

Leisure and Tolerance – An Historical Perspective

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explain and explore the concept of tolerance as developed in post-Reformation Europe. The religious turmoil of this period tested the social order of the day and will be used to exemplify the difficulties of embracing tolerance while clinging to dogma. The work of French philosopher, Voltaire, provides the reader with an understanding of the Enlightenment's perspective on tolerance as an outgrowth of the repression of the reformation period. Tolerance, in the traditional sense, is limited to the allowance for diverse systems of ideas, beliefs and practices. Tolerance is differentiated from diversity, as a contemporary description of sensitivity to and appreciation of personal difference, and multiculturalism, an all - inclusive attempt to embrace ethnic and racial differences. Tolerance as a contributing factor to cultural progression has profound implications for the continuing evolution of leisure theory. Leisure, both substantively and functionally, requires and supports the notion of tolerance and its subcategories of diversity and multiculturalism.

Key words: tolerance; religion; horror religiosus; diversity; multiculturalism

Introduction

Tolerance, in contemporary society, is considered to be a key political virtue in our post-modern, secular world (Conyers, 2001). An ability and commitment to recognize, respect, engage, and negotiate difference is said to be an integrative socio-political force (DeVries, 2002). Tolerance is a fundamental criteria for peace, civility and the exercise of democratic principles (Moreno-Riano, 2003). Given the present geopolitical realities, both developed and emerging countries are challenged in their efforts to understand and exercise tolerance. Threats to survival, embodied by war and the present fear of terrorism, often cloaked in fundamentalist ideologies, challenge our ability to remain open to the differences of belief and practice offered by the world community. Multiculturalism and sensitivity to diversity emanate from an acceptance and practice of tolerance. Understanding the role of tolerance in society requires one to consider both the philosophical and historical foundations of the concept as well as its cultural applications.

The role of leisure, here defined as free time, as a contributing factor in the evolution of culture is an appropriate starting point for a philosophical discussion of tolerance and its relation to a contemporary understanding of leisure. This paper examines the practical origins of the concept of tolerance as realized in post – Reformation western culture. This understanding of tolerance, unfettered by contemporary issues of identity politics, will be shown to have an intimate link to the potential found in leisure.

Tolerance, or the lack thereof, in western societies was often most evident in the constraints placed on leisure, the enjoyment of recreation, godly or otherwise, by those who interpreted and enforced religious or political power. To participate in unapproved recreational activities during the reform period was paramount to treason resulting in censure, excommunication and sometimes imprisonment or death (deLisle, 2003). As the control exerted by the Roman church receded in Europe, regional lords and opportunists, who saw benefit in allying themselves with proponents of ecclesial reform, filled the power vacuum. Church law and civil law were bound together in unprecedented ways. One may examine the municipal records of Geneva (Kingdon 1995; Lindberg 2000) as they relate to the actions of the Consistory and the Elders to more fully understand this relationship. Further evidence is available in the records of the Roman Church documents regarding the consequences of non-conformity in politico-religious settings of post-reform Europe. While the intention may have been to create a society based on scripture, the methods of enforcement were decidedly medieval.

This study attempts to provide a general understanding of the interrelationship of leisure, religious belief and the practice of tolerance. Institutionalized religion has historically used leisure activities in both positive and negative ways in enforcing its vision of world order and eschatological reward. The level of tolerance for opposing views often results in oppression and strife.

