TOLERATION AND MULTICULTURALISM

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> *I hate the Pope. Wholeheartedly, gut-wrenchingly hate him. I hate him for sitting around in his white frock, luxuriating in the infinite wealth of the Vatican while casually denying condoms to the dying of Africa. I hate him for condemning the poorest of women to early death by childbirth. And I pretty much hate, by extension, the Roman Catholics whose devotion permits his tyranny to thrive…While we're at it, I hate the people in the sinister church at the end of my street who beat 'devils' out of the flesh of children. I hate the Jamaican congregation who kicked a man to death on a rumour that he was gay. I hate Sikhs who bully theatres (Sarler, 2005).*

The idea that one desirable social and political response to moral and cultural diversity is increased toleration is a commonplace of political discourse, and once would have been almost orthodoxy among liberals. The value of toleration had surely been decisively shown in wide variety of contexts from at least the sixteenth century onwards. It is no surprise, therefore, that until fairly recently toleration was widely seen as an important and obvious resource for dealing with the various problems associated with societies that we now describe multicultural.[1]

[1] I shall use the term 'multicultural' in a descriptive sense. When referring to the normative ideal I shall use the term 'multiculturalism', and I shall call advocates of that ideal 'multiculturalists'.

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The idea of toleration has a long and diverse history, and no one understanding of it commands universal assent. However, what might be plausibly regarded as the classical or core conception grew out of the political thought of seventeenth century Europe. On this account, very roughly, toleration is understood as the willing putting up with the beliefs, actions or practices of others, by a person or group that disapproves of them, and who would have the power to prohibit or repress them, if they chose to do so. Toleration in this sense is a form of self-restraint, a kind of willed reluctance to interfere coercively with what is regarded as the objectionable behaviour of others, an attitude and practice of restraint, typically distinguished from approval, indifference or mere acquiescence (Horton, 1998). It is, perhaps, a cross between Walzer's 'resigned acceptance of difference for the sake of peace' and 'a principled recognition that "others" have rights even if they exercise these rights in unattractive ways', but some distance from being 'passive relaxed, benignly indifferent to difference', let alone still more welcoming responses to difference (Walzer, 1997: 10).

This conception of toleration is also clearly judgemental, and has about it a grudging, condemnatory, condescending and superior air; not least because toleration in this meaning tends to carry with it the idea that, from the point of view of the tolerators, the world would be a better place if what was tolerated were no longer to exist. The tolerant person or group is to some degree characteristically opposed or antagonistic, even hostile, to what is tolerated. While it is possible to overstate the extent to which this must always be so, even in this sense of toleration, it would be mistaken to think that these attitudes are only accidentally associated with it. A kind of negativity lies at the heart of toleration, especially when some action or practice is disapproved of on moral grounds. This is not intended to be a complete, precise or nuanced account of this conception of toleration. Many of the key elements – including what counts as 'coercive interference', rather than a legitimate expression of disapproval – lack specificity; and there are any number of challenging questions that could

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be asked about it, most of which I shall cavalierly ignore in what follows. But, hopefully, what has been said is sufficient to identify, at least in broad terms, one familiar understanding of the notion.

1. A multicultural critique of the traditional conception of toleration

In recent years especially, this idea of toleration – what I shall henceforth call the 'traditional conception' – has come in for extensive criticism, especially from those thinkers concerned to advance an ideal of multiculturalism. Some theorists of multiculturalism have rejected the ideal of toleration entirely, but even those more sympathetic to it have felt a need to radically rethink the traditional conception. In its place have been proposed a variety of alternatives; including, for instance, 'positive toleration', 'transformative toleration' (Mookherjee, n.d.), 'affirmative tolerance' (Apel, 1997), 'toleration as active engagement' (Creppell, 2003), and 'toleration as recognition' (Galeotti, 2002). For all the differences between them, however, there is also a significant degree of commonality in what these critics find unsatisfactory about the traditional conception of toleration, and in the broad direction in which they think that conception needs to be rethought and reformulated. In particular, it is the grudging quality of the traditional conception, as mentioned earlier, to which they object; its negative, condescending, judgemental, even hostile, character, and also its tendency to treat beliefs or ways of life as simply 'given', rather than as raw material to be worked on through dialogue or transformative discourse. Instead, they articulate a more positive and affirmative understanding of toleration; a conception that plays down rejection and any sense of superiority and condescension, and which actively seeks a constructive engagement between beliefs and ways of life so as to modify or enlarge them in a more appreciative or sympathetic direction.

