
Tolerance in Modern Liberal Society:

An Analysis of the capacities of Tolerance

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1. Introduction

Toleration is a concept that is often used in modern political discourse. Huijer (2015) states in an interview that the Netherlands has a long history of toleration, and that it is one of the most tolerant countries in the world. Huijer still very much believes the Netherlands is a tolerant country. From the way she is defending these tolerant values, it can be deduced that she is quite positive about at least some form of toleration. And this seems to be a broadly held conception. Tolerance is seen as a necessary, virtuous way of living. After the terrorist tram shooting in Utrecht on the 18th of March 2019, Minister-president Rutte said on national television that 'tolerance and openness' were core values of Dutch society (Telegraaf 2019).

Not only the Netherlands is interested in the concept of toleration. Around the world, toleration is used in political discourse, calling it a virtue, something to strive for. Ban Ki-moon said, when he was secretary general of the United Nations, 'Tolerance must be taught, nurtured and defended' (UN News 2015). He then stated that society is getting more and more diverse, but little understanding is growing between people. This creates a tension that is sometimes at the core of contemporary conflicts. UNESCO Director-General Bokova (UN News 2015) also states the importance of tolerance in modern society: 'Tolerance is a new idea, one which we now need more than ever. It leads us to respect cultural diversity, ways of life and expression of our own humanity. It is a necessary condition for peace and progress for all people in a diversified and ever-more connected world'. The United Nations holds toleration in such high regards that they branded the 16th of November as 'International Day for Tolerance' (UNESCO 2019).

I think we can safely establish that toleration is seen as an important value in modern society. But even though toleration is used so often in modern discourse the tension, that Ban Ki-moon refers to in his speech still exists. As mentioned earlier, in the Netherlands, there has been a long history of toleration. It could even be argued that, in the Netherlands, toleration has actually been something to strive for, with whole generations growing up learning about this concept. This development has been necessary for the success that Huijer is claiming that toleration had in our society. However, despite the claimed success, there are many newspaper articles about the failing of our multicultural society (Aniki 2016). I'm not arguing that the multicultural society has failed, but it cannot be denied that there are tensions in society caused by its diversity. The question, then, is why even though the Netherlands has such a long history of toleration, the tension still exists.

2 The Main Question

In this thesis, I will be critically examining the concept of toleration. My aim is to examine if this concept is something that could be vital in challenging the problems modern society creates. My research question will be: *In how far is the concept of toleration usable in fighting problems that modern liberal society faces?*

In order to do this, it is vital to find a conception of tolerance that does not suffer from the paradox of moral toleration. The paradox of moral toleration (Raphael 1988) arises in the situation where it is morally right to tolerate what is morally wrong. This paradox can be solved by ranking the different moral arguments. If one of the arguments is morally superior to the others, there is no paradox anymore. However, if both arguments are on the same moral level, the paradox continues to exist. For toleration, this would be relevant if the reasons to accept toleration are just as morally right as the objections against toleration. In this case, it is not clear if toleration does more harm than good, or the other way around. Finding a conception of tolerance where this paradox does not exist, would give an answer to the question in how far toleration is able to fight the problems that modern liberal society presents.

To find the answer to the question, this thesis is divided into three parts. After a short historical introduction, I will discuss a definition of toleration as presented by Forst (2013) (Chapter two). Furthermore, I will look at the different conceptions of toleration as well as the grounds for their acceptance. Secondly, I will analyze the modern liberal discourse of toleration using the work of Brown (2008) (Chapter 3). I argue that there are many moral reasons for the acceptance of toleration in liberal society, but that reasons to object to toleration also exist. I show that modern liberalism can be interpreted as a form of the permission conception of tolerance, which is based on unequal division of power and can exacerbate and reify this difference. In the third part, I look at the political liberalism of Rawls (1993) trying to find a liberal conception of tolerance that is free from the drawbacks of what Brown characterizes as modern imperial liberalism. I look at the three core concepts of his theory of political liberalism, neutrality, reasonableness, and public reason, in order to understand their relation to toleration and look whether a perception of tolerance free from imperial liberalism is theoretically possible. In the end, I will try to answer the question in how far toleration is able to fight the problems of modern day society.

I hope that this thesis will provide an overview of the modern liberal discourse of toleration. While discussing how toleration interacts with liberalism and the paradox of moral tolerance, I combine the

views of Forst (2013), Brown (2008) and Rawls (1993) to search for an answer to the question if toleration is able to fight the problems of the pluralist liberal society. Furthermore, I show how these different views interact with each other and try to analyze key discussions in the debate on tolerance. It is my hope that this thesis will contribute to the existing literature on tolerance and provide new insights into the applicability of tolerance as a concept in society.

3 History of Toleration

In order to understand in how far toleration is able to fight the problems of modern day society, it is important to show how the concept has developed historically. The first time the concept of toleration came into political thought, was as a strategy to deal with religious differences in the times of the Christian Reformation (Grell 1996: 1-13). The Catholic church split up, and a new branch of Christianity, Protestantism, was formed. Because of this, people were suddenly faced with conflicting interpretations of the scriptures that had, before this time, only been accessible to the priests of the Catholic church. During these times, in 1689, Locke published a paper called *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, where he called for religious toleration. He argued that people could not be forced to believe, and that we should strive for 'individual co-existence' (Mendus 1987: 4). However, as he was very much a person of his own time, he was not willing to extend these rights to Catholics and atheists. Locke clearly strived for two things: protecting the individual from the authority and power of the state and protecting the individual from the power that is harnessed by the state through religion. In premodern times, these two values would often go hand in hand. Locke's influence can be seen even in modern liberal society, as the church is (partly) secularized, at least in the Netherlands, and there is a constitution that guarantees freedom of religion.

Around the same time as Locke published his work, a different perspective on toleration, championed by Spinoza, rose up. Spinoza argued for freedom of thought and speech, instead of just focusing on religious toleration, what he called 'freedom of philosophy' (Israel 2007). This is a form of toleration that does not try to protect people from a state-like authority, but it tries to free people from the dogma's of religion, so that they can live and express themselves freely.

