

‘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* (1965)

Introduction

The principle of toleration is probably one of the principles of greatest importance to our modern western societies. Deeply embedded into our modern global multiculturalist civilization, toleration remains one of the most concerning problems within the realms of our modern global world. But yet our times mark the biggest crisis of tolerance hitherto we have ever known. How could we defend the very principle of our civilization, if it is undermined by the impending horror of terrorism? How could we protect our multicultural global society from collapsing, when the pressure between those extremely different cultures turns out to be the greatest threat to our world of freedom and equality. How could we protect our global community from dissolving after it is apparent that these cultures are more different than similar? The very foundations of our global society are in their biggest crisis. Such are some of the issues that ought to be sought in order to live peacefully with the ones who somehow differ from us. Those are some of the questions to be asked in order to overcome this crisis of tolerance. The answers, I believe, ought to be sought by means of reasoning and presenting sound argumentation. Therefore our task requires from us to broaden our intellectual capacities and possibilities. We should be able to compare different points of view and have our own one provided by means of reasoning and logic.

My general statement or thesis in this philosophical paper is that in order to maintain the principle of toleration and therefore to defend our modern western societies from collapsing and dissolving, we ought to promote education. Only through education and critical thinking, the latter implying the need both of philosophy and logic, we could defend successfully the sound foundation of our global multicultural society. But how is that to happen when the very principle of toleration is paradoxical in its nature or at least turns out to be paradoxical when applied in practice? This was, I think, one of Herbert Marcuse's biggest concerns explicated in his work *Repressive Toleranz*. He thought that the universality of toleration becomes questionable in the moment that it loses its reasonable grounding and this, as Marcuse put it, undermines the universal validity and relevance of toleration. Therefore in order to point out that toleration has a chance through promoting education and critical thinking, I shall engage with the task to point out a few aspects in which toleration turns out to be paradoxical and I shall attempt to overrule them by suggesting an alternative that could be implemented into education.

Before engaging with the argumentative part of this paper I shall outline its structure in order to make it much easier for the reader to follow my framework of argumentation.

- I. Clarifying terminology
 - The term 'toleration'
 - The term 'paradoxical'
 - The term 'reasoning'
- II. Universal toleration – paradoxes and (im)possibilities?
 - Arguments against the possibility of universal toleration
 - Marcuse on the questionability and the role of reason.
 - Tolerance and obedience/manipulation
 - Toleration is not by any means universal
 - Should a paradox be upheld by means of reason? If not, then why not?
- III. Karl Popper and the paradoxes of tolerance.
 - Undermining the principle of toleration
 - Should a paradox be upheld by means of reason? If not, then why not?
- IV. Why is tolerance important to us?
 - The need of tolerance
 - An alternative through education and critical thinking
 - Differences and similarities

Part One

Clarifying terminology

Before engaging with the critical part of this paper I think that it is of great importance to the reader that some of the terms that I shall use quite frequently further into this philosophical paper are made explicit and comprehensible. Such terms are 'toleration', 'paradoxical' and 'reasoning'. The need of conceptual linguistic analysis is due to the importance of making more lucid both my thoughts and the framework of argumentation in this philosophical paper. The term 'toleration' I shall refer as someone's will to accept and appreciate the other, albeit their differences. Toleration, on the other hand, deals not only with cultural issues, it could deal with other social issues too and is to be thought as a sound principle of our global society that ought to keep society intact. By 'paradoxical' I refer to an untruthful argument or implication of the sort 'If A...then B' in which it could be verified that if B is wrong or untrue then A should not be considered valid. By the term 'reasoning' I refer to using certain logical operations in order to make an argument convincing enough in order to be accepted and ascertained as true. By critical thinking in my essay I shall mean exactly the above mentioned features of 'reasoning' which seem to be of great importance for Herbert Marcuse, who above all points out that another essential feature of critical thinking or reasoning is precisely the ability to doubt and question things and their truthfulness

Part Two

Universal toleration – paradoxes and (im)possibilities?