Tolerance Defined

Tolerance has been grounded in theories ranging from its description as a benevolent form of conflict management (Moreno-Riano, 2003), as a wholly social phenomena (Nederman, 2000, Murphy, 2001), and a universal virtue beyond a mere conformity to external standards (Newey, 1999). Tolerance, for the purpose of this discussion, is considered to be the deliberate act of an individual or organization in refraining from disapproval, censure or violence against the beliefs of another, despite one's disagreement with those beliefs (Thompson 2002). Beliefs, the property of the conscience, are necessarily communicated through acts such as ritual public assembly or worship, the observance of moral restrictions upon leisure behaviors and other acts of ideological allegiance. This is evident in the evolution of the concept of *sabbath* in the Hebrew tradition with its many restrictions on human behaviors, the canon laws of the Roman Church and the *Ordinances Ecclesiastiques* scribed by Jean Calvin. Tolerance, confronted by dogma, is then grounded in permitting both the ideology and the activities intimately related to these beliefs. Tolerance is not to be equated with the mere acceptance of inevitable consequences due to one's inability to make change, nor to the assignment of positive values to socially enabling behaviors (political correctness). Tolerance suggests a power of determination that one may choose to exert in order to accept or change another's beliefs either by persuasion or coercion.

Having this power to potentially change or suppress another's beliefs distinguishes tolerance from the contemporary efforts to accept physical differences such as race, gender orientation, ability or disability, and other characteristics commonly bundled in the concept of diversity. Allison and Schneider (2000, p.4) identify six core dimensions of diversity: sexual identity, age, social class, gender, race and mental/physical ability. Religion, along with seven other characteristics, is described as a secondary dimension of diversity identification.

Tolerance and diversity are therefore, not synonymous. Many core characteristics of an individual that describe diversity, such as age, gender and race, cannot be possibly be changed and therefore do not call for tolerance but rather an open mindedness to the value of these differences. This study limits itself to a classical understanding of tolerance as related to belief, freedom of conscience, and those behaviors that manifest these dispositions.

The Relationship of Leisure to Religious Belief and Tolerance

Leisure, objectively defined as free time, can be considered as a non-institutionalized forum for the exploration of the boundaries of individual freedom, allowing for self-determination and varying levels of personal and societal integration: *Otium opportunitatis est*.

Within the realm of leisure is the opportunity to realize the significance of individualized beliefs and practices in the form of religious practice. Religion is understood to be an institutional reality with a hierarchy of beliefs, rules and traditions

delineated through revealed writings and doctrinal statements. Religion binds us to an external force, stabilizes meaningful interaction in the world, creates taboos and forbidden behaviors and protects the social order through a hierarchical structure (Rappaport, 1999, p.xv). These attributes are generally regarded as positive contributions to the advancement of culture and society. However, faith, which frequently finds expression through religious institutions and practices, can also confuse, mislead, create skepticism and fanaticism, intellectual resistance and emotional surrender, lead to the rejection of genuine religion and subjection to substitutes (Tillich, 1956).

Leisure, to be truly representative of freedom, relies on an environment that includes tolerance. History demonstrates that leisure, when subjugated to the designs of church and state, can be constrained and may contribute to a continued pattern of control leading to misunderstanding, strife and violence. The commingling of civil and ecclesial powers in reformation society created a more exacting environment of oppression and greater social control. During the post-reform period, the exercise of free will, from a theological perspective, was denounced (deLisle, 2002). Dumazedier (1974) paints a picture of 'traditional leisure', unfettered by ideologies, as throttled by religion and family with no room for individual expression. Parker (1977) states: "what encroaches upon and destroys leisure is repression, intolerance, a fixation on conformity."

The role of ritual and religious belief and practice contributes towards societal attitudes towards the perception and use of leisure. Religious convictions and practices greatly impact leisure use, from hunter-gatherer societies to post-industrial societies (Overman, 1997). Leisure is a theological construct, as free time and freedom are necessary for the practice of ritual and religion (Shivers & deLisle, 1997). It has been observed that many of the moral constraints placed on leisure behavior are said to originate in religion (Overman, 1997). Leisure experience, according to Kelly & Godbey (1992) is often religious in the most fundamental sense.

The relationship between leisure and religious faith continuously changes as the functional reality of religious practice constantly adjusts to the demands and permutations of societal norms and values. We find therefore, a tenuous and sometimes adversarial positioning of these two basic constructs of human behavior, the ordering of the world to a transcendent, spiritual dimension realized through human institutions and the influence of the temporal reality, free time, known as leisure.

