Abstract

There is a strong attachment to pluralism in the liberal tradition. Giovani Sartori, one of the great theoreticians of democracy, speaks about a ‘genetic code’ of the free society. Undoubtedly, pluralism is closely connected with one of the features of the ‘open society’, which Karl Popper defined as the science of tolerance. We deem it necessary to discuss this notion (tolerance) for it is claimed by currents opposing liberalism, multiculturalism primarily, which, among other things, reproaches the former for lacking the exigencies of tolerance.

It may seem paradoxical, but if confrontations on tolerance were to be carried on nowadays, they would not be carried on between its partisans and its opponents, but solely between its partisans (Zarka & Fleury, 2004, p. 3). This paradox shows us that an effort is needed in order to shed some light upon the concept, if we wish to know exactly what type of pluralism we need to promote.

John Locke's *A Letter Concerning Tolerance* (1689) establishes the specificity of religious tolerance; however he shows very little interest in the advantages of pluralism. We must not lose sight of Voltaire's more recent *Treatise on Tolerance* (1763) and especially of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (1859).

Indeed, Mill points out to the full importance of the relations between tolerance and pluralism. Just like Tocqueville, the issue that Mill addresses is that of the necessity to integrate minorities into democracies and, more precisely, the issue of the way they are represented. Mill is one of the most authentic liberal authors and the

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precursor of those who, nowadays, reflect upon the rights of the minorities. Defending tolerance, as far as he is concerned, is based on the value of diversity: it is a good thing, he reckons, that there are different 'life experiences'. And this is because individuals are fundamentally different and they need to be above themselves, for tolerance is a moral exigency. Mill admits, of course, that tolerance cannot be limited, the evil that one does to another being that which constitutes the limits themselves.

Mill's topic is to be traced in the midst of modern debates. There are authors who notice that the main contemporary manners to defend tolerance (types of defence that are founded on moral scepticism, on the necessity of the State's neutrality and, finally, on the importance of individual autonomy) are related to Mill's theory (Mendus, 1996, p. 1537). One can say, and not without reason that tolerance consists of “refraining yourself from interfering with another's action or opinion, while having the power to do so ...” (p. 1536).

Five tolerance regimes have been differentiated, namely a typology of institutional arrangements that are possible in circumstances of cultural pluralism, regimes that are founded on the following attitudes: resignation, stoic acceptance, indifference, curiosity and enthusiasm (Walzer, 1998).

In order to move forward in the process of understanding tolerance, three elements should be taken into consideration:

1. the action that is tolerated leads to a refusal and this refusal induces a tendency to forbid;
2. the person that tolerates holds adequate attributions that allow him/her to determine the deontic statute and the tolerated action, namely the ability to intervene;
3. the omission of such intervention is the result of a rational balancing for and against permission or interdiction.

In other words, tolerance supposes “a conflict”, in terms of reason, inside the subject that tolerates, whose result is the inhibition of the action to block or to forbid the “tolerated” action, all towards a predominant rationality (Garzón Valdés, 1993, p. 401-415).

The meaning of tolerance itself asks for the existence of some strong and stable arguments to refuse the tolerated behaviour: “There is no tolerance in the absence of a previous intolerance” (p. 44). If these strong and stable arguments were to disappear, tolerance would disappear along with them. Tolerance could not be, as is most often the case nowadays, synonymous to the compassionate passion for difference. The worshipping of the latter is the exact opposite of tolerance. An authentic pluralism supposes, on the contrary, admitting the difficulty to love the other.

That tolerance is a modest and difficult virtue comes as a result of its constitutional fragility. All the more reason to defend it and not to mistake it for its manifold counterfeits. This necessary defence goes through interpretation in juridical-political terms. The new conditions of co-existence and the probable absence of reconciliation are to be taken into consideration, for it is absurd to wager a moral, spontaneous improvement of people so as to examine the conditions of their co-existence.

These conditions are displayed alongside several elements that point to ensuring the compatibility of liberties:

- the State's neutrality
- values (dignity, individual autonomy etc.)
- fundamental rights (the rights of man)
- the right to difference.

We shall add here what presents itself as foundation of the edifice, the State's neutrality, as we examine the relationship with secularism. Secularism – the central notion of political modernity – is often mistaken for tolerance, while it is actually a condition of tolerance.

