

Evolution, Morality and the Meaning of Life

Jeffrie Murphy's *Evolution, Morality and the Meaning of Life* gives a thorough review of two main topics. First, he discusses the competing claims on the evolution theory and scientific creationism to account for the origin of the species. Second, he delves on further ethical implications of evolutionary theory. He discusses the philosophical view of the works of Darwin, Kant and Hume. He further elaborates on Wilson's book, *Sociobiology* by providing a clearer view of the revolutionary ideas promulgated by this author. Murphy attempts to use popular ideas on the origins of man as contributing factors that affect human behavior questioning the true meaning of life.

Darwin's theory of evolution relates to the survival character mechanism in human species that is also present in animals. It accounts how human relates in societies that have aided man in the evolutionary process. The process explains the history and diversity of life on earth with five main themes. First, are the probability and chance, the nature, power and scope of selection, the adaptation and teleology, nominalism versus essentialism about species and the mode of evolutionary change. There has been varying meanings placed on Darwinism but Murphy quickly summarizes the main competing points. The prime core of Darwinism is that it is nature that selects which members of species would survive. The account of survival is nonrandom and predetermined by nature. It is quickly summarized by the line "survival of the fittest." Darwin's greatest contribution is heralding the idea of evolution to explain the origins of man. His works were pioneering since at this time science has not yet discovered the DNA or genes. So in effect, his ideas are to a certain degree supported by scientific findings.

In relational to Darwin's theory of natural selection, which was first popularized one hundred twenty five years ago, Wilson has used the primacy of natural selection in

determining the most important characteristics of human behavior. In general, this is a deterministic view on mankind. It basically deduces human behavior and societies like mathematical equations. Anything can be explained scientifically based on the theory of natural selection. This form of biological determinism has become a scientific explanation even for social problems. For example drug addicts and alcoholics engage in this deviant behavior because they are genetically more susceptible to do so. This even includes criminal behavior. The gene code embedded in the human cell has become the plausible explanations of human behaviors. There is no room made for the possibility of human choice coming into play.

Genetics also predetermine why some races are smarter than other or why there are racial tensions. The view on natural selection has become to reinforce the idea of status quo wherein scientific data is used to promulgate certain privileges according to class, sex or race. It has become an extension of power in societies to continue using the line 'the survival of the fittest' to justify capitalization, exploitation and even eugenic policies. Wilson's book *Sociobiology* also does the same wherein man's behavior towards society is a product of evolution such determining factors are the brain or hand size. Wilson's book is revolutionary but he disassociates himself with other biological determinists, because he feels other people's work select facts to support existing notions. He clearly uses the example of animals and insects and relates these species with human behavior. His works can be summed up as first; he sees that human behavior and man's social structures are like organs. In which, those that can adapt quickly are good and whatever the result, this is considered good as well.

Wilson uses the gene theory to explain homosexuality, human creativity, entrepreneurship, drive and even mental stamina. This is widely speculative since DNA itself has not yet been broken down to justify these behaviors. Wilson confirms selectively certain contemporary behavior as adaptive and “natural” and thereby justifies the present social order. For example, social unrest is seen as maladaptive. Racism is the failure of other men to adapt to the social evolution. Wilson goes further to use gene codes to be the determining factor but he is unable to prove this scientifically. Wilson also uses genes to explain cultural behavior. Culture is seen as non-biological or super organic in which human have surrendered himself or herself by adapting, but this goes against the animalistic nature of man. Wilson’s work is to be the evolutionary analysis for explaining human behavior, however this is only applicable to humans. His works are not enough basis to interconnect genes to explain human behavior, societies and culture.

The interchangeable comparisons of animals and human societies are widely used by Wilson, but his comparisons are the results of metaphors. For example explaining social classes to also be present in animal kingdoms. He is in fact using human behavior to describe animal behavior. It must be noted that this is only done metaphorically. The interchangeable use of Wilson makes him a clear advocate of this idea even when at times; he contradicts himself in his book. Wilson’s emphasis on innate biology even uses economic terms such as the multiplier effect to account for radical changes in societies. The changes cannot be proven scientifically by genes, and Wilson conveniently uses another explanation to expand his highly speculative ideas. Wilson work is a speculative reconstruction of human prehistory and he centers around themes of territoriality, gather vegetables, game hunting and even

human sexual behavior as a basic division of labor. Basically, Wilson himself is not objective in his observations.

