

INTOLERANCE IS A VIRTUE

Tolerance is a virtue, or so many think. Sure such people have noble motives: different societies have different morals, they say, and we shouldn't arrogantly assume that our own morals are the only correct ones. So "let's be tolerant of differences." But this sort of universal tolerance really makes no sense. If you believe a given practice is morally wrong then you *shouldn't* tolerate it, for that would be to condone it. And if you believe that practice is morally acceptable then you're not "tolerating" it, you're agreeing with it! So if you really think a practice is wrong, you should think of it as wrong for *everyone*.

Suppose you were a teacher and you awarded different grades to two identical exams. The students would be outraged. Why? Because you awarded a difference in "value"—a different grade—where there was no underlying difference in "facts"—here, answers—to justify it. That is clearly wrong.

But those noble tolerators are doing the same thing. Westerners condemn (for example) "female genital mutilation" while various others consider it a moral obligation. A tolerator—who believes it's wrong but "tolerates" it for others—is effectively granting a difference in "value": that practice is wrong "for us" but acceptable "for them." But now what is the relevant difference in facts between the two cases to justify awarding these different values? There is none.

True, different societies have different beliefs about morality. But suppose someone believes that sex between an adult and a child is morally acceptable. No matter how nobly tolerant we might be, we wouldn't tolerate this person. Why? Because his simply *believing* that sex with children is acceptable does not make it so. Nor would it be so if this man had a dozen friends who shared his beliefs, or even a few hundred or thousand, or a whole society. Moral legitimacy is not to be found in numbers.

If you believe a practice is wrong, then, have the courage of your convictions: it is wrong for everyone.

You ought not to tolerate the tolerators.

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