Consequently, the tolerance that we need to promote within civil society is being disseminated through the secularism of political association. Amidst this, one does not need to have the obligation of affiliation. Secularism speaks to “people, and people only” (Descartes, 1953, p. 127). Consequently, in a secular State, political space acknowledges free and equal citizens only. This indicates that freedom, equality and individual autonomy constitute fundamental values that the State is not indifferent to. The State does not really become secular except when the freedom of consciousness is proclaimed and the State signs up to protect it. This cannot be carried out without excluding any project that again brings forth the cause of values and the fundamental rights. It is necessary to point out that the thus conceived neutrality maintains a strong connection with the principles of John Rawls' justice
theory. He tried to work out a rational theory of justice that could ease the tensions and hold together, in an overall movement, the contradictory requirements of freedom and equality, individual autonomy and community stability.

One of John Rawls' great merits is to have generated a heated debate among the heterogeneous intellectual media that were suddenly invited to explore together the foundations of social connection.

Starting from the idea that any society is an adventure of cooperation directed towards mutual advantage and that the correlative defining of the advantages and assignments tied to this cooperation inevitably gives birth to interpretation conflicts, Rawls questions the principles that may lead to equitable rules of distribution and may thus establish an acceptable order. Whereas, according to its own terms, a society is well ordered when it is not conceived only to satisfy the particular interest of its members, but when it is also guided by a public conception of justice.

This has always been considered to be the first virtue of social institutions. Consequently, it has to inspire the basic structures of society, including not only constitutional rules but socio-economic forms as well. John Rawls admits that his attachment to the idea of justice comes from an “intuitive conviction” ultimately embraced by numerous ordinary individuals, but he immediately adds that his goal is to transform this institution into theory, to rationally argue in favour of a conception of justice that would hold a predominant, though not exclusive position in the structure of society.

The priority of equity over asset does not carry along a systematic depreciation of the welfare which is certainly cut out from the collective horizon, but which stays in the background of individual horizons. An equitable (just) society could not be coordinated within a universalist conception of welfare; it could not, however, disregard the fact that each individual has the right to look for the maximum degree of welfare. This is John Rawls' wager, to prove that the persons called out to enter the society have as an interest to rely on a public conception of justice if they wish to accomplish their own welfare.

John Rawls wants to convince his fellow countrymen that there is room for some sort of “disinterested interest” and that they would be able to optimize their own welfare, by guiding themselves after principles of justice: it is, he says, rational to be reasonable.

Rawls had the clear consciousness of the difficulties raised by the existence of comprehensive doctrines, thus suggesting ultimate values, territorially different from those that constitute the foundation of political liberalism. His notion of reasonable pluralism conveys the request that each man be treated by the institutions in a way that is justified by his/her own point of view, namely considering his/her values.

Raising the question of tolerance within a reasonable pluralism means considering the problem solved. Indeed, reasonable doctrines seem fit to align with a consensus through the conjunction of some pieces of information and the principles of justice. But the task becomes all the more difficult if one wishes to equally take into account the extravagant doctrines, those that make diversity deviate in the direction of contradiction and conflict. While, it is precisely to that end that tolerance should be transformed, namely to come up with a solution for the deviations of doctrines and extravagant components (Zarka & Fleury, 2004, p. 84).

Democracy, as Tocqueville had envisaged it, allows, by guaranteeing freedom of speech, for the most extravagant opinion to be developed. The levelling of spirits that the tyranny of the majority produces also grants the latter indisputable chances of perpetuation. Rawls did not think that this reality had “enough success to ruin the existential justice of society” (Rawls, 1993, p. 65). One is, however, allowed to ask oneself whether the fate of these extravagant doctrines represents an imminent downfall.

The main idea is that according to which, for a society to practice an authentic tolerance, it cannot content itself with the appeals to virtues. Undoubtedly, nothing can definitively eliminate the risk of intolerance. In a democracy, pluralism can only be heroic.

The two concepts, tolerance and pluralism, are arguably distinct. While tolerance respects the other's values, “pluralism asserts its own value” (Sartori, 2003, p. 17). Indeed, he asserts that diversity and disagreement are values that enrich the individual and its “political citadel” (Sartori, 2003, p. 17).), diversity and disagreement being considered sources of disorder that led the States to their own ruin, up until the 17th century at least. Political liberalism is, on the contrary, founded on the affirmation of pluralism's moral character. The concept's popularity that broke out during the '60s is again questioned, with pluralism's reduction to plurality being the grossest of all things.
Pluralism must not be assimilated with multiculturalism, even if we must, of course, appreciate cultural diversity. Rather frequently, some authors defend a normative multiculturalism, thus claiming the elaboration of a neo-pluralism. This latter one renders a new context, in relation to the classical pluralism, and realizes the co-existence of involuntary (sexual or race) connections.

