (the 'human persons' all). As the first, they are subject to change by **evolution**: as the second, to change by **development**. And it's vital both to distinguish the two 'changes' as existing each in its own right, and to permit no reductionism from the one, the 'development' of the world, to the other, the 'evolution' of biosphere. Why? Well 'evolution by natural selection' favours, in the long run, those organic entities which, in *competition* with others seeking to occupy the same niche, struggle the most successfully to defy entropy: to live. It's a struggle which is both caused and causing. By complete contrast, 'development by cultural election' favours, in the long run, those personic entities which, in *cooperation* with all their kind, struggle the most successfully to defy competition: to love. And that too is a struggle both caused and causing.

The error in the standard models which this model tries to correct is what is sometimes called 'nothing buttery': the idea informing such oxymoronic concepts as 'evolutionary psychology' and 'sociobiology'. Failing to distinguish between the biosphere and the world, the organic and the personic, members of the species *Homo sapiens* and persons, such approaches treat humans as 'nothing but' rather clever animals, or – philosophy's favourite – as 'the rational animal'. In fundamental contrast to such models, this one posits persons as entities totally other than animals - - - clever, rational or otherwise.

But it does so scientifically - - - which involves identifying causes. It's important to stress this because, hitherto, the only way in which anything like such a 'specialness' of persons has been defended has been religiously, via the concept of something supernatural. And that's a way which, totally appropriately I think, satisfies fewer and fewer of us as scientific literacy

grows. But with the arrival of the (misnamed) ‘social’ sciences in the mid-nineteenth century, another way has been steadily developing. And in my ontological model, I’m suggesting that that ‘other way’ can now come to full fruition. Like this.

When Wundt opened the first psychological laboratory, in Leipzig, in 1879, he was asked what was to be the subject matter of his new science. He answered: ‘experience’. Now a common enough understanding as to the meaning of the word ‘experience’ is that it’s an event or occurrence which leaves an ‘impression’ on someone: that it ‘impresses’ in some way. And this model suggests that such an understanding is rather more accurate than its users probably register: that is, that the ‘experiencer’ is not a someone but a something; that the something is a nervous system; and that the ‘impression’ involved is very literally a Salmon-style *mark* ‘pressed into’ that system at the smoothing of its synapses, which *causes* the resulting behaviour. Pressed only *directly* into the nervous systems of entities without language (via sight, sound, touch, taste or smell) it results in *caused* biological **sentience**. But pressed also *indirectly* into the nervous systems of entities transformed by the acquisition of language (primarily via sound, secondarily via sight, occasionally by touch) it results in *caused* psychological **consciousness**. And via that, a caused world.

Models in science are habitually transformed, often from being hypotheses into being theories, by the identification of a *mechanism*: an answer to a ‘how’ question. Thus in biology, it’s the gene which is the *mechanism* by which the information as to ‘how’ to make a human animal is carried. So by which *mechanism* is the information as to ‘how’ to make a human person carried? This model suggests that that mechanism is the morpheme: that is, the smallest unit of language which carries meaning. Both mechanisms are causative: determinately causative. But just as when we came to understand the role of genes in the one case, we came to be able directly to influence the causation they carry (think CRISPR), so when we come to understand the role of morphemes in the other, we will be able directly to influence the causation they carry too. The end of free will becomes the beginning of freedom: freedom, that is, as Hegel’s ‘recognition of necessity’.

Perhaps the key idea to get hold of here is that we persons are not **in** the world: we are **of** the world. Think of a bowl of water. Contained in it are nine billion molecules of the stuff, together with a fly - - - which has fallen in, and drowned. The fly is **in** the water: each of the molecules is **of** the water. We persons are not **in** the world, as the fly is **in** the water: we are each **of** the world, as each of the molecules is **of** the water. This is the reality which I think makes all that ‘anthropic principle’ stuff; that ‘physical constants’ stuff; that ‘possible worlds’ stuff; that ‘many worlds’ stuff - - - just daft. There are as of now about nine billion of us on the planet. Progressing our way up (or is it down?) a Pascal’s triangle structure, one person is inconceivable (literally!); two persons gives us one relationship; three persons gives us three relationships; four persons gives us six relationships; five persons gives us ten relationships. And so on. Somebody might like to amuse themselves in an odd moment over the weekend working out how many relationships nine billion of us produce. But whatever the answer is, it’s that interconnected and *mutually causative* mesh which is the world. As ‘per-sons’ – ‘through-sounds’ – we *in mutuality* make each other via our words. Maggie Thatcher got confused because she thought of ‘society’ as just ‘individual’ plus ‘individual’ plus ‘individual’. But the whole which is the world is actually *monumentally* bigger than the total of its parts. And that’s because it’s the total of the ‘relationships-between-its-parts’, not of the ‘parts’ themselves. And there just *are* many more of them.