

Comment BY BRENDAN O'NEILL



The cause of Jacko's death is neither black nor white

IN THE LATE '80S, the question on the lips of every soap opera buff was "Who killed JR?" Today, as the trial in Los Angeles of Dr Conrad Murray turns into a real-life soap opera, the question everyone's asking is: "Who killed Jacko?"

Murray, Michael Jackson's personal physician at the time of his death in June 2009, is charged with involuntary manslaughter. It is alleged he procured huge amounts of drugs for Jackson. A lethal dose of one of those drugs – propofol, a powerful anaesthetic – caused Jacko's death.

The eyes of the world's media are fixed on Murray's trial, and not only because it has become a celebrity event in its own right, with various members of the Jackson clan attending every day. There is intense interest because many people believe the trial will mark a neat end to the tragic Jacko story by revealing who was ultimately responsible for his demise.

Outside the LA courtroom, Jacko fans from the Justice for MJ movement wave placards that leave no room for confusion about whom they hold responsible. One has a picture of Murray alongside the words: 'He's a monster. He's an animal'. According to CNN News, the M word – murder – is on the lips of many of these fans.

Yet in the rush to find the 'killer', are we in danger of overlooking the possibility that no one was really responsible for his death? That it was simply, as we used to say, "an act of misfortune"?

The fuss around the Murray trial suggests modern society is profoundly uncomfortable with the idea of "acts of misfortune". We seem incapable of accepting that, sometimes, bad things happen, whether it is accidents, natural disasters or early deaths, and no one is ultimately to blame.

The rush to turn Jackson's demise into a simplistic

morality tale about a 'monstrous' doctor murdering an innocent singer echoes attitudes towards the death of Princess Diana. Unwilling to accept that their favourite princess met her end in an accidental car crash, people invented all sorts of stories about her being murdered, turning a messy real-world event into a moral fable.

Likewise, natural disasters are often followed by a hunt for someone to blame. Recent flooding in parts of England led to much finger-pointing at local officials, who were, bizarrely, accused of being unprepared for unpredictable weather shifts.

And everything from tornadoes to tsunamis is now blamed on global warming. Many argue these climatic shifts can be directly blamed on the lifestyles of well-off Westerners, with their wicked plasma TVs and big cars.

Of course, in relation to Jackson's death, Murray has questions to answer. And it seems as if Jacko's people – his managers and moneyspinners – were helping to keep him pumped with drugs to sustain him as a semi-functioning, profit-making performer. That's bad. But equally, Jacko was not a child, for all his fascination with Peter Pan, and he would have known very well that it was reckless to knock back so many pills.

The best thing one can say about his death is: it's complicated. But modern society doesn't do 'complicated'. We want black-and-white moralism. The hunt for someone to blame for everything that goes wrong echoes the pre-modern outlook, when people assumed the gods were behind every act of misfortune.

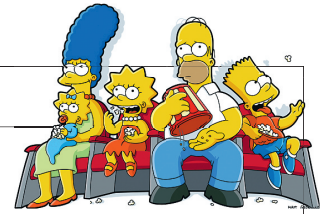
Sometimes, it is more grown-up simply to say: this was a sad event, but no one is to blame.

Let's move on. ●

Brendan O'Neill is editor of Spiked Online. John Bird is away

'HIS MANAGERS PUMPED HIM WITH DRUGS. THAT'S BAD. BUT JACKO WAS NOT A CHILD'

MODERN-DAY WITCH HUNT?
THE INTENSE FOCUS ON THE TRIAL OF JACKO'S PHYSICIAN MAY BE MORE ABOUT THE PUBLIC'S DESIRE FOR A NEAT END THAN CRIMINAL JUSTICE



The Big Q

WHICH TV SHOW WOULD YOU WATCH FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE?

As *The Simpsons* hits its 500th episode and a dedicated TV channel is proposed, we ask readers: if you could only watch one TV show for the remainder of your life, what would it be?

JOHN CASSIDY
56, labourer, Cambuslang



Michael Palin's shows are my favourites. With *Around the World in 80 Days* I could see the world again and again.

AMY BENSON HARUM
28, journalist, Canberra, Australia



I wouldn't watch a TV show for the rest of my life because I've better things to do. I'm from Australia: I'd rather spend my time on the beach.

SHAHNAZ AHMED
26, graphic designer, Kingston, Surrey



The boring answer would be the news, so I could watch the world's stories the rest of my life. Actually, it's not boring, is it? It's really interesting!

DEREK FAHY
37, retailer, Dublin



Frasier. It's comedy, it's fun, original, the characters are good and it ran for 11 years so there are lots of episodes.

JORDAN SPITTAL
20, student, Airdrie



The Still Game box-set. It's phenomenal, no matter how many times I watch it. ●