
RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND INTOLERANCE

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Abstract

The authors start with the presentation of the arguments for the thesis that there is no sufficient political justification for religious tolerance. They recognise their soundness but on the other hand, they argue that there are also other, non-political arguments for religious tolerance. They stress the argument from religious ecumenism, and arguments from the doctrines of certain religions themselves. Regarding the second, they focus on Christianity as the religion of freedom, which prefers acting according to one's consciousness over the utilitarian reasons. In the second part of the article, the authors deal with the implementation of tolerance and intolerance. In this frame, they consider the issues of the agent of tolerance and intolerance, and of the compatibility of world religions with religious freedom and political pluralism. They draw the following conclusions: 1) we should avoid as much as possible the state of being the agent of tolerance and intolerance; 2) the majority of the adherents of world religions are religious exclusivists. However, religious exclusivism doesn't imply political exclusivism, and world religions are compatible with political pluralism. Moreover, they have resources for being important origins and foundations of religious freedom, political pluralism and (thus) of liberal democracy.

Keywords: paternalism, freedom, conscience, world religions, religious exclusivism

1. Lack of political justification for religious tolerance

Religious (in)tolerance has been thoroughly, clearly and comprehensively addressed by the philosopher Thomas Christiano, and we will begin by drawing on his discussion on this topic [1]. The premise on which he develops his arguments in favour of the violation of religious tolerance is that religious interests are transcendent and that as such they outweigh all other interests. He deals with three arguments for religious tolerance and shows that they are not sufficient for the absolute exclusion of religious intolerance. These arguments are: the argument from the principle of harm, the argument from moderate scepticism and equality, and the argument that religious persecution is inconsistent or self-defeating.

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The first argument is that religious intolerance does not necessarily violate the principle of harm. The principle of harm claims that we should not engage in the conduct of another person without their consent unless it is to prevent harm to others. This principle implies that paternalistic or moralistic interventions are prohibited unless we have a person's consent or a person is not in the condition (yet) to truly consent [1]. Christiano proves his claim by referring to the ignorance of a person and the inability to learn from their mistakes. Suppose a person does not know that the bridge over the abyss will collapse (Mill's example [2] by which Mill advocated the possible justification of paternalism). At that time, we can prevent them from using the bridge, and they would be grateful if they knew that the bridge would collapse under them. It's similar with religious intolerance. People do not know and do not have an exam retake, but end up in the worst situation. If they knew where their misconduct leads, they would be grateful for our intervention, even if it violates religious tolerance and represents religious paternalism [1].

Christiano considers another two other arguments for religious tolerance: the argument from moderate scepticism and equality, and the argument from the inconsistency of religious persecution [1]. The first of the just mentioned arguments goes as follows: if we observe various religious views, we see that to adherents of each religion, its views seem to be the most true or sensible, but there is no authority (from this world) to decide on this issue [3]. Thus, each religion can impose its own views on others only on the basis of the mere inferiority of other religions. Christiano points out that here we deal with moderate scepticism: the argument does not claim that the religious views concerned are not justified, but only that they have not been given adequate evidence and that the arguments of religions can't be proven. The argument thus avoids conflict with religions, and its adherents seek peace or reconciliation between religions [1].

Why is the argument of moderate scepticism and equality wrong? Christiano shows that the defence of tolerance from scepticism and equality ultimately reduces the opposition to paternalism. But, as we have seen above, paternalism is justified if the 'victim' of the paternalistic intervention later, retrospectively, accepted that we had saved them from something bad and actually helped them. That is what a religious believer believes about the 'victim' of their paternalism. Christiano adds some other interesting thoughts to this. He for instance refuses the objection from equality to paternalism which claims that we treat the 'victim' of paternalism as inferior and therefore unequal. In a sense this is certainly true in the cognitive or epistemic respect. However, there is an even more important level of equality, namely that we must strive for other people's welfare and survival as their prosperity and life are as valuable as ours. And respect for this equality (as more important than respecting cognitive equality) leads the paternalist in their intervention. Christiano further argues that faithful people can't, in fact, be convinced that their religious beliefs are equally unfounded as the beliefs of representatives of other religions. If they thought this, they would not be faithful, but they would be real sceptics [1, 4]. Therefore

paternalism can be permitted and even commanded by the principle that we must respect another as being equal (for example, in the case of others experiencing eternal curse if we do not (paternalistically) help them). Consequently, the argument from scepticism and equality is not enough for the absolute unacceptability of religious intolerance [1].

