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Liberalism and Toleration: Competing Concepts of Toleration in Liberal Thought

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LIBERALISM AND TOLERATION

COMPETING CONCEPTS OF TOLERATION IN LIBERAL THOUGHT

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A Thesis

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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by

Jonathan Parks Pierpan

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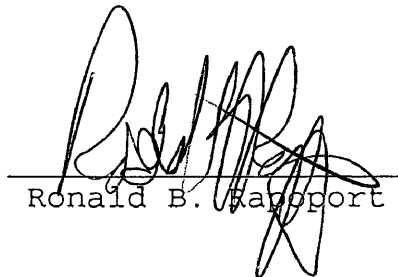
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DEDICATION

To my parents, whose belief in knowledge as a noble pursuit has made this possible.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

Since the appearance of John Locke's *Epistola de Tolerantia*, toleration has been commonly understood to be one of the central tenets of liberalism. However, while the relationship between toleration and liberalism has been studied previously, these studies have not been grounded in an adequate exploration of the concept of toleration itself. This thesis examines the concept of "toleration" in ordinary usage as a means to obtain a deeper understanding both of toleration and of its relationship with liberalism.

This examination reveals two key components. First, toleration implies two boundaries: to tolerate x is both to disapprove of x, on the one hand, and to say that x should nevertheless be permitted, on the other. Second, while "to tolerate" can be a passive act, "to be tolerant" can also imply the possession of a specific virtue and character: thus, a tolerant citizenry can be an active citizenry with a specific ("tolerant") character.

While advocates of a thin "permissiveness" and a thick "authoritarianism" appear to advocate polar opposite political positions, many authors in both camps hold that their views are compatible with liberalism. This thesis, however, will argue that both are incompatible with liberalism because neither guarantees the two boundaries of toleration, and neither requires an active conception of citizenship. Furthermore, this thesis will examine what a political order would look like if it were to be "tolerant" in both of the required senses.

LIBERALISM AND TOLERATION

COMPETING CONCEPTS OF TOLERATION IN LIBERAL THOUGHT

Introduction

The era of the Enlightenment provided the genesis for a new conception of the good: liberalism. The emergence of liberalism created a new philosophy which formed the underpinnings of a new foundation for the Western World. A philosophy based on reason, liberty, and toleration, liberalism promised to free man from the tyranny to which he had been subjected throughout history. John Locke's *Epistola de Tolerantia* established toleration as a central concept of liberal thought. Although reason and liberty are also important components of liberalism, this paper will focus exclusively on toleration. This focus is warranted because, although the relationship between toleration and liberalism appears to be straightforward, there are different concepts of toleration, and these different concepts contain important implications for liberalism.

The relationship between toleration and liberalism has been examined previously, but these interpretations have not adequately explored the meaning and usage of toleration in liberalism. An examination and interpretation of the range of uses of "toleration" in ordinary usage yields a deeper understanding of its relationship with liberalism. An examination of usage, moreover, allows us to examine the

moral and political assumptions that are embedded in our own language. An examination of this type reveals the two key components of toleration in liberal thought. A concept of toleration, if it is to be compatible with liberalism, must contain both (1) boundaries of "tolerance", and (2) an active conception of citizenship. Two concepts of toleration, a thin "permissiveness" and thick "authoritarianism", are polar opposite political positions that are often held to be compatible with liberalism. This paper, however, will argue that they are not compatible because neither guarantees *both* boundaries of toleration and an active conception of citizenship. I will begin by analyzing three dimensions of toleration--passiveness, boundaries, and activeness. This paper concludes with an examination of what a liberal political order would look like if it were to be "tolerant" in both of the required senses.

SECTION ONE:
Defining Toleration

CHAPTER I

The Passive Dimension

The first task required in an examination of different concepts of toleration in liberal thought is to define "toleration". The plethora of definitions and variegated usage contributes to the confusion concerning the role of toleration in liberalism. This examination of toleration will reveal the assumptions and distinctions deeply embedded in the culture of the liberal tradition. In this section I will show: (1) the boundaries which are necessary in order to create a "range" of toleration, and (2) the components of an "active" conception of citizenship. This examination necessitates an exhaustive list of definitions describing the usage of toleration. For this, we turn to the Oxford English Dictionary, as it is here that any usage of the term is likely to be found.

Sometimes toleration can be tied to passivity and agnosticism. The definition of the verb "tolerate" is: "To endure, sustain (pain or hardship)."[1] The essence of this

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[1]J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, eds., The Oxford English Dictionary: Second Edition, Volume XVIII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 200.

definition reveals that the act of toleration represents a *passive* physical act. While this definition does assist in clarifying the act of toleration, it does not explain much concerning its relationship with liberalism, as toleration entails some modicum of disapproval and active restraint.

