

Title: On Tolerating the Unreasonable

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Readability: Moderate

Possible Applications:

Social/political philosophy

Philosophy of law

Ethics

Bioethics

Moral atrocities

Complimentary Texts/Resources:

Locke "On Toleration"

MacKinnon, *Toleration: A Critical Introduction*

Williams, "Toleration: An Impossible Virtue?"

Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'"

Wolf, "Two Levels of Pluralism"

Dworkin, "Even bigots and holocaust deniers must have their say"

Possibly useful citations from article

Joshua Cohen, "Moral pluralism and political consensus," *The Idea of Democracy*, ed. D. Copp, J. Hampton, and J. Roemer (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), pp. 270-91; Charles Larmore, *The Morals of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chs 6 and 7; and Barbara Herman, "Pluralism and the community of moral judgment," *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue*, ed. David Heyd (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 60-80.

Mill "On Liberty"

Rawls, *Political Liberalism*

Larmore, *Morals of Modernity*

Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

Thesis:

Justice requires us to acknowledge the claims of morally or philosophically unreasonable persons, as long as they are politically reasonable; such people must be tolerated and considered part of the social contract. Toleration as wide public justification is the proper response to the pluralism characteristic of modern democratic societies.

Key Definitions:

toleration as wide public justification: a form of justification by agreement that aims to include as many people as would be consistent with the political values of democracy, requires that our basic political and social institutions be justifiable in terms that unreasonable as well as reasonable persons have reason to accept, requires not only a presumption against interference but also that the boundaries of noninterference may need to be justifiable to persons who hold unpopular views or engage in offensive behavior 39, 40

compatibility requirement: compatibility with the greatest range of equal basic rights and liberties for all, justifies toleration of range of practices, needed to preserve political autonomy, 42 54

politically reasonable persons: prepared to grant one another the status of free, and to propose and abide by terms of social cooperation that they believe are fair and mutually acceptable -- in public political discussion, such persons would not appeal to sectarian moral and political philosophies, but only to common political values, 39, 43

philosophically reasonable persons: engage in rational, critical reflection, hold views supported by arguments and reasons which others can be in a position to evaluate rationally, sensitive to the burdens of judgment, 43-44

burdens of judgment: the empirical evidence may be conflicting and complex; agreement about the kinds of considerations involved does not guarantee agreement about their weight; key concepts may be vague and subject to hard cases; our total experience, which shapes how we assess the evidence and weigh values, is likely in complex modern societies to be rather disparate from person to person; different kinds of normative considerations may be involved on both sides of a question; and, finally, when forced to select among cherished values, we face great difficulties in setting priorities, 44

-explains how philosophically reasonable persons may fail to agree upon the nature of the good and the methods and conclusions of moral deliberation, 44, 53

-means that exercise of free reason results in differing conceptions of the good, 44

-indicate that the politically reasonable response to pluralism is to accept that a just arrangement of political institutions cannot presuppose a shared conception of the good, 45

Examples:

All-male clubs, 39

Klansmen, 39

Certain forms of pornography, 40

Prostitution, 40

Creationists, 45

Religious superiority, 45

Ethnic superiority, 45

Pacifists, 46

Terrorist militias, 46

Unreasonable ideas of human nature, 46-7

Unreasonable grounds for religious belief, 47

Racism, 47

Environmentalists, 49

Animal rights, 50

Division of labor in marriage, 51

Summary:

We should tolerate people who are unreasonable in various aspects as long as they are politically reasonable. Reasonable people are not infallible, wider toleration encourages wider respect, a democratic society should encourage autonomy as widely as possible without infringing on rights. As long as unreasonable persons do not make demands on public resources based solely on unreasonable views, their views should be tolerated. People can separate views that may be unreasonable in a variety of ways from political interaction.

People should not invoke comprehensive moral doctrines or religious beliefs as justifying reasons unless absolutely necessary and debate should not extend to issues that do not require political resolution. It is neither feasible nor just to require people to engage in philosophically reasonable conversation and accept unified standards for philosophical rationality.