But the authentic pluralism, founded on mutual respect and recognition, treats identity affirmations in an identical manner, for it is from them that voluntary or involuntary associations emanate. In a pluralist society, these associations are, evidently, very numerous and, more importantly, they intersect. This signifies that affiliations are multiple and, consequently, no identity affiliation can, by itself, become aware of what we are. It is obvious that there is no consent towards social fragmentation. Nor is there, indeed, a question of neglecting the connections that we share with those that identify themselves with an affiliating community, by drawing a boundary between themselves and those who are not members. Any community supposes a certain type of consensus, a general agreement on the rules of living together.

The question of pluralism rejoins that of tolerance: openness towards the other could not lead to accepting the intolerable at the risk of endangering the foundations of a pluralist community. There is a point that we must not deviate from – which Sartori strongly emphasizes – the criterion that serves to determine this point being reciprocity. "Joining a pluralist community signifies both acquiring and conceding. Those who are not willing to concede anything in exchange of what they gain, who set themselves to remain outside the community which they have joined [...] inevitably suscitate rejection, fear and hostility reactions" (Sartori, 2003, p. 48–49). It is not certain whether normative multiculturalism has the clear consciousness of pluralism's minimal exigencies. However, its introspection is a necessary task in the elaboration of an authentic universalism.

The dialectics of the one and the multiple, of the singular and the general, of the particular and the universal represents, undoubtedly, as Georg Simmel thought, an invariable that man's spirit cannot put aside. He suggests, however, that these series of oppositions should not be regarded as absolute dichotomies between which no bridge could be built. More often than not, we tend to separate, to set apart that which is united. But we are not condemned to choose between universal and plurality.

Reasoning in Durkheim’s terms, there are two elementary forms of the relationship with the Other. In the first form, the Other is assessed according to one from my own culture and the difference can only be interpreted in terms of inferiority. In the second, beyond differences, I assert the unity of the human genre. People standing as One have the same intellectual and moral potential. What they have in common is reason and they share the same vocation for freedom, regardless of the diversity of their systems of values and their practical realizations. The other is another self. To acknowledge the Other's entire humanity cannot be done without difficulty. Colonial history proved that the universalism could be perverted in order to enable a logic of assimilation that, under the pretext of equality, denies the other's identity. At the same time, we must avoid the trap of differentialism and that of the abstract universalism in order to consider the conditions of an authentic universalism.

The project of a science of the individual supposes the research of the general attributes of social life or cultural universes. Besides cultural diversity, owning a culture constitutes a universal experience. Just like the individuals, cultures differ especially in the way in which their essential elements are organized. Acquiring culture in itself, which contributes to the humanization process, must be different from acquiring a specific culture.

P.-A. Taguieff (1988) was wondering in relation to the integrationist strategy which consists of suppressing community entities, establishing universal human society. Thus, the prejudices would be deprived of any empirical foundation: "The human species must only include individuals who are racially undifferentiated, so that the programme could be fulfilled. Insomuch as there is difference between groups, one can anticipate." (p. 191). One of the main requirements is being expressed here, formulated, in this case, by integrationist leaders: asking for interference, creating racial intercrossing as a saving method. It is not futile to observe the contradiction between this claim and the one consisting of asking for the protection of differences. To want a multicultural society and to promote undifferentiation, at the same time, represents a major product. This is probably explained through the fact that difference is perceived as a source of inequality, whereas, the primacy granted to the equality exigency implies the final abolition of differences. Abstract universalism designates the singular individual as depository of eternal truths. He thus contributes to fuelling the idea according to which we cannot get away from the following alternative: either the exclusive exaltation of difference, or the pure universalism, reducers of any collective affiliation.
On the contrary however, the principle of universality does not exclude, not in the least, the positive acknowledgement of differences. A consistent closeness to universalism must consider the articulation of the particular and the universal. Is it that humanities’ very object is to understand what Wilhelm Dilthey used to call the combination of the general and the individual?

In our world, which is faced to the plurality of values and cultures, we cannot conceive a consistent universalism, forgetting that the relationship constitutes both the primitive fact of human relationship and the central norm of this relationship. By internalising the communicative rules and competences, the individual becomes subject. The subject is, therefore, the one who takes the wager that communication is possible in spite of the plurality of codes and of our affiliations to singular communities. Thus, in the political order, the universalist exigency transforms itself as an infinite task, that of the necessity of the co-existence of two polar types of solidarity, the one founded on blood and the one founded on reason.

References