The second definition of "tolerate" contains a clearer connection to liberalism. This entry defines toleration as: "To allow to exist or to be done or practised without authoritative interference or molestation."[2] According to this definition, to tolerate "X", one can be agnostic as to the desirability of "X". All that is required is for a person, state, society, etc. to allow "X": "to be done or practised without authoritative interference or molestation." While this definition reveals how toleration can require active restraint, it does not indicate any disapproval as to the desirability of "X". Thus, according to this definition, the act of toleration allows one to be agnostic as to what is being tolerated.

However, toleration does not necessarily include agnosticism because "to tolerate" X also means that X is in some sense wrong or bad (even though I for some reason choose not to ban or suppress X). Thus toleration, as it relates to liberalism, entails at least some level of disapproval. An example of this disapproval is the conventional attitude toward homosexuality. To say that we

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[2] OED 200.

"tolerate" homosexuality implies that it is wrong, as we do not tolerate heterosexuality. A polis which does not have any *moral* qualms about homosexuality would not have a need to "tolerate" it. Liberalism allows for competing conceptions of the good, especially ones which are antipodal. Thus toleration implies that what is being tolerated is in some way wrong, but not so heinous as to be proscribed. This is why toleration is necessary in liberal thought, and this also contributes to the difficulty of defining toleration. As Mendus points out:

> [I]t is nevertheless true that amongst the most problematic cases of toleration are those which what is tolerated is believed to be morally wrong (not merely disliked) and where it is held that there are no compensating virtues associated with the thing being tolerated.[3]

This usage reveals the tricky relationship between toleration and liberalism. It involves understanding why conceptions of the good, X (e.g. homosexuality), must be tolerated even though they are deemed to be morally wrong, while in other conceptions of the good, X may be deemed "intolerable". Yet both may be a usage of toleration in the "liberal" sense. This confusion leads us to the next usage section, which examines the varying boundaries implicit in liberal thought.

This examination of usage reveals some possible implications of toleration when it is used in liberal

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[3]Susan Mendus, <u>Toleration and the Limits of Liberalism</u> (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1989) 18.

thought. These definitions tell us that the act of toleration can be a "passive act" which requires "non-interference". Toleration, according to this usage, is a passive act which requires active restraint. The concept of toleration becomes increasingly complicated when it is used in relation to liberal thought, and as widely varying uses of toleration are encountered. The multiple uses reveal the complex relationship between toleration and liberalism. One usage of toleration may be much more restrictive than another, yet both are deemed "liberal". This complexity leads us to the next step, examining the boundaries of toleration. These definitions and uses of toleration which we have examined provide a broad foundation for the concept of toleration as it relates to liberalism, but the usage of toleration in liberalism also entails boundaries.

CHAPTER II

Defining Toleration:

Boundaries and the Range of Tolerance

The definitions of toleration examined thus far require "endurance" and "non-interference" of something which may be disapproved of, even including something believed to be morally wrong. This definition is not particularly compatible with liberalism, for while there are many conceptions of the good that are in disagreement, there are some which may be proscribed even in a liberal society. Therefore a concept of toleration which is compatible with liberalism is required to contain this component of proscription. It must contain the elements of "endurance" and "non-interference", but there must also be some limit as to what will be tolerated. Thus, as we shall see, a viable concept of toleration will contain the element of non-interference, and also contain limits, or boundaries. This usage of toleration can be illustrated by examining the technical definition of "tolerance".

The creation of a range of "tolerance" requires two boundaries, and the definition of "tolerance" in its technical usage is analogous to this concept. One definition of the technical use of "tolerance" in the <u>Oxford English</u>

Dictionary defines tolerance as: "a limit laid down for the permitted variation of a parameter of a product."[4] To illustrate this the Oxford English Dictionary applies this definition in the manufacturing of coins. "The small margin within which coins, when minted, are allowed to deviate from the standard fineness and weight."[5] This creates a range of acceptable variation. Anything which falls within this range, while not perfect, must be tolerated. This concept is analogous to the usage of toleration in liberalism. Toleration contains boundaries, and as long as particular conceptions of the good fall within these boundaries, then citizens of a liberal state are required to tolerate them. This range of "tolerance" comprises an essential component in this concept of toleration. The method by which the parameters of coin production are created are of course different from how the boundaries for conceptions of the good are created. Therefore the implications of this usage of toleration needs to be examined.