The third argument that Christiano deals with is that religious persecution does not achieve conversion, but at most force people to feign faith. On the other hand, many inquisitors and their collaborators deviate from salvation because of their crimes. In addition, persecution can aggravate or intensify conflicts, violence etc. Christiano claims that this is not necessarily the case. For example, we can change people's belief indirectly by changing their environment. He points out to St. Augustine who initially opposed the persecution but then accepted it on the basis of the experience with the Donatists [1]. He observed that after persecution, many people truly converted to genuine Christianity and expressed gratitude for persecution [5, 6]. These people are an example of retrospective gratitude that justifies paternalism. Christiano concludes that the case of the Donatists contests the power of both the anti-paternalist argument and the argument about the inconsistency of religious persecution [1].

Christiano therefore thinks that there is no sufficient political argument for religious tolerance, because he argues that the above three arguments are the main political arguments for religious tolerance. However, this does not mean that there are no other, non-political arguments for religious tolerance. In addition to some pragmatic arguments as such, Christiano lists two arguments: 1) argument from religious ecumenism, and 2) argument from the doctrine of certain religions themselves. The first argument is based on religious inclusivism, which is the view that salvation can be achieved through following the path of various religions [1]. Some inclusivists even claim that anyone whose worldview includes moral, political, and spiritual values is actually a member of a certain religion [1]. As an example of such position, Christiano cites the work of Hans Küng *Freedom Today*, in particular the chapter *Freedom of Religions* [7]. With regard to another type of argument, it is mentioned that according to some religions the persecution of differently believing (and not believing) is a sin, and that the change of belief is a matter of God, not of man. Some religions teach that the salvation of an individual depends on his or her morality, not on faith [1].

2. Non-political reasons for religious tolerance

Christiano believes that the principle of equality of persons is a necessary and sufficient basis for democracy, and that it follows that the violation of the principle of religious tolerance is not contrary to democracy. This is a good utilitarian political argument against the principle of tolerance. However, it is not always useful for all. For example, from the Christian point of view, utilitarian argumentation is not enough to justify religious intolerance. Christianity is a religion of freedom [8-12]. Christianity does not support utilitarianism, but

requires the respect of freedom, both of its own and other. However, religious paternalism is incompatible with this respect. In Christianity, freedom is superior to other values, and equality of freedom is ahead of other equality [13, 14]. Consequently, Christians should not oppress freedom in order to achieve some other goal, for example, achieve economic equity. They also must not suppress freedom in order for someone else to survive, unless these are unadult or dependent persons. But in this case, it is not about oppression of freedom, but about leading it through life (to independence and thus to freedom).

After considering these arguments, it is clear that religious fundamentalism can't be overcome by pragmatic or political arguments because it doesn't take them into account. We can only defeat them in such a way that in the very religion to which they refer, we find constituents that support religious tolerance or religious inclusiveness. If there are no such parts in their religion, or even there are the opposite, then we have no other way than to somehow protect ourselves from the disadvantage of such religious groups, and we strive to achieve their abandoning of their religion. In this regard, the indirect influence of the environment and protection and the support of those who opt for abandonment, including enabling proper life even after conversion, is very important. Is absolute respect for the principle of religious freedom and absolute religious tolerance compatible with liberal democracy? No, we can only tolerate the tolerant ones. Therefore, in the world where intolerant subjects exist, Jesus' ethics and his command 'Love your enemy' are even more important because they soften the sharpness of urgent intolerance to the intolerant.

Philip L. Quinn uses the term 'tolerance' to refer to something that we feel that is bad and for which we have the power to remove it, and yet we do not do it. It is important to distinguish between what we just do not like, we dislike, and what we consider to be morally bad, which we do not approve of in this sense, what we disapprove [15]. In Quinn's sense, we can talk about tolerance only in the second case. Only such a relationship is true tolerance. This distinction enables us to distinguish between the very different relations and attitudes that would otherwise be thrown into the same box of tolerance. In a loose sense of the word, we can also be tolerant because of pragmatism, scepticism or 'wider Church' (the other is not mistaken as much as we thought). But in the first case, tolerance is not a genuine value, and in the other two cases it is not at all about tolerance in the true sense of the word. Bernard Williams [16] convincingly argued that tolerance is neither indifference nor a Hobbesian compromise [17]. According to him we can, paradoxically, really tolerate only what is intolerable. If there is a decline in 'enthusiasm' (scepticism, pragmatism, ecumenical wide church), then we are not tolerant in the true sense of the word. We can speak of true tolerance only when it comes out of the cherishing individual's autonomy as a value. Similarly, we can say regarding the dialogue with others (who in their beliefs and opinions differ from us). In genuine dialogue, we are not neutral but rather committed. In moral dialogue, we strive primarily for truth and not for compromise [18].

