

# Why do we have to be tolerant? Tolerance in the light of modern political philosophy

HALINA RAROT

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Marie Curie-Skłodowska University, pl. Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 4, 20031 Lublin, Poland

E-mail: rarot@nowanet.pl

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Author explains why empiric and philosophical knowledge is so ineffective in this case, why it does not make us more tolerant when a significant part of people in western civilization are convinced that tolerance in the world of globalization, in the world of moving people and their cultures is a social necessity. She asserts that in modern political philosophy, it is not possible to reach a consensus on the matter of tolerance. This consensus could be helpful in conforming to necessity and in calculating tolerant behaviour. The impossibility to co-ordinate the positions clearly shows that these positions are only partial, almost ethnic truths. Theoretical nihilism leads to practical nihilism. The only way out from that crisis is to try to overcome theoretical nihilism.

**Key words:** tolerance, consensus, modern political philosophy

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## KNOWLEDGE, FAITH AND TOLERANCE

Probably everybody will agree that nowadays it is difficult to say something new about tolerance. We are surfeited with articles and presentations on the subject. It seems that all has been said about tolerance: about its history in Europe, that it is a virtue or a road to other values, that there are two forms of tolerance, and that there are some limits of tolerance (with which philosophers and ethics have a serious problem). Professor Ryshard Legutko from Cracow even declares that he does not like the meaning of tolerance because it is too vague and has replaced a lot of other values.

Despite the great number of books, articles and papers about tolerance, we are not becoming more tolerant toward different and alien phenomena. Naturally, we are more eager to show friendliness, leniency, patience, acceptance (ethics appeal to these values). But we nurse these feelings and show them only to members of our group, to “*our members*”. Toward “*not our members*”, to those who are diametrically different and culturally alien, to those from other races it is very difficult for us to be friendly, open, to present a moral stoicism, principally accepting that the others have their own rights and that it is necessary, basing on these principles, to respect them. We are capable only of passive tolerance, or in other words of soft insensibility which fills us with proud because the situation may be worse! We were able to be passively intolerant (lack of contacts, no discussions, closing up) or to show active intolerance (a strong will to convince others into our rights).

Why an empiric and philosophical knowledge is so ineffective in this case, *why it does not make us more tolerant?* Why we all know that we have to be tolerant, but in spite of it we are not? It seems that there are two answers to this question: first – the duty to be tolerant

is caused in a wrong way. For example, in the western civilization the duty to be tolerant is reasoned by the empiric knowledge: tolerance is useful because it gives to the mankind a possibility to co-exist in peace, to the different groups the possibility to cooperate, gives us freedom, and at least even the biological survival itself (Walzer 1999: 10).

In the meantime, the duty of tolerance is taken not from the sphere of facts but from the field of “what have to be”, i. e. from *the sphere of challenge or motivation of activity, the sphere of freedom*. So, the previous empiric explanation has not to be sufficient for man’s will. The duty to be tolerant may be based – to my mind – only on faith, because only faith is able to motivate man’s will for activity.

It may be, for example, faith in man’s dignity and autonomy in the case of each concrete man, even that who arouses alien feelings in us, who is alien in many aspects, who is different. This faith in man’s dignity is not an easy faith as there is no easy faith into an absolutely transcendental phenomenon. Those who are capable of such feelings and not very often fall into the darkness of doubts are willing to be positively tolerant (to respect the others, be ready to hear them, etc.).

Another answer to the question why empiric knowledge does not cause tolerant activities is as follows: in this transition from knowledge to activity, stereotypes and prejudices disturb us. In other words, pre-reflex structures of knowledge, a specific “vision in the head” which covers knowledge, convictions and expectations of the observer concerning the alien social groups. These visions, which were engrafted in the socialization process (and therefore are so strong) are characterized by the economy ordering of the world impressions’ richness, and serve the purpose of keeping the positive picture of a person, and even (and this is the most important for us in this case) to explain predominance in the social stricture, etc.

## THE PRESSURE TO BE TOLERANT

It is an ideal situation when faith motivates a person for activity. When there is no faith we still have a pressure which also generates activities (but less effective). A significant part of people in western civilization are convinced that tolerance in the world of globalization, in the world of moving people and their cultures, is a social necessity. The necessity, natural or social, is not discussed but respected. So, to adapt to the necessity, it is necessary to cultivate a person’s behaviour, to mark the signs and criteria that distinguish our deeds towards the radical ethnic and race differences.

