
The Death of a Mouse

Can cats eat grass? The answer is, "Yes, they can." And they do, from time to time. However, a cat cannot survive on grass. They are carnivores, and they need to eat meat in order to survive. Cats do eat grass, but it is not likely that they derive much nutrition from it. While a little grass does provide some vitamins that may be scarce in meat, it is likely that cats eat grass because grass helps them throw up hairballs and the indigestible parts of prey. An old farmer's proverb says that cats also can be seen eating grass a day or so before it rains, but that is anecdotal, and if it is true, no one really knows why they would do that.

I raise this question because I have heard, several times in the last few months, that before the world fell into sin, cats (lions, in particular) ate only grass or other kinds of vegetation. The idea is that cats had to be entirely vegetarian because there was no death before the fall, and the only way for a cat to eat a mouse was to kill it. Cats were changed physiologically in the fall as were all other carnivores, or so the claim is made. This claim is quite significant, for if it is true that the world's fall into sin changed a cat from being a herbivore into a carnivore, that is a huge change. It's almost as if cats became entirely different animals because of the entry of sin into the world.

This question brought me to another question: what is death? Death, as we normally define it, occurs when a living organism stops living. A tree dies when its cells stop reproducing. A cat dies when it stops breathing and its heart stops beating. That is one way to explain the phenomenon of death. Another way is to say that death is an unnatural separation. Spiritual death, for example, is the unnatural separation between God and a person. God created us to be in fellowship with him, and our sin causes that fellowship to cease. We become spiritually dead, the Bible says, because we are separated from the source of our spiritual life. The physical death of a human being is the unnatural separation of a body from its spirit/soul. Our souls leave our body at physical death, and while our bodies remain on this earth, our souls go to their post-life destination which, for Christians, is into the presence of God.

With that in mind, we have to ask ourselves, "What happens when an animal dies?" Animals do not have souls, and as much as we might try to comfort a child whose hamster has died saying that the hamster is in hamster heaven, it is unlikely that there is such a place. A dead hamster is simply a hamster whose body has ceased to function. Further, hamsters do not die spiritually for, unlike humans, they have no soul, and thus they were never connected to God as humans are, so they cannot be separated from God. So, the big question is this: if a cat kills a mouse, while the mouse ceases to exist as a living creature, does it die in the sense that there is an unnatural separation?

I won't answer that question, but it should give us pause and ask the question: did God originally create cats to be carnivores? If there is no unnatural separation when a mouse dies, is that truly death or does the mouse simply cease to exist?

This whole discussion reveals a significant difference between the viewpoints of atheistic evolutionists and those who believe that God created the world. An atheistic evolutionist will say that all living creatures are of the same kind, for we all have the same source of life. Thus, for such a person, the death of a cat

or a mouse or a human is nearly the same thing. Death is merely the cessation of life. Humans feel it more when a fellow human dies compared to a pig losing one of its siblings, so that makes death more noticeable. But for an atheistic evolutionist, death is a natural process which happens to every living creature and that is the way it is. There is no unnatural separation, according to an atheistic evolutionist. For them, death is the cessation of existence.

Christians (and Jews, of course) see things differently. While we were created on the same day as animals, we are very different from them. While God spoke, and animals came into existence, the creation of humanity is very different. Genesis 2 tells us that story, and we learn that after God had carefully shaped us out of the dust (let us never forget where we came from), he breathed into us life, setting us apart from every other living creature. The intimate act of God bending low to breathe into the nostrils of Adam shows us a closeness between God and humanity that is never shown to be true of animals. Genesis 2:7 says that God breathed into his (Adam's) nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. It was the breath of God that gave us life, not just a spoken word. We could say that it was in that act, human beings were granted souls, something that animals do not have.

Sin brought death into the world, causing unnatural separation. The two kinds of death that humans experience (spiritual death and physical death) are real and powerful and, for us, irreversible. But death is not irreversible for God, for in Jesus Christ, we are made spiritually alive through the working of the Holy Spirit. The first unnatural separation is reversed as we are reconnected to God. And our physical deaths will also be reversed when Jesus returns and we experience the resurrection. The death of humanity is reversible through Jesus Christ.

It should be noted that the same is never said of animals. There is never an inclination or desire to see animals restored to life. While there may be animals in the new creation, it doesn't seem as if the pet hamster will be the same one as the one who we assured our children is in hamster heaven. A dead hamster on this earth is a dead hamster, and it is no more. So, we must wonder, using the definition of death being an unnatural separation, if the hamster really died. Or did it just cease to exist? And would it matter if, in a perfect world, the cat ate the hamster? Maybe the cat was a carnivore before the fall and even though it ate a mouse, there was no death, if we define death as an unnatural separation of two things that are designed to be united. I don't know the answer, but the question did make me contemplate the reality of what death is and how in Christ, death is reversible and reversed for all who believe in him. This is what sets us apart from the animals as well.

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