In *On Liberty* (1859), Mill focused more on the freedom and autonomy of the individual, and thus formulated a different account of toleration than Locke and Spinoza, who focus on the power that authorities can have over the individual. Mill argues that opinions should never be silenced by authorities. People should be free to think whatever they want to think, because it could be true. He states:

"First, if any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility" (Mill 1859: 50).

We should always leave some space for others to be wrong, and in the same way, accept that we could be wrong. Mill sees the expression of individuality as the only way to get closer to the truth. He fervently insists that the right to make individual choices should be tolerated by everyone in society, no matter how eccentric these choices may seem. He introduced an important rule called 'The Harm

Principle'. It states that it is only allowed to exercise power over others from the same community if it is to prevent harm to others. All other expressions of individuality need to be tolerated by both the state and society. With this approach, Mill made the first attempt to find a solution to the friction and strife caused by human difference in the liberal state. Even in modern liberal society, the harm principle is still relevant when defining the limits of toleration.

After these works on toleration, the concept became, for a time, integrated with mainstream liberal discourse. This led to tolerance receiving very little attention in philosophical and liberal political discourse. However, as society got more pluralistic, toleration regained its former popularity in the late twentieth century (Brown 2008: 2). This was after the ideological conflict of the cold war passed over, and was replaced by the politics of identity. Societies were becoming increasingly pluralistic due to a variety of reasons. In the Netherlands, there was a huge influx of Moroccan migrants, who came to work in the Netherlands, on invitation of the Dutch government. Brown (2008: 16) argues that something happened with the concept of toleration during this time. Instead of it being a passive attitude, toleration became something that had to be actively strived for in liberal society. It became something that promised mutual respect and unity, which is how toleration is used right now in modern political discourse. The earlier quote by Ban Ki-moon (UN News 2015) is an example of this shift in discourse.

4. The Concept of Toleration

In this chapter I will elaborate on the concept of toleration. First of all, I will discuss the definition of toleration that I will be using in my thesis. In order to understand the effects of toleration, it is vital to know what exactly toleration is. Then, I will discuss the different conception of toleration. The four conceptions form the basis of philosophical analysis of the concept of tolerance, as they provide much information on the stability and power structures that they engage in. Finally I will discuss on which grounds the use of toleration can be justified.

4.1 The definition of toleration

'Toleration' stems from the Latin word *Tolerare*. It means to 'put up with', 'to suffer through'. According to Forst (2013: 8), we may fruitfully distinguish the 'concept' of toleration from 'conceptions' of toleration. While the concept of tolerance is about components needed in order to give a general account of tolerance, the conceptions of tolerance go into the different historically developed understandings of how toleration can be present in society. I will elaborate on this in the next two paragraphs.

4.1.1 The concept of toleration

In order for something to be tolerated, Forst (2013: 18-26) argues, a belief must exhibit three characteristics. First, there is the *Objection component*. This means that the tolerated belief must be considered morally objectionable. If this is not present, that means the belief is not being tolerated. We could then speak of concepts such as affirmation or indifference. The second component is the *Acceptance component*. One must have a positively grounded reason to stop one from acting on this objection component. This is usually context related. The third component defines the limits of toleration. This is called the *Rejection component*. The limits of toleration need to be established within a society, and mark where there are stronger reasons to reject than there are to accept what is happening. When there is no rejection, toleration will never start. If rejection is too intense, toleration will end. These three characteristics can be the same reason, but they can also differ. I distinguish three grounds on which the use of toleration can be justified: the argument for prudence, rationality, and morality (Mendus 1987: 10). I will further elaborate on this in §4.2.

To be able to speak about toleration, Forst (Ibid.) argues that toleration must be practiced voluntarily. If it is not done voluntarily, it can only be something else, for example suffering. So, to be tolerant one must hold at least some form of power. This does not mean, however, that toleration

needs to be practiced from a position of power, in which someone could influence what is happening. An example of this could be a small religion that tolerates the existence of gay marriage, even though its doctrine would consider it morally wrong. The religion has no control over the law, but even if it did, it would still tolerate gay marriage. In this situation, it is possible to speak of toleration, even though the party in question is not able to influence the authority that established the law. Would this religion have been able to forbid gay marriage, their actions would not be considered toleration but suppression or suffering.

In this thesis, I will be restricting myself to the liberal concept of toleration. Toleration is a broad concept and discourse on toleration is different for different societies. As modern western society is predominantly influenced by liberal ideology, it seems most fitting to restrict myself to the concept of toleration in liberal society.

4.1.2 Conceptions of toleration

There are different conceptions of toleration. Forst (2013) identifies four different conceptions. These conceptions of toleration exist next to each other, especially in modern liberal society. People can exhibit a variety of conceptions even on the same day. These conceptions are historically developed ways of using the concept of toleration, and define how tolerance is used in a variety of situations. Toleration has four different possible interpretations, according to the analysis of Forst, (2013) that are all correct in their own way, but each have their own distinct characteristics. These conceptions are hugely important in the way toleration is embedded in society and the possible consequences of the usage of these conceptions.

The first conception of toleration is the *permission conception*. This is the form of toleration that was first used by kings to deal with the religious plurality in the time of the Reformation. This form of toleration is a relation between an authority, in this case the king, and a vulnerable minority, in this case people who deviated from the dominant religion at that time. The authority gives permission to the minority to sustain their practices, and the minority also acknowledges this authority. As long as they do not publicly proclaim their beliefs, their behavior can be tolerated. Toleration is used here as a means to avoid open conflict. It can also be used to solidify one's own power, as the moment a minority speaks up, repercussions can follow based on the tolerated practice. As this form of tolerance is established between an authority and a minority, the relationship between the tolerator and the tolerated is stable but very unequal. It rests on the mutual benefit that both actors achieve by engaging in this relation.

