

ESSAY CONCERNING DOGMATIC AND RATIONAL TOLERATION

I.

In this essay, I will defend that toleration has to be aligned with reason and true autonomy, inspired by Herbert Marcuse's excerpt from *Repressive Tolerance*.

When toleration becomes merely a repeated dogma, it loses its essence, closing the door to questioning, debate, improvement, and revision of ideas. Moreover, a repeated dogma which is not seen as one by the "parrots" that repeat it, is even more dangerous, because it hides behind a cloud of supposed justification, which is in fact indoctrination. We must therefore be able to identify this loss of essence in toleration, in order to question its harmful implications.

I will argue my views on "dogmatic" tolerance by using Kant's rational justification to the categorical imperative. After that, I will examine some implications of unquestioned tolerance, namely moral relativism, violation of rights, and abuse of power, defending a rational approach to tolerance, much more aligned with morality. Universal tolerance, justified by reason, is a powerful tool towards a progressive and ethical society. Dogmatic universal tolerance, however, quite contrarily, could serve as justification for unethical behavior, mainly because it becomes an echoed doctrine, absent of proper application or motivation by its perpetrators.

II.

Any universal rule should touch the characteristic that differentiates humans from other creatures: reason. Because it is the faculty that we all share, it is what universal rules should be based on. Reason is the factor that makes rules universal, so defending universal toleration through parroting of ideas, and not reason, is a contradiction.

Kant arrived at the categorical imperative through reason. Any other human, by looking at his argument, must also be able to conclude that the categorical imperative is the rule they should follow in ethics. If Kant had based the imperative on contingencies, humans far from his context would not be able to make sense of the system, and the categorical rule would become particular. The notion of autonomy is central in the reasoning behind Kant's ethics. The philosopher opposes inclination, such as desires and the emotions humans arbitrarily have, to duty, which we must use reason to get. Autonomy is the law we give ourselves, so it cannot be based on arbitrary inclinations, mentioned before. Heteronomy, in opposition, is the law we are given, be from inclination, be from third parties, such as the masters in Marcuse's quote. The very notion of parroting of ideas resides in the sensible realm, external to our reason and ability of autonomy. It is only through reason that we can turn a heteronomous concept into something worth abiding by.

If a rule is dogmatic, you cannot rely on its follower to accept other rules consistently if they are reasonable. The justification for the follower to act on dogmatic tolerance is dependent on who administered the rule, and not the rule itself: what truly matters is the communicator, and not the idea. If the communicator proceeds to defend a different idea, or use the original one to justify questionable behavior, the follower will dogmatically believe the master. Again, in opposition, if one follows a rule through reason, even if introduced to the rule by someone else, rationality is the sovereign over that rule, and the communicator loses their power. It is important to note that Kant doesn't exclude the possibility of a heteronomous rule to act in accordance to duty. Similarly, the dogmatic tolerant can act in accordance to reasonable rules, but not *because* of reason. And that is the problem: whoever acts in accordance to reason in a particular situation, will not necessarily do so

again in another. Following this logic of autonomy and heteronomy, we can align different rules in two sides: Reason and Authority. The rules in the reason side are compatible with one another, while the rules in the dogmatic side are contingent, lacking universality. If one accepts one of the universal rules based on reason, they should also accept the others in that side, while if one accepts rules based on authority, they should accept other rules defended by the same authority, be politician, media, philosopher, or teacher. Rational tolerance is aligned with morality in the Kantian sense, while dogmatic tolerance is not aligned with other rules, but merely an echoing of opinions.

III.

By differentiating dogmatic tolerance from rational tolerance, we can begin to access some implications the former has, in opposition to the latter.

Firstly, dogmatic tolerance may lead to moral relativism. The unexamined tolerant is more prone to improperly apply the concept, because he didn't reason it, but rather accepted it. A dogmatic tolerant does not feel entitled to object to immoral practices, because the justification of his tolerance is not in sync with other duties he has under reason. Some of the practices a moral relativist must accept are genital mutilation and forced marriage with minors, which go directly against objective rational morals, and also our internal drive for disagreement and differentiation between good and bad. Toleration must not be mistaken with passiveness when facing those kinds of situations. When toleration is aligned with reason, however, it also takes into account the dignity of humans as rational agents, which is superior to diversity for the sake of it.

Secondly, dogmatic tolerance may put positive rights in front of negative ones. We must differ duties we have in regards to diversity, such as respect for different religions and backgrounds, to impositions on other rights we have, namely freedom of speech. It is a fundamental constituent of a rational society to have open debate of ideas, even if they go against what others believe (be minority or majority). It is through reasonable dialogue that we improve society, advance knowledge, and create rational tolerance. Moreover, silencing dissenting and offensive individuals makes it an impossible task to address their arguments and eventually prove them wrong. Lack of respect for freedom of speech is very compatible with dogmatic tolerance: it substitutes reason for authority. With diminished freedom of speech, individuals are not able to separate sound arguments from bad ones, relying on authority and censors to say what is and what is not to be followed.

Lastly, the justification for dogmatic tolerance is a symptom of something worse, as Marcuse implies in his argument: it shows that individuals are manipulated and indoctrinated, situation which is a fertile terrain for immoral behavior and instrumentalization of the masses. If the masters convince people to be tolerant based of authority solely, authority is what matters, and not the contents of ideas. The power is all in the master, and not reason. Immoral ideas could conduct the indoctrinated individuals, if so the master wished. We have seen several examples of charisma and authority leading whole nations into obscurantism throughout history, and dogmatic toleration, while a relatively innocent subject matter in the field of repetition of ideas, is a sign of the power the communicators of that idea hold. On top of immoralities the "parrots" could commit themselves based on authority, they are also subject to the masters' wrongdoing. Their dignity is not held if they are merely instruments of the wishes of the masters, be for tolerance, or for worse. If individuals are instilled to be critical thinkers, not only immoral behavior will be largely avoided, but they will also have the right motivations to believe in the right ideas, namely reason instead of authority. The same action with

different justifications has different moral worth. While action through dogma uses people as means to an end, action through reason dignifies them.

IV.

Objections could be made regarding the importance of motivation and justification for tolerance, which seems to be good in itself. However, I believe that this was addressed in the essay, by looking at the group of rules in which rational toleration falls as opposed to dogmatic toleration. Dogmatic toleration emphasizes dogma and authority, making easy to turn masses to the wrong direction. Rational toleration is much more sustainable, because it is not as much dependent on the likes of powerful people as it is dependent on strong ideas and sound arguments. By analyzing different justifications for toleration, it is possible to identify implications they present. Dogmatic toleration can, by itself, be harmful in many ways, but much more so because of its authoritarian nature. Rational toleration, contrarily, causes much better consequences, and more fundamentally, for the right reasons. We should be alert to value the toleration of Locke and Erasmus, not because of who they are, but because of their arguments. Also, in order for toleration to be universal in a sense that not only some people do it in regards to everyone else, but that all humans practice it, a rational defense for it must be made, as free as possible from contingencies. Universality relies on reason, and that is what toleration should be based on.