



THE INTOLERANCE OF TOLERANCE

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Do you know what the word “tolerance” means? If you do, I salute you, because I have no idea anymore. I did... once. Everybody did... once. But now, thanks to the left, the word is totally up for grabs. Actually, it’s worse than that. Tolerance now means the opposite of what it once meant. Tolerance now means intolerance, and intolerance now means tolerance.

Confusing—yeah, I know—but stay with me. There’s a big pay-off at the end. It’s called “clarity.”

To be “tolerant” today simply means you agree with politically-correct—that is, left-wing—positions. That’s all it means.

This is easy to show: Name one position that differs from the left that they don’t label intolerant.

When you differ with the left on any subject—and I mean any—the people who claim to be tolerant don’t attack your position; they attack you. They label you, as Dennis Prager puts it, “SIXHIRB”—sexist, intolerant, xenophobic, homophobic, Islamophobic, racist, bigoted. And if that fails, there’s always the ever-popular “hater.”

This is obviously not tolerance. This is blatant intolerance. Your accusers are guilty of doing exactly the same thing they’re accusing you of doing.

Here’s what they’re missing: In order to be genuinely tolerant of someone, you first have to disagree with them, since you don’t tolerate people you agree with. The classic definition of “tolerance” means to recognize and respect others’ beliefs and practices without sharing them.

Notice the element of disagreement is key to tolerance. Without it, true tolerance is not possible. This is critical. We don’t “tolerate” people we agree with—we’re on the same side! We only “tolerate” people we differ with, yet still choose to treat decently and with respect.

This vital ingredient of real tolerance is completely missing in the politically correct version. Nowadays, if you differ with others on culturally sensitive issues—like sexual orientation or religious beliefs—you’re labeled intolerant no matter how you treat them.

The left says all behaviors and ideas have equal value—that no behavior or idea is any better than any other. They don’t act that way. Tolerance is a one-way street for the left.

Openly declare that sex differences are real, as Harry Potter novelist J. K. Rowling did, and see what happens. You’ll be called “transphobic” by the left. The same thing happened to

legendary tennis star and feminist Martina Navratilova, when she said it was unfair to women to have to compete against trans-athletes—that is, athletes who say they identify as female, but are biologically male. But I thought, according to the left, all ideas have equal value. So why are J.K. Rowling and Martina Navratilova suddenly called haters? Because the left doesn't believe its own rhetoric.

What the left has done is cleverly redefine tolerance to mean “agreement with leftist views.” Tolerance no longer means treating people with civility and respect even when we disagree with them. It means not disagreeing with them—that is, the left. That's how, in the name of tolerance, the left shuts down all disagreement. It defines any contradiction of leftist views as intolerant.

But not only is disagreement not intolerant, it's morally and logically essential. Think about it. All ideas, all behaviors are not equally valid. Some are better. Some are worse. And discussion and disagreement and debate are how we sort out the good from the bad. Civilization depends on it.

The abolitionist movement in America believed its arguments were better than pro-slavery arguments. They were. Anti-communists believed freedom was better than communism. It is. Tolerance doesn't require we treat all ideas as equally valuable. No—true tolerance means we treat all people as equally valuable, with kindness and with civility and with the freedom to express their ideas even when we disagree with them. That is real tolerance.

Boston College philosophy professor Peter Kreeft has a good way of putting it. He says be egalitarian about people. That is, treat all people with equal dignity and respect—regardless of their views. But, he says, be elitist about ideas. In other words, treat some ideas as better than other ideas. Why? Because they are.

Some are good; some are bad. Some are smart; some are dumb. Some are dangerous. And we ought to be able to have the liberty to figure out which is which in our discussions without being called names, and certainly without fearing we'll lose our jobs—or our careers.

True tolerance applies to how we treat people we disagree with, not how we treat ideas we disagree with. All people have equal value; all points of view do not.

I'm Greg Koukl, president of Stand to Reason, for Prager University.