- *Arguments against the possibility of universal toleration*
- *Marcuse on the questionability and the role of reason.*
- *Tolerance and obedience/manipulation*
- *Toleration is not by any means universal*
- *Should a paradox be upheld by means of reason? If not, then why not?*

Herbert Marcuse is one of the most prominent post-war philosophers who considered toleration and tolerance in general as quite problematic topics. Now I shall give an account for his skepticism towards toleration made explicit in his quotation from *Repressive Toleranz* and his view that the questionability of tolerance rises in the very moment when reason is abandoned.

In ***Part One*** I have already given a definition of the term ‘reasoning’. In sum, to reason is to think in terms of using logic to provide a solid ground for your own arguments and to be able form your point of view to question things. This definition refers to critical thinking and respectively to the inquiry of philosophy. The philosopher, in a Cartesian sense, ought to be skeptic, ought never to accept anything as given but rather should aim to understand what is true or false and what is good or evil. Therefore skeptical thinking applies to human experience and is to be thought to have a constitutive positive role for human existence and society in general. So basically Marcuse meant that if accepting universal tolerance implies or entails that we accept reasoning, then we should not question toleration since it will lay on some solid reasonable grounds. So if universal tolerance is bound with the effectiveness of reasoning, then it does not follow that there is any problem. But yet the problem arises when we abandon critical thinking. If we do not consider skepticism it could be easy that other people could mislead us in our judgments. Only then when universal toleration is bound with speculation and manipulation, with indifference and ignorance, with indoctrination and parroting the principle of toleration loses its ground and becomes questionable. The negation of skepticism could lead us into dismissing our own freedom since we would not have our own logically grounded opinion which is a requirement for expressing freedom. There simply would not be a diversity of opinions. Marcuse points out that if the principle of toleration loses its rational grounds, then it would become nothing more than a firm ideological conception based not on freedom but on submission. Here another aspect of rationality is given as opposed to the irrationality of the ideological doctrine or dogma. Rationality accepts and considers other points of view. It already admits the diversity of the other. If we act and think rationally than we would not be failed to idealize – for example, the principle of toleration by making tolerance a submissive ideology. Rationality has already admitted the pluralism of views as a premise whereas the ideology acknowledges only one opinion – namely, the opinion of the master. Therefore true tolerance could be maintained only by rationality for only rationality accepts that the freedom of expressing different opinions. Therefore universal tolerances become questionable as far as it loses its solid rational ground and becomes mere ideology.

Part Three

Karl Popper and the paradoxes of tolerance.

- *Undermining the principle of toleration*
- *Should a paradox be upheld by means of reason? If not, then why not?*
- *Imposing toleration; self-refutation of tolerance*

Marcuse seems to be afraid that it is the universality of toleration that makes it vulnerable to losing its rational grounds and becoming an ideology. Namely from its universality come its paradoxes. If toleration ought to be universal, then how should we deal with the intolerant groups or people within our society? Irrational tolerance – namely, ideology contains within itself a paradox which Karl Popper pointed out. Let us imagine that a society is consisted of three groups. Two of them approve the idea of tolerance and claim that the principle of toleration ought to be universal so that the society consisted of all of the three groups could exist. Yet third group does not support this claim. We should make the distinction between the first two groups and the third one. The latter we shall refer to as the intolerant group and the others – the tolerant groups. In proportions, that would be 2:1. If the third group does not want to be tolerant, then the society could not simply exist, therefore they, too, have to accept tolerance but the problem is that they do not want to. Yet they are intolerant. They do not accept the differences of others and quite often harass and humiliate them on the very basis – for example, of their religious believe or sexuality. If this keeps going then the society would have to simply cease to exist. Then what are the options? The tolerant groups have to somehow make the intolerant one accept their views. But yet here the problem arises. Tolerance ought to be imposed in an intolerant manner. If they do not want to accept our views peacefully without conflicting us, then we must make them do it and subdue them to our own views without considering their own freedom of choice and expression. Hence not only then, in a such case, as it quite often occurs, especially recently in some parts of Europe, that we impose toleration violently but we also take the freedom of others. Therefore, in this sense, this universal claim or demand of toleration, which by its nature is universalistic, may lead to self-refutation of the very principles of toleration which are reasoning, freedom and admitting and accepting the differences of the others without judging them. Yet in its paradoxical nature toleration refutes and undermines itself since in practice tolerance is never fully fulfilled. Therefore if by its paradoxical nature toleration is rather unachievable, then what is the use of it since there will always be inequality and discrimination in practice in society? How is it possible for toleration to be logically maintained when its appliance leads to even bigger problems for society and might even disrupt it? In the meantime we ought not to be intolerant in order to promote tolerance. Then how could we promote tolerance without refuting any of its fundamental premises? How is it that cope with its paradoxes and manage to overcome imposing tolerance by intolerant means? Moreover, it is impossible for one to demand a logical maintenance of a paradox. Thus we are faced with the problem of refuting toleration on a logical ground.

