

Introduction to Philosophy Essay Questions Units 1 – 3 (Second Attempt)
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Abstract

This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements needed for completing introduction to philosophy, “A Possible World Machine” through the International Society for Philosopher’s (ISPP) Pathways to Philosophy program. This paper attempts to address question four as presented by Pathway to Philosophy as means of partially satisfying the requirements concerning association with the ISPP. The question that is addressed concerns material presented during the course of studies concerning the first three units of the Program A, Introduction to Philosophy, which introduces us to philosophy as a means of helping us build a foundation upon which to develop ourselves as philosophers while cultivating an ability to think philosophically. It should be noted that this paper is written according to American Psychological Association (APA) sixth edition standards as it is the format the author is most familiar.

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Introduction to Philosophy Essay Question 4, Units 1 – 3.

In this paper, we will examine the fourth question presented in Pathways to Philosophy, or simply, “Pathways”, which asks, “in the light of the critique of 'free will', can blame and punishment ever be rationally justified?” (Pathways, n.d, p. 1). To facilitate this examination, we are invited by Pathways (n.d.) to consider such cases as those that “involve brainwashing, crimes of passion, the influence of drugs, medical or psychological conditions etc.” (p. 1). Let us examine each to see whether we are able to justify punishment. First, brainwashing seems to suggest that a person’s free will is tricked into willfully thinking about something than it would otherwise think. The term itself, is defined in the American Heritage dictionary of the English language (2011) as exhaustive indoctrination that of a political or religious nature that is forcibly aimed at eliminating and replacing one’s basic convictions and attitudes with an alternative belief system. For example, people who are indoctrinated into cults may be thought of as being brainwashed; especially when they go on to commit seemingly inhuman acts such as evidenced by the Manson group’s murders in America. The question being whether the individuals themselves may be held responsible for their crimes and if so, is the punishment justified.

If someone joins a cult, they would have done so willingly. This is different than being born American or British because whereas being born into a culture, one unwittingly adopts a cultural set of normative beliefs, when someone willingly joins a cult, he or she may be reasonably thought to possess presence of mind enough to know what the cult’s ideology is one is subscribing to. When any rational person ponders what someone might have been thinking when thinking about why someone would join a cult like the Manson groups and go murder a family, they might reasonably assume the person was crazy.

If the person was “crazy”, it seems to suggest that the person cannot be held accountable because either they were crazy to prior to joining the groups, or lost their mind after joining the group. If they were crazy before, then brainwashing might be thought nullified by one’s preexisting mental condition. However, if someone became crazy afterwards, then it would seem that Charles Manson’s presumed attempt at brainwashing had its intended effect.

This “effect” as it were, as brainwashing’s principal component, may have been charismatic. In accordance with rational choice theory, which posits that people being in possession of reason are able to make reasoned decisions, it would seem that any attempt at effectively “washing another’s brain” would be rendered ineffective, and it may be despite Wilson and Kwileck (2003) reference to the effects of charisma as brainwashing’s chief element, for it is entirely possible that the followers were not “brainwashed”, but in control of their intellectually driven will.

If they were absolutely brainwashed, we would expect Manson’s followers to have obeyed him without question as mindless drones. However, Manson’s awesome power of charisma is not enshrouded in irrational mystique to the extent that Wilson and Kwileck (2003) might otherwise suggest, for therein the mystique itself, if a forced that would otherwise seem to defy any attempt at rational explanation. The reason being that the extent to which Manson’s followers may be believed to have been seized by mind control in its most elemental form would surely have scrubbed their ability to even hold a weapon without thorough direction.

With this said, we may say again, either Manson’s charismatic brainwashing was in effect, representative of the imposition of his will over that of his followers, or it was not. If so, then the follower should not be held directly accountable assuming they were not “crazy” prior to joining his cult. However, if so, and they were

crazy prior to joining the cult, then we are left wondering how a crazy person can be brainwashed in the first place because being crazy seems to suggest in itself, a lack of will to be imposed upon; in which case, a crazy person probably should not be held fully accountable either. However, if a person was not crazy to begin with, then they should be held reasonably accountable for failing to exercise reason in determining the risk involved in allowing oneself to subscribe to what should have appeared to any reasonable person, an extremely irrational ideology.

What then should just punishment be? If the person was crazy before, then it would seem that the person should be excused from being punished in the traditional sense of punishment. A crazy person may be believed however, to be criminally insane; thus suggesting there are underlying tendencies governing the person's personality that are antithetically inclined towards the nature of civility itself. If the person become crazy afterwards, then it would seem that perhaps, second degree murder would be a just punishment as although judgment may determine that a person may not have fully not-crazy, the judge him or herself would not be admitting that the person is not, not-crazy either.

An alternative hypothesis might suggest that the Manson murders were not instances of murderous brainwashing, but *passionate crimes* if you will. A crime of passion being characterized by temporary lapse of will. If for example, the individuals were sane when they conscientiously decided to join the Manson family, but were temporarily worked into a psychotic madness by the hypnotic charm of their leader into killing innocent people, it would seem that their actions may escape punishment. The reason being that if hypnosis is regarded as viable psychotherapeutic technique among courts, then it should stand to reason in a court of law that any member that was essentially hypnotized when committing a "crime of passion" should be excused from being prosecuted outright for murder as their actions were not committed in themselves in an outright manner. In addition, it should be taken into consideration that they did not willfully forfeit their will as it was unlikely that Charles Manson would have warned them beforehand that we was about the send them into a murderous hypnotic state of characterized by passionate madness.

In consideration of the ones culpability regarding the use of illicit drugs, we should not forget that one likely decided to use the drugs with, or without awareness of their consequences. If this is the case, then punishment to the first degree would be warranted. However, once may argue that punishment should not be of the first degree, but the second if the persons were not aware that they were taking drugs. It should be noted that there is a difference between knowing and not knowing whether one is taking drugs because knowing is willful, whereas not knowing is not willful.

Final Thoughts

Finally, it should go without saying that if there were a genuine material or immaterial cause for the Manson family members actions that they should be help criminally insane. Where on one hand there may be a physiological or anatomical explanation for their actions, there could just as easily be a immaterial, or paranormal one, in the case of demonic possession even though courts do not typically recognize such defenses. In the end, it seems that we have deliberate the relationship between one's actions, will, and punishment.

References

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