

2 - I Propose... Conditional Tolerance!

Since my last entry focused on the relationship between magic and perceptions of knowledge, I will now discuss it on terms that relate to the standards for which different forms of magic are generally exalted or condemned. While the Encyclopédie does not necessarily acknowledge its existence, it classifies supernatural magic as originating from dark or possibly satanic metaphysical forces. There is a powerful correlation between magic and that which is either considered to be evil or feared due to a profound lack of comprehension about a specific realm of thought. Considering that the books and selections that we have been reading in class reflect the sentiments of an age that retroactively considered itself to be enlightened, there are many writers (or characters, in the case of Robinson Crusoe) who can be commended for their lack of superstition and genuine desire to comprehend rather than ostracize. This tolerance is the culmination of decades of progressive thought being applied to many areas of life.

In the story of Robinson Crusoe, he could have easily attributed any of his various misfortunes to dark forces, if not to the devil himself. Crusoe is gracious to the point of pledging religious piety after he is cast ashore on the seemingly abandoned island that he finds himself marooned on for a significant portion of his life. It is extremely revealing of his mental state that he chose to perceive his situation as both serendipitous as well as castigatory. Although it had been a matter of little or nonexistent importance in his previous existence, he now acknowledges divine magic in its most extreme form not only as extant, but as supreme. A more superstitiously oriented individual might have bemoaned their fate and the sense of ominous premonition that has haunted his or her last several years. Crusoe, however, recognizes salvation in his misfortunes and becomes acutely aware of the benevolence of God and Christianity. He does not at all feel forced to embrace his dogma, but rather exalts in the happiness and new perspective that dominates his consciousness.

This palpably impacts his morality. The petty arrogance and hedonistic tendencies that would have characterized him as a sailor have been abandoned even as they are replaced for an appreciation of the divine. Indeed, his incipient [moral sensitivity](#) causes him to consider that he is being punished for his previous transgressions. This transformation is heavily associated with the concept that religion imposes morality and can act as a catalyst for drastic changes in mentality. Without his natural attraction to the serenity offered by his new religion, his reformation would have been far more gradual, if not disempowered to the point of never occurring.

While it is true that Crusoe does not interpret the depravity of the cannibals as relating to magic necessarily, he certainly associates them with a sort of spiritual darkness that supernatural magic was thought to have derived from. When Crusoe first witnesses the remnants of the cannibals' feast, he is mortified. He considers the immorality of their actions to qualify them for unconditional slaughter and takes it upon himself to end them. This extreme moral reaction is instilled in him by his adoption of religion many years previously. It is interesting that he perceives their actions as standing in opposition to his form of morality. We have witnessed a moral polarization that may be considered morbid since Crusoe uses it to justify murder, but it still must be recognized that he thinks in a manner that can be thought of as bound to a clearly delineated moral code.

In Crusoe's mind, there is a dichotomy that is established in the form of knowledge and ignorance. The savages, who are clearly ignorant of God's righteous path, induce ruin and human despair with their primitive rites. This [superstitious and arcane activity](#) is consistent with Demonomania, where it is articulated that evil actions can be measured in extremity by using the standard of the tangible effects that these actions produce. Crusoe's actions can be construed as being more benevolent since his religion (consistent with divine magic) does not drive him to acts of violence and prompts him to care for those he deems capable of virtue; such was the case with Friday. Conversely, the savage rites of cannibalism (consistent with supernatural magic) evidently produce only inhumane misery that operates independent of morality.

In the Turkish Embassy Letters, Lady Mary, a professed Christian, appears to be extremely tolerant of the Muslim religion that is predominant in Turkish culture. In past centuries, the followers of Islam and Christianity had waged war against each other during the crusades and had possessed a historical animosity. In conversing with her friend Achmed Bey, Lady Mary is nothing except benignly curious and gracefully tolerant towards Islam. Rather than focusing on the parts of the two beliefs that contradict or differ from each other, she is most intensely concentrated on the facets of the religions that share commonalities. Despite claiming to be Christian, she presents herself as being more of a desist than anything, of course meaning that she believes that God serves as a divine creator that has determined and sustains the laws of the universe. Not only does she recognize and accept that Islam as explained by Achmed Bey contains the same conception of God, but she miraculously acknowledges the transcendent religious notion that the God that is revered by both religions is the same entity. These proponents of two distinct, yet similar religions collectively recognize that all existence can be attributed to the same source, thus fostering a sort of camaraderie between the two great minds. They jointly deduce that the uniform principle of natural magic is applied to both religions.

Yet, much like Robinson Crusoe, Montagu is quick to ostracize the beliefs that she perceives as primal and unenlightened. Much like the writers of the Encyclopédie referenced Catholicism in a condescending manner (mainly demonstrated by their comparison of transubstantiation and cannibalism), Montagu refers to it in a sarcastic and often irreverently demeaning manner. Much like Sterne is described as revolting intellectually against conservative Enlightenment values, Montagu revolts against the facets of Catholicism that she perceives as sordid and esoteric. Given this analogy, her chosen weapons are wit and ridicule.

Throughout the course of human history, superstition and the willingness to accept that certain things originated from dark or unnatural powers has resulted in the alienation of certain groups, if not direct hostility. The Salem Witch Trials resulted in the death of hundreds of innocent women (assuming that witches are not real). The propagators of mass genocides of the past such as the Holocaust or the Armenian genocide often instilled derisive tendencies in an entire culture. There has been a succession of atrocities throughout history, the majority of which have been incited either by the embrace of ignorance or intolerance. Misguided individuals have espoused these corrupt notions as virtues with the result of oppression or warfare, which inevitably results in a reciprocal dislike from the victimized peoples. Such is the nature of a [theocracy that is justified through deception](#). Regardless of the severity, these complex hatreds exist on one level or another. The ability to recognize that these differences should be respected is manifest in the liberated thinkers of the enlightenment who are able to more objectively achieve the humility necessary to be a scholar. The notions that are explored and emulated by individuals such as Crusoe (fictional though he may be) and Lady Mary are beneficial to humanity. They both actively think in patterns of thought that generally gravitate towards the acceptance of ideas that are conducive to moral and benevolent thought.