Analytical Essay on Ignorance, Tyranny and Fanaticism

In this Degree, the three Ruffians represent Ignorance, Tyranny, and Fanaticism, and we are told the Scottish Rite Mason must contend against them. Discuss the nature of these evils and the relationship between them. Is fanaticism ever good? How do we distinguish between fanaticism and zeal? How do we distinguish between ignorance and lack of information?

Ignorance, Tyranny, and Fanaticism: their nature and the relationship between them Ignorance, Tyranny and Fanaticism are the enemies of our freedom as they are the enemies of Freemasonry. Ignorance, fanaticism, and intolerance are the great enemies of mankind. Fanaticism is evil manifested in religion, ignorance is evil manifested in man, and tyranny is evil manifested in government.

Tyranny and fanaticism come in many forms. They take place whenever any person or group says: “What I want is more important than what you want.” Or even worse, “I matter more than you matter.”

Tyranny and fanaticism do not equate with authority, but with attitude - an attitude of selfishness. What is their level of difference? Tyranny is selfishness in the world of material things. Fanaticism is selfishness in the world of ideas and beliefs. Fanaticism is the sort of selfishness which says, “My beliefs are right. If you do not agree with me, you are wrong.”

Ignorance allows both fanaticism and tyranny to flourish. And ignorance is the primary weapon of the tyrant and the fanatic. When the tyrant and the fanatic find opportunity to rise to power? It is when people are uneducated to facts, to history, to economics and science.

Only knowledge can form the basis of freedom of people (to honor life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness). To truly be champions of the freedom of people, we must be concerned with every miscarriage of justice, every unreasonable limitation of liberty, every inequality, every arbitrary act of court or state house or capital. Our duty is to bring light to darkness. To educate. To engage. If we fail to protect in individual civil liberties and freedoms of others - our own freedom will be at risk. Our duty is to enlighten our souls and minds; to share that light with the people; and to defend the interests and honor of our country so that its freedoms may be preserved and extended.

Throughout history, there has been a basic conflict between those who seek to suppress others and those who seek to free them. We are in a battle with the forces which seek to enslave the spirit of men and women. And it is a battle fought just as really with truth and justice and virtue.

Is fanaticism ever good?

Fanaticism as a universal phenomenon that can manifest itself in almost every sphere of human activity. Although many expressions of fanaticism are negative and destructive, some can be almost neutral or even positive. The terms fanaticism and fanatic come from the Latin adverb fanatice (frenziedly, ragingly) and the adjective fanaticus (enthusiastic, ecstatic; raging, fanatical, furious). The adjective is based on the noun fanum (place dedicated to a deity, holy

place; sanctuary, temple).1

We need to consider the following:

Fanaticism is a universal phenomenon: What makes fanaticism universal is that it is related to human traits so it can be found in almost any activity where people are involved.

Fanaticism is not always a negative phenomenon: There is an expression that has been ascribed to Voltaire (although he never said this in his writings, but it fittingly summarizes his attitude toward freedom of speech): “I disapprove of what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” Here we do not find the conviction of having absolute truth that characterizes the fanatic, yet there is a fanatical fighting attitude for freedom of speech in this saying. In a similar manner someone can fanatically defend someone else’s rights and could even be ready to die for them. Harmon gives an example of the religious fervor of an ascetic or spiritual teacher that can be considered peculiar to his contemporaries but can be seen as an example of a virtuous person for future generations. Thus fanaticism can be either good or bad depending on how and for what reasons someone acts fanatically.

Fanaticism is primarily a behavioural trait: The origins of fanaticism are based in the mind but it always manifests itself through actions. For instance, a fanatical conservationist is not only convinced that a certain corporation is responsible for polluting the natural environment but s/he actively calls upon others to boycott the corporation and is even prepared to commit acts of terrorism to sabotage the company.

What is the difference between fanaticism and zeal?