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This is a view eloquently captured, if less cautiously expressed than by these philosophers, by the historian, Theodore Zeldin, when he writes approvingly:

> *The tolerated are increasingly demanding to be appreciated, not ignored, and becoming more sensitive to suggestions of contempt lurking behind the condescension. They do not want to be told that differences do not matter, that they can think what they like provided they keep to themselves, out of the way of the majority…The ideal of toleration can now be seen to be not a goal, but a stepping stone. Understanding others is the great adventure that lies beyond it (Zeldin, 1998: 272).*

And Bhikhu Parekh expresses no more than an entirely commonplace view when he relates this assessment of the value of toleration to the demands of groups seeking recognition within an ideal of multiculturalism:

> *Their demand for recognition goes far beyond the familiar plea for toleration, for the latter implies conceding the validity of society's disapproval and relying on its self-restraint. Rather they ask for the acceptance, respect and even public affirmation of their differences (Parekh, 2000: 1).*

In short, the traditional conception of toleration is seen as too limited and lacking the appropriate receptiveness to difference to meet the legitimate aspirations associated with the multiculturalist ideal.

These critics of the traditional conception of toleration are sensitive to the fact that toleration is often presented as a good, an ideal or a virtue (Nicholson, 1985; Newey, 1999; Horton, 1996). But it seems hard to square this valuation of toleration with the sort of grudging acceptance and hostile attitudes towards what is tolerated that characterises the traditional conception. Such attitudes do

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not appear to be wholly praiseworthy or admirable. Hans Oberdiek makes the point with some relish:

> *No one likes being tolerated; most resent it. To be tolerated is to be an object of contempt, condescension, or patronizing suffocation….The alleged virtue of tolerance encourages tolerators to indulge a groundless, smug complacency celebrating their own superiority. While it is surely better to be tolerated than persecuted, at least persecutors regard those whom they persecute as worth persecuting. The tolerant often like to present themselves as showing great forbearance and largeness of soul by not letting on how offensive, childlike, or otherwise deficient they find the objects of their toleration (Oberdiek, 2001: 18).*

While perhaps over the top in its expression – for instance, it rather begs the question to assert that any sense of superiority can only be 'groundless' – Oberdiek's basic point would appear to be a sound one. Surely, it might plausibly be said, if we are to think of toleration as a virtue or a moral ideal, something to be aspired to, a goal, then we should look for something more alluring than the apparently unattractive qualities of the traditional conception. In this way the desire to transcend, to 'go beyond', the traditional conception can be seen to flow from some of the features of that conception itself. And this objection seems especially pressing when conceived in the context of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism, of course, is not a single ideal. Some multiculturalists see it as no more than the logical extension of liberalism (Kymlicka, 1995), while others explicitly present it as an alternative to liberalism (Parekh, 2000). Fortunately, it is not necessary for me to pursue these controversies, or to try to specify the ideal in any detail. For my purposes it is sufficient that all those whom I am here concerned with share one feature, whatever the other aspects of their multiculturalist ideal: that is they reject the traditional conception of toleration for

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something like the reasons I have just set out above.[2] For my purpose in this paper is only to speak up for the traditional conception of toleration, rather than articulate any more comprehensive critique of multiculturalism, by suggesting that there is still a valuable place for it in the politics of modern, plural, multicultural, societies. In doing so I want to defend the traditional conception of toleration from some of the criticisms advanced against it, and to suggest that for all its apparently unlovely and down at heel appearance it can be both a political good and an individual virtue; and in any world we are likely to experience to be indispensable. In particular, it provides a resource for dealing with a range of problems that identity politics, the politics of difference or the politics of recognition associated with multiculturalism do not satisfactorily address. This is not, though, to deny that it has its limitations, nor even to reject out of hand alternative conceptions of toleration. It would, indeed, be unlikely for so many intelligent and reflective writers on toleration to be completely mistaken, and the traditional conception of toleration should be thought of as a resource, not a panacea.