The second type of conception is the *coexistence conception*. This type of conception is similarly about avoiding conflict. The difference in this conception lies in the fact that in the relation between

the tolerant and the tolerated, there now is an equal level of power. In this type of toleration, it is perceived that there is no better alternative than to just peacefully coexist, and pursue one's own interests as the costs of escalation are too high. The downside to this type of toleration is that it is not a stable construct. If one of the two groups grows too powerful, it may become a threat to the other group, and conflict can still arise. I would argue the cold war can be seen as a case of this kind of toleration. The United States and Russia tolerated each other's existence because they were roughly equal in power.

The third conception of toleration is the *respect conception*. This is a form of toleration that is used quite often in modern political discourse. It holds the perception that people should recognize each other as equals, even if they have a fundamentally different view on how life should be lived. Here, people live according to uniformly accepted laws that do not favor one group over the other. An example of this would be the acknowledgement of human rights. This type of toleration can be achieved when all involved parties mutually respect each other's comprehensive doctrines. As Forst (2013) already said, this conception of toleration does already exist in society. A downside to this conception is that it places heavy demands on the actor. One needs to be able to have respect for another comprehensive doctrine in order to fulfill the requirements of the respect conception of toleration. As Locke's argument of prudence already presupposes, it is impossible to force people to respect one another. Forst tries to promote the respect conception, as it a conception where mutuality and equality are inherent (Forst & Brown 2014: 15).

The fourth conception of tolerance is even more demanding than the respect conception. It is the *esteem conception*. Being tolerant here is not just about respecting beliefs of the other, but even accepting they might have a value, even if you don't agree with them. This conception of tolerance could be helpful to resolve many of the tensions residing in modern liberal society. One might even argue that there would be no tensions, however, that would not be true. Even if tolerance expresses itself through the esteem conception, people are still capable of holding fundamentally different views. This is not changed by accepting that there could be value to others' beliefs. Though the esteem conception is helpful, its usability is questionable. Its requirements are so stringent, it is dubious if it is even possible to be practiced by society as a whole, considering the fundamentally different views that people hold.

4.2 The grounds for toleration

There are multiple arguments that justify the use of a tolerant approach. Mendus (1987: 2-16) names three different ones.

4.2.1 Argument for Prudence

The first one is the *argument for prudence*. Mendus shows that Lord Scarman (1983) makes this argument when he argues that consequences may follow from refusal to be tolerant. His argument to be tolerant is based on the consideration that the stability of public order may be in danger if there is no tolerance. Lord Scarman is saying that sometimes it is prudent to tolerate what we detest because it will bring greater benefits. In his case, it was a plea for granting tolerance to the people of Brixton, since not providing it could be the downfall of the plural society (Lord Scarman 1987: 60). Locke argues for the same: "Sometimes it is prudent to tolerate that which we dislike, either because toleration will bring economic advantage or because intolerance will promote unrest and civil strife" (Mendus 1987: 5). In essence, this argument presents a non-moral argument for a moral action.

However, this approach can be highly unstable. Firstly, because it does not explain what is wrong with intolerance itself, but only that intolerance may not serve the purpose you want to achieve. Since it provides no moral reason, the execution of toleration is only based on imminent gain, and can, therefore, shift very quickly. The coexistence conception of Forst (2013) has overlap with this argument, as they are both unstable constructs that are quick to change. The second reason is that the argument of prudence applies only to this specific situation, and no others. It is extremely context relative. Because the first argument is unstable and limited by itself, it is usually combined with another argument for toleration in order to increase its effectiveness.

4.2.2 Argument for Rationality

The second justification of toleration is the *argument for rationality*. This argument tries to provide a general justification for toleration, not only a context relative one. Popper argues that rationality and fallibility together form both the grounds and the limits of the concept of toleration (Popper, 1987: 26). There are two ways in which rationality can be a reason for toleration. Locke (Mendus 1987: 6) argues that religious intolerance is fundamentally irrational, since people cannot be forced to change their religious beliefs. Trying to do so would be irrational. The only way to rationally deal with the situation is to be tolerant. The second argument for rationality is given by Popper (Ibid.). Since man is imperfect and easily falls into error, everyone will make mistakes. Not accepting that someone, including yourself, could be wrong would be an irrational choice based on intellectual arrogance. I do have to clarify that Popper is, in no way, playing with skepticism here, as he does hold the presupposition that there is indeed a truth, but it is unclear what exactly.

4.2.3 Argument for Morality

The third justification is the *argument for morality*. This argument makes a case that people need to be tolerated, because people have the right to live their own lives and think freely. This presupposes

a liberal view, as championed by Mill, that freedom is the highest virtue of society. Any restriction of this freedom is morally wrong. A famous example is given by Lord Scarman. A Muslim teacher wanted every Friday morning off in order to pray, as the Koran states that a man must go to the mosque on Friday if he is able to. Lord Scarman argues that the Muslim Teacher should have won the case, even though he did not, by appealing directly to the rights of the Muslim teacher to lead his own life and make his own choices. This direct appeal to the moral rights of the individual is the core of the moral argument for toleration.

5. Tolerance in Liberal Political Discourse

In the chapters before, I gave an overview of views on toleration and its justifications, from the moment it rose up until after the end of the cold war. It was at this moment that talk of toleration became very relevant again in order to battle the modern pluralistic and multicultural society. This was especially so for the liberal conception of toleration, as proposed by Mill. This modern discourse on liberal toleration is often put in a positive daylight, as a savior to the modern multicultural society. However, Brown (2008) has a different view. In this chapter, I will provide a critical discussion of neoliberal toleration. I will debate the views of Brown on toleration and reflect on her argument that toleration could lead to depoliticization and help in creating and reifying existing stigma's. Her critical take on toleration helps to map out what the results of toleration can be in order to move away from these conceptions of toleration. In the first part of this chapter, I will show that toleration is, next to an attitude, also a political discourse. The second part will cover how toleration is a form of depoliticization, showing that discourse on toleration tries to hide the origin of unequal power relations in society and presents solutions to this problem that actually reify the problem. In the third part, I will argue that modern discourse on toleration helps to create and enforce 'marked identities', which can lead to negative stigma's. The final part of this chapter will link liberal toleration discourse to the permission conception that Forst (2013) outlines and show how modern liberal toleration is unable to solve the paradox of moral tolerance.