A compatible concept of toleration does not require unlimited "endurance" of something which is disapproved of or morally wrong. This is because liberalism does not require that *any* action or behavior be tolerated. Obviously an action which is illegal in a liberal state will not be tolerated, but there are conceptions of the good which, while not illegal, may be proscribed. It is possible for

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[4]OED 200.
[5]OED 200.

liberalism to proscribe a particular conception of the good, thus "interfering", and still be "tolerant". An example of this may be religious beliefs, such as those practiced by Christian Scientists. Their conception of the good includes the belief of healing through prayer, but this is often interfered with by the liberal state, such as when the welfare of their child is thought to be endangered. This example may create an appearance of incompatibility between toleration and liberal thought; but this apparent contradiction is permitted because the concept of toleration which is essential to liberal thought contains *boundaries*.

The concept of toleration which is most compatible with liberalism actually contains *two* boundaries. The definition of toleration which we examined requires "endurance" and "non-interference" of a disapproved of act. The first boundary of toleration therefore requires allowing a particular conception of the good, which may not be desirable, to be tolerated and not outright banned. This is an essential component of the relationship between toleration and liberalism. As liberalism contends that a rational man may decide what is the best conception of the good for himself, toleration requires that competing conceptions of the good must be tolerated. They may not be desirable, but they are not proscribed, and thus they must be tolerated. The first boundary allows competing conceptions of the good to be tolerated, and the second

boundary provides the demarcation at which a conception is, or becomes, intolerable. Proscribed conceptions are not viewed as legitimate; they may have been legitimate, but have been taken to an extreme and are no longer acceptable. This demarcation may be viewed as the outer boundary of toleration in liberal thought. As stated previously, liberalism does not require every conception of the good to be viewed as legitimate. Therefore toleration in liberal thought does not require unqualified acceptance, but rather limits, boundaries that establish the range of "tolerance" within liberalism.

The range of tolerance created by these boundaries is essential to liberalism. Liberal thought, while it does allow rational men to decide for themselves what is good, does not permit everything. The boundaries establish a range of toleration, not an unqualified toleration which many believe to be compatible with liberalism. The first boundary permits what is not regarded as "universally" good (e.g. homosexuality), although deemed a legitimate conception of the good, to compete with other conceptions of the good. The second boundary excludes those conceptions of the good which are taken to extremes or are not legitimate to begin with. Any conception of the good, once it is outside the second boundary (however defined), is intolerable. The result of this concept of toleration is that a *range* of toleration is established. As we examined previously, toleration entails

some modicum of disapproval, therefore everything within this range is not universally "good". Thus, although a conception of the good may be disapproved of, it must be tolerated if it falls within this range, within these two boundaries.

This usage of toleration which we have examined entails limits, or boundaries. Analogous to the technical definition of tolerance, a range of "tolerance" is created through the construction of parameters. The method by which the boundaries of toleration are created has important implications, particularly for its compatibility with liberalism. Because of these implications it is necessary for us to examine different concepts of toleration in liberal thought. While the necessity of boundaries may be established, the extent of these boundaries, and their construction, still needs to be examined.

CHAPTER III

Defining Toleration:

The Active Dimension

The idea that to be "tolerant" can be an "active", sustained practice, is the second required component of toleration. The definitions we examined previously defined toleration as a "passive" act, consisting of "endurance" and "non-interference". These definitions were shown to be inadequate as toleration, in a liberal sense, entails some level of disapproval (e.g. homosexuality). We now turn our focus to how these boundaries are established. I will argue that in order for a concept of toleration to be compatible with liberalism the boundaries need to be constructed through democratic discourse. This discourse will in turn foster and contribute, in some significant sense, to the "tolerant" character of the citizens.

This component of "active" toleration requires, in part: a disposition to be patient with, or indulgent of, others; and a freedom from bigotry and forbearance.[6] An active toleration will therefore require citizens to tolerate competing conceptions of the good which are within the boundaries, or range, of "tolerance". Unlike the other

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[6]OED, 200.

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two concepts of toleration (permissiveness and authoritarianism), in an active concept of toleration competing conceptions of the good will not just be "endured", but will help create a dialogue concerning the boundaries of toleration. The experience of living in a tolerant environment and engaging in this democratic dialogue will lead to "tolerance" constituting a significant part of a citizen's character. This concept is analogous to how people *develop* a "tolerance" to a drug. Some people may already *have* tolerances of this sort, but in most people they must be developed. Most people have to be *exposed* to the drug in order to develop a tolerance for it, as "tolerance" is not an inherent characteristic. Likewise, if people are not exposed to toleration it is unlikely they will develop it, and thus will not tolerate competing conceptions of the good. Therefore a citizen must be able to engage and be "active" in the democratic debate to negotiate the range of "tolerance", and thus reinforce this liberal virtue.

