

Explaining Epiphenomenalism to a Dead Horse

By Kenneth Francis (October 2017)



Landscape With a Dead Horse, Gustave Courbet, mid 1800s

In the blood-soaked jungles and plains of the animal kingdom, in all five continents, every second of every minute of every hour of every day, thousands upon thousands of carnivorous beasts are tearing each other to pieces alive in a world of perpetual screaming. This is how the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer viewed the hellish bloodbath of grotesque survival in the Wild. “The agony of the devoured animal is always far greater than the pleasure of the devourer,” wrote Schopenhauer the pessimist.

Despite being the most depressing figure in the history of Western philosophy, his incredible prose inspired waves of the world's 'greatest' writers and thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries (greatest doesn't necessarily mean morally good or rational). As for his philosophy: it is a strange mixture of pantheism (the universe is 'god' but not personal), panpsychism (everything is conscious) and solipsism (only one's mind exists). There are those who see his philosophy as Buddhism. However, Schopenhauer's driving cosmic force is an aggressive Will, blindly headbutting its way through the universe, devouring everything in its path. Schopenhauer laments this sorry state of affairs, especially the suffering in the animal kingdom.

However, when a hungry lion kills its prey, the king of the jungle *kills* the beast, but doesn't murder it. In Schopenhauer's Godless universe, there are no *objective* moral agents and every scream of agony is nothing more than a brute fact of nature.

Schopenhauer's ideas of morality lie in compassion, not God, who he doesn't believe in. The problem here is compassion can be subjective, a matter of taste. Schopenhauer would disagree, saying: "If an action has as its motive an egoistic aim, it cannot have any moral worth."

But surely egoism and compassion can be linked? One good person's sense of pity for a creature's suffering at the jaws of a lion is another person's feeling of compassion for the lion's daily struggle for survival.

When we leave the hell of Schopenhauer's jungle and head for intellectual survival in the 'civilised' West, there's another Godless, liberal fantasy land where objective morality is borrowed from the residue of biblical ethics. In this la-la-land, every minute

of every hour of every day of every week of every year, the social and secular media/Twitterati is metaphorically red in tooth and claw with righteous indignation.

Spiked editor, atheist Brendan O'Neill, writes: "Ours is a society in which people, especially tweeting people, those people who make up the perma-furious Twitterati that is never happier than when it's demanding someone be silenced, shamed or shunned, are always on the lookout for an opportunity for *moral distinction*. An opportunity to show how good they are by advertising to as wide an audience as possible how bad someone else is."

But without God, have they, including Mr. O'Neill, any justification for their moral righteous indignation? Even if some atheists act far more moral than a sinful Christian, which they often do, where do such things as morals and human rights come from if not from God? Moreover, can atheists do something good? The answer is yes, they can, as most of them, like theists but not all, know right from wrong. The problem is, if there is no God, does good and evil exist and, if it does, what does it mean?

Can such acts be justified? If we are the result of Darwinian evolution and the subsequent spin-off of altruistic herd conformity, then there is nothing to say one can't abandon the herd for his or her own subjective lifestyle. And no matter what they do in life, bad, good or otherwise, death ends at the grave and there is no *ultimate*, cosmic justice.

If you watch any debate between a Christian philosopher versus an atheist, the biggest blind-spot on the part of the latter is the Moral Argument. The atheists' concept of objective morality is either

seriously impoverished or they purposely fudge the issue to win an argument, as well as piggy-back on Christian ethics. This surprises most theists, as the cosmic creation argument would seem more prone to secular disagreement.

But laying out the significance of objective moral values and duties is like explaining epiphenomenalism (mind is brain, physical without a soul) to a dead horse. Besides, what does a horse know about morals, especially a dead one? In the opening scene of Peter Shaffer's play *Equus*, the protagonist psychiatrist, Martin Dysart, reflects: "Is it possible at certain moments we cannot imagine, a horse can add its sufferings together—the non-stop jerks and jabs that are its daily life—and turn them into grief? What use is grief to a horse?" It's no use if it can't convey it to anyone. A horse is not a moral agent and, despite likely to have some level of lower consciousness compared to humans, it lacks a sense of self-awareness: the "*I*"; *intentionality*; *directedness*; *aboutness of mental states*; *language*; *it's mortality*; *morality*; *the cosmos*; and *ultimately, God*.

Here's how the Moral Argument goes for humans, who possess all the above attributes

1. Without God, *objective* moral values and duties do not exist
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist (some things are really evil)
3. Therefore, God exists

The key word in the above syllogism is *objective*. By objective, such morals and duties would still exist in the world even if no one believed in them. The torturers in Soviet prisons didn't believe in such morals when they brutally treated the inmates. In his book,

Tortured For Christ, Richard Wurmbrand wrote: "The cruelty of atheism is hard to believe when man has no faith in the reward of good or the punishment of evil. There is no reason to be human. There is no restraint from the depths of evil which is in man. The Communist torturers often said, 'There is no God, no hereafter, no punishment for evil. We can do what we wish.' I have heard one torturer even say, 'I thank God, in whom I don't believe, that I have lived to this hour when I can express all the evil in my heart.' He expressed it in unbelievable brutality and torture inflicted on prisoners."