However, lest this give the impression that such theoretical ecumenicalism promises nothing but a bland inclusiveness, I shall, at least by implication, be criticising some of these more recent views, and indeed the ideal of multiculturalism in so far as it is inclined to eschew, or at least seriously undervalue, the traditional conception of toleration. This criticism relies on a particular reading of the place of moral and cultural conflict in the life of modern, plural, multicultural societies; and will be directed towards what I take to be an inadequate appreciation of the nature and implications of much of this conflict, and especially of its darker side. For modern, multicultural societies are not merely marked by diversity or difference; but also by conflict. That is: the kinds of difference that are especially problematic in such societies are those that involve conflict one with another, and it is with respect to this agonistic character

[2] Of course not all those who reject the value of the traditional conception of toleration for the reasons

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of difference that I argue the traditional conception of toleration continues to have an important role.

In defending the traditional conception of toleration, however, I need to be a little more explicit about both what I am, and what I am not, seeking to do. What I am aiming to show is how this conception of toleration still has a valuable place in our thinking about certain sorts of conflict, and how we should deal with them, that are ubiquitous in modern, plural, multicultural societies. In trying to show this I shall from time to time employ examples and make various claims about them. However, it is important to be clear from the start that nothing necessarily hangs on whether or not the reader agrees with what I say about these particular examples, for their purpose is only illustrative. I am not concerned to advance claims about whether toleration really is the appropriate moral response in the specific examples that are discussed, or indeed in any particular examples. Someone could certainly reject some, or even all, of the examples, but still accept my general argument. For my intention is not to defend a moral position with respect to any particular case, but to develop a general philosophical argument about the kind of circumstances in which the traditional conception of toleration remains importantly relevant, and there may certainly be room for disagreement about whether or not any particular case is an exemplar of those circumstances. So, what does matter is that the reader is persuaded that there are some examples, some kinds of circumstance, to which my arguments do have application. Thus it is not essential to my argument for the continuing importance of the traditional conception of toleration that there must be agreement about any particular case: indeed, it would be surprising if there were complete agreement about all such cases What would be fatal to it, though, would be the rejection of the claim that are *any* non-trivial instantiations or examples that meet the conditions of the arguments I set out.

given would call themselves multiculturalists.

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My defence of the traditional conception of toleration is advanced through two principal arguments. One is a broadly political and circumstantial argument. It focuses on the role of toleration in an often radically divided and always imperfect world, and in which partial compliance is the norm and dispute and contestation applies as much to any putative 'ideal theory', in Rawls's sense (Rawls, 2001: 13), including the meaning and value of multiculturalism itself, as to other moral and political questions. On this view, toleration can be understood as part of a politics of *modus vivendi*, to which negotiation, compromise and bargaining are as integral as purer forms of moral reasoning, and in which a political relationship of toleration has an important place as a viable form of accommodation between groups, who differ, for instance, over which ways of life are morally objectionable, and who may be of unequal political power. The second, and perhaps more theoretically interesting argument, seeks to defend the traditional conception in terms of what follows from an adequate understanding of a certain class of conflicts of value. Here the contention is that the traditional conception of toleration can both acknowledge and accommodate the fact that some values, cultures or ways of life are in some respects necessarily morally antagonistic towards others. In these circumstances, I argue, toleration in the traditional sense, with all its negative associations, may still be the best that can reasonably be enjoined and expected. This second argument speaks for the value of toleration generally, and not only of political toleration.