5.1 Tolerance as a political discourse

Brown (2008) analyses the effect that the discourse on toleration has in modern society. She wants to lay out the "social and political work of tolerance discourse by comprehending how this discourse constructs and positions liberal and non-liberal subjects, cultures, and regimes" (Brown 2008: 4). Brown (2008: 13) separates two forms of tolerance. She notices that there seems to be tolerance which relates to the individual as an ethical principle on a personal level, and tolerance as a form of discourse used in politics. Tolerance in the first sense is very closely related to the definition of toleration that I describe in the first chapter. It has to do with voluntarily ignoring or enduring what one sees as something to be disapproved. This can be anything, as long as it is related to a personal experience. An example can be tolerating certain religious beliefs or practices, but also a friends annoying laugh (Ibid.). These acts of tolerance are, according to Brown (2008: 13), not necessarily a bad thing. She even says that if everyone acted according to these principles, tolerance would contribute to a peaceful society.

However, Brown (2008:14) also describes a second form of tolerance, which she calls political tolerance. While the first form of tolerance is about the individual, political tolerance is about the discourse on tolerance. It takes a more general perspective. Discourse on tolerance decides how tolerance should be used by society and also how tolerance is presented. She gives an example of how people are instigated to show tolerance in order to keep the peace with the increasing influx of immigrants from countries that are unable to provide the same chances to their citizens as in the west. Tolerance is presented as something to be strived for, a virtue. This can be seen in the speech of Ban Ki-moon, where he urged society (UN News 2015) to teach, practice, nurture and preach tolerance in society. Even in academic work, tolerance is regarded as a key savior for the multicultural society, which is why many academics advocate the use of political tolerance in society (Widmalm, 2016: 3). However, Brown is hesitant about this discourse of tolerance as a way to save the multicultural society. She argues that, while it hides under a veil of virtuousness, this discourse on political tolerance can actually be very harmful for society. It masks its own incompetence and ineffectiveness and presents itself as a solution to human difference, while actually exacerbating it.

5.2 Depoliticization

Tolerance is part of a development of the depoliticization of society, according to Brown (2008: 15). But the term 'depoliticization' requires some further specification. Brown understands depoliticization as removing the discussion on unjust affairs from the political sphere. The difference between people in society can create situations that could be called unjust for certain parties. Instead of dealing with these problems on a governmental level, tolerance tries to diffuse these affairs to the public sphere through multiple ways. An example of what political tolerance does, can be seen in the example of discrimination based on cultural identity. This discrimination violates the principle that all people are born equal and are entitled to their own opinions. So, we are asked not to give into our prejudices and refrain from discriminating people based on certain cultural beliefs by practicing tolerance. This does two things. First of all, the discourse on tolerance makes this discrimination of cultural beliefs an individual practice, as it is an individual responsibility to tolerate certain types of behavior. Secondly, showing people what should be tolerated reifies and essentializes the images of group identities and beliefs even more, which I will further explain in §5.3. While Brown does not argue that tolerance has caused the essentialization of group identities, she does say that tolerance helps to strengthen this essentialized view. Political tolerance, according to Brown (2008: 15), presents the view that it is inherent in human nature to have conflict between different identities. We can also see this in the speech of Ban Ki-moon (United Nations 2015). Ki-moon holds the view that the convergence of human differences in modern society creates a certain

tension. The only thing that can be done to counter this natural phenomenon, is practice tolerance. Brown completely disagrees with this notion of natural struggle. She shows that all struggle of human difference is embedded in a historical perspective. The identities of people and groups do not naturally appear in the world, but are constructed and change over time; they are fluid. Tolerance hides the historical factors that led to the current situation, by presenting the argument that tension produced by human difference is natural. Ban Ki-moon only presents the argument that there is such a thing as tension caused by human difference, which might lead one to overlook how this difference was created in the first place.

Furthermore, not only does tolerance hide historical perspectives on difference, it also sustains the current power structures that exist within society. Brown says that the liberal state cannot, by itself, provide the equality to people that it strives for. Since a liberal society tries to be inclusive to all its members and create equality among everyone, it is not fit to deal with human differences that remain as a residue. Tolerance, however, is fit to deal with human difference, as its main use is to provide a way for people to react to and deal with this difference. What Brown (2008: 15) sees in this, is that tolerance provides a way for human difference to exist without disrupting the power structures that exist in society. Through doing this, tolerance actually provides a way for these structures to continue existing, even though these structures marginalize people. She calls this normalization. This can be seen, for example, in cultural perspective. Society is asked to tolerate cultural aspects that diverge from the norm, but this could be interpreted as a confirmation that those cultural aspects are indeed wrong, even if they are to be tolerated. Through this notion, tolerance creates a situation where certain cultural aspects will be perpetually rejected. Since tolerance is a depoliticized concept, it replaces the responsibility of the state to create equality by appealing to the public realm of individual responsibility and then normalizes power relations by obfuscating them.

It should be noted, however, that Brown does not think tolerance is the only form of depoliticization. She argues that there are other discourses that also show the same tendencies and strengthen the effects of the political discourse on tolerance in society.

5.3 Tolerance and Marked Identities

While tolerance is often interpreted as a solution to conflicts relating to human difference, a broader analysis of tolerance actually shows that tolerance is also about power. The chapter above looks at how tolerance actually shows dormant power structures that hide behind the veil of tolerance. Clearly, Brown takes a very different perspective on tolerance compared to Forst (2013). Although

Forst looks at the way in which tolerance can be practiced, Brown looks at the consequences of its discourse. Her theory is clearly Foucauldian inspired, as her conception of how tolerance exerts its power is decentralized and subtle.

Brown shows how these earlier mentioned power structures are reinforced even further by introducing what she calls 'marked identities' (Brown 2008: 39). In this argument, the influence of Foucault is also clear, as it is based on his theory of subject production through regulatory discourse, which, in this case, is the discourse on tolerance (Foucault 1982). Marked Identities are the products of the essentialization of physical and non-physical characteristics of groups, for example their ideological or religious beliefs. They provide a quite static conception of these characteristics, which could very well in reality be very changeable and fluid, as Bradatan (2010), for example, would argue.