But on Naturalism, like the Gulag torturers, we are effectively androids made out of carbon, where mind emerges from the workings of one's brain and nothing else. On theism, this sounds absurd. How can the reliability of any moral statement be true if it's coming from an android made out of carbon? Surely carbon androids are primarily evolved for the survival-of-the-fittest values, with truthful statements being less significant? This certainly is the case with animals.

Furthermore, an android does not have freedom of the will (it has to be programmed), is hard-wired and its behaviour would be determined to come to any given conclusion. But how can the behaviour of nerve cells, glial cells, and the atoms, ions, and molecules that make up and influence them magically belch out the emergence of consciousness? Epiphenomenalism fits in well with non-human creatures in the wild and domesticated pets, but not for homo sapiens.

This is a problem for the atheist, because at what point in evolution did the atoms in brains develop morals? That we can have logic, reason and truth evolving out of a material process that is aimless, purposeless, misguided and unaware seems absurd. Objective morality cannot be justified if all forms of righteous indignation are nothing more than sophisticated monkey screeches emanating from a carbon android with intellectual delusions of grandeur.

So, how do the social justice warriors who don't believe in God get away with moralizing if objective moral values and duties don't exist on Naturalism? They ban free speech for anyone who doesn't share their worldviews or deem anything they dislike or disagree with as 'hate speech'. There is nothing new in this. It started in 1st Century Judea, atop a hill in Jerusalem called Calvary, with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The two thieves on either side of Jesus were aptly symbolic for the Left and Right. "And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left." (Mark 15:27). The thief to the left of Jesus mocked him, thus rejected Logos (Truth), while the Good Thief to the right of Christ (Jesus also sits at the right hand of God the Father), accepted Him as his savior and asked for forgiveness. Jesus said: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." From that day onwards in Western civilization, there has been a clash of worldviews: Logos (Truth) and Moral Relativism. The problem with moral relativism is, in denying Truth it gets caught in its own Godless net by self-refutingly calling *its* worldview: true. This is what happens when God is rejected.

The German atheist Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) spoke of the ramifications of 'murdering' God. In his *Parable of the Madman*, he wrote:

. . . All of us are his [God] murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become

colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

Nietzsche would have been aware that without God, humans are prone to the worst cruelty imaginable, even to our animal 'friends'. It is alleged that after seeing a horse being whipped in the streets of Turin, Italy, he had a mental breakdown that put him in an asylum for the rest of his life. Nietzsche is reported to have run over to the horse and held it in his arm to protect it before he collapsed to the ground. Such cruelty, devoid of morality and human compassion, knows no bounds.

Even in works of fiction, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* highlights the barbarity humans are capable of. The protagonist in the novel, Raskolnikov, has a glass of vodka, but he's not used to drinking alcohol. He then staggers to a park and immediately goes to sleep. He dreams that he is back in his childhood, aged seven, and as he is walking with his father, he sees a drunk trying to make his old horse pull a wagon full of people. When the crowd laugh at him struggling, the drunk peasant becomes furious and begins beating the horse so brutally that the others begin to do likewise by using crowbars and iron shafts. The old horse at first tries to resist, but soon it falls down dead. The boy in the dream, devastated and in great sorrow, throws his arms around the horse and kisses it. All through the dream the owner of the horse is shouting that he can do what he wants with the mare because he owns her.

One would have to have a heart of freezing steel to not be deeply saddened by this poignant passage of human savagery, despite it being fiction. Anyone who hurts a human or animal for fun or pleasure is a

degenerate psychopath. But wait a minute: there is no psychopathy or degeneracy *if* the universe is made entirely of determined matter. All we are left with are chunks of atoms bumping into one another. And, on Naturalism, some of these chunks end up shattering other molecules in motion in the chaotic maelstrom of the material universe spinning ultimately into oblivion: the final heat death of the cosmos. In such a hellhole, there is no creator to save us—and no objective morals or values!

Nietzsche's death of God also leaves us with no absolute truth, meaning, author, history, writing, interpretations, Thinker, laws of thought, good, right or wrong. We are left rudderless trying to keep afloat in a sea of moral relativism with all its dire ramifications. Can any sane person *really act* as if atheism were true? Dostoevsky asks in *The Brothers Karamazov*: "How will man live after that?" On Darwinism/atheism, there is no objective morality or free will, especially if the universe just *is* and not what it *ought* to be. The late atheist scholar at Yale University, Arthur Leff, realising the ramifications of atheism and trying to justify morality, said:

. . . As things stand now, everything is up for grabs. Nevertheless: Napalming babies is bad. Starving the poor is wicked. Buying and selling each other is depraved . . . There is in the world such a thing as evil. [All together now:] Sez who? God help us.

However, St. Paul, who underwent a life of enormous suffering, believed God *is* here to help us if we give ourselves to Christ. He wrote:

We do not lose heart . . . For this slight, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all

comparison, because we look, not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal' (2 Corinthians 4:16:18)."

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