

**“If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them.” - Karl Popper: *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 1945**

One of the biggest dilemmas faced by political philosophers is trying to establish the limits of liberty, if any should exist. In a liberal society it is understood that even if there were any restrictions to exist, they should be miniscule and should not interfere with the oppression of rights that concern private individuals; the only justification for the intervention of liberty being in potentially causing harm to another individual. Any actions that concern only the individual must be accepted by society, tolerated by society. However, even from the statement made by Karl Popper, it is understandable how quickly this proceeds to the next dilemma; to what extent is one required to tolerate the intolerant?

A common misconception by many liberals is that in order for all cultures to co-exist, everyone must be tolerated. In this essay I will argue that this point of view is not only incoherent but moreover contradictory to the main principles of liberalism. Similar to liberty, tolerance also has its limits, as will be justified. Any form of intolerance should be treated accordingly, uniformly, in a manner that does not tolerate the intolerance.

An argument often used by pluralists, liberals who believe that for cultures to co-exist in a society, they must not only tolerate one another but also actively ensure the protection of the other cultures as well as their own. Therefore a culture that for example discriminates against a specific ethnic group must be tolerated, so long as they do not harm the other ethnic group in any manner. It should be clarified that all acts in society still remain within the jurisdiction of the law; any acts committed against the law, whether cultural or not, should and will be persecuted. Nevertheless under circumstances in which the law is abided, a pluralist would claim that all cultural acts and beliefs must be protected. Their defense for unlimited tolerance is, simply put, that there exists no legitimate authority with the ability to judge another culture. The moral relativist claims that since all cultures were created based on the same principles by essentially, the same beings, no cultural group has the right to judge the other or put themselves above the other for that matter. Their defense for unlimited tolerance is that there is no supreme culture that can in effect, judge another culture.

A true liberal multiculturalist however can see the flaws in this argument, the first and foremost being the lack of attention given to the preservation of the rights of the individual. In John Stuart Mill's essays "On Liberty", liberty was not a reason to act in whatever manner one pleased, it was rather a measure taken to protect one's individual rights. These rights included the liberty of thought, and the liberty to act accordingly to these thoughts, so long as one's actions do not harm another. From Mill's "Harm Principle" we see how individual rights are given the utmost importance, whereas in a pluralist society the preservation of cultures is the main priority; even if it meant that people are harmed in the preservation process.

It is understandable, however, that a supreme authority able to judge other cultures does not exist. Unfortunately humans are incapable of being enlightened with the absolute truth, however, this does not mean that we succumb to our incapability and become inactive. As curious beings we must remain active in our search for truth, to come as close as we possibly can in reaching the “absolute” truth. According to Mill, this progress towards truth can only be done through the clashing of opinions; only through open dialogue can a society expect to be able to co-exist. Any manner of prohibiting dialogue can be seen as “tyranny of the majority” or oppression which is another danger to society, from society. In a pluralist society, people succumb to their incapability and are led to blind toleration, even when such toleration is harming them. It is vital to understand that being intolerant of intolerance does not contradict liberal values; in fact it enforces them, if the intolerance is being exercised in a proportionate manner.

To prevent what Popper predicted to be the destruction of a tolerant society by the “onslaught of the intolerant” it is vital that people become intolerant towards intolerance. This does not mean, however, that people should act violently or savagely; as was mentioned before, all actions should remain within the jurisdiction of the law. The liberals must be intolerant in a proportionate manner to the amount of intolerance shown by the opposing forces. This “principle of reciprocity” is based in favor of liberal values because it encourages open dialogue between the two sides of society. This allows for the clashing of opinions which leads to progression towards truth and ultimately societal progress. Therefore being intolerant is coherent with liberal virtues.

Popper highlights the irony in the pluralistic view of being absolutely tolerant, as a means of protection of other beliefs, since this undermines protection for the belief of being tolerant and therefore causes it to “be destroyed”. Personally, though I believe that there is no supreme judge that can deem one culture offensive towards another, if a culture is being intolerant then it is the responsibility of the remaining society to protect the rights of those that are being undermined by the intolerant. This protection, contrary to pluralists, should not have a passive nature; it should assert itself as intolerant towards the intolerant. By taking these measures, Popper’s, and several other liberal multiculturalists’, worst nightmare, of the ironic destruction of the liberal, can be avoided.