

Can you be blamed for your beliefs?

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Conflict over beliefs permeates human society. Disagreements abound over everything from the mundane to the esoteric and the ethereal. And feelings about such disagreements range from nonchalance to fierce passion, from loving acceptance to mortal hatred.

The topics that engender the most intense controversy are religion, politics, and ethics, which established the basis of our October meeting "Why are good people divided by politics and religion?"

Due to the pervasive conflict over beliefs, the question arises, "Can you be blamed for your beliefs?" Suppose that members of group A disagree with members of group B. If the conflict is passionate, it is common for the members of one group to attribute to the members of the other group any of the following: ill motives, deficient intelligence, irresponsibility. "Those people are selfish!" "Those people are corrupt!" "Those people are evil!" "Those people are stupid!" "Those people are fools!" "Those people are irresponsible!"

In this light, the following question arises: Can you be blamed for your beliefs? Phrasing the question more generally:

To what extent are you responsible for your beliefs and why?

Let's consider some examples categorized by topic.

Religion

Can you be blamed for belief in atheism? Can you be blamed for belief in Christianity? Can you be blamed for belief in Judaism? Can you be blamed for belief in Islam? Note that each of these religions includes the afterlife dichotomy of heaven vs. hell, but they differ in the means of salvation from hell.

Can you be blamed for belief in Protestantism? Can you be blamed for belief in Catholicism? Note that Protestantism emphasizes the idea of salvation by grace through faith, where faith is a form of belief.

Politics

Can you be blamed for belief in Communism? Can you be blamed for belief in socialism? Can you be blamed for belief in democracy? Can you be blamed for belief in big government — centralized solutions to public policy problems? Can you be blamed for belief in small government — decentralized solutions to public policy problems?

Can you be blamed for belief in imperialism? Can you be blamed for belief in Nazism? Can you be blamed for belief in racial supremacy? Can you be blamed for belief in male supremacy? Can you be blamed for belief in female supremacy? Can you be blamed for belief in slavery?

Ethics

Can you be blamed for belief in monogamous, heterosexual marriage, a topic that we considered in our February and March meetings? Can you be blamed for belief in homosexual marriage? Can you be blamed for belief in no marriage? Can you be blamed for belief in promiscuity?

Can you be blamed for belief in theft, that is, that theft is morally acceptable? Can you be blamed for belief in adultery? Can you be blamed for belief in rape? Can you be blamed for belief in murder? Can you be blamed for belief in terrorist bombing?

Science

Can you be blamed for belief in biological evolution? Can you be blamed for disbelief in biological evolution?

Miscellaneous

Can you be blamed for believing that driving while intoxicated is safe?

Can you be blamed for believing that you are currently reading this page? Can you be blamed for not believing that you are currently reading this page?

Can you be blamed for believing that the world is an illusion? Can you be blamed for believing that you're a reincarnation of some person or animal that lived in the past? Can you be blamed for believing that you're God?

Conclusion

The examples are meant to stimulate your thinking, and I invite you to think of more examples. Drawing on such examples, we'll discuss the following question:

To what extent are you responsible for your beliefs and why?

In the context of this discussion, I'll present my theory of knowledge, reality, ethics, freewill, and mind in order to clarify the ramifications of the question and in order to answer it.