His work is a peculiar theory about human behavior that has no scientific support and is purely speculative. There is a genetic component to human behavior but biological universals can be seen in simpler concepts such eating and talking rather than explaining racism, money spending habits and sexual behaviors. These are highly variable human habits that cannot be explained with analyzing the animal kingdom. Wilson is not able to take into account the effects of cultural transmission. Wilson like many biological determinists are unable to explain fully the extent of social problems, ethics and the concept of morality.

Kant's view on ethics is based on emotional feeling and human goals. His work claims that human behavior is explained by an underlying maxim or principle. It is in this manner morality is defined. Kant believes that man is ultimately a rational being and all rationals are inherently good. This lead to the formulation of the Categorical Imperative, which serves as a compass between whether a principle or maxim is good or bad. Kant's view on ethics is to bases on how a maxim can conform to reason. Kant is able to use much of what is the common sense view of good or bad actions but he goes further to say that actions done without a rational explanation cannot be quantified as good or bad. Kant also describes that the physical world is beyond our control and as humans we cannot be held accountable for world events.

The foundation rule of Kantianism is that humans should only act according to a maxim that is a universally upheld law. Therefore human should treat other people as the end and not to treat others as a means to an end only. Kant's contribution to the evolution theory can be seen in the Kantian conception of final causes that are seen to be by nature recursive. Kant's view on teleology is that this is a necessary principle for the study of organisms. This is a regulative principle that has no ontological implications; basically humans are constrained to view organisms teleologically. Hume further expounded on this by explaining that consequences of empiricism through the use of observation to study human nature itself. Hume basically rejects all forms of speculation and superstition. HE only advocates the use of philosophical skepticism.

Hume basically advocates that the proper goal of philosophy is to explain why we believe in what we do. Humans are seen to be part of a functioning world and with the use of scientific method of observation we will be able to discover the causes of human belief. The answer lies in our cognitive capacity. Hume therefore sees human belief in a mental context. Impressions are a result of an immediate experience and ideas are copies of impressions. Ideas and impressions vary in humans. Ideas are a result of association, which is a result of human interaction. Hume is able to explain how humans sees objects. First, man sees through resemblance. Second is cause and effect. Humans learn through experience, which includes ideas and awareness of associations. Human beliefs are the overall result of resemblance, case and effect, experience and awareness.

Hume distinguishes two forms of belief. Relations of ideas are beliefs based on associations, there are no external referents present. Matters of fact are beliefs that explain the existence of objects. Hume therefore believes that mathematical and logical thinking is a result of relations of ideas that are uninformative. Natural science can be explained through matters of fact, other methods are not advocated. Hume's work relied on matters of fact but he is unable to explain how humans are able to learn from experience, he is not able to justify this. Hume placed a large emphasis on sense-impression and memory as connected by cause and effect. Therefore Hume justifies that causal reasoning can never be answered in a rational manner.

Human beings learn from past experience with the belief that these past experiences aid us in understanding present or future experiences. Hume was able to deduce that since change is possible therefore inferences from past to future are not rationally certain. Hume therefore believes that matters-of-fact are fundamentally non rational. Beliefs are therefore not rational as well. However, Hume sees beliefs as part of a habit. This is how we learn from experience. If we are used to an idea, and the past experience has justified then humans begin to expect from their beliefs. It is short for saying that we cannot prove it, but it must happen because we believe in it. Reasoning is therefore seen as slow and inefficient guides for humans. Hume advocates that humans learn by habit and experience is the best teacher. Therefore even mathematical equations are not rational simply, it is a result of repetitions wherein we have come to expect and believe in the outcome. Repetition can therefore produce a powerful conviction, and can be formed independent from reason. In fact the strength of regularity allows us to increase our measure of conviction. Beliefs therefore is a result from a sentiment rather than from reason.

Hume is quick to point that imagination and belief are only separated by the measure of conviction attached to them. Hume has espoused that custom or habit is the great guide of life and the foundation of all natural science. Humans therefore gets the habit of expecting the effect whenever we experience the same cause. Human also believe that the cause somehow produces the effect. This is how Hume is able to correlate cause and effect as a cycle. Humans non-rational expectation will follow the cause with a strong sense of conviction, the impression of this feeling is the connection between cause and effect. It is basically the force of causal necessity that strengthens our sentiment in anticipating efficacious outcomes. With regards to man's view of himself, Hume believes that humans do not have an impression of the self neither is man aware of the concept of "I" therefore, the persistent self and the immortal soul are philosophical fictions.

Hume believes that the concept of self is just a bundle of perceptions. Our idea of a persistent self is simply a result of the human habit, and the belief in our own reality as substantial selves is natural, but unjustifiable. Hume sees that the primitive human belief is we actually see and hear Hume says we cannot rely on causal reasoning to make us believe in the external world, the belief in the reality of an external world is entirely non-rational but belief in the external world is natural and unavoidable. Hume espoused "mitigated" skepticism that humbly accepts the limitations of human knowledge while pursuing the legitimate aims of math and science.