The boundaries created by this concept of an "active" toleration are obviously not arrived at *deus ex machina*, but are rather formed by "active" discourse and debate. Therefore a system, or method, for this discourse is required. This is one reason why democracy is compatible with this concept of toleration. Public discourse and debate are essential to a democratic regime, and the creation of

the limits of toleration is a part of the discourse. This democratic discourse creates a method through which an "active" toleration may operate and negotiate the boundaries of toleration.

The component of "active" toleration is uniquely compatible with democracy. The democratic characteristics of a liberal state provides the structure for public discourse to debate competing conceptions of the good. Practitioners of "active" toleration democratically debate competing conceptions of the good, and create a range of "tolerance" which is continually changing. This "active" concept of toleration thus requires a sustained democratic discourse through which the boundaries are negotiated. Therefore, a democratic state provides the method and structure necessary for an "active" toleration.

The democratic discourse which is necessary to create a range of "tolerance" leads to the second part of this "active" component of toleration. The method by which these boundaries of toleration are formed necessitates that citizens be able to practice and engage in this discourse. This results in the creation of toleration as a "liberal" virtue. As the first component of this "active" toleration will continually re-negotiate the range of "tolerance", citizens must be able to participate and sustain democratic debate. This democratic debate which negotiates the range of "tolerance" must constitute their character in some

significant sense through living in this environment. Thus, for an "active" toleration to continue to exist, this tolerant characteristic must be *cultivated*. This idea comprises the second part of this "active" toleration, and is connected with the first. The creation of a range of "tolerance" through an active, sustained practice transforms toleration into a necessary virtue of the liberal character, a virtue which needs to be exercised if it is to be developed.

The first dimension which we examined, boundaries, creates a range of "tolerance" *via* democratic discourse. If this discourse is sustained it becomes part of the liberal character and is dependent upon the second dimension, an "active" citizenship. The democratic discourse creates "tolerance" as a virtue, which must be continually exercised if democratic discourse is to be sustained. In order for this *method* through which the boundaries of toleration are created (i.e. an active democratic discourse) to survive, an "active" component must ensure that citizens in a liberal society have the capacity to engage in this democratic discourse. Thus this virtue of "tolerance" must be cultivated as a characteristic of the polis. Perhaps neither the individual belonging to a thin "permissive" nor thick "authoritarian" society can contain this virtue, this "tolerance", as neither lives in an environment of sustained democratic dialogue concerning the boundaries of toleration.

Thus it appears that these two components are interdependent. A sustained democratic debate is required to nurture this liberal virtue and create boundaries, thus this liberal virtue is necessary for the debate to remain viable.

In summary, these two components are necessary for a concept of toleration to be uniquely compatible with liberalism. The method through which the range of "tolerance" is established, a sustained democratic dialogue, reinforces and fosters tolerance in the citizens of the political community. The boundaries create a "range" of toleration which places limits on particular conceptions of the good. The necessity of these two components becomes clearer when placed on a continuum with two competing concepts of toleration in liberal thought. At one end of the continuum is a "permissive" liberalism, which contains a broader conception of toleration; and at the other end of the spectrum is an "authoritarian" concept of toleration.

SECTION TWO

Two Concepts of Toleration:

Permissiveness and Authoritarianism

There are two competing concepts of toleration in the liberal tradition which are relevant to this examination. These two concepts, permissiveness and authoritarianism, are best examined when placed on opposite ends of a continuum. The concept of toleration at one end, "permissiveness", is most closely identified with John Stuart Mill and commonly promoted by libertarians. The toleration which Mill espouses in his seminal work, On Liberty, is believed to be a concept of toleration which is the least restrictive of individual liberty, and thus most compatible with liberalism. The basic tenet of this concept holds that there are no limits to toleration, save one, the "harm" principle. An examination of this concept of toleration reveals that this position does not create a "tolerant society", as it lacks an active democratic discourse which we have seen is necessary to create viable boundaries of toleration. The "permissive" society, I will argue, is not a "tolerant" society due to the absence of this active component.

The second concept of toleration at the opposite end of the continuum is a much more restrictive one. While there is

no single author associated with this extreme, if some of the characteristics of Locke's *Epistola de Tolerantia* were emphasized, it would create a restrictive, or "thick" concept of toleration. While this concept of toleration is extremely limited, it does allow for some competing conceptions of the good. This authoritarian concept of toleration also lacks an active component, which contributes to the narrowness of its boundaries of toleration. An examination of these two concepts of toleration, at the opposite ends of this continuum, will reveal their deficiencies in creating viable concepts of toleration which are compatible with liberal thought.

