

Topic number 2

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While in general the idea of tolerance is widely accepted and beneficial, the question of exact boundaries of tolerance is still quite open. One of the possible answers is universal tolerance – tolerating all and everyone – however, Herbert Marcuse questions this idea saying that “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”.

Marcuse develops an interesting point, however to understand him, one must first come to a general understanding of tolerance, universal tolerance and the rationale of universal tolerance and how it relates to an individual’s autonomy. When this understanding is attained we may fully interpret the statement and afterwards a more detailed examination of the practical aspects of the implications of Marcuse’s idea can be made.

1.

I do agree with the idea that if “the rationale of *something* no longer prevails then it becomes questionable”. However now one must understand if the rationale truly does not prevail and to that end the rationale of the *thing* in question must be fully understood.

Tolerance in itself is the notion that, even when faced with an idea, opinion or action of another that I do not agree on, one that may even cause significant dislike or even disgust in me, I must not force my views, especially in an angry or hateful way, and come to acceptance of the others actions.

Thus, for example, if I am a non-smoker, and while standing in line to buy some groceries I see the person in front of me buy two blocks of cigarettes, I should not go up to him afterwards and lecture him on the negative health effects of tobacco and how she should stop smoking. Rather I should accept that the person has his or her own reasons unknown to me to buy the two blocks of cigarettes, and thus come to acceptance. For example the person might just be buying the cigarettes for a friend, or maybe he was planning on using them in an art installation in protest of smoking or what not. Then if I were to come up to him with my initial assumption of him being a chain-smoker and started giving him a lecture on non-smoking, I would have simply imposed my own view without need.

A key idea here is that the person, who does this action or promotes this idea or opinion that I do not agree with, is either fully unknown to me or possesses some information that is hidden from me. **Thereby I cannot make fully rational assumptions about his specific thoughts or actions, and thereby cannot make a fully rationalized argument against the others actions. Thus it would be irrational to put forth my argument (either in words or actions or otherwise) as it is not rational in the first place.** And this at its basis is what I understand as the rationale of tolerance.

In a Cartesian sense, one must first use the method of systematical doubt to come to some unquestionable foundations that he himself cannot doubt anymore and only then may he build up his argument on these foundations to be true. The rationale of tolerance is that if we cannot find such foundations then we cannot argue with someone and must come to accept his (but not necessarily make it our own) view.

Just to clarify, we cannot talk about tolerance in mathematics. It would be most absurd to tolerate someone's idea of -1 being a positive integer, provided we know the exact system of axioms he has used to derive this statement, and see a flaw in his reasoning.

2.

In this context, universal tolerance is the idea that tolerance should be universal, in other words we should tolerate everyone around us, and in turn this would be implied by the fact that everyone around us has to have to some extent hidden information. And of course this is true, since each of us is an individual with his own thoughts and history and only I myself may know who I am fully. So in some sense there is grounding for the idea of universal tolerance.

There have been multiple problems with this idea, however. Namely the "paradox of tolerance" which asks should one tolerate people who are themselves intolerant. Since, if we do not tolerate those who are intolerant, then we ourselves become intolerant. If we do however tolerate those who are intolerant then we may put ourselves in danger, for they may act upon us violently.

I was once buying cigarettes and some granny in line behind me started quite vocally insulting me and I was at a terrible loss of words since on one hand I didn't want to start forcing my own opinions upon her, however on the other hand I was very offended.

A famous solution to this is to tolerate the intolerant so as long as the intolerant do not pose a threat to the safety or liberty of those tolerant. So in a sense we recognize that some actions, such as the limiting of liberty due to one's skin color or violence because of one's political beliefs, are universally irrational no matter the hidden information behind it. And here we see the rationale of tolerance breaking down as one can now fully rationalize and put forth his ideas despite the hidden information. This also shows us that there are situations in which intolerance (the intolerance of the intolerable and violent or deliberating (taking away liberty)) is tolerable.

3.

Marcuse provides a completely different context for the rationale of tolerance to be broken. He argues that it also breaks down if the individual whom does the action or has this thought, that we do not accept, does it not on his own accord but rather because of some outside influence. So this would mean that, similarly to how we cannot tolerate those who are intolerant and violent, we also cannot tolerate those who are not autonomous.

Notice that Marcuse does not say specifically that the heteronomous person should also be intolerant. He argues purely on the basis of lack of autonomy.

A parent catches his teenage son smoking with his friends, and she absolutely despises smoking. By the concept of universal autonomy she should come to tolerate the actions of her son. I however think that he is right to impose his view upon his son and be intolerant of smoking. Here Marcuse's point becomes apparent, since the son himself is not acting autonomously here, but is rather adhering to the group of friends (in addition one might argue that the son, being a teenager has yet to develop full autonomy but this is a rather complicated position).

