

Talking Philosophy With Igor
A day with Igor
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Igor is my cat. He is also known by other names: Igor-the-cat, Iggy, kitty cat, cat, and CAT! – depending on the circumstances, my mood, and whatever he is doing. I have been living alone with Igor in my two-bedroom condo since last January after I moved my wife into memory care – it’s now June. Igor is my housemate. Since our governor’s COVID-19 pandemic “stay at home” order in mid-March, I have been even more lonely, going out only for daily two-mile walks and not much more. Without Igor I don’t think I could survive – we talk a lot, there’s nobody else to talk to.



In the morning, after I get up, shower, and dress, I open my bedroom door and there is Igor, patiently lying on the other side. I greet him, “Good morning, how are you?” with a lot of petting. Then I say, “Time to get up,” and he anxiously leads me to his food dish, which is his main concern at that time. It’s nice waking up with another living creature in my condo. After we both eat breakfast, he wants to play and I want to check my email and read the NY Times online. That creates some conflict – more talking, often ending with closing my door on him. I tell him that he should be patient – not much response – and he then starts scratching the furniture, “CAT! STOP!” That’s how our day begins.

As I go about my daily chores and other activity – not much to do today – I often start talking to him to keep my sanity. Not conversing with other people makes me a little weird. That’s where philosophy enters into our one-sided conversation.

“Igor, what’s it like being a cat? Are you aware of time? What is time? Time does not exist in the basic laws of physics. We all live in the present instant. We cannot go back in time – rewind the movie of our life. And we cannot predict the future – we live in a probabilistic world where everything happens by chance. You tell me to feed you when I already fed you twenty minutes ago! It’s always time to be fed in you in your concept of time.” (*The Order of Time*, Carlo Rovelli; *Chance & Necessity*, Jacques Monod)

“Igor, what makes you and me different? We both have the same physiology, our biochemistry is the same, we both came off the same evolutionary tree. Yes, my brain is bigger than yours, and I can talk, but you can’t. Do you have a soul? I don’t know what a soul is, so that’s hard to answer. All life is sacred, both yours and mine. Are we that different?”

“Igor, are you an existentialistic cat? Do you have free will, or are you controlled by some outside force? You certainly seem to have a mind of your own. Most of the time you don’t listen to me, but do what you want to do – do you ever listen to me? Are you a creature of God? Who is God, you say? Does God exist? I don’t know. Do you control your own life? It certainly seems like you do.” (Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus)

As I get ready for my walk and put my shoes on, Igor is sacked out on my bed asleep, snuggled with my PJs by my pillow. I tell him "I'm going for my walk now, I'll be back (no use telling him when, he has no concept of time). Do you want to come along (no response)? Be a good cat. Goodbye." He opens his eyes, looks at me and falls asleep again. When I return he's often still asleep, or else he comes trotting to the door as I enter, wanting another round of play, or to be fed. I don't have to worry about Igor escaping when I open the outside door – he doesn't know how to use the elevator yet, so he can't go anywhere.

The other day I was starting to fix my dinner while Igor thought it was time for his dinner – his wasn't due for another half hour, and he was being quite annoying. As I got started, he was running around the kitchen in front of me and I was likely to step on him or stumble over him. To keep him occupied I started to tell him what I was doing. "Okay cat, let's get some pasta out of the cupboard. Oh, there's half an onion in the fridge, zucchini, and some cherry tomatoes. Oh yes, some snap peas, garlic – you can't have too much garlic! – and mushrooms, of course. Now, what spices shall we use? Let's get a pan, and a pot for the pasta..." Then I look around and Igor is nowhere to be seen! He was tired of listening to me, and I was just talking to myself. I felt a bit foolish, but that's why I like to have a cat around to talk to.

What does a cat do all day other than sleep, eat, and play? He likes to spend time at the windowsill, peering out the window at birds or other activity below. If the weather is nice I leave the balcony sliding-glass door open so he can get some fresh air. The balcony has a two-and-a-half-foot-high solid enclosure with a small railing on top, so I don't worry about him jumping off – it's a third-story fall. But there are little scuppers at the bottom to let water drain, which are just big enough for him to stick his head into and see what's going on outside. It's a cat's world.

Then there's the kitty litter. It's a nightly chore I don't much like to do, but I do it anyway. When I tell him how much I do for him, he just looks at me and walks away. After finishing my necessary chore, he then proceeds to dirty up his fresh kitty litter. Not a bit of thanks from Igor, ungrateful cat!

When I'm ready for bed, Igor is usually lying on my bed expecting to spend the night there. No way, I'm not sleeping with Igor! Then I have to quickly grab him before he jumps into a tunnel between the headboard and the bed frame where I can't reach him. He's quick and determined. I have to entice him out. I say, "Good night kitty cat" and anticipate another day much the same as before.

Despite our differences and his inability to talk, I love him, and could not do without him. I just hope he will pay attention to my philosophic discourses.

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