

ARE WE ALL AMORALISTS? SOME DEBATES

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An individual that pays no attention to right or wrong motives seems to be rather unimaginable in a world where we seem to be programmed to symbolize and epitomize even the most clinically objective and random of occurrences, in which we attach meaning to otherwise meaningless, abstract objects. Yet, much like when arguing the meaning of art, one should try to first describe, even if highly hypothetically, what an ideal or perfect artwork MUST contain, and from that point, retrospectively focus on what art should and should not attain to, we too can focus on the Amoralist, even if such a being is entirely mythological, or especially if we are to reject morality entirely as a smokescreen for amorality, before we can draw any meaningful conclusions.

Nietzsche, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885), and a year later in *Beyond Good and Evil* might have put the final nail (if such a thing can ever be possible in philosophy) in the debate over the existence of morality from the point of view of the individual, where the power of will, more accurately the supremacy of vaguely defined and understood, but positively present 'life force', surpasses subjective culturally ephemeral moral standpoints to show that arguing for or against morality is in itself a false subjective act, deviating from (an amoral?) Truth. However, his theory fell into obscurity as quickly as it rose, as evolutionary determinism shamelessly disproves "life-force" in the new era of Western thought (*even as I postulate this throughout the text, I am aware that classical evolutionary /genetic determinism is under rapid fire by breakthrough, however premature studies in epigenetics (and other fields. Refer to: [http:// nexusofepigenetics.com/the- philosophy- in and- epigenetics/ for further reading](http://nexusofepigenetics.com/the-philosophy-in-and-epigenetics/)*). Modern scientific breakthroughs, especially in the field of psychology, psychoanalysis and neurology suggest that today we are faced with something that Nietzsche may have named, if he were to accept it, as the death of the individual. Indeed Nietzsche set the snow ball rolling in his monumental work of the 1880s that has been expanded, and has metamorphosed over the past 100 years first by the psychoanalytic work of Freud (who was immensely influenced by Nietzsche), and Lacan or by Jean Paul Satre's lucid and honest interpretations of Radical Freedom and the delusion of the self, much like Darwin's first steps into

evolution have now permeated across all human sciences and in recent times applied by scientists like Steven Pinker or Richard Dawkins, to dissect the mystery of humanity, language and social behaviour among strict scientific guidelines. The individual met his death with epistemological studies not so much from the discovery of subtle influences and conditioning by external forces on human behavior, such as the ideas of culture industry, and in extreme forms of occultism or the thousands of deeply troubling, often nihilistic studies into fascism after the calamities of two World Wars, but from internal forces, first of the recognition of the control of unconscious drives, motives and repressions, and the existential crisis of the individual and later, from the studies into the origins of consciousness which through back into question very existence of free-will by illustrating that the will of an individual is an after-effect of a deep, inaccessible decision-making process, and illusion of the psyche, that creates a mirage to trick a conscious acceptance. A simple experiment in which the subject is asked to choose between two pictures, by pressing either the button on the right or on the left, is but one example – neurologists can in real time study the subject's brain and predict the choice before the subject is consciously aware of making it¹. Evolutionary determinism, especially Natural selection and Survival of the fittest contest that random genetic mutations follow no path to complex behavior, have no destiny or direction. Many similar experiments have come to the same rather gloomy conclusion; that conscious perception, including such complicated processes as reason and motive, is an illusionary process; it may play a part in certain rationalizations and reason (such as for an apt example; comparing and strategizing on two outcome by creating a model of the future that can be explored intentionally) but conscious awareness has no ultimate control in originating ideas, or even in making choice – where and how these processes originate is a subject of lengthy and at present obscure debate, but the implications of what a functioning human being and by extension a functioning society is, are in need of revision –not in the least in the question of morality.

Before we lapse into an attempt of this revision, it may be mentioned briefly that we are likely to approach a kind of synthesis, in the terms of Hegelian Dialectic, as we turn our attention to the proposition of rather foreign to the field sciences, beginning with evolutionary biology which is modeled today into theorizing on

economics, the rise and fall of civilizations and social behaviour : such as Economic Game theory², where all social interaction are giving values based on selfish interest of the gene (*the theory of Selfish Gene was popularized by Richard Dawking's book to counter the erroneous idea of "selfish species"-however, for the purpose of this discussion it matters little what propagates our survival drives as long as we accept that it affects individual action directly or indirectly*) – this parallels the exchange of properties that we find in classical physics, and more intriguing even, are the correlations we can theorize on between particle interactions in quantum physics or the implications of ideas such as Chaos theory (*i.e. small, seemingly unrelated changes in, genetics produce ripples that cause global effects on society at large. See: Butterfly Effect Theory*).