2. A *modus vivendi* defence of political toleration

The first line of defence of the traditional conception of toleration, at least in some form or other, is one that even most of its critics, more or less reluctantly, are likely to agree has some force. They might accept that in particular historical or social circumstances the kind of grudging putting up with others inherent in the traditional conception is the best that can be hoped for, and no doubt

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preferable to the only probable realistic, alternatives, all of which would be worse. This is intimated by Zeldin's notion of the traditional conception of toleration as a 'stepping stone' between intolerance and something more and better than toleration. The thought here seems to be informed by a teleological perspective in which toleration is understood as but a transitional stage in a process that moves from intolerance through enlightened moral development towards acceptance or engagement. In a world in which the persecution of heterodoxy of belief and intolerance of diversity of practice was the norm, the advent of toleration represented a significant advance. However grudgingly, toleration at least allowed some space for cultural minorities, the unconventional and the different. But, as the 'stepping stone' metaphor clearly implies, it is conceived as a temporary expedient; or, as Bernard Williams puts it, 'an interim value, serving a period between a past when no one had heard of it and a future in which no one will need it' (Williams, 1999: 74). Ultimately, from this viewpoint, toleration is something that has its uses, but which we should strive to outgrow. Less optimistic versions of this view can also take on board the idea that this process may take a very long time, that the road to this better state of affairs can be a rocky and uncertain one, and that therefore toleration in the traditional sense may be the best that is possible in many situations at this time, given the imperfections of the world as it is. Ultimately, though, we should aspire to transcend the need for mere toleration – a point on which multiculturalists and many liberals agree.

However, the teleological perspective that underlies these critics limited and qualified defence of the traditional conception of toleration is itself far from uncontentious. While it would be too crude to suggest that we are simply being presented with a barely disguised version of the Whig interpretation of history, it is sobering to be reminded that the happy days that Zeldin and Williams look forward to may not be welcome to everyone. A world in which people view all differences of belief, culture and ways of life (except those which Williams or

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Zeldin or multiculturalists regard as properly intolerable) as something to be relished, or at the very least to be indifferent to, is effectively to adopt a highly contentious view of what is a good society. It is actually a surprisingly Manichean perspective, too, in that, in way that is structurally reminiscent of deeply illiberal and monocultural perspectives, it tends sharply to divide differences into those that are at worst a matter of indifference, and those that are simply unacceptable. Of course, it draws the line around what is to be permitted in a different place, but it is, in the last analysis, similarly impatient of the traditional conception of toleration. And from the point of view of the ideal of multiculturalism, which is professedly inclusive in its aspirations, it threatens to be rather exclusionary of a great many actual cultures, which are from wholeheartedly welcoming of departures from their own values and preferred ways of doing things.

Instead, I want to suggest that we should look again at the merits of *modus vivendi* as a broadly acceptable and effective way of mediating political conflict. John Rawls famously rejects *modus vivendi* as being 'political in the wrong way', but that is partly because he understands the idea very narrowly to be nothing more than the outcome of a balance of political forces, and therefore inherently unstable, as well as unjust (Rawls, 1993: 147-8). However, my thought is that we need to understand *modus vivendi* more generously, as encompassing *all* of the resources that can be brought to bear in a given situation to secure a peaceable political accommodation, which is generally acceptable only in the weak sense that contending parties can live with it. On this understanding, *modus vivendi* can draw on a range of moral ideas as well as calculations of advantage and disadvantage, and benefit and cost, prudence in the largest sense of that term. It is also sceptical of any sharp polarisation between *modus vivendi* and 'a principled defence of toleration' (Matravers and Mendus, 2003: 50). This inevitably means, though, that *modus vivendi* admits of general theorisation to only a very limited extent. We can point to values such

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as the desire for peace, security and prosperity, to widespread acceptance of the idea that agreements should usually be kept even if circumstances arise in which they can be broken with impunity, and that are ways of treating other people that are generally considered to be unacceptable, but we cannot *a priori* theorise the particular outcome of a *modus vivendi* in any specific situation: that will always be a function of the political process of negotiation, bargaining and compromise, and of the political imagination, flexibility and adeptness of those much maligned figures in contemporary political theory, politicians.

