

A Scientist and a dead bird

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Bending low over a dead blue macaw, the scientist said “are you still in there.” Probes and wires sprouted from between blue feathers and from small holes drilled to access the dead creature’s peanut sized brain. “Why are you doing this?” The scientist jumped, not expecting to be interrupted in his basement laboratory, by his wife. Her face was crinkled with disapproval and disgust. The dead parrot’s mate, Minnie, trumpeted another long contact call. The meters twitched. “Mickey was part of the family” said his wife. “I just want to know...it’s hard to explain exactly what I’m looking for” said the scientist. “I have an uneasiness about the nature of life that’s hard to wrap words around.” “Explain why you would do experiments on a creature who played peek-a-boo with our son. Help me understand this” said his wife. Her eyes raked over the laboratory and the dead bird and her husband. “It’s exactly that, playing peek-a-boo, that doesn’t feel right. Socrates thought that men were smarter than women because their brains were larger, and we make the same assumptions about birds and fish and many other small creatures, yet our son’s grapefruit sized brain and Mickey’s seem to be about equal. They do a lot of the same things, screaming for attention, or food, saying approximately the same number of words. The parrot seems to have a stronger personality. He also processes sounds much faster than a human can. If the brain were simply an electrical organ, than how can a peanut sized brain function as well as a grapefruit sized one? ...unless it doesn’t work quite like we think it does...and why do we die all at once...and why is every cell of us so complicated if it wasn’t designed...and who... how... but never mind.” She stroked one of the long tail feathers of the blue and gold bird. Her face was furrowed in sadness. “Mickey” said Minnie. The meters twitched. “You said ‘are you in there’ when I walked in. So you want to know if Mickey has left the building? He’s dead, I think he has” she said. “I know Mickey is dead. I have a suspicion that... that...” “Good bye. Good bye. Good bye. Be good” said Minnie, in a mournful way. “I think I saw your gauges move” said the scientist’s wife. “Is this some after death twitching or something?” “I don’t know” said the scientist. “When I was a boy, I believed in God. I believed that God made the heavens and the earth, and all creatures great and small. Now, I’m a scientist. I don’t believe in creation myths, or heaven, and I don’t have a great deity to ask questions of, so I’m asking a dead bird.” The scientist leaned over Mickey’s body and asked “What happens when we die? How do we work? Are you there, at all?” The gauges didn’t move.