There are two problems with the way tolerance relates to these marked identities. The first problem is that tolerance ascribes the products of individual practices and actions as products of the marked identity, instead of acknowledging them as consequences of the actions of conscious individual actors. A person wearing a niqab will almost automatically be marked with the identity of 'Muslim' and all associated essentialized beliefs that are placed within that group. It will be presupposed that the Muslim will exhibit other characteristics that are ascribed to 'being Muslim', as if it is the identity of 'Muslim' that is producing these actions. This can become a serious problem if there exists a small group of aggressive fundamentalists that reject the liberal state, since this can become part of the marked identity as well. Calls for tolerance actually make the process of relating negative characteristics to the marked identity of a group easier. There would be no need to reject something that is not inherently bad. So, by that logic, it is also presupposed that the Muslim wearing a Niqab is an aggressive fundamentalist. Then, 'being Muslim' is, in itself, seen as something bad, as it is creating aggressive fundamentalists.

The second problem is that this process of assuming culture produces certain thoughts and actions, making the people who are called on to tolerate these cultures appear fully rational and in control of their own thoughts. It, unintentionally, gives the tolerator the idea that his way of thinking and autonomy is on a higher level than the person who is influenced by these thoughts, produced by culture. The tolerated, on the other hand, is almost seen as a being that is determined by its cultural background, and therefore not able to control their own thoughts.

5.4 Liberalism and Tolerance

These two problems together are part of a larger development of liberalism that has been happening for hundreds of years already. Western society has had a tendency to view itself as superior in many ways for the last couple of centuries, for example Rostow's stages of economic growth (1960). In this model, Rostow attempted to connect economic history and economic theory (Itagaki 1963). Here Rostow characterizes western economies as further developed than other economies. It can be argued that liberalism has been influenced by the same modernistic way of thinking, present in the ethnocentric views of early modern Europe. Brown argued that liberalism has a tendency to hide its own cultural embeddedness and present itself as something that transcends culture, since it is meant for everyone. But liberalism is, according to her, in essence a product of culture. The depoliticization, that tolerance is also subjected to, is just another way for liberalism to draw people into the liberal system and exert its control. Liberalism is an imperialistic ideology that tries to draw everyone into its system, and uses many tools for this purpose. In this way, tolerance is also a product of liberal culture. She points out that only liberal societies have the option to tolerate behavior, but that this immediately reaffirms the existing power structures that liberalism already exacerbates, in the form that it presupposes that there are autonomous, rational individuals, and individuals that are ruled by their culture and are part of a lower form of society, not based on these principles. Brown's assessment of the discourse of tolerance is very critical of liberalism; she blames liberalism for its role in the tolerance discourse.

However, it is interesting to note that Brown does not want society to abandon the concept of tolerance. As previously stated, Brown does see value in the way that tolerance operates, even though it has many drawbacks. She has a point, since there are very few strategies in modern society that are able to combat difference in the same way that tolerance has been able to. Moving away from liberalism could be an answer, too, but the likelihood of that happening and the effort needed in order to do this could prove to be more than can be accomplished in a lifetime, and it seems highly unlikely that the fundamental differences between people will resolve themselves naturally. Still, there are problems that need to be faced, and tolerance could help combat these problems. It might even be necessary to use tolerance to fight these problems. As Brown (2008: 206) recognizes this, she proposes that there should be a more open debate on the downsides of tolerance, so that tolerance is no longer able to hide historical relations behind a veil of obscurity, and tolerance becomes part of the political sphere again. This could provide an answer to the question how tolerance could be useful in combating the problems that modern society faces. However, she remains vague on the exact way in which this could be accomplished.

However, I do not agree with Brown that this would be the best alternative to the current discourse on tolerance. For Brown, liberalism, even though there are many forms and theories of this liberalism, is culturally rooted and, therefore, already biased. It has led to the problems that I have shown earlier, where minority groups are oppressed and regulated by the discourse that is provided by tolerance. However, the concept of liberalism is very broad and I find her views reductionist in this sense, and, therefore, unfitting to provide a complete answer to the question in how far tolerance can provide an answer to the problems that society faces. That does not mean that I do not think she has a point. Liberalism has provided discourse that has helped with controlling the minorities in society and keeping people in power. Furthermore, it also tries to expand by presenting itself as above culture. I do think it could very well be possible for other forms of liberalism to provide a discourse of tolerance that does not lead to the same results as Browns interpretation of liberalism. Brown takes a neoliberal view of discourse on tolerance (2008: 18, 2015), so in order to escape the problems she presents, I will move away from neoliberalism.

Rawls' (1993) political form of liberalism takes a different direction from Brown. In Brown's view, all liberalism holds a strong opinion on what is morally good and how to achieve this: one of individual freedom of choice achieved by rationality. In this doctrine of what is good, cultural influence on one's autonomy is seen as a bad thing, which is why liberalism presents itself as transcending culture. Rawls agrees with Brown on the notion that a society based on this concept of ultimate freedom would not be able to provide a stable fundament on which to base a pluralistic society. However, *contra* Brown's interpretation of neoliberalism, that leaves no space for an interpretation of liberalism that does not regress into imperialistic neoliberalism, he does try to envision a form of liberalism that does not try to enforce its ideals on individuals. It would therefore seem that there may be a way out of Brown's culturally rooted neoliberalism.

Brown's neoliberal vision of tolerance seems to be connected to the permission conception of Forst (2013), where there is an authority that is granting tolerance to a minority. The liberal modern society holds the superior and more developed view that is not influenced by culture, but stands above it, and grants tolerance to the lower developed people that have not reached the same enlightenment. Brown clearly shows that tolerance creates and reifies power structures in society where the liberal individual is placed in a morally higher position. The permissive form of toleration is a dangerous structure for society as it can be used by the authority that fuels it to hide and obscure injustice that is done.