We have momentarily digressed only for the purpose of acknowledging that a scientific synthesis is more possible today than it was in Nietzsche's time; this can be seen as an encouragement that we are indeed, on the path to, philosophically speaking, truth. Throughout this dysjunction of ideas and theories, especially in the face of most complicated classification of humankind, we are forced to find a new place for morality, be it merely on superficial platform: it is important to stress that even if we choose, as today's empirical evidence seems to demand, to entirely reject good and evil, reject rational and conscious behaviour as subjective, transitory manifestations of ulterior functions, and even if we were amass irrefutable evidence to approach a true synthesis, we are at present, and in the foreseeable future, inept to remove ourselves from the world of morality. For the purpose of this discussion we can place morality in three categories (rather bravely, I have trimmed many alternative categories):

1. Morality is a manifestation of personal, conscious ideologies, which are themselves product of unconscious drives, for the purpose of accessing external reality.
2. Morality is a manifestation of cultural and societal ideals, for the purpose of maintaining collective survival and
3. Morality is a representation of 'the drive of life- force', a tool for the progress in the direction of development, evolution or greater complexity – or towards utopia, and is thus but a part of a much more complex and unknown external

drive. It is only in the third option in which morality is a distinct entity, but this supposition of morality as an external quality is under intense scrutiny in today's scientific approach: if morality on the other hand is condition, than it would be no great leap to presuppose that below the surface we are all amoral.

So far, this essay has been resting on one very important assumption which I am now in need of addressing: that rational reasoning is vital for moral behaviour, and everything irrational is by definition amoral. Consciousness seems to be *a priori* to defining morality; we all make mistakes, but intentionally making a mistake can lead you in front of a judge. Although the penal code is certainly an inferior evaluator of morality, it is also the most concise, especially if we suppose that the legal system is but a controlled expression of human emotion, chiefly 'revenge' customized to function within the terms of society; as such, thankfully for children and animals conscious intent is a requirement for a guilty verdict. For example, there are hundreds of "sleepwalking murder" cases, dating back from the 17th century, in which the suspect has been found not guilty after claiming that he / she was unconscious during the act: in some cases the suspect covered a great distance, even by car, and used complicated weapons, to complete the act, all while remaining totally asleep³. Sleepwalking is a state where unconscious drives transcend internal thoughts and the id gains control of motor-function, creating automation out of the individual, who then, the theory can be extended, becomes an amoral subject, fulfilling the pleasure-seeking desires of the unconscious unrestrained by morality. Yet, a sleepwalking person is not an entire individual, but rather an incomplete version- he/she is not normal in the sense that anyone encountering the subject in this state will be able to tell so right away. Is morality then a vital part of what makes a human, human? Does an amoralist, if such a person exists, cease to be human? Can there be a philosophical Zombie (*a philosophical Zombie is a hypothetical individual that acts and responds to stimuli as if he/ she possesses all qualities of human life but in actuality lacks consciousness, feeling suffering and morality. Such a person would be indistinguishable from any normal human being. This thought experiment is highly debated and often rejected by philosopher*), as depicted in this comic:



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Consider another scenario: that of a beggar asking you for a hand-out. The morally correct thing, assuming that you are in a position to help, would be to yield to the beggar's demands; however, one can play skip-rope with morality on such occasions, seemingly controlled by the whims and wants of the subject at that particular time – i.e. “he’s just going to spend it on alcohol”, “how is my money helping him find a job”, and other such half-explained, half-entertained yet socially acceptable principles, (and terminologies like “hand-out”). On different occasions, the impulse may be to be charitable, on certain day’s one may be predisposition to feel pity, or to impress some observer, while on other days one can choose to be amoral in this situation, as a lawyer can choose to be amoral in regard to his defendant, even if he knows that the suspect is guilty: morality is not porous, like for example language, but can be switched on and off by a conscious subject, it seems to be but a context against which we judge our egos (this idea is wonderfully explored in Mark Twain’s *What is man?* (1906) where any apparently altruistic is refuted as fulfilling the selfish desire of individual ego in a judgmental society: I could not bear to live with myself if I didn’t attempt to rescue the drowning child).