Such sign-marks and criteria are possible – to my mind – to find in works of the modern political philosophers, because tolerance is a problem and phenomenon of political and not private life. In the private sphere, as already mentioned, it is easier for us to accept something eccentric, it is easier for us to forgive people from our surrounding, while we convince not the whole of our surrounding but only a concrete unit! When something is happening in the external sphere, between the “others”, alien, it gains for us a collective scale (it touches in that time each of the “others”).

Traditional philosophy of political liberalism, based on the utilization approach (consequencialism), teaches that before we condemn something in an arbitral (stereotype) way, before we show a lack of approval, patience or at least tolerance, for example, towards homosexuals, vulgar youth language – *let us show who has suffered through this behaviour*, let us show their negative consequences, let us point out whose position had become worse through such deeds. On the contrary, things that help to improve somebody’s situation are treated here as morally good. If somebody appreciates these deeds as improper but is not able to show their negative consequences, in this case such a judgment is only esthetical (Kymlicka 1998: 20).

The different critics of the utilization approach lead to the situation when this approach had stopped to be a good tool in the political decision making (Kymlicka 1998: 21). It appeared that people want different things, but the ethics of utilitarianism, which is limited by the pressure to maximize the usefulness, demands to sacrifice the needs of the minority to the needs of the majority and does not treat seriously a unit's individuality. Another fault of such way of thinking about the political life and the moral-political duties is an impo in the complicated post-modern world.

That is why we look for the other solutions, supporting utilitarianism or alternative to it, which would be able to support us in keeping away from the autocratic (stereotype) judgments and behaviour. More and more importance in the solution of problems such as the state and a unit and a vision of social justice gains the conception of the feminist political philosophy. The representatives of this direction are S. Okin (*Women in Western Political Thought*), J. Kristeva (*Nations without Nationalism*), Andrea Dworkin and others. They demand to take into consideration and to be tolerant towards the values of the women's world (first of all care and responsibility) in the sphere of politics (politics and economy), liquidation of the private-public dichotomy<sup>1</sup>. They do not resign from being an object of tolerance. But when they get the question what are the practical criteria to distinguish the deeds, when somebody is rejected to get care and tolerance – at that very moment they have to agree that they have limited possibilities to practice their own attitude, that they are not able to take care of each person, or to do everything they are directed by their ideals of care. They need even general moral directions (which they treat only as a support in solving a concrete situation, but not only a suggestion for a return to action on the spur of the moment)<sup>2</sup>. They have to agree that really there is no consensus among them in the issue most important today: to keep the existing networks of human relations or to discover by their care absolutely new, not typical situations (Kymlicka 1998: 198).

The new conception of the realized political activities, including a decision about the *re-signed accept* of the different, which is new in the global civilization, has been proposed in the 80 of the 20th century by the communitarists: M. Walzer (*Spheres of Justice*), Ch. Taylor (*Philosophy towards the Social Sciences*). Communitarists in their critics of the liberal democracy model (which destroys tradition and community links) consider that it is necessary to tolerate only those things that are tolerated by a community, because the language of morality always is the language of the community, but not the language of all rational beings. This thesis deals with the acceptance of not only the local community, but also of the world's community. The stability of the local community is finally dependent on and guaranteed only in the situation when members of a community "are strongly linked to each other through their common subordination to the state" (Taylor 1995: 17). Awareness of that subordination bears respect among different groups and a hope that they will be really heard in spite of the differences. Thus, members of marginal groups have to conform to the preferences of the community's majority, to conform their personality and practice to the values of the dominating group not

<sup>1</sup> Liquidation of his opposition – according to their opinion – will make free from hypocrisy the modern conceptions of social justice, and will allow to realize a social revolution, if the principles of justice will be verified on the level of privacy, and if it will be accepted that "privacy also is political", after Emma Goldman (in her book *Anarchy and the Other Ideas* (1915)).

