

What Toleration Is: Its Nature and Moral Boundaries

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Abstract

The nature, grounds as well as limits of moral toleration continue to instigate philosophic debates. This paper presents a review of relevant liberalist literature on toleration and suggests a comprehensive conception of tolerance. To this end, in this article first, a working definition of toleration is presented; the nature of tolerance is analyzed, than reasons for considering toleration as a free-standing moral attitude are presented by contrasting it to indifference, forgiveness and permission. At the end of the article the working definition is improved and limits of moral toleration is outlined.

This paper aims at showing that to *tolerate* is to voluntarily, intentionally abstain from struggling (via certain means) against incorrect, harmful or immoral beliefs and acts of others in situations when the agent is capable to act otherwise. The actions or beliefs tolerated need to be arguably wrong. Toleration assumes existence of objectively wrong and correct actions. Moral skepticism and moral relativism make toleration impossible. The tolerant agent understands that the object of toleration is morally wrong, yet does not fight against it for moral reasons. Toleration, involves two opposing drives: one to fight against something wrong, the object of toleration, and a second one, the grounds of toleration, that demands being reserved, for instance, abstaining from violence or coercion. These two constituents make toleration an *intrinsically incongruous attitude*.

Toleration does not mandate abstaining from rightful punishment. Being intolerant is reacting to arguably wrong actions with incorrect, impermissible, immoral ways, meanwhile toleration requires to react to incorrect, harmful, immoral actions in a moral way: by actions that are within the *range of tolerant actions*, i.e. actions that a tolerating agent may choose to make in response to a toleration object and yet remain tolerant.

Toleration is not a fundamental value. People tolerate for the sake of values which serve as grounds for toleration.

Toleration is often conflated with a number of other moral attitudes. However closer observation demonstrates that toleration is neither an expression of indifference nor of permission, neither of forgiveness. These attitudes set limits to tolerance.

As tolerance is not a basic value and is grounded on basic values such as freedom, equality, truth, divine command etc., abstaining from struggle against an object of toleration can be considered moral if it promotes these values.