But what has all this to do with toleration? My contention is that the traditional conception of toleration offers one important form that a *modus vivendi* may take. It offers one generic form of a viable political settlement in the face of a range of conflicts over values and what ways of life should be permitted, to what degree and on what conditions (Gray, 2000: Ch. 4; Horton, 2006). It has the merit of including within the circumstances of a political accommodation, which incorporates some measure of toleration, the antagonistic nature of many cultural conflicts. It also allows for the inequalities of power that are typically airbrushed out of ideal political theory, whether this be conceived in terms in terms of liberal impartiality or dialogical democracy, although it is not reducible to a mere balance of power or a mechanical calculation of interests. It acknowledges that the interplay of interests, ideals and power, of self-interest, prudence and morality, is an essential feature of any plausible understanding of political life, and that any adequate theorisation of *politics* needs to take this complexity into account. Inevitably, on this view, the precise form that toleration takes in any actual political accommodation will be in large part a function of context and circumstance.

Glen Newey, however, has argued powerfully that there is much less reason to think that *modus vivendi* will be as politically effective as the above account suggests. And, although his argument provides little, if any, succour for

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multiculturalists, it still needs to be addressed if my claims on behalf of a politics of *modus vivendi* are not to fail. The core of Newey's criticism is that:

> *The underlying difficulty is that the modus vivendi argument tries to approach the justification of [toleration] pragmatically, but in a political environment in which ex hypothesi, the parties involved are not prepared to act pragmatically. This is particularly clear in circumstances of toleration. For the circumstances only arise where at least one party (and usually each) is not prepared to act tolerantly (Newey, 1999: 134).*

Let me begin by conceding at least this much to Newey: there may indeed be circumstances in which nothing will in fact persuade a group to act tolerantly. This is a possibility that no account of tolerant can preclude, for there can never be any *guarantee*, no matter how strong the considerations in favour toleration, that people will act on them. But he is also right to suggest that there may not be rationally compelling arguments - moral, prudential or any other sort - in its favour either. Reasons in this context are always reasons *for* some group or person, and are therefore dependent, at least in part, on their particular motivational beliefs. And these may not include beliefs that will enable toleration to have an adequate motivational purchase on their actions: in such circumstances the prospects for toleration are, indeed, very bleak.

However, having conceded that much, we should not allow Newey quite so easily to turn the merely very difficult into the impossible. For one thing, if he were right, toleration would surely be a much less familiar phenomenon than it is. The strength of the *modus vivendi* approach is that it is prepared to draw on whatever moral, intellectual, practical and other resources are available in a given set of circumstances. For instance, intolerance usually has costs to the intolerant themselves. True, those costs may not always be judged to be worse than a policy of toleration, but they will typically have some weight. Similarly,

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many cultures, though they disparage and seek actively to discourage ways of life that conflict with them, also have available intellectual and other resources that may permit their toleration, though not their equal standing or recognition. In the modern world at least, most religions, usually thought to be the hard cases, do not licence complete intolerance of other religions. Many Islamic states, for instance, allow people within them to live as Christians or Jews, although often at a disadvantage and sometimes without the same social or political rights as Muslims. The traditional conception of toleration is quite consistent with unequal burdens being borne by the tolerated group, so long as those burdens fall within certain broad, if unspecifiable, limits. The general point, though, is that we cannot know in advance of some political process whether or not, or to what degree, toleration will be possible; and there is certainly no reason to think that it will never be possible, even when it is most needed and the circumstances not obviously propitious.

The basic problem with Newey's argument, as I see it, is that he comes dangerously close to setting the problem up in manner that makes it definitionally impossible for toleration ever to be a viable response. Crudely, his contention is that we need toleration only in circumstances where people are unwilling or unable to be tolerant; and therefore, unsurprisingly, they will not be tolerant. Moreover, if *per impossibile* pragmatic considerations do somehow result in a group showing some degree of forbearance, then they are not really acting *tolerantly* because they had no effective alternative (Newey, 1999: 134-5). But we should be wary of such a conceptual straitjacket, which *a priori* denies any possibility of toleration. In life motives are invariably mixed and reasons complex. A politics of *modus vivendi* aims to exploit whatever practical, intellectual and other resources are available in any particular set of circumstances to produce a political accommodation. Unless we simply define circumstances in a way that necessarily precludes them, what resources will be available to support toleration cannot be known independently of a detailed

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description of that situation. Nor can we know how human imagination, ingenuity and creativeness will be employed in any political process of negotiation and compromise. That toleration cannot be guaranteed by such a politics should not be denied; but not only will it not be theoretically precluded, there is a good deal of historical evidence to suggest that it can be a viable and politically attractive outcome. It will not, though, require that the aspirations of the ideal of multiculturalism should be met.