1 We also find some similarity to those terms in the verb fano (devote). Webster’s which describes a fanatic as “a person with an extreme and uncritical enthusiasm or zeal, as in religion or politics”. Psychologist of religion Tõnu Lehtsaar has defined the term fanaticism as “the pursuit or defence of something in an extreme and passionate way that goes beyond normality. Religious fanaticism is defined by blind faith, the persecution of dissents and the absence of reality”.

There are many people today who seem to be zealous over religion, politics or an ideology. Yet, some seem to have gone overboard to the extent of being extremists, condemning everyone else who does not agree with them. There are others who turn violent and violate the freedom of others. They cannot accept others with contrary ideas, opinions and practices. They are imposing and do not stand to reason. When that happens, zeal has been supplanted by fanaticism. When zeal is no longer tamed by reason and a controlled enthusiasm, it becomes a mere emotional outburst and is transformed to fanaticism.

How do we distinguish between ignorance and lack of information?

The word ‘ignorant’ is derived from the Latin in (not) and gnarus (knowledgeable, acquainted with). This suggests that ‘to be ignorant’ means ‘to lack knowledge’. But is ignorance really equivalent to lack of knowledge? In other words, are ignorance and knowledge each other’s complements?

There seem to be just five ways for some person S to fail to know that some proposition p is true:

- (a) p is false;
- (b) S disbelieves p, while p is true;
- (c) S suspends judgment on p, while p is true;
- (d) S does not have any doxastic attitude toward p, while p is true;
- (e) S believes p, while p is true, but S's belief that p lacks the warrant necessary for knowledge.

Ignorance, however, is the pervasive and persistent continuation of lack of knowledge and information when you have the ability and resources to change that course. Ignorance is a refusal to learn. Ignorance is a refusal to try and understand viewpoints other than your own. It is one thing to simply not know something and, it is entirely plausible that you do not understand what knowledge or information you are lacking. However, when it has been brought to your attention, refusal to look into something or otherwise further educate yourself, then transfers from a lack of knowledge to ignorance.

There are several philosophical issues in which ignorance takes centre stage:

1. Ignorance as excuse condition for moral responsibility: Ignorance is one of the so called Aristotelian excuse conditions for bringing about a morally bad state of affairs. In other words, a person's performing an action that has harmful consequences may be excused by her ignorance of certain facts.
2. Ignorance as excuse condition for doxastic responsibility: Perhaps ignorance can be an excuse condition not only for performing a morally bad action, but also for acquiring or having a bad or wrong belief. But what is it to have a bad or wrong belief? Here, one might think primarily of false beliefs. Obviously, the topics of ignorance as excuse condition for respectively moral responsibility (or, more precisely, responsibility for actions) and doxastic responsibility are closely related to each other. Whereas culpable ignorance may be an excuse condition for morally wrong actions, culpable ignorance is always an excuse conditions for ensuing false beliefs.
3. Justified ignorance
4. Ignorance as a necessary condition for certain moral virtues: some kind of ignorance is necessary for one's exemplification of certain moral virtues.

Conclusion

The highest price we are called upon to pay for freedom is not in taxes. The highest price we must pay for freedom is to allow others to be free. Attempting to Limit another person's Rights or Freedoms (to work, to become educated, to question dogma, to marry the person they love, to vote, to improve, etc.) is a reflection of fear, ignorance and lacking enlightenment. It's always easier to restrain the freedoms of others than to challenge our own biases. We should always look for the good in others; to make allowances for their shortcoming; and combat spiritual tyranny with reason, truth and respect for others.

The key is tolerance (Religious, Intellectual and Social). Religious tolerance means that we must allow others the same right to freedom of worship we demand for ourselves. Intellectual

tolerance means that we must allow the free and full exploration of every idea, even if we think it wrong. Social tolerance means that we must allow others to live their own life - even if a particular lifestyle we find strange or uncomfortable. Of all the lessons a man or woman must learn to be truly human, tolerance may well be the hardest.