I think the problem here arises from the fact that the person who has committed an action or promoted an idea that we do not agree with has done so without his own thought and thus there can be no hidden information pertaining to the person in question (he himself can have no information about it for that would imply that he does have some autonomous opinion or ideas). If he is acting only on the opinion of his master then it is fully rational to be intolerant and to present

our own arguments against his position. To a certain degree this might even serve as a way for us to educate the person on the matter and help him develop his or her own opinion. So in a sense, if I know that someone has been manipulated into thinking some particular opinion is right, then I can make a fully rational argument, since there is in fact no more hidden information of the person **himself** that would pertain to this opinion, we may only talk about the hidden information that his master has.

4.

I think that Marcuse's position is justified and that universal tolerance may be questioned in the cases where people act without autonomy, similarly to how we may question universal tolerance in the cases when there people are both intolerant and violent or oppressive.

However a quite practical question now comes to mind – how do we know that the person in particular is not acting on his own but rather being manipulated by some master? To return to the example of the smoking son, how is the parent to know that it was not her own son who manipulated others into smoking? Of course the parent may know his son very well and without a shadow of a doubt deduce that the son is not acting his usual self.

However in practice we may not always be able to make such a distinction. A rather famous example comes from the trials against the Nazi's after the war. To what extent could we say that those from the Nazi Germany side were criminals of war if most of them were only following orders. So to a certain extent they are implying full heteronomy. Of course, Marcuse's claim applies to a very strong form of heteronomy, "manipulated and indoctrinated individuals who parrot, as their own, the opinion of their masters, for whom heteronomy has become autonomy", which may imply that he only thinks the very extreme end of this non autonomy should not be tolerated.

However a yet more interesting question is then should we tolerate the so called master? Because in essence the master's idea is his own autonomous idea by definition, and it may even be tolerant. Thus by the rationale of tolerance it does not seem likely that we shouldn't tolerate him.

Yet at the same time people have been manipulated and indoctrinated and have lost all or almost all autonomy in relation to the idea they are promoting. Is there not something inherently intolerant and deliberating in such an idea and way of promoting this idea? The limiting of autonomy implies also a limiting of liberty and is a very intolerant action since it heavily ignores the existing ideas one might have about the subject and not only forces foreign ideas and opinions, but actually substitutes one's own ideas. Now we see that the act of indoctrination is both intolerant and deliberating and thus is also intolerable. So the master who indoctrinates others to some idea is also intolerable just like his followers.

5.

However the very idea of tolerance is very much being indoctrinated to people around the world right now.

We are constantly taught to be "politically correct" and to be tolerant and accepting of everyone around us but very rarely is there concrete proof given to support that this is really the case. And even more rarely are cases where being intolerant is ok are discussed. Not only have we just seen two examples where this is completely rationalized, but it is also applied in practice on many occasions, for example on the markings of tobacco products, which in most EU countries show rather grotesque pictures of smoking related diseases and has labels educating us that "smoking kills" etc. which are well known facts to most smokers, which shows that the country is against

smoking, and is trying to force its opinions upon the consumers of tobacco in a paternalistic way. Of course we may debate whether or not this is an example of rationalized or unrationalized intolerance, but the fact that the general public is often not aware of this application of intolerance is quite baffling.

So it might seem that, as it is presented to the public, the idea of tolerance, while widely useful, is actually in itself being presented as a universal dogma and this in turn has created many brainwashed followers of the idea in recent years, the so called “social justice warriors”, people whose cause is to fight for social justice which in itself is a very noble cause, but often they are quite misguided in the way of the social. They have taken the idea of tolerance quite dogmatically and usually very easily fall into the paradox of tolerance.

That is not to say that the very idea of tolerance is intolerable, simply that the way of presentation of tolerance is intolerable.

6.

To summarize, through a more complete understanding of tolerance and the rationality of intolerance we were able to interpret Herbert Marcuse’s quote and understand the problem that he proposes, and the similarity of this problem to a previously proposed problem dubbed the paradox of tolerance. The introduction of hidden information of a person was vital in the analysis of solutions to both problems, and a further analysis lets us conclude that the very teaching of tolerance nowadays are becoming part of the problem. So in a way, I think that for the reason shown earlier and the situations where intolerance is rationalized, it may be inferred that the teachings of tolerance as a whole have become somewhat of a dogma and should thus not be tolerated and there should be an effort made in order to better the understanding and the teachings of tolerance around the world.