CHAPTER IV

"Thin" Liberalism:

Permissiveness

The prevalent approach in contemporary liberal thought represented at one end of the continuum may be described as a "thin" liberalism. The term "thin" is applicable as it requires minimal obligations from citizens to the political community. The thinker associated with the components of this "thin" liberalism is John Stuart Mill. This philosophy may be understood to be akin to libertarianism. The crucial deficiency of this "thin" liberalism is that it lacks an active component and thus inadequately defines the limits of toleration. This deficiency is due to "thin" liberalism's essential elements: liberty and neutrality. An analysis of the components of "thin" liberalism, Mill's harm principle and neutrality, will reveal why it is an inadequate concept of toleration and ill-suited for liberalism.

The concept of liberty is the cornerstone of Mill's thought and an essential component of "thin" liberalism. The liberty of the individual is paramount. As Gray explains:

> [T]he Principle of Liberty presupposes the classical liberal principle prescribing the greatest possible equal freedom. For, if the principle is accepted, no man may abridge

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>   another's freedom unless there is a justification
>   for such abridgment in terms of harm.[7]

Thus the restriction of liberty is only justified in terms of harm. As Mendus explains: "Harm - specifically harm to others - is the sole warrant for government interference in Mill's opinion."[8] This concept of the harm principle leads to the problem of defining "harm". If harm is the limit of government and society, then it must be accurately defined. But as Mendus points out, "Mill's principle is open to a multitude of interpretations, many of them inconsistent with one another, and some of them illiberal in their implications."[9] While it may be futile to interpret what Mill meant by harm, this principle does have implications for the limits of toleration.

The essential element of liberty in "thin" liberalism is limited by the "harm principle". No person or entity may trespass on one's liberty except in the case of harm, however defined. As Gray explains: "Once the harm-prevention barrier is crossed, however, restricting liberty is in principle allowable."[10] This idea also indicates the limits of toleration in a "thin" liberalism. If *liberty* is broadly extended, and only limited by the harm principle, it logically follows that *toleration* is broadly extended; in fact, it appears that the same limits apply. One must

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[7]John Gray, Mill On Liberty (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983) 59.
[8]Mendus, Toleration 121.
[9]Mendus, Toleration 121.
[10]Gray, Mill On Liberty 59.

tolerate any idea or action by another individual unless it is harmful. The reason for toleration, according to this principle, is nothing more than reciprocity. It is in essence saying, 'I will tolerate you (unless what you're doing is harmful), and in return you must tolerate me.' This is why it is a "thin" liberalism; its obligations are minimal (reciprocity), and its boundaries are designated unconditionally by this rule. Just as the limits of liberty are prescribed by the harm principle, the limits of toleration are likewise. This introduces the second component of "thin" liberalism: neutrality.

According to a "thin" liberalism, forcing an individual to do something against his or her will, even though beneficial, would be a violation of their liberty. Therefore a "thin" liberalism is required to be "neutral" in regards to conceptions of the good. Advocating a conception of the good may infringe on an individual's liberty, and as explained previously, infringement may only be done to protect a person from harm. The example of homosexuality may shed some light on the complexity and ambiguity of this concept. If the state is to be neutral in regards to conceptions of the good, then it can not take a position on homosexuality. But if an individual living next to a homosexual household believes that the homosexual lifestyle is harmful, does he have the right to prevent his neighbors from engaging in an act which he believes is harmful, and

thus violate there liberty? Furthermore, if he believes that by having neighbors who practice homosexuality he, his family, and neighborhood are harmed, is the state then responsible to protect him from this perceived harm? If protection from his perceived harm dictates, does this restrict the liberty of his homosexual neighbors? And if he is not protected from his perceived harm, is *his* liberty restricted? The complexities and contradictions which this example point out underscore the simplicity which attracts supporters to this concept of a "thin" liberalism. As Galston explains, this "thin" liberalism "is desirable not because it promotes a specific way of life but precisely because it alone does not do so. The liberal state is 'neutral' among different ways of life."[11] Proponents of this "thin" liberalism "assert that liberalism rejects - and can get along without - any substantive theory of the good as a determinate end for human endeavor."[12] Thus by advocating neutrality among competing conceptions of the good as a way to maintain liberty, proponents of this "thin" liberalism fail to see the contradictions which this concept entails. For in this "thin" liberalism the "principle of neutrality denies...the legitimacy of assuming a single, correct conception of the good."[13] Thus if something is not harmful

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[11]William Galston, Liberal Purposes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 80.
[12]Galston, Liberal Purposes 81.
[13]Mendus, Toleration 132.

then it must be tolerated, and the only justification for this toleration appears to be reciprocity.