<sup>2</sup> In this place, W. Kymlicka quotes a position of V. Held included into his work *Feminism and Moral Theory* (1987) and J. Grimshaw, described in *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking* (1986). See Kymlicka 1998: 297.

to be a moral or esthetic affront to the values dominating in the group (Kymlicka 1998: 225). Such an unpopular approach to the duty of tolerance or non-tolerance of some behaviour is difficult to accept by the “moral minorities” (which had not participated in the definition of certain phenomena and values) and is caused by the communitarist approach to the subject and its self-development. That subject is always rooted in the social roles and practices from which it is very difficult to keep a distance or to be released from. The self-development of the subject becomes real only in the framework of the social roles, when these roles are well understood and the subject is identified with them. The individual benefit distant from all the social determinants would be something void. Only the common benefit delivers the final criteria of the value of the individual need, preferences and objectives of the activities (Kymlicka 1998: 230). This common benefit is a proof the existence of senses and meanings, a denial of the theory according to which an individual will be a primary to the social responsibilities (theory started by J. Locke).

The work on tolerance and its principles only in the field of the cultural, race or sex differences would mean to touch only the cover of the problem. *Discrimination on the grounds of cultural differences is not so painful as discrimination on the grounds of economic differences*<sup>3</sup>. To tell the truth, it is difficult to divide these differences; it is necessary to talk about a dangerous *combination of economic, racial and cultural differences* (Walzer 1999: 73). In the best way it can be seen – as M. Walzer writes in his work about tolerance – in immigration societies today (immigrants bring with them poverty, become economically dependent on the majority of society and are touched by non-tolerance). Permanent poverty and cultural mark were characteristic features of the concurred local ethnoses, former slaves, etc.).

A question should be asked: what is the attitude of political philosophy to that dangerous for tolerance problem of social and economic differences? It treats human equality in a more fundamental way than it was always done by egalitarians, and deals with the treatment of citizens with equal interest and respect (Kymlicka 1998: 13). Naturally, that type of equality taken in an abstract way may have different concretizations.

The liberalists are able to say about this issue more than others, because they have been working on it from the beginning of the 19th century, trying to answer very difficult question: what to do with social disproportions which are the basis of any non-tolerant behaviour? Their position is able to explain only the *equal chances*. The existence of the income and social prestige disproportions is accepted only when the stratification is a result of the honest and free competition. So, unequal incomes are honest only when they are “worked out” (“earned”), but not “get as a gift” (Kymlicka 1998: 69). At the same time, among liberalism philosophers there is no common view on the ways to guarantee equal chances: “*Some of the philosophers consider that it will be enough to prohibit legally a discrimination in the sphere of education and employment. The others suggest that the groups discriminated from the economic and cultural points of view have to be covered by an affirmative action, in the case when the members of these groups have to get the real equal chances in getting the qualifications necessary on the labor market*” (Kymlicka 1998: 69).

<sup>3</sup> The support to my thesis may be the result of the questionnaire research held in Poland in July–September 1991 and concerning tolerance in Polish society. The results were described in the book by Jolanta Augustyniak-Kopka *Tolerant – non-tolerant – indifferent (Tolerancyjni–nietolerancyjni–obojętni)*. In the summary, the author assumes that finally “material and financial issues were the purposes of different aversion and non-tolerant positions” (p. 71). See J. Augustyniak-Kopka, *Tolerancyjni–nietolerancyjni–obojętni*, Łódź, 1992.

An extremely opposite position in the field of liberalism belongs to J. Rawls who tries to overcome the weakness of utilitarianism and Kantianism in his book *The Theory of Justice* (1971). He pays a special attention to the natural disproportions disregarded by the other liberal philosophers – the problem of differences in the sphere of natural abilities (not only social disproportions). He comes to the conclusion, paradoxical for the ordinary way of thinking, that the talented people do not deserve higher incomes and social prestige, and may get them only in the situation when it is combined with the benefits for the less wealthy people, when the first ones share them with the others. The author bases his conclusions on one of the ethic theses that talents and success in life are the result of the “natural lottery”. The result of this lottery is even the readiness to make efforts, which is combined with the social and family circumstances.