Many, sometimes moving, relationships to others that could be superficially interpreted as tolerance, do not turn out to be true tolerance in the light of the above thinking, since two conditions are not fulfilled: 1) what is 'tolerated' is not something bad (in the eyes of the 'tolerant'); 2) 'tolerance' is not based on respect for the subject's autonomy, but on pragmatism, scepticism ... At this point, we can also criticize the above-presented Christiano's view that the three foundations of religious tolerance are: 1) the pragmatic arguments we encountered in considering the argument about the inconsistency of religious persecution, 2) religious inclusiveness, 3) parts of the teachings of religions themselves that prohibit religious persecution and religious intolerance. The last two are non-pragmatic and non-political foundations. We find that the first foundation is neither necessary nor sufficient condition for tolerance. Religious inclusiveness is not a matter of tolerance if we assume that salvation or good can be achieved in different ways, and for pragmatic reasons, we decide to leave a person to walk on their own way, even if they participate less in truth. The foundation of true tolerance can only be the third foundation, insofar as it follows from the belief that even if one's conduct or a way of life is in fact something bad, we should nevertheless tolerate them out of respect for the value of personal autonomy. True tolerance is therefore not based on pragmatic or utilitarian reasons, but on the respect for person's autonomy as a value. Conduct originating in personal autonomy can be limited only to the extent that it threatens others in their autonomy. Respect for human autonomy in this sense does not contradict the fundamental heteronomy of Christian ethics, but is incorporated into Christianity itself, it is reflected in the Christian belief that we must always act on our conscience, even if it later turns out to be wrong. Thus Thomas Aquinas wrote that any conscience is obligatory so that anyone who acts against the conscience sins [19]. Respect for the conscience is also a human right which is referred to in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the General Assembly of the United Nations (1948) [20]. Preventing the offense of human consciousness is stated by the preamble of the mentioned declaration as one of the reasons for the declaration. Article 18 also declares religious freedom to be a human right.

Cultures may have elements that can be the basis of true tolerance and liberalism. They can be elements that allow for behaviour that is tolerant and liberal only on the face of it, or, in other words, conduct that is only in accordance with virtue but not out of virtue and thus in fact is not a true virtuous or liberal acting (religious inclusivism, pragmatic reasons). These two - acting in accordance with virtue and acting out of virtue - were explicitly distinguished by Kant [21] and, although less explicitly, already by Aristotle [22, 23]. There are also cultures that are not capable of tolerance, and liberal and democratic conduct, even in the weaker sense. Insofar as their activity is directed only inward, we can tolerate them or even support them if pragmatic reasons force us to do so. At the same time we must allow their members the freedom to abandon both the culture and the way of life from which they originate. But if their

activity is outwardly aggressive and actively intolerant, then we must strive for the extinction of the culture of such groups.

3. Implementation of tolerance and intolerance

In this final part of the article we will deal with the question about the correct way of carrying out of tolerance, if our criterion is the compliance with liberal democracy in the Western sense of this term. We will first present the position of Alasdair MacIntyre about the (in)tolerance in general, which we find as very convincing in this regard. MacIntyre's central claim is that intolerance is sometimes correct, yet in most cases it is not right that it is implemented by the state, but rather by the relevant community. We will conclude with a reflection on religious (in)tolerance in the light of MacIntyre's account stressing particularly the importance of protection and cultivation of religious freedom and political pluralism as the fundamental constituents of Western moral grammar.

The toleration is good if it enables us to achieve some individual or communal good. The same is true for intolerance. Toleration must serve to rational discussion in which also conflicting points may be exchanged, *de facto* must be, in order to achieve certain goods. But the conflict must be constructive, not destructive regarding achieving of good. Tolerance and intolerance are in service of a constructive conflict. Tolerance presupposes certain degree of liberty and autonomy on behalf of the agent we tolerate. To be tolerant may be right, and the same it is true of intolerance: it could be right or wrong. It depends on the object of (in)tolerance. Some exclusions and intolerance are needed for rational communal dialogue. Some intolerance should be silenced. By whom? MacIntyre argues that it is not good that this is done by the state. The state should be an agent of (in)tolerance only when this is really necessary. He gives two main reasons: 1) the state is in social conflict never neutral, but rather one of the parties in the conflict [24]; 2) the values and demands of modern state and of the market, and demands and values of a rational local community are always in tension and sometimes in conflict [24, p. 212-214].