But Brown also sees tolerance as something that can be very useful to society in order to deal with difference. So it seems that in the neoliberal conception, tolerance struggles with the moral paradox

of tolerance. If the reasons for tolerance and the objections of tolerance are both moral, which is the case, the questions arises how it can be morally right to tolerate something that is morally wrong (Mendus 1989). Forst (2013) argues that in order to solve this paradox, one needs to find distinctions between the different kinds of moral reasons that are presented, and if one is of a higher level than the other, that can be ground for a verdict. However, in this case, both the reasons and the objections are of the same level, as the reasoning is that it is both good and bad for society as a whole. So this paradox of moral tolerance will continue to exist within Brown's work. In order to find a conception of tolerance that does not suffer from this paradox of moral tolerance, I will therefore have to move away from Brown's radical neoliberalism, and search for a different conception of liberalism, even if she would argue that that would be a futile effort.

The permissive form of tolerance is unable to deal with modern societal problems, since it rests on the shoulders of the majority. However, maybe it could be possible to practice toleration from a conception that is not based on the same structures as the permissive conception, like the coexistence conception, the respect conception or the esteem conception. For this, a form of liberalism is needed that does not allow for this kind of bilateral power relation of majority and minority. Therefore, I will discuss the political liberalism as proposed by Rawls (1993). Rawls claims his theory of political liberalism is free from the moral framework that neoliberalism forces on its believers. Of course, Brown would disagree to this, but since I find her views to be very radical, I will leave room for another interpretation of liberalism. This might provide the foundation necessary for a form of tolerance that is free from the paradox of moral tolerance and is still able to provide solutions to the problems that the multicultural society faces.

6. Toleration and Political Liberalism

In the previous chapter I have shown that Brown connects the discourse of tolerance to liberalism, and holds it responsible for the way this discourse has evolved. Her neoliberal views are based on the presupposition that liberalism is fundamentally based on a cultural bias that creates an imperialistic form of liberalism. But at the same time, it can be argued that liberalism is a much broader concept. Rawls (1993) argued that the liberalism Brown discusses is based on the concept that individual autonomy is the fundament of society. Rawls then notes that for a stable liberal fundament, society should move away from this notion of autonomy and on to a different concept. Since Brown did establish that liberalism has influenced discourse on tolerance, moving towards a form of liberalism, that is not based on the fundament of individual autonomy might be able to change the discourse in such a way that the paradox of moral tolerance could be solved. This could in turn allow for a conception of tolerance that is able to combat the problem that modern pluralist society faces. Of course, Brown herself would argue that this is impossible. In this chapter I will first discuss the theory of political tolerance as it is introduced by Rawls (1993). Rawls is one of the most prominent liberal philosophers of the 20th century, developing a theory of political liberalism that turns away from partiality and the majority, and instead aims to establish a 'freestanding' liberalism that is equal to all of its members. Therefore, it seemed fitting to discuss his unique and dominant view on political liberalism. This principle of equality allows for a conception of tolerance that has very little affinity with the permission conception of tolerance, since there is no dominant group that can take advantage of the power provided by the discourse on tolerance, and instead focuses more on the respect condition of tolerance. Finally, I will talk about the paradox of public reason and problematize the concept of political liberalism.

6.1 Rawls on tolerance

The most influential book of Rawls is *A theory of Justice* (1971). In this book, Rawls tries to gain insight into the fundamental principles of justice in a liberal society. In order to come up with neutral principles of justice, Rawls uses the thought experiment of the 'Veil of Ignorance'. To find principles of justice, one must deliberate on this while unaware of one's own position, biology, wealth, history, etc. within society. Through this, it is possible to find principles of justice that anyone could consent to, no matter their position in society, and, through this, live on a fundamental level as equal citizens. However, critics (Baynes 1992, Couture 1992) have argued that this theory of justice is the product of the Kantian doctrine, something not shared by all members of society. Baynes (1992: 1) says that

Rawls is based on “an expressly normative conception of practical reason or, what I shall argue amounts to the same thing, ... a conception of ourselves as free and equal moral beings”. In this way, the principles of justice are built on the concept that people should be autonomous and, are therefore, at risk of trying to pull other doctrines under the liberal hegemony of western society, as Brown (2008) envisions liberalism.

In 1993 Rawls claimed he now had a universal liberal theory that would not revert into this imperialistic form of liberalism. His work focusses on the question how it is possible for citizens, who can be so divided in their core doctrines, to create a stable and just society for all of its members. He reformulates his argument from *A Theory of Justice* in such a way that his liberalism would move away from the presupposition that these principles of justice apply to all life, but instead would only be applicable to the political sphere. It is at this point that liberalism stops being a contentious doctrine, but is able to become the subject of a consensus of comprehensive doctrines that are not necessarily only liberalistic in nature, but also include other kinds of views. If the consensus is established between all these comprehensive doctrines, political liberalism becomes something neutral or ‘freestanding’. This is different from Brown’s interpretation of liberalism, since, in her view, liberalism is never able to become neutral, but will always be grounded in culture and form an imperialist form of liberalism that tries to force its values onto others. In her view, this freestanding view would also become a form of normalization.

It is possible for a variety of comprehensive doctrines to endorse political liberalism, as long as they are ‘reasonable’ doctrines. Rawls argues the comprehensive doctrines that reject other doctrines or doctrines that try to violate the political rights of its members (for example by not allowing them to vote in public elections) are ‘unreasonable’ and should be rejected and challenged by the state (Tan 1998: 277).). All reasonable doctrines and views will be on equal grounds and even though discussion is still possible and even encouraged in some cases, no doctrines can be excluded from the discussion (as long as they’re reasonable). As long as a consensus can be established between all these reasonable views, this view of liberal toleration can, according to Rawls, provide a form of liberalism that does not regress into imperialistic neoliberalism.

Rawls system is based on three core features. In this next part I will discuss these three parts and their relation to the concept of toleration. In all three parts, toleration plays a particular role that I critically reflect upon.

6.2 Fairness

In Rawls' (1993) theory of political liberalism, justice is presented as a neutral concept. He introduces the concept of justice as the concept of 'Fairness' (Rawls 1993: 9). This means that the conception of justice can be shared by all citizens as a political agreement that can be entered voluntarily.