This extreme approach to the social disproportion becomes more understandable when we take into consideration the intention used by J. Rawls in his thinking. He intended to avoid any indifferent attitude, to avoid preferable positions of the sides in the social agreement, which may be included into a new one and will be able to create the new principles of political justice. These principles will be cleared from any practical knowledge about their positions and based as purely theoretical issues on the general rational knowledge. Rawls's conception because of its extreme character was not able to change the real backgrounds of concrete political decisions, but instead his theory brought to life political philosophy which was dying from the 50s of the 19th century. His theory started a lot of discussions about the conception of justice, which resulted in new theories: neo-Aristotelianism (A. Bloom) and libertarianism.

Libertarianism, which is called also anarcho-liberalism (or ultraliberalism), is the most extreme form of liberalism (known in Poland mostly from the views of J. Korwin-Mikke), represented by R. Nozick, L. von Mises. Libertarianism, similarly as liberalism, accepts the principle of respect of the individual choice, but rejects the principle of compensation of the social position, because it accepts “the ever growing costs of the realization of the principle of circumstance equalization” (Kymlicka 1998: 176). To these costs can be added the state interventionism, central steered economy, etc. Going in the same direction, one can reach a paradox like, for example, a will to compensate for talent differences. Basing on this argument, libertarianism gains a lot of adherents who do not hear another libertarian thesis (much more controversial) that poverty is not limiting man's freedom or self-possession. But, what is more important (at least in this paper), adherents of libertarianism, spreading the free market principles on the whole social reality, do not want to see the inevitable link between the economic poverty and intolerance and the strengthening of negative stereotypes.

The above presentations of the main streams in modern political philosophy in the field of social (and natural) disproportions and tolerance may bear only relativism or a desire to compose together different elements, to overcome contradictions and finally to reach the consensus. Relativism itself may somehow make tolerance legal, but it frequently leads to its passive form – delicate indifference: I accept the rights of the others, but I need no contact with them.

## **IS PEACE THE HIGHEST VALUE?**

Till this moment I wrote about people who understand tolerance as a necessity in the modern global world, which has to be respected in order to survive. But to save man's life, which is possible in the conditions of the peaceful co-existence of the nations, is not the highest value to everybody. Thus, peace is no more the main fundamental value which bears the hope for a universal legal status of tolerance (and consensus).

It seems that the value of tolerance is appreciated and used to make tolerance obligatory only by weak people (units, social groups, nations). This thesis may sound too sharp, but we cannot ignore the thoughts of many theoreticians from different fields of research (history of ideas, social psychology, or even the ethics of business) who underline that for the socially weak units and groups (for example, immigrants), *tolerance is the most rational strategy of behaviour* (Walzer 1999: 69). Such a strategy makes possible assimilation with a new country and its culture, co-operation free of violence, negotiations in business, which bring social peace and is chosen by those who do not feel themselves strong enough for a hard game called free-market economy, etc. Even J. S. Mill in his essay writes (quoted after R. Legutko) that “history is a constant struggle between the power of authority and the power of freedom; this means that a person who accepts tolerance supports the power of freedom against its adverse – the power of authority” (Legutko 1994: 162).

There are also other people, named by J. S. Mill “freedom-adverse”. For them, more important than peace is the feeling of power’s will, which today is understood not as “powerful corporality, overwhelming health” in the past but rather as “everything in which there is strong, free, and joyful activity” (Nietzsche 2003: 28). The condition of keeping and proving the feeling of this power, as F. Nietzsche wrote, are wars, adventures, hunting, sports events, the possession of an enemy (Nietzsche 2003: 28) (which is at the same time a promise of a joy of victory in glory or, in the case of defeat, the latter would not be so shameful). This joyful activity may be expressed nowadays, for example, in the competition on the computer market, described by Mr. B. Gates, an authority in this field, as a game. He entirely believes into the right of the strongest, and even more than in victory he is interested in how to make the opponent to lose. He rises the speed of the race or competition, paying no attention to the methods because it makes him joyful, and he believes that “only paranoia maniacs will survive” (Laszczak 2001: 59–60).