At this point we should mention the historical moral MacIntyre draws, and his warning concerning also religion: "What has most often been feared in the past was the state, by favoring one point of view exclusively, would damage the interests of those who gave their allegiance to other standpoints. The harm done by the legally sanctioned hegemony of an established church would be a harm done to dissenters and to the liberty to dissent. But although this kind of harm is still to be feared, grave harm would also be done to the cause of those whose point of view the state had made its own. For the contemporary state could not adopt a point of view on the human good as its own without to a significant degree distorting, degrading and discrediting that point of view. It would put those values to the service of its own political and economic power and so degrade and discredit them. The principal harm that was done by the hegemony accorded to the Roman Catholic Church by regimes as different as those of

Franco's Spain and de Valera's Ireland was after all to the Roman Catholic religion." [24, p. 214]

Who should silence the utterances if not the state? Local communities engaged in systematic conversation about their own goods, answers MacIntyre. The utterances that preclude rational evaluation of important conception of human good should be silenced by rational local communities. How? By ignoring them, by speaking ironically about them, by excluding them from decisions making and from education [24, p. 221] MacIntyre's example of such intolerable examples is on one hand denying the facts of Holocaust: "Local communities engaged in systematic conversation about their own good have to treat certain questions as already decided. And among these by now are questions about the evils of anti-Semitism. Indeed the poisons of anti-Semitism are such that no conception of the human good can be treated as rationally defensible whose defenders cannot show not only how allegiance to it can be dissociated from anti-Semitism, but also how it can provide or acquire resources for neutralizing those poisons. And that can be done only by those who recognize the facts of the Holocaust. I do not mean by this that there are not many other factors that also need to be recognized. But I take the facts about the Holocaust to be a paradigm case of historical facts the denial of which precludes a rational evaluation of an important range of conceptions of human good. I conclude that this is an opinion that ought not to be tolerated in any local community, that to tolerate it is a form of vice, and that those who express it ought to be silenced." [24, p. 220]

But on the other side we find some very particularistic sentences by him: "But of course whether or not to enforce such an exclusion, whether or not to refuse to tolerate the expression of this belief, is itself something open to rational debate and enquiry for any group for whom this issue arises. It is their reasoning about particular cases, not my generalizations, which has to be conclusive." [24, p. 221]

The state may and should be tolerant or intolerant to certain persons or groups but it does not have the right to impose a tolerant or intolerant attitude on other persons or groups. Local communities are according to MacIntyre autonomous regarding what to tolerate and what not. This is the decision belonging to them. To draw the line between tolerable and intolerable is their freedom [24, p. 222].

What does all this mean in respect to religion? First of all, the government must not intervene in the religious communities and violate their religious freedom, as well as in religious tolerance and intolerance. This can only be done when it is really necessary. It is necessary when there are violations of the law and a threat to the foundations of the society itself and its moral grammar. In today's world, most important in this respect are the world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam). This raises the question of which aspects of world religions are relevant in this regard. Two things are most important: firstly, the compatibility of world religions with religious freedom and, secondly, the compatibility of world religions with political pluralism.

Religious exclusivism is the view that a particular religion is superior to others and that it is the only way to the crucial truth and salvation or the crucial good [25, 26]. This applies universally for all people at all times. On the contrary, religious pluralists claim that the highest and decisive good is reachable in various religious (and non-religious) ways [25, p. 140]. Political pluralism is a view that the matters of public or common importance has to be judged and acted in accordance with one's conscience, and that every full and adult member of society has their right to decide on those matters in that way [25, p. 141; 27]. Political exclusivists reject this position.

If specific religious communities violate the two key elements of our Western society and civilization - the principle of religious freedom (which also includes freedom from any religion) and political pluralism - then we can restrict them. Of course this can be done by local communities, civil society, but also the state can do it if necessary, and in certain cases it must do so. This is not an example of violation of the principle of religious freedom, but rather its implementation and justified religious intolerance. Similarly, it is true regarding pluralism.

Many times the actual attitudes and praxis of concrete members and communities alas deserve restrictions and intolerance of a democratic and liberal society. However, we should immediately point out that in principle there is no need for such interventions to happen, because world religions have resources for both, respect for religious freedom [25, p. 110, 193] and political pluralism, which are two most important constituents of liberal democracy. Although most of the members of world religions today are religious exclusivists and it is not to be expected that this will change in the future [25, p. 142], it must be emphasized that religious exclusivism does not imply political exclusivism, and that world religions are compatible with political pluralism [25, p. 150-160]. That is why world religions as such are not a problem regarding respecting religious freedom and political pluralism. On the contrary, they were, are and can be one of its deepest origins and foundations [25, p. 171-172, 192-194]. However, it is crucial that the true interpretations of world religions prevail. Thus we face the competition and 'clash' of interpretations and the problem of providing conditions for constructive discussion and dialogue in society in which the right interpretations of the world religions can prevail. But for such conditions, it is needed that the correct use of tolerance is provided. The circle is closed. In short: if we want to ensure a society of correct use of tolerance and intolerance by world religions, then we must provide the conditions for a constructive discussion which favour the right interpretations of world religions. On the other hand, the correct use of tolerance is already needed for a constructive discussion.

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