The quest to define meaning in life is a current phenomenon. In fact, only the past twenty-five years has there been a resounding call to search for the elusive meaning of life. Many new literatures expound on this topic and so does Murphy in his book. Murphy indicates that there is God in this earth that many believe is reason for the creation of man. Therefore, God is the one that is giving us purpose. In this sense, Murphy says if God did assign us a purpose, then God would degrade us and hence undercut the possibility of us obtaining meaning from fulfilling the purpose. Murphy is able to correlate the theories of Darwin, Kant, Hume and Wilson as to forming a plausible explanation for the purpose of man, concept of morality and ultimately how does man give meaning to his life given these philosophical ideas. Basically, Murphy is able to give a short cut version on how derive meaning but certainly, he does not espouse the belief in purposes as reasonable basis to give life meaning. In fact, he also cites the works of Aristotle that morality is relative. Murphy says that there is no logical connection between facts either natural or supernatural and the values that give meaning and direction to human lives. He expounds on this for four chapters.

Certainly philosophical ideals on this concept are worth reading so that people can gain knowledge about varying beliefs. However, I believe that God is our creator and he created us in his image and likeness. This is not to say we are like God or are gods, but this is to say that I believe that we are his children. As he is our maker, he has designed us for a purpose otherwise why would he have created us? There is an inherent meaning and purpose to our lives here on earth. In the same manner, God has created all the things around us, for us his children to enjoy. Philosophical ideas are ways in which man is trying to find meaning, purpose or reason for God's creations. This may be through observation, scientific methods, genes and mathematical equations. However, man is has a limited capacity in fully understanding the complex universe that God has created therefore, most philosophical

definitions I find are inherently baseless. These are only futile attempts in explaining the true nature of God. We may never really find the true meaning. We may never really discover how we are fashioned or whether our evolution from apes is true. I find that in order to truly learn about man—his purpose, what ethics is, what morality is, where we came from. This can be answered by reading the Bible. The Bible is the word of God and it in all the answers to all this questions can be found. The book of Genesis explains our creation. This also shows the system or the order of the animal kingdom. Most books of the Bible talks about morality and it here we are able to find the answers to determine which values are good and which are considered sins against God and man. Inherently many scientists and archaeologist attribute their discoveries from reading the Bible, such as exploration activities in Egypt.

Human behavior can be explained to a certain degree by science and DNA but this does not take into account the free will of man. Man was created to be a steward here on earth and man does have a choice to follow evil or do good. I do not agree that morality and ethics are relative. In fact, I believe that there is one true way of living and this is clearly espoused in the Bible. Forgiving others, doing good, showing empathy and compassion these are all values that are in inherent to man. I believe that they way things work and function in this world is part of God's master plan. Man tries to quantify it, but it can never really be truly explained in relative terms. Simply, because understanding the full nature of God is beyond human comprehension. We are also not meant to understand it, therefore I find that there is no purpose in trying to find rationalities and determine logical thinking. Man is not supposed to play like gods but rather we must simply do our part as his children.

To explain other deviant human behaviors such as crime and racism, I believe that this is simply a result from people having poor or no relations with God. In fact, if they did

then they would understand and apply the universal truths of values such as love and compassion and apply it quickly to their daily lives. When people are far from God, then they are more susceptible to attacks from the enemy. This is when people are tempted to do evil acts. It is the inherent belief in God and the Bible with trust that allows me with confidence to say that I have meaning and value in my life. My life is richer and blessed because I have a relationship with God. I know my purpose is to fulfill God's will and continue to do good. Part of doing good is to spread his word to non-believers. Reading this book has helped me realize the value of bible preaching and Sunday schools. I realize that there are so many misconceptions in the world. The Devil has tricked so many men into believing in so-called truths. When in fact, there is only one truth and this is the truth found in God's word.

Personally I do not believe that man came from apes, nor do I believe in comparing humans to animals in the same manner as Wilson did. First, I believe that man has a soul and this is what makes us different from all animals. We are superior beings to animals because this is how God has made us. Let us not degrade our human existence by equating ourselves to animals. We are in fact smarter than all animals created here on earth. This makes us unique and special. Our thinking capacity has enabled us to achieve human progress. This is why we are radically different from animals. We understand the concept of good and evil, animals do not know the difference because they act purely on instinct. Man acts because of the capacity of his mind and does so because he chooses to practice his free will.

Bibliography:

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