What would be able to keep that kind of people away from violence, discrimination, using and strengthening stereotypes or negative approaches – in other words, from intolerance? What would be able to keep them away from thinking that “tolerance is an offence” (Goethe)? What is able to stop a heterosexual person from discriminating a homosexual, a husband violating his wife, when their hearts are hard and do not feel lament, sorrow, pain, despair, if they decide to be shy of everything that is painful (Nietzsche 2000: 78), if they do not pay attention to compassion which is one of the fundamental values of peace and harmony in a small or big social group? It would probably be only an esthetic argument according to which peaceful co-existence makes possible the rich variety of the world and generates numerous values. This variety may be a perfect field for the “joyful activity” (the world where there are a lot of potential enemies, many of truths and thus a “*lot of the power centres*”, as we are persuaded by the postmodern discourse). Unfortunately, this argument about the value of variety, while proposed to strong people, may be for them only an encouragement – as R. Legutko says – to provide a selection and hierarchisation of the variety of values to diminish the number of the *centres of power and to create a dominating structure of a power-truth* (Legutko 1994: 173). The best solution in this case is to create one’s own structure, to avoid the feeling of sultry and sticky mud, the feeling that comes from the mentioned excess of diversity. If we will continue the idea of R. Legutko, we have to say pessimistically that [...] “*to be accused of the intolerance of diversity is very easy – almost nobody is free from that accusation (...); the more diverse the world becomes, the higher is the probability that each statement or act, thought or idea will be appreciated by somebody as an expression of discrimination or captivation*” (Legutko 1994: 173).

That is why it is impossible to achieve an agreement, to combine into one unit the partial perspectives in the approach to the problem of tolerance and its argumentation. We have here a conflict of positions, but not a consensus.

## CONCLUSIONS

For political philosophy itself, the situation is definitely positive. Being engaged in life as a descriptive and normative science, political philosophy deals not with *the old truths*, but with *the conflict of the rations* (Kapustin 2002: 30), with the numerous perspectives of its solutions, which are proposed by different ideological positions. This number of perspectives gives us a hope that sooner or later the conflict will be solved. At the same time, political philosophy stops being a dead science, and it is possible to talk about its renaissance.

In an ordinary person's mind, this situation may cause alarm, impatience, even a protest. Man is still expecting from the world of science that a strait answer will be given to a distressing problem in the multicultural world: *why one should be tolerant?* It seems that the modern science has lost any contacts with reality and with the truth about this reality, that this science is anti-realistic and, what is obvious, nihilistic. The mentioned inability to co-ordinate the positions clearly shows that these positions are only particular, almost ethnic truths for the reason of partial solutions, that we have come to the position "forgetfulness of existence" and have rejected the adequate truth. The danger is based on the fact that a contestualist expresses himself as a member of a certain linguistic and cultural community and that is why it is difficult to talk about the differences between knowledge and opinion, and it is difficult to say why the objects have to put the linguistic-historical horizon of their community over the other horizons in different things-opinions. This theoretical nihilism, prevailing in the modern methodology of social and humanistic sciences, leads to serious negative consequences in practice. The different types of a practical nihilist are born from it: a) moral nihilism, equalizing all the opinions about the values and not accepting the moral facts; b) political nihilism, which does not give to politics any personal objectives and accepts the consensual character of rights and norms; c) nihilism in human sciences, which deconstructs an object; d) anthropological and biological nihilism, which reduces man to a body which may be in different ways used for the biological and genetic experiments (Possenti 1998: 126).

The only way out from this crisis is to overcome the mentioned theoretical nihilism and to get out from the "iron cage on the instrumental rationality".

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HALINA RAROT

## **Kodėl turime būti tolerantiški? Tolerancija modernios politinės filosofijos šviesoje**

### *Santrauka*

Autorė aiškinasi, kodėl empirinės ir filosofinės žinios nesuteikia mums daugiau tolerancijos, nors didelė Vakarų civilizacijos žmonijos dalis įsitikinusi, kad tolerancija būtina globalizacijos bei mainų tarp žmonių ir jų kultūrų sąlygomis. Pasak autorės, politinė filosofija nesuponuoja susitarimo tolerancijos pagrindu. Negalimybė koordinuoti pozicijas parodo, kad šios pozicijos tėra dalinės. Teorinis nihilizmas veda į praktinį nihilizmą. Pasak autorės, vienintelis kelias išėiti iš šios krizės yra ieškoti būdų įveikti teorinį nihilizmą.

**Raktažodžiai:** tolerancija, susitarimas, modernioji politinė filosofija