

“Universal toleration becomes questionable when its rationale no longer prevails, when tolerance is administered to manipulated and indoctrinated individuals who parrot, as their own, the opinion of their masters, for whom heteronomy has become autonomy.” Herbert Marcuse, *Repressive Tolerance*

To tolerate is to find means of peaceful coexistence with others. This concept has been used and misused for centuries, starting from the question whether to tolerate other religions continuing until now with new social and ethical dilemmas. The purpose and limits of tolerance are still not defined clearly. In this essay, I will explore the concept of tolerance and its limits.

i. Universalism and Relativism

An utterly important distinction that Herbert Marcuse draws in his quote is the distinction between universal and relative tolerance. As the main object of toleration is culture (in the wider sense of this word), this distinction brings us to a comparison between cultural universalism and relativism. Are different cultures of equal value or some of them are more developed than others? For many people in the Western world this answer might seem obvious: Western individualistic culture is more developed than cultures that neglect human rights and the value of the individual for the sake of society. However, this view is claimed to be ignorant and uneducated by contemporary thinkers, as it is difficult to take individualism as a criteria for development. As culture is a means of adaptation to the environment, it is not possible to state that populations that became focused on human rights are more or less developed than those that sacrifice human rights for the sake of society. Moreover, we are not allowed to judge cultures that violate human rights as it is a part of their culture. As Zhizhek (sorry for misspelled surname) argues in one of his articles, it is hypocrite to judge cultures that have compulsory women circumcision while at the same neglecting the pressure that capitalist liberal democracy puts on women to undergo plastic surgery to become competitive on the sex market. One might also argue that when the intervention of one's body is unavoidable the matter is different, yet still situations are similar because in both cultures one has to choose to modify their body or to be excluded from the society.

This might bring some people to a conclusion that we must universally tolerate cultures without any regard to what extent they respect human rights, yet I believe the difference to be way too fundamental. In a liberal democracy, a person may change their appearance because they are acknowledged to have free will and ability to improve their appearance according to the standards set by the media (which is, in most cases, a representation of society's wishes), while in a tribe a woman that has to undergo the traditional operation is separated from the body that belongs to her. Let us suppose a woman has a plastic surgery in a capitalistic society and if the results are satisfying she feels happier because she made a choice to become more apt to the standards of the society that she lives in. If a woman in the tribe is forced to undergo a surgery, she will feel that it was not her choice and her responsibility to become a part of the society, and thus feel unhappy.

If we agree with Aristotle that to be happy is the universal goal of our lives, than we might as well use happiness as a criteria for development. When we say that we would like to live in a more developed world, we mean that we want to live in a happier world, and this would require our cultures to lead to happiness. Some cultures lead us to suffering, thus some cultures are less developed than others.

ii. Do ideas have a universal value?

So we have agreed that universal toleration of cultures is not a virtue, as some cultures are less developed than others, and tolerating their disadvantages will not help them develop. The other

question is whether we can tolerate ideas universally and if they have, in contrast to cultures, a universal value?

Every document that guarantees freedom of speech is based on the idea that nobody in this world has the right to claim their knowledge to be an absolute objective truth. Nobody knows whether it is better to lower the taxes or increase the quality of public education, build a wall or let immigrants in. We are allowed to express our opinions because we hope that in a free competition the more rational ones will be more convincing and have more chances to win in an election, therefore our world will be ruled by ideas closer to the truth. As Herbert Marcuse himself points out in his article, the telos of tolerance is finding the truth. This concept might bring us to a conclusion that every idea has a universal value and must be tolerated and allowed to be expressed unless we remember the limitations of the freedom of speech. It is said that we can execute our right of freedom of speech until we start violating other people's rights, which means expressing opinions that are factually false or based on unreasonable hatred which only aim is to discriminate against a social group. Can we state that ideas of Nazi Germany politicians have the same value as ideas that promote peace and justice around the world? Let us first define that the value of an idea is a term to be used to measure how reasonable and coherent the idea is. An idea that has more factually correct arguments than another idea has more value. From this point, it seems obvious we can claim the ideas of Nazi Germany less valuable, as most of their arguments are based on factually false information.

iii. Intolerance Supports Tolerance

As we have seen that some ideas are more valuable than others, we can state that less valuable ideas should not be tolerated and should not be allowed to be expressed as they can lead our world to a disaster. So how can we tolerate discriminatively without violating the coherence of the concept of tolerance, as its aim is to establish a free market of opinions where the closest to truth should be discovered?

The main problem faced here is that a free market can be conquered by unfair competition, where participants use unfair methods to gain more supporters. In the market of ideas, these competitors are called demagogues, and their unfair method is an excessive appeal to the strong emotions of fear and hate. Karl Schmitt described that one of the reasons Hitler came to power was because his party was able to construct the image of the Other. The Other should be hated and cannot be tolerated, it is an outside enemy that unites people in their support of one dominating opinion, establishing a monopoly on the opinion market and thus destroying the main purpose of tolerance. Therefore, not tolerating demagogues that by definition express ideas of lower value (and it is also the only way ideas of lower value can win in the market), will not violate the concept of tolerance and can be accepted as an exception to the rule. Because demagogues can destroy the market with spreading lower value opinions, we cannot tolerate ideas that have a certain lower value.

Of course, determining the value of an idea is a process that can be made impossible due to chaos that occurs in the politics, yet still we can realize the value of the idea once we see the consequences of realizing it. This is the same thing that happened with forbidding the support of Nazi ideas. It is already defined ideas of what kind of value cannot be tolerated: ideas that promote crimes against humanity, spread hatred towards a social group, generally speaking, those that are a threat to tolerance itself.

iv. Conclusion

In this essay I analyzed the concept of tolerance and justified its limits. Tolerating every idea without any consideration of its value will lead to destruction of the concept itself. In order not to be repressive, tolerance should not be performed universally, but rather relatively.