3. Taking conflicts of culture and value seriously

The second line of defence of the traditional conception of toleration might be seen simply as yet another manifestation of the problem of tolerating the intolerant, although I hope it will become clear why I do not regard that as a helpful way of formulating the issue. This argument focuses on the implications of taking conflicts of culture and value seriously. For, if we accept that there are deep differences of value and ways of life, which cannot be conclusively resolved, either in theory or in practice, and for whatever reasons, then I think that we also have to accept that some of the multicultural critics of the traditional conception ask too much. And they ask too much not merely in the prosaic and commonplace sense that many people or groups will not in fact be able to live up to such expectations, but court theoretical incoherence in the very ideal of multiculturalism. In seeking to detach beliefs or ways of life from all associated negative attitudes towards others, these critics can be seen to threaten their own claims to be genuinely inclusive of difference. For, such an ideal seems to exclude cultures and ways of life, which incorporate within them derogatory and hostile attitudes towards other cultures and ways of life. Or, at the very least, it demands that such cultures or ways of life must be suitably ‘reformed’. To demand that people should positively embrace diversity, recognise other identities as equally valid to their own, or transform their conceptions of the good to be ‘inclusive’ rather than ‘exclusive’, or even to mandate indifference to

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them, is to fail to take seriously the dark side of conflicts between the different values that are incorporated within cultures and ways of life.

It is no more than a truism that at least one of the roots of the desire to be intolerant lies in the fact that beliefs, values and ways of life often include within them injunctions about how those who do not subscribe to those beliefs, values and ways of life should live. In particular, what we typically regard as people's moral beliefs are likely to have this property. It seems so obvious that it hardly needs saying that there is nothing exceptional or necessarily objectionable in people viewing some actions or ways of life embraced positively by others as wrong. Of course, the fact that these other actions or ways of life are thought to be wrong need not be accompanied by the view that therefore they should be prohibited or repressed. But it does tend to go with the view that the world would be a better place if they did not exist (although, again, it most certainly does not follow that anything that would bring about this better state of affairs would therefore be justified). I do not want to assert this as a universal metaphysical truth about morality but simply as part of our commonplace understanding of what it normally means to say that something is wrong. For, to believe an action or practice to be wrong is, standardly, to hold, all other things being equal, that it would be better if the action were not performed or the practice abolished. And, if we are tempted to deny that it is permissible or legitimate for people to hold such negative views of other cultures or ways of life then this itself sounds narrow-minded and, indeed, intolerant.

Although the connection is weaker with respect to how one regards the agent who engages in wrongdoing, such a negative attitude will often carry over to the agent. Thus I do not think that it will always be possible entirely to 'distinguish between what is advocated by one's opponents and one's attitude towards those opponents themselves' (Scanlon, 1996: 235). Of course, there are usually limits to this: it is improbable, for example, that someone in our society who

believes that adultery is wicked will think that this is a good reason for depriving known adulterers of the vote. No doubt, too, there is a wide range of possible attitudes, some of which, for example pity, may not amount to a condemnatory attitude to the agent at all. But even pity, surely one of the more generous responses to a perpetrator of wrongdoing, may have about it just that air of superiority to which critics of the traditional conception of toleration are liable object. In many other cases much stronger attitudes, including condemnation, contempt and other forms of hostility towards the wrongdoer, are likely. This is just part of a 'normal' response, in the absence of excusing conditions or extenuating circumstances, to believing that people are behaving in ways that are wrong.