Tolerance – An historical perspective

While tolerance was certainly practiced in some form in the great societies of ancient times, it was a benevolent tolerance based on power and dominance by the ruling, leisured class. Tolerance was more a policy than a virtue. Tolerance promoted domestic tranquility but did not address the underlying issues such as slavery and the prevalent disregard for human life, which, retrospectively, causes one to question the virtue of these acts of tolerance and cultural accommodation. Ancient philosophers and moralists including Aristotle, Plato, Seneca, Epictetus and others, spoke of tolerance, and also of leisure, as the highest level of human activity (Christie, 1996).

Leisure was, however, for those of a certain status in society, freemen, who enjoyed leisure as a by-product of the labor and sacrifice of others. From earliest history there existed an ever-present tension between those who accepted a humanistic, philosophical approach to living and those who participated in cultic or religious behaviors. When viewed as a non-threatening distraction, religion co-existed with the designs and political objectives of the state.

As religious belief and practice exerted a noticeable influence upon the populace, and was deemed to pose a threat of subversion or treason, the government identified these behaviors and corrective actions were taken. It was later, in the Holy Roman Empire, that the need for tolerance was most evident. Competing theological and political interests created what Kierkegaard refers to as the ‘horror religiosus’, the violence that is intimately related to the practice of religion in theologico-political settings. It is a violence that is ‘inescapable and omnipresent’ (DeVries, 2002).

It is somewhat puzzling, and at best ironic, that religion should be the source of particularly cruel forms of violence and intolerance that have plagued the world for countless centuries. In western Europe the utopia envisioned by the reformers was usurped by the elite and merchant classes resulting in cultural hegemony, as the civil authorities attempted to define and control the symbolic and ritual behaviors of the masses. The merchant class, seeking a more orderly and sober society, turned to the new sects of Christianity in order to enforce moral and civil constraints upon the populace. Those participating in leisure activities that were deemed ungodly were met with harsh sanctions. Our contemporary understanding of both religion and leisure compounds this irony as both are viewed as important areas in determining personal and societal well-being (Staley and Miller, 1972, Iso-Ahola, 1980, Winter, 1981).

Conyers (2001) suggests that tolerance is a decidedly Christian contribution to culture, despite the voluminous accounts of intolerance that shaped the theological and political landscape of Europe and its colonies. Christianity, in the purist sense, is about agape, unconditional love, as demonstrated through the life and death of Jesus. When left to the designs of human nature, and the propensity toward physical and dogmatic self-preservation, its purity and sense of universal tolerance are challenged.

Philosophical Foundations of Tolerance – Locke, Voltaire

During the first millennium common values, particularly religious values, were viewed as being critical to the continuance of social order. Religion contributed to the stability and social order by identifying and restricting certain leisure behaviors. Divergent religious values also caused great strife and division in society.

John Locke, exiled from England due to his religious convictions, wrote at great length on the concept of tolerance. Locke’s ideas, found in his *Epistola de tolerantia*, achieved popularity with many, particularly the settlers of the colonies of North America, who sought a proper role for freedom of conscience. His ideas inspired the writings of visionaries, such as Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, in their attempts to form a more perfect union and a new world order.

Locke's explanation of tolerance in combination with Bentham's concept of utilitarianism, provided the colonists with a roadmap of sorts by which the precepts of a new democracy were founded. Locke's understanding of tolerance, however, was limited to the needs of protecting personal autonomy within the confines of the ruling authority. Tolerance, for Locke, was not extended to Catholics as they were seen to be in allegiance with the pope, or atheists whose lack of belief in God was seen as too great a threat to the social order.