The component of neutrality is also significant in regards to toleration in a "thin" liberalism. This component requires that the state, society, and individuals must be agnostic concerning the conception of the good. As Mendus explains, "The reason for this is that, whilst many political doctrines may avoid foundation in a single conception of the good, liberalism is often characterized by its overt commitment to a plurality of goods."[14] Thus the component of neutrality in a "thin" liberalism has a significant impact on this conception of toleration.

The neutrality required by a "thin" liberalism creates a society which does not advocate values, for it must be neutral towards conceptions of the good. Values betray a belief in a certain conception of the good, for something which is 'valued' is believed to be 'good'. This lack of values (which is required by the neutrality principle), in turn creates a permissive society, not a tolerant one. The variable of values is not relevant, for values are proscribed. The important question becomes- what is to be permitted? The concept of toleration is itself value laden, for the language of toleration is the language of right and wrong, and toleration requires one to "endure" what one believes is wrong.

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[14]Mendus, Toleration 133.

An individual may be pursuing a conception of the good which you find morally wrong (e.g. homosexuality), but in a liberal society you must "tolerate" it. Our previous examination of the passive definition of toleration supports this, for as Nicholson states; "Toleration is the virtue of refraining from exercising one's power with regard to other's opinion or action although one morally disapproves of it."[15] This is the essence of toleration in a "thin" liberalism.

The problem with this passivity is that toleration is itself a "virtue", which in turn is a conception of the good. To advocate tolerance is to advocate a certain conception of the good. A "thin" liberalism must be neutral, agnostic, towards conceptions of the good. If being tolerant is seen as a virtue in a liberal society, then it cannot be advocated. Thus citizens of a "thin" liberalism need not practice tolerance, for being tolerant will advocate a certain conception of the good, and will interfere with liberty. Thus Mill's "concept of "thin" liberalism lacks the active component of toleration. The boundaries are established *deus ex machina* by the harm principle and neutrality. Thus there is no democratic discourse which continually re-negotiates these boundaries. Furthermore, as we have seen, Mill lacks a means (e.g. democratic discourse) to adequately define and continually re-negotiate the

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[15]Peter P. Nicholson, "Toleration as a moral ideal," in Aspects of Toleration, John Horton and Susan Mendus, eds. (New York: Methuen & Co., 1985) 162.

meaning of harm. Tolerance thus does not become a part of the character of a citizen of this liberal state, for tolerance is not required, only permissiveness. Due to the absence of this active component, as long as an individual is not violating the harm principle (and intolerance is not deemed "harmful"), citizens may be as intolerant as they please.

This analysis of a "thin" liberalism reveals why this concept of toleration does not create a "tolerant" society, but a "permissive" society. Anything which is not deemed as "harmful" is allowed, for anything less than this would restrict liberty; and the protection of individual liberty is paramount. The second component, neutrality, gives Mill the pretense of being objective. Neutrality does not allow toleration, for toleration is seen as a value, a conception of the good. Neutrality requires that the state, society, and the individual be agnostic towards conceptions of the good, for fear that advocating a particular conception will restrict another's liberty. But by employing neutrality and the harm principle as the means to protect liberty toleration is no longer applicable. The example of the homosexual neighbor reveals the contradictions of this position. Who is being "harmed", and whose liberty is being restricted cannot be clearly discerned. This is because toleration is a certain conception of the good, and a "thin" liberalism must be agnostic towards conceptions of the good,

whether homosexuality or heterosexuality. This neutrality of a "thin" liberalism thus creates nothing more than a permissive, or laissez-faire, liberalism.

The definitions of toleration and their usage we examined in the first section indicate that this concept of liberalism may only contain (if any at all) a "passive" toleration - one which requires "endurance" and "non-interference". The active component is completely lacking, which prohibits democratic discourse concerning the boundaries of toleration and denies toleration from becoming a significant component of a citizen's character. The end result of this "thin" liberalism is that there is no place for toleration, as the boundaries which are created by these two components of harm and neutrality are too vague and expansive to be meaningful; for according to these components, nothing can be tolerated, and (almost) everything must be permitted.

CHAPTER V

"Thick" Liberalism:

Authoritarianism

The concept of toleration advocated by Mill has been shown to be a "permissive" concept of toleration. This "thin" liberalism is opposed on the other end of the continuum by a concept of toleration which is understood to be a "thick" liberalism. This concept of toleration creates a much more restrictive range of "tolerance". While there is no particular author who is associated with this position, the elements of a "thick" liberalism may be understood if we examine certain parts of Locke's *Epistola de Tolerantia*. Although Locke's thoughts concerning toleration were radical for its time and essential to the growth of liberal thought, his views are nonetheless dated and thus restricted in their scope. Therefore I will use his *Letter* to illustrate the elements of a concept of toleration contained in a "thick" liberalism.