The upshot of all this, I want to suggest, is that the kind of negative attitudes associated with the traditional conception of toleration are no more than a familiar and unexceptional concomitant of what it is to believe that actions, practices or ways of life are wrong. The quotation from Carol Sarler at the start of this paper may be slightly shocking to some in the intensity with which it is expressed, but it is surely not uncommon. If we think that it is reasonable, or even merely permissible, for people to hold such views then we are also committed to accepting that they are likely to have negative attitudes - and sometimes strongly so - to beliefs, actions and ways of life that they regard as wrong or harmful, and also to some degree towards those who hold or engage in them. That is, they are likely to be disparaging, condescending, superior, and hostile towards people whom they see as wilfully and unapologetically behaving in ways or living lives that they believe to be bad. And one reason for choosing Sarler's comment is to bring home that secular liberals are quite as capable of these attitudes as are any other group. For this kind of attitude tends to go with strongly held convictions, whether or not they are based in religion; and this is the reason why I want to suggest that toleration in the traditional sense, rather

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than the more demanding ideal of multiculturalism, may be the most that can reasonably be required when such convictions are at stake.

Let me try, very briefly, to elaborate on this and give some idea of what is at stake by sketching a highly stylised, but I hope wholly plausible, example. On the one hand we have a secular, gay hedonist, dedicated to a life of sexual pleasure, who not only thinks that there is nothing morally objectionable about homosexuality, but maintains that homosexuals are entitled to exactly the same social rights as non-gays, including for example rights to same-sex marriages, to adopt children on the same basis of heterosexual married couples, to have exactly the same career options and so on. On the other hand, we have an ascetic, Christian fundamentalist, who holds that the practice of homosexuality is sinful, an unnatural abomination in the eyes of God, and for whom marriage is a holy estate instituted by God for the purpose of procreation. This is not to deny that there will be more to these people than just these attributes, but fashionable talk about hybridity and fluid identities should not blind us to the fact that many people often take a relatively small range of features to be fundamental to their self-conception. And here, I suggest, we have a pretty deep moral conflict, but one that for all its simplification is far from contrived or artificial.

Let us look at this conflict from the perspective of each in turn. The ascetic, Christian fundamentalist is committed to the view that homosexuality is unnatural and sinful. Regardless for the moment of whether she thinks homosexuality should be tolerated, she is unlikely to be seeking a genuinely open or transformative engagement with homosexuals. (I say unlikely to be seeking a ‘genuinely open or transformative engagement’ because of course she may well be interested in persuading the gay hedonist of the evil of his ways, but not be open to reconsidering her own views.) Although many possible attitudes to the gay hedonist are intelligibly open to her, ranging from pity to

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contempt, the latter cannot necessarily be shown to be an inappropriate response. In so far as her attitude grows out of a religious doctrine and a coherent way of life, it is not clear why it is not a legitimate expression her moral outlook. And before those of us more liberally inclined about such matters look down our noses at her 'closed mind' we should ask ourselves how far we are genuinely open to being persuaded that homosexuality is sinful, or on the other hand, say, of the merits of paedophilia. Turn now to the perspective of the secular gay hedonist. His view of the ascetic, fundamentalist, Christian may not be very different from hers to him. He may, for instance, engage in the fashionable pathologising of her views as 'homophobic', and be contemptuous of her, as he sees it, life hating, narrow-mindedness and sexual repression. But that, too, can quite easily simply follow from his view on life, even if not in quite the same way. To ask each to be tolerant of the other in the traditional sense does not require either of them to give up their negative views of the other. It accepts that each view includes within it an intelligible grounding for a negative attitude, even hostility, towards the other, and it does not require of either that they modify their attitudes or compromise their beliefs about the wrongness of what they disapprove, although it does require of them a certain restraint in acting on these attitudes. To ask that each do more than exercise toleration in the traditional sense towards the other is to start to intrude in a deep way on the integrity of their beliefs.

The general point is that values and ways of life are often mutually antagonistic and hostile, and can only coexist in an uneasy tension with each other. Toleration in the traditional sense allows for this, and accommodates it; at least to the maximum extent that it can be accommodated at all. We must not be too Panglossian about this, of course, because toleration, even in the traditional sense, is not an option for groups who are unwilling to live together with those whose values, culture or way of life they reject. But in so far as they are willing to live together, then toleration in the traditional sense may afford the only basis

on which a coexistence that recognises the mutual antagonism that is the dark side of many conflicts of values is possible.