It was commonly held that society would collapse into open violence without the cohesion provided by common values. Those in authority were compelled to protect both moral and economic values that their power and authority depended upon. Rejection of homogeneity would lead to a denial of other values such as education and governmental controls. The freedom of individuals to decide for themselves what is valuable could easily lead them to demand the right to live according to those values and to teach them to their children. It could lead to an unraveling of centralized control (Harvey, 2000). Voltaire argued that precisely the opposite was true. The process of imposing homogeneous values led only to conflict and religious wars. The society that resulted from such a process was intellectually stagnant and morally corrupt, because no questions or dissent were permitted. (McElroy, 2003) Instead of homogeneity and control, it was diversity and freedom that created a thriving and peaceful society.

Voltaire's perspectives on tolerance evolved from his readings of predecessors such as Locke and Bayle. Bayle's work, *Commentaire philosophique sur ces mots de Jesus-Christ contrains les d'entre* provided the main source of information and reflection for the French Enlightenment understanding of tolerance. Voltaire's approach to philosophy was less academic and more pragmatic than that of Bayle. Of importance to him was to change the world rather than mercifully interpret it. Voltaire stated that one should not seek to impose answers to the ultimate questions of life on those who may not agree with the propositions put forward. He saw tolerance as contradictory to dogma (Harvey, 2000). Voltaire referred to tolerance as a form of indifference towards dogma. While Locke and Bayle called for a distinct separation of church and state, Voltaire saw religion as being essential to society but subordinated to provide service to the state. Voltaire summarizes in, On the Presbyterians:

"If there were only one religion in England, there would be danger of tyranny; if there were two, they would cut each other's throats; but there are thirty, and they live happily together in peace"(McElroy, 2003).

Those who proposed a serious consideration of the value of tolerance did so in reaction to the enormity of violence that had fallen upon Europe for several centuries, most due to religious intolerance fueled by political ambitions. Particularly abhorrent to Voltaire was the St Bartholomew's massacre of 1572 in which over 50,000 people died at the hands of the French nobility, in approximately six weeks of fighting. The wrongful execution of Jean Calas, based mainly on his status as a Protestant in a predominantly Roman Catholic enclave, motivated Voltaire to express his thoughts on these wrongdoings in his *Treatise on Tolerance*.

Voltaire noted how the merchants and traders of England, from varied religious and cultural backgrounds, got along so well as they concentrated on business. The financial aspirations of these merchants became a shared focus and goal for cooperative behavior. This social model of tolerance has positive implications for the role of leisure in our multicultural world.

The Historical and Theological Basis for *Horror Religiosus*

The events of the Reformation, according to Kingdon (1974), represent a true revolution, although the word would not have been used in such context during that time. Kingdon (p.55) refers to revolution as a sweeping, fundamental change in political organization, social structure, economic property control, and the predominant myth of a social order, thus indicating a major break in the continuity of cultural development.

The Reformation challenged the very basis of Church and State; it declared freedom, yet imposed incarceration, it championed life, but frequently resulted in death. It was nothing if not intolerant of the beliefs and practices of competing ideologies. Decades of war were the immediate result of the inability of religious and temporal leaders to find commonalities amongst themselves and to provide space, both geographically and religiously, for co-existence.

The Reformation began with the struggles of the Roman Catholic Church to manage the spiritual, intellectual, economic and political forces of a growing nationalistic empire during the early years of the 14th century. The Roman Church also suffered from the self-inflicted wounds of internal corruption. Heretical movements such as Lollardism and Hussitism, the Papal Schism 1378-1417, and a growing anti-clericalism all set the stage for the bold actions of Martin Luther in the first few decades of the 1500's. In general terms, the Reformation was a reaction to the Roman Catholic Church's structure and administration throughout Western Europe. Papal supremacy was challenged on theological, political, economic and social fronts.

Concepts such as predestination, and the restrictions placed on social and religious practices by reformers challenged the popular beliefs and practices that for centuries served to ground the populace in the superstition, servitude and relative tranquility of the Roman order. The emergence of a merchant middle class that sought a new order for society, based on social and moral control, led to unprecedented societal upheaval as well as state and church sponsored violence. The pervasiveness of religious constraints in the lives of the early Protestants effectively choked the spontaneity out of leisure.