Part Four

Why is tolerance important to us?

- *The need of tolerance*
- *An alternative through education and critical thinking*
- *Differences and similarities*

Yet every day we meet intolerance in its various forms. It seems that our society prefers to remain negligent. While being intolerant by any means, we claim that we uphold the principle of toleration. Tolerance in such manner is nothing more than an ideological instrument to subdue people, to deprive them from having their opinion. In this case, universal toleration turns out to be merely a hypocrisy. Ignorance then is an instrument of submission by which individuals are made less interested in expressing or even having any opinions about topics that are vital for a society. The abandonment of reason is a rejection of true tolerance. But why do we need tolerance in the first place if everyone is ignorant and, in practice, intolerant? The meaning of tolerance is a result of the need of peaceful life and appreciation of the other. The alternative I would rather suggest in opposite to the status quo in which ideology is disguised as toleration that we ought to invest in education and critical thinking. I have hitherto mentioned that toleration is possible only there were one has the right to have his own opinion and to express it reasonably. Toleration is not only about accepting differences. It is about accepting that to a really large extent, no matter what the differences are, we are human and have the ability to think and communicate with others. Hatred comes there wherein no similarities are to be seen although they might be apparent. If ideology puts the stress on the conceptual difference between your view and my view, then it is tolerance bound with reason that shows the multitude of similarities between us thus enabling us to enter freely into dialogue wherein you and I are equal and free. Therefore it is only through education and critical thinking that there could be antidote against the blindness of ideology and the delusion of 'repressive tolerance'.

Conclusion

In this paper I attempted to offer an alternative through which we could defend and maintain the principle of toleration within our western modern societies. I have suggested that namely through education and critical thinking toleration and tolerance have a chance. I have divided my paper into four parts. In the first one I give an account of some basic terminology used further in the paper. Then, in the second part, I view Marcuse's quotation and question the role of rationality and skepticism concerning the problem of toleration. I point out that it is namely rationality which admits the freedom of the other person and accepts his different point of view. Therefore rationality and freedom are the premises of true tolerance whereas ignorance and the inability to have or to form an opinion characterize a state of limited freedom or even submission typical for the ideology. Thus I have opposed tolerance bound with reason to tolerance as a disguise for the ideology. Then in the second part I point out one of toleration's biggest paradoxes, indicated by Karl Popper, consisted of the fact that in practice tolerance within a society is imposed intolerantly. Therefore, I have pointed out, we could talk about

toleration's self-refutation in practice and the impossibility to logically defend a position which turns out to be paradoxical and untenable. Then in the fourth part of my paper I argued that we should not hurry to overrule toleration for it is a vital concept concerning the survival and the integrity of our multicultural global modern society. I have suggested that we have to by any means invest in education and critical thinking because only through these means we could manage to promote tolerance without refuting its basic principles and premises, i.e. the freedom to reasonably form and express different opinions about important societal issues. I have insisted that we only through education and critical thinking we could overrule the immense threat of ideology or of 'repressive tolerance'. Toleration I have pointed out is not about us being different but about as being equal.