CONCLUSION

None of the foregoing is intended to suggest that toleration in its traditional sense is always the most appropriate response to difference. Sometimes, it will not be appropriate at all. One obvious reason for this is because some differences will be thought intolerable. I have made no effort to suggest where the line between the tolerable and the intolerable should be drawn, but every person, group and society will draws that line somewhere. Another reason why toleration may not be appropriate is because it may be practically impossible. This may be because some groups are simply unwilling to exercise tolerance. More interestingly, though, it may not be feasible because not all ways of life are compossible: one way of life can render another unliveable within the same society (Waldron, 2003). In other circumstances toleration may not be the most appropriate response because, as the multicultural critics of the traditional conception urge, we should, indeed, aim for a form of engagement or accommodation that is less antagonistic and more welcoming of difference. Nothing I have argued precludes that this may sometimes be the case. However, I have sought to argue that there are good reasons for thinking that this will not always be so.

Why, then, is the traditional conception of toleration still important? I have contended because it provides a particular sort of space in which significant differences that are essentially conflictual in character can be accommodated. It makes possible the peaceable coexistence of groups that are antagonistic, even to a considerable degree hostile, to each other. It allows for a broader range of political accommodations than those allowed within the ideal of multiculturalism. It makes this possible precisely because it permits mutual

antagonism some scope for social expression in a way that multiculturalism appears always to want to circumvent. There are certainly very real dangers in this; and also inevitably limits in how far it is possible, especially for example if these differences are such as to undermine any allegiance to a common polity. But there are also dangers, and some element of delusion, in any approach that thinks such differences either can or should always be 'reconciled' or harmoniously mediated through dialogue or equal recognition. Too often, it seems to me, the more or less suppressed premise in such approaches is that some groups who disrespect the ways of life of other groups must amend their beliefs to make them acceptable. But then this, in turn, is surely to 'disrespect' the beliefs of those groups. An important function of toleration in the traditional sense is precisely that of trying to find a way in which people who may have little respect for each other's culture or values can, nonetheless, still live together peaceably.

In claiming that reconciliation, mutual affirmation or recognition, let alone the celebration of difference, will not always be possible or appropriate, I am making more that an empirical prediction about the tenacity of conflict; although I am also committed to that kind of claim. More fundamentally, my argument is that some differences of belief, identity, culture, especially where ideas about right and wrong are involved, are of their nature conflictual, entailing some element of mutual antagonism and that a genuinely plural and diverse society must sometimes acknowledge and accommodate those differences.[3] The ascetic, fundamentalist Christian and the secular, gay hedonist are pretty much *bound* to think badly of each other's beliefs and lifestyles, and probably of each other too. If we are genuinely to accommodate these mutually antagonistic views for what they really are, then each can be legitimately required to tolerate the other in the traditional sense; but no more.

[3] Interestingly, Charles Taylor is one multiculturalist who allows that there can be no guarantee that one group will find anything much of value in the culture of another, but he is noticeably silent on what follows from this (Taylor, 1994: 68-73)

A tolerant society, therefore, will not, in some respects at least, match the ideal of a multiculturalist society. And it may not be a very comfortable society either, contrary to some images of a tolerant society as one at ease with itself. It *is* easy to exercise 'toleration' in relation to things we do not much care about; but when we really do care, toleration is difficult; especially, as Scanlon wryly observes, when we start to expect it of ourselves and not just of others (Scanlon, 1996). Typically, there is a tendency to approve of toleration in the abstract, so long as it does not require us to tolerate what we disapprove of. And, because we are not really being challenged in any deep or fundamental way, that enables us to be not merely 'tolerant', but even to talk cheerfully of mutual recognition, openness, dialogical engagement and the celebration of cultural diversity, while more or less subtly wagging our finger at others, but exempting ourselves. However, in so far as different cultures and ways of life are deeply committed to beliefs and practices that are mutually antagonistic, particularly when they are bound up with ideas of right and wrong, a measure of disparagement, condescension or even hostility may be a normal concomitant of such commitments. And in our enthusiasm for something supposedly better we should not lose sight of the continuing role that the traditional conception of toleration is still needed to fulfil.

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