Therefore, this fair concept of justice should try to distance itself from comprehensive doctrines that citizens hold. In trying to formulate this conception, political liberalism has to appeal to the principle of toleration in order for this to be possible.

The principle of fairness by Rawls is based on the conception that all groups involved in the creation of a consensus will choose political liberalism as overlapping value, but through this, it is heavily reliant on toleration in two ways. First of all, political liberalism reflects that there is a set of principles and values that is endorsed by all citizens on the political field (Rawls & Kelly 2001: 40-41). However, the citizens do not necessarily need to endorse political liberalism, since, according to Rawls, political liberalism is not chosen because it is true, but because it is able to provide the fairest outcome to all citizens of society. Therefore, I would argue that political liberalism is fundamentally reliant on the citizens to tolerate the existence of political liberalism. If there is a doctrine that does not allow for the existence of other ways of thinking, political liberalism will not work.

Next to a guarantee of an egalitarian set of principles and values, political liberalism also allows for citizens to keep their own private comprehensive doctrines. Political liberalism can only legitimately exercise its power when it is exercised in accordance to the constitution. This constitution in turn, is comprised of the values and principles that have been endorsed by all citizens (Rawls & Kelly 2001: 41). In this way, it leaves room for a multitude of doctrines to flourish. At the same time, I would argue that these doctrines need to be tolerant of each other as well, next to being tolerant of the political liberalism. If this is not done, a consensus based on shared principles of justice cannot be reached.

Next to a guarantee of an egalitarian set of principles and values, political liberalism also allows for citizens to pursue their own private activities. As political liberalism does not try to establish its presence as truth, it leaves room for a multitude of doctrines to flourish. These doctrines need to be tolerant of each other as well, next to being tolerant of the political liberalism. If this is not done, a consensus based on shared principles of justice cannot be reached.

One might argue here that the grounds for the justification of toleration in Rawls are an interpretation of Locke's *argument for prudence* (§ 4.2.1). One of the drawbacks of the argument for prudence is that it can be highly unstable. Therefore, Rawls second core principle tries to establish the stability of political liberalism.

6.3 Reasonableness

In this second section, I will discuss the concept of reasonableness that permeates Rawls' political liberalism. Rawls argues that a consensus can only be established between citizens if all citizens are 'reasonable'. Reasonableness is the primary political virtue of citizens and it is absolutely necessary for the citizens to have this virtue. Otherwise, overlapping consensus cannot be established. Reasonableness means that one has realized that political liberalism gives all citizens the most equal opportunities to strive towards their own conception of the moral good:

“Reasonable persons, we say, are not moved by the general good as such but desire for its own sake a social world in which they, as free and equal, can cooperate with others on terms all can accept” (Rawls 1993: 50).

However, there may be doctrines, both philosophical and religious ones, that do not allow for any other doctrines to coexist with them, as well as doctrines that completely dismiss the concept of a neutral overlapping consensus between citizens. In this case, tolerance will not be granted to other citizens and a consensus cannot be reached. Rawls suggests that in this scenario, the unreasonable doctrine has no right to negotiate at the table with the other citizens, but should be actively challenged and suppressed by the state (Tan 1998: 277). He makes this claim as he is concerned with the stability of the system. If doctrines are not reasonable, they will not be tolerant towards other doctrines either. This would create the paradox of tolerance (Popper 1945).

Popper argued that a society that is endlessly tolerant towards intolerance, will cease to exist as it will be swallowed by the intolerant. As Rawls is obviously aware of the danger that the consequences of the unsolved paradox would pose to a tolerant society, the concept of reasonableness can be seen as his argument to define the limits of tolerance. Since his concept of reasonableness is based on two concepts, the limits of tolerance are as well. The first limit of tolerance in political liberalism is that one only has to be tolerant if this is reciprocated (Rawls 1993: 49). Mutual tolerance is the only way for a system to be stable. This argument is quite clear, but on its own not enough to grant stability. Since it is possible that mutual tolerance is based on unstable power relations like in the coexistence conception, it is possible that when the balance of power shifts, doctrines can become intolerant again (Rawls 1987: 11). Therefore, the second limit of toleration is that one has to be tolerant because one realizes, or at the very least assumes, that it is the best option for all citizens of society.

Together, these two arguments mark the limits of toleration in political liberalism, without which liberal toleration is unable to form a stable system. The second argument, political liberalism as the

best option for a fair society, neutralizes the permission conception that the imperialist liberalism creates. It also takes one step towards a respect conception of tolerance, since the recognition of all citizens as equal, provides stable ground for the development of respect towards others. It seems as if the respect conception of toleration could fit very well with political liberalism.

6.4 Public Reason

The final core idea in Rawls, is the idea that society will continue to diversify. A just and fair society based on the concept of liberalism will lead to a continuous diversification of doctrines:

“The diversity of reasonable comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines found in modern democratic societies is not a mere historical condition that may soon pass away; it is a permanent feature of the public culture of democracy... This pluralism is not seen as a disaster but rather as the natural outcome of the activities of human reason under enduring free institutions... A continuing shared understanding on one comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine can only be maintained by the oppressive use of state power” (Rawls 1993: 224).

Since there is no alternative to pluralism, there needs to be a way to communicate between citizens about political matters, which are supposed to be neutral ground. Therefore, Rawls argues that there is a certain range of political values that can be used in a public political discussion, for example to review the discourse set by the ruling party. Since politics is outside the scope of ideological and religious doctrines, these have to be neutral values. Rawls calls this range of values ‘Public Reason’ (Brown 2003: 2). Public reason marks the divide between private comprehensive doctrines and public political matters.

However, public reason also leads to what Brown (2003: 4) calls ‘the paradox of public reason’: “Why should citizens in discussing and voting on the most fundamental political questions honor the limits of public reason?”. When important core questions are at stake, why should people refrain from arguing from their whole point of view and, instead, stick to the limited range of values that are offered by public reason (Brown 2003: 4)? If this paradox cannot be solved, Rawls theory of political liberalism is in grave peril. Although he does not offer any thought himself, a possible consequence, if this paradox remains unsolved, is that citizens start speaking from their private convictions and doctrines in public, which would lead to the degeneration of the overlapping consensus (Brown 2003: 5).