The concept of toleration discussed in Locke's *Letter* is drastically more restrictive than that of Mill's. It does, however, contain a guiding principle similar to Mill's "harm" principle. The guiding principle in this concept is order instead of harm. Whereas "thin" liberalism creates a

range of toleration too vague, "thick" liberalism utilizes "order" to create a range of "tolerance" which is too restrictive.

The crux of the "order" principle is that "disorder" may undermine the state and society, and this is deemed intolerable. Specifically, in the case of Locke, any religion which does not practice monotheism, worships a foreign prince (Catholicism), or worst of all, denies the existence of God, is a threat to civil order. Atheists are a threat to civil order because: "Covenants, and Oath's, which are the Bonds of Humane Society, can have no hold upon the atheist."[16] While Locke did advocate toleration for non-Christian religions, his definition of toleration (guided by the order principle) is too narrow. Toleration was not extended to atheism and Catholicism, or polytheistic religions. Thus, while people had to "endure" a religious practice which they thought may be incorrect, they did not have to endure something believed to be morally wrong. Locke creates a range of tolerance, guided by the order principle, which is very narrow. As a result of this narrow range of "tolerance" no one is expected to tolerate what he or she believes to be morally wrong. Locke uses this as an argument why Christians should tolerate non-Christians:

> Things in their own nature indifferent cannot, by any human Authority, be made any part of the worship of God; for this very reason they are indifferent. For since indifferent things are not

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[16]Locke, <u>A Letter Concerning Toleration</u> (Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Co., 1983) 51.

> capable, by any Virtue of their own, to propiate
> the Deity; no human Power or Authority can confer
> on them so much dignity and Excellence as to
> enable them to do it.[17]

Locke is arguing that toleration of non-Christians is acceptable, as monotheistic religions (excepting Catholicism) cannot be, in a sense, morally wrong. The range of "tolerance" is thus so restrictive as to be *de facto* non-existent. This concept of toleration, guided by the non-negotiable "order" principle, thus lacks an adequate range of "tolerance" which allows for conceptions of the good to compete.

The result of this restricted range of "tolerance" is a concept of toleration which is ill-suited for liberalism. Similar to the "thin" liberalism, this "thick" liberalism lacks an "active" component which creates the boundaries of toleration. The lack of a sustained democratic discourse is the result of the "order" principle. No debate on the boundaries is allowed because they are mandated by this principle (however interpreted). Thus, similar to "thin" liberalism, the boundaries are established *dues ex machina* and are non-negotiable. The ramification of these components of "thick" liberalism is the creation of a concept of toleration which, while still liberal, is ill-suited for liberalism.

As I have argued, the "thin" liberalism and "thick" liberalism contain deficiencies that create concepts of

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[17]Locke, <u>A Letter</u> 40.

toleration which, while containing liberal aspects and characteristics, are incompletely liberal. While both contain boundaries which demarcate what is to be tolerated and what is intolerable, analogous to the parameters of a coin, neither concept contains an "active" component. In the previous examination of usage I illustrated that toleration has a passive component, which entails "non-interference" with something which is disapproved of. There is also an active component to toleration. This "active" component is not only necessary in the creation of these boundaries, but also is necessary for the creation of a "tolerant" citizen. Thus, in summary, the deficiencies resulting in the lack of an "active" component in a "thin" and "thick" liberalism creates two distinct concepts of toleration which are incompatible with liberalism.

SECTION THREE:

A Complete Concept

CHAPTER VI

Toleration and a Middle Concept of Liberalism

The concept of liberalism for which I have been arguing
is radically different from the two concepts previously
discussed. The two components of this concept of liberalism
provide (1) boundaries, and (2) a method through which the
limits of toleration may be defined and negotiated. This is
necessary because to create a truly liberal society (as
opposed to a permissive or authoritarian), the boundaries of
toleration cannot be established *deus ex machina*. This
middle concept uses the democratic framework of a liberal
state to negotiate and maintain a sustained discourse
concerning the limits of toleration: the range of tolerance.
The boundaries of toleration will be drawn from, and
influenced by, the conventions, traditions, and customs of
the society and culture. Furthermore, these boundaries will
not be static, as they are in "permissiveness" and
"authoritarianism". The sustained democratic discourse will
create boundaries which are continually evolving and being
re-negotiated.