Violence, as a reaction to both revolution and unorthodoxy, became institutionalized through the continued battle against heresy and the suppression of all forms of dissent. The political ambitions of lords and nobles who seized the opportunity to wrest away control and property held by the Roman church, and the Church's reaction

to these theological and material threats, resulted in untold levels of suffering and protracted war. The 'battle' frequently took place in the realm of leisure, in the control of freedom as expressed in recreational activities. The practice of 'godly recreations' became a test of allegiance to the reform movement. Kingdon (Pettegree & Duke eds.1994) mentions that over fifteen percent of the population of Geneva (approximately 16,000) was brought before the Consistory in a single year due to inappropriate recreation. In later times great debates ensued concerning the alleged bowling by Jean Calvin on the Sabbath in Geneva. The Genevan Consistory outlawed bowling, yet there are anecdotal claims that Calvin was observed bowling by John Knox, the Scottish reformer on the sabbath. This story became a source of scandal for his followers and a point of derision for his detractors (see Coldwell, 1998). This is not a question of fornication or doing physical harm to others, it's about lawn bowling. But due to the intimate links between ecclesial authority and civil law, bowling on the Sabbath could be construed to be treasonous leading to harsh punishment.

Further indications of recreational restrictions are evident in decrees of James I, as stated in the Declaration of Lawful Sports of 1617, extended to all British subjects in the Book of Sports 1618. These admonitions attempted to lessen the controversy between the Puritan leaders who sought stricter controls on leisure behaviors and the Anglican Church, which allowed for more extensive recreational activities on Sunday (deLisle, 2002).

Discussion

Why might one expend time and energy in an analysis of issues and events so far removed from our current time and place? Religion represents an important element of our cultural memory and continues, on many levels, to be relevant to contemporary discussions of social significance. It is politically and socially commendable to embrace diversity and multi-culturalism in contemporary society. The practice of tolerance, in the classical sense of allowing for differences of belief and practice, is presently under duress. Goodale & Cooper, in Driver, Brown & Perry (1991, p.27), prophetically foreshadow today's environment: "But in the absence of an unlikely wave of theocratic fervor such as the Middle East is experiencing, it is not expected that religion will be a salient category within which people tend to think of their free time." We have, over the past decade, moved towards a confrontation with this 'theocratic fervor' as the seeds of fundamentalism, both Christian and otherwise, have resulted in life altering consequences that threaten our existence and constrain our leisure.

Despite the post-modern, humanistic environment of western societies, religion is critical to the reassessment of debates concerning identity, belief and self-determination. Bigotry, fanaticism, fundamentalism, terrorism and state repression are often the response to the growing pluralism of the world community (Devries, 2002).

The post - Reformation movement towards tolerance, associated with Voltaire and others, resulted from a reaction to the intolerance exhibited by religious and secular

rule. Religious intolerance continues in Ireland, Israel, Iran, Iraq and other Middle Eastern locations, in Pakistan and India, Afghanistan, in the Philippines and Indonesia, and most recently in the United States. These religious differences present the greatest source of strife in the modern world. Whether caused by prejudice or by the underlying fear that fuels hate and misunderstanding, the world community has yet to genuinely embrace the concept of tolerance of diverse beliefs and practices. Voltaire reminds his readers that tolerance has not been responsible for a single war, whereas intolerance has 'covered the earth with corpses.' (Harvey, 2002, p.22)

Tolerance, for Voltaire was epitomized by the freedom to act, based on a free and informed conscience. Tolerance was instrumental in that it supported a vision of the common good. While he did not support complete tolerance, as tolerance itself suggests intolerance of certain oppressive behaviors, Voltaire's vision of the role of tolerance in providing for social order provided the impetus for a secular approach to the management of religion in pluralistic societies.