Rawls responds to this paradox with the argument for the 'duty of civility' (Weithman 2016).

However, the credibility of this argument has been the object of discussion. Some (Weithman 2016, Brown 2003) conclude that Rawls fails to solve the paradox of public reason, while others do find his arguments to be sufficient (Christiano 2001).

This presents a dilemma. If the argument of Rawls is sufficient in order to solve the paradox of public reason, then political liberalism will, theoretically, be a solution for the paradox of moral tolerance. Since there are no objections against toleration on the same moral level as the reasons for moral tolerance, there is no paradox of moral tolerance in political liberalism.

I argue that the respect condition of toleration fits very well within political liberalism that is unplagued by the paradox of public reason. Forst's (2014: 15) own call to promote a respect conception of tolerance shared the core values of mutuality and equality. In both this conception and Rawls' political liberalism, these qualities are inherent. The respect conception of tolerance is also a stable construct. Since human difference is a positive given for political liberalism and will likely increase, the respect condition can guarantee a stable and sustainable usage of toleration, especially combined with when a society consists of reasonable comprehensive doctrines.

However, if the argument fails to hold, then political liberalism is plagued by a fundamental problem that could cause the downfall of the entire system. In that case, political liberalism will most likely regress to the imperialist form of liberalism that Brown (2008) saw as the only possible form of liberalism. Brown would absolutely interpret the argument for the duty of civility as a form of normalization. And therefore, the paradox of moral tolerance cannot be solved and the permission conception of tolerance will take over, when liberalism proves – again – that it cannot deal with difference.

7. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have given a critical analysis of the value of liberal toleration. My aim has been to answer the question in how far the concept of tolerance is capable of fighting the problems that modern society faces. Although I have focused on finding this conception of toleration, it should be said that it is an extremely broad concept, and will most likely remain so. As Forst said, toleration comes in many forms and conceptions of tolerance are able to exist simultaneously within the same individual. It is very unlikely that finding one conception that does not suffer from the paradox of moral tolerance and is still able to fight the tensions created by society, will negate the other forms of tolerance. My objective is, therefore, to reduce the optimism toleration seems to create, and show the consequences of modern discourse on toleration.

The concept of toleration, first introduced in liberal society by philosophers like Locke, Spinoza and Mill, are all pervaded with the thought that individual autonomy and freedom is the highest virtue possible. They preached for toleration of individual choice and the minimalization of state influence. Toleration was a concept used to prevent violence and serve as a practical solution to conflict, for example Locke's argument for prudence. After the cold war, discourse on toleration changed, as it was hailed as a savior of society and a virtue. At first, tolerance may seem very attractive. Although the imperialistic nature of neoliberalism is fervently criticized by, among other, Brown, toleration is still a concept deemed necessary in order to deal with the structural problem that liberal society faces: it cannot deal with difference. As toleration is a concept that deals exclusively with human difference, it is fit to combat this problem. However, under the influence of liberalism, toleration becomes a tool for the powerful.

Although tolerance is hailed as a savior of pluralist society, it actually creates, exacerbates and reifies inequality. It hides the historization of power relations behind a veil of obscurity. Furthermore, it presents the difference between people as something natural and not cultural, even though it is not. Under the influence of neoliberalism, toleration is able to reify power relations that already exist and even create more human difference, under the pretense of solving these human differences. Brown's view is that liberalism is imperialistic and hegemonic, as it tries to subvert all other ideologies and subordinate them to its own ideology of human autonomy and rational freedom. Liberalism tries to present itself as something that transcends culture, even though it is an ideology that is fundamentally rooted in culture. I argue that tolerance in Brown's analysis has the characteristics of a modern day permission conception of tolerance. Tolerance, under influence of this imperialistic form of liberalism, is not able to escape the paradox of moral toleration, as the objections are morally on

the same level as the reasons to accept toleration. Therefore, it is unclear whether toleration is exacerbating or solving human difference in society. Maybe it does both at the same time.

I therefore turn to Rawls in the hope of finding a liberalism that is free from this imperialism. Rawls claims that his theory of liberalism is free of the conception that human autonomy and freedom are the ultimate virtues of society. His overlapping consensus seems promising, as it could possibly provide a truly neutral political environment, where tolerance could not be misused in the permission conception, as all comprehensive doctrines are considered equal. However, no matter how promising this theory seems, it is plagued by the paradox of public reason. The argument is extremely complex and there is a still ongoing fierce debate about the credibility of the argument. If the argument were to hold, it would be possible for toleration to exist within this society without suffering from the paradox of moral toleration, as long as it adheres to the respect conception of tolerance. As the respect conception is just like political liberalism based on the principles of equality and mutuality, they fit very well together. This combination is as close as I can get to a definite answer to the question in how far the liberal concept of toleration can be used to fight the problems of liberal society. In Rawls's political liberalism, it could be used extremely effectively to fight these problems.

However, if the argument does not hold, Rawls's political liberalism has to deal with a fundamental problem, which will most likely make it regress to the imperialist neoliberalism that Brown so heavily criticized. Now the answer becomes more complex. Toleration is still able to provide some solution to human difference, as even Brown does not want to ban the concept from liberal society. However, it is unable to escape the fundamental problems of liberalism and will most likely be used to exacerbate human difference as well. In this case, its ability to deal with difference is questionable. As is its employment, since it does not survive the paradox of moral toleration.

Brown is certainly of opinion that toleration can still be useful and is still a necessary strategy within liberalism in order to deal with difference. She suggests that toleration should be politicized again and that there should be an open debate on the consequences of liberal discourse on toleration. This might be able to help lift the veil that toleration has placed on the historicized identity and power relations in society. It seems that right now, liberalism needs tolerance in order to function, and therefore we should embrace the good and work on the bad. As one of my favorite science fiction writers once said:

“Tolerance, like any aspect of peace, is forever a work in progress, never completed, and, if we're as intelligent as we like to think we are, never abandoned.” – Octavia E. Butler

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