The result of these two components is a concept of liberalism where "tolerance" will itself become a liberal virtue. The democratic debate requires that toleration constitutes in some significant sense the character of a "tolerant" citizen. A citizen in a "permissive" or "authoritarian" state will not have this characteristic, because neither enjoys an environment of sustained democratic discourse which re-negotiates the boundaries. Therefore this liberal virtue of "tolerance" needs to be cultivated and exercised if it is to constitute a citizen's character. Thus this second component (liberal virtue), becomes dependent upon the first (democratic discourse), as this virtue requires a method or system to create a "tolerant" environment for its development.

A concept of toleration which contains these components is one which is uniquely compatible with liberalism. Analogous to the parameters of a coin, this concept of liberalism is in the middle, comprising the area between the two extreme positions: "thin" permissiveness and "thick" authoritarianism. As I have argued, a concept of toleration requires boundaries and an active democratic discourse; if either of these are lacking, then it cannot be regarded as a viable concept of toleration. But what is more important than these requirements is how they interact. Both the "permissive" and "authoritarian" concepts of toleration contain boundaries, but these boundaries become meaningless

since they are arrived at *deus ex machina*. These boundaries do not create a liberalism which will constitute toleration as a significant characteristic of the citizen. Since both "permissiveness" and "authoritarianism" lack this democratic discourse, the boundaries which are created do not lead to a concept of liberalism which requires its citizens to practice toleration. Rather, citizens are only required to be "passive" and "endure" according to the boundaries derived from the non-negotiable principles of "harm" and "order". It is this interactive effect between these two components which creates a concept of toleration which is truly liberal, and as I have argued, constitutes the philosophical underpinnings of a tolerant society.

Conclusion

The role of toleration is central to the history of liberal thought. The Enlightenment brought the Western World liberalism through recognition that there was no "universal" conception of the good. If it is the right of rational man to discern for himself which conception of the good to follow, then these different conceptions of the good must be allowed to compete. This requires allowing competing conceptions of the good to attract followers through persuasion, not force, as Locke argued. Thus, varying conceptions of the good must be tolerated in a liberal state.

The role of toleration in liberalism has been shown to be a complex relationship. Just as there are competing conceptions of the good, there are competing concepts of toleration. These different concepts of toleration are best understood when placed on a continuum, with the two extremes creating a "thin" and "thick" liberalism respectively. These concepts of toleration were examined and shown to contain deficiencies which made them ill-suited to liberalism. Since these two concepts were deficient, a third, or "active" concept of toleration was examined.

The "active" position of toleration, I argued, is uniquely compatible with liberalism. The essential components of this concept of toleration are: 1) two boundaries which establish a range of "tolerance", and 2) a sustained, active, democratic discourse which creates these boundaries and continually re-negotiates them. The first component is essential because not all conceptions of the good are legitimate in liberal thought. There are some conceptions of the good which may be proscribed in liberalism; thus this concept of toleration does not contain unlimited "tolerance". The way in which these boundaries are established comprises the second component.

The boundaries of what is to be tolerated are created by a sustained, active, democratic discourse. The boundaries are continually re-negotiated through this discourse, and most importantly, it partly takes place within the structure of a democratic regime. This component reinforces the democratic structure of liberalism and works within it to create these boundaries. A concept of toleration which contains these two components results in the creation of a citizen who is tolerant, one who "tolerates" conceptions of the good that are within this range of "tolerance". Furthermore, a citizen who is tolerant will participate in the democratic dialogue which continually re-negotiates what is to be "tolerated". This will entail deciding upon the norms and what conceptions of the good are intolerable. The

result of this participation in the democratic dialogue and decision making concerning the boundaries of toleration is that the character of the citizens will be constituted in some significant degree by this experience. Thus these two components create a concept of toleration which is compatible with liberalism. This *liberal* virtue is dependent upon a concept of toleration which contains these two components. It is also dependent upon this concept of toleration for its survival. These components have an interactive effect and re-enforce the principles of liberal thought, and develop and cultivate the idea of competing conceptions of the good.

The two components of this concept of toleration are dependent upon each other to maintain its compatibility with liberalism. The debate creates meaningful boundaries of toleration debated by the polis; and this debate creates a liberal virtue which encourages tolerance. The "thin" permissive and "thick" authoritarian concepts of liberalism have been shown to be sufficiently deficient to require an examination of another concept of liberalism. But this third concept of liberalism, a middle concept, is not without its deficiencies. As it is dependent upon this liberal virtue to create boundaries of toleration, it does not protect against excesses, e.g. tyranny of the majority. Thus it is dependent upon the nurturing of this tolerant environment to protect against intolerance.

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