The relationship of tolerance to religious belief has evolved since the period of the Enlightenment. The definition of religion has expanded from the identification of the substance of religion - a belief in a divine being, to the consideration of the psychological function of belief. Contemporary understandings of faith may include systems that reflect a sincere belief in a philosophy or life system devoid of any reference to a divinity.

The substantive approach traditionally identifies religion as a body of beliefs and practices inspired by a divine being. This method of interpretation allows for the delineation of specific theistic systems such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism. In contrast, the functional perspective includes those belief systems that determine a moral order, ascribe beliefs in relationship to conscience, and may not necessarily include specific belief in a god. Examples include Buddhism, Taoism, and natural philosophies such as Humanism. This expansion to a dualistic definition of religion, that of both substance and function of belief, during the past two centuries has been accepted and implemented by governments in their attempt to position religion in the greater realm of government and the common good.

Conclusions

Leisure, like religion, has moved from a focus on its substance, free time or what have you, to an appreciation of its functional benefits. Defining leisure, like defining religion, continues to be a challenge to many. Leisure however, contributes greatly to our understanding of the common good, devoid of particular ideologies. Conversely, leisure as an opportunity for the expression of human potential, embraces the dialectic of faith and religious practice as a core rather than secondary consideration.

We are presently experiencing ideologically diverse groups and whole nations that reject the leisure practices of western societies based on their religious and ideological beliefs. Material success, pluralism and a consumptive relationship to leisure have resulted in cultural myopia on the part of westerners who fail to see the implications that their lifestyles exert on "less developed" regions of the world. These actions continue

to highlight the cultural differences existing between western and non-western conceptualizations of the common good.

One may view leisure as the best opportunity to exercise our commitment to tolerance. As diverse groups attempt to actualize their beliefs and vision of the good life through a myriad of public expressions, society has the power to tolerate or restrict such behaviors. (See Ivy, Stewart and Lue (1992) *Exploring the role of tolerance in recreational conflict: a study of canoeists and motorboat operators*).

Voltaire's practice of tolerance challenges us to re-examine our utilitarian approach to the common good as being the most favourable outcome for the greatest number of people. This approach often ignores the needs of the minority and marginalized portions of society. What must be debated personally and communally is our understanding of the common good.

Our understanding of tolerance has matured since the times of Voltaire. Current efforts towards inclusion, diversity, and multiculturalism have served to move the value system of western societies towards a fuller appreciation of difference as a positive and contributory factor in attaining a sense of moral and social well-being. As we are provided with more choices and constant change, we must recognize that leisure, like religion, provides an opportunity for personal growth and for a greater understanding of diverse visions of the common good. Leisure is critical due to its 'multi-dimensional contribution to a well-lived life' (Driver et al 1991, p.29).

As we daily confront the differences of belief and practice in this village of ours it is evident that we need to expand our understanding of the role of leisure in non-western societies, as religion plays a more prominent role in many of these settings. While the beliefs and practices of Islam have been described relative to leisure (Ibrahim, 1991, Abd-el Salam & El-Sayad, 1997), this religion is only now being explored in a more systematic way (Martin & Mason, 2003). As an emerging China leads the Asian continent to a position of economic influence in the global economy it would serve the Academy well to continue to investigate the role of leisure in the philosophical, theological and political paradigms of that region (see Yeh 1993).

Leadership, both academic and professional, can play a pivotal role in enhancing awareness of the need for tolerance. The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (1993) addresses the issue through their pronouncement on the value of multiculturalism:

"There is a need for national organizations... to take the lead in promoting harmony, equality of opportunity and greater knowledge, understanding and acceptance amongst all racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious communities across the country... Multiculturalism encourages personal freedom and the development of the full leisure potential of the individual regardless of one's racial and ethnic background." (CP/RA, 1993)

Tolerance requires that we accommodate not only the physical differences of race and ethnicity, but the fundamental qualities of values, beliefs and practices that identify and differentiate the human family.

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