The question becomes how can we approach morality logically (analytically) when it has no interconnectivity, when it seems to be entirely subjective (amorality, however, is merely the absence of morality, and is thus objectively sound)? We may scorn philosopher Peter Singer when he laments that suffering is the same regardless of intensity of suffering⁵, and should be deplored; thus murdering a zebra is as tragic and morally unacceptable as murdering a man: what gives you moral right to disagree, the argument goes, how can you distinguish between the two, on what scale can you possibly rank 'suffering'? It would be easy to take the advice of Kant, or if you prefer, the teaching of Jesus Christ and proclaim that man should treat others as he would prefer others to treat him, until you meet masochist, of course. So far evidence points to morality as an individual creation. Consider Martin Seligman claim that happiness is synthetic, that, as any new-age hippy and speculative, pseudo-science life guide books like *'The Secret'* will agree, we create happiness (or any other emotion) at will⁶: yet we are merely pushing the problem back one step: create at *what will?* let us suppose that the ultimate definition of Free Will is the conscious freedom to commit suicide- we may not have a choice of *if we die*, but we may choose when to die, and yet, even the most prejudice psychologist will point out that the subject who attempts suicide is depressed, is unwell or sick - not acting within his full rational capacity. Most intriguing is an epigenetic study⁷ that showed how abnormal methylation of DNA was found in all suicide victims pointing to environmental and genetic factors, as oppose to conscious action that determined the victim's fate (by comparing "the brain tissues of those who had committed suicide to those from a control group who died suddenly, from heart attacks and other causes" the study determined that "the DNA in the suicidal groups brain tissue was ten times more methylated". "The gene being shut down (for unknown reasons) was a neurotransmitter receptor that plays a major role in regulating behavior). Worth mentioning is as a group, do we really have any choice in tendencies towards collective suicide (when starting and fighting in wars, or inventing and stockpiling weapons of mass destruction) or is the choice already made for us by some external and mysterious forces? (Remarque's literary masterpiece, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) discusses First World war soldier's inability to understand their place in war remarkably).

Let us again attempt to approach this from a modern, purely socio-evolutionary standpoint. If individuals in groups are acting according to efficiency, within the principal of ‘survival of the fittest’, and groups, family, and society follow from this function then it is easy to see how cooperative behaviour may be favourable in certain conditions, and competitive behaviour in others – everything in between is but a facade for the propagation of the individual, the species, the gene, the collective, the country: the object, of course, is interchangeable as life- drive is not restricted to only human individuals. As mentioned before, in such circumstances morality is subjective to, not just status, but outcome, and not just emotion, but productivity- in the strict sense of the word. Perhaps this is why we can imagine a utopia world but never realize it, or even approach it. We could all then be considered to be amoral to the point where our acts are disingenuous even (or especially) to our self – rational. Or put plainly: is life amoral? If it is, then we by definition are amoral, no matter how large the illusion of morality is.

However if life in itself possess a moral compass - or to be more modern, if morality is an evolutionary process on its own, gaining ability, expanding as those capable of propagating it (humans) mutually expand with it. This will have to presuppose a starting point for the evolution of morality. It could be human reasoning. The *a priori* in this case is amorality, from which morality emerges at the beginning of civilization (whatever that may be): under such condition we maintain the integrity of morality, especially if we suppose that morality has or has the ability to evolve independent of humanity (here, the exciting field of Artificial Intelligence can one day yield some answers: time will tell if AI will evolve its own independent sense of morality).- in such a scenario, morality should be accepted at face- value and amorality, although vital for historical analysis, should have no place in modern life. But if morality is interlinked to your own perception only (this theory requires less assumptions), than it has no steadfast quality, and in analytical terms at least, it has no real quality. Consider Theodor Adorno’s thesis which postulates that humanity has reached a stage where, having no longer to fear nature, we have turned our fear towards each other, “a humanity whose control of nature as control of men far exceeds in horror anything men ever had to fear from nature”⁸.

Under such conditions, the morality of tomorrow may be no more morally intact than the morality of bygone days when witch-burning and sprawling slave-markets were acceptable. If morality has no principals, if it can be turned into a weapon, as it has been, time and time again, then we cannot justly give it a decisive entity, and as Nietzsche pointed out, we should become strong and overcome this *Slave Morality*, to evolve from *Tschandala worship* of illusionary morality past the realm of immorality and into amorality- ironically, under such conditions, it becomes easier to dream of utopia.

Notes/References:

1. *Unconscious determinants of free decisions in the human brain* published in *Nature Neuroscience* (2008). Contributors: Chun Siong Soon, Marcel Brass, Hans-Jochen Heinze and John-Dylan Haynes.
2. Proposed by psychiatrist Eric Berne (among others) in *Games people play* (1964).
3. Refer to Lawrence Martin's lucid study titled *Can sleepwalking be a murder defense*(2009), published by: Lakesidepress.
4. Existential comics number 11*Bad News at the Docto'*
5. See peter Singer's entry in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Chicago(1985), pp.627-648
6. Wonderfully described in a Ted video by Dan Gilbert titled *The Surprising science of Happiness* 2008 study by Dr. Michael O. Poulter and Dr. Hymie Anisman:
7. <http://pepoledisease.blogspot.in/2009/04/genomic-changes-found-in-brains-of.html>
8. *Dialatic of Enlightenment*(1944) and *Theses Against Occultism* (1974), Theodor Adorno