

THE FACES OF TOLERANCE AND THE QUESTION OF ITS LIMITS

Paweł Dybel

University of Warsaw / Polish Academy of Sciences
pdybel@waw.pl

Orbis Idearum (ISSN: 2353–3900), Vol. 2, Issue 1 (2014), pp. 97–111

One of the most passionate critiques of the liberal idea of tolerance has been performed recently put forward by Slavoj Žižek who maintains that it is self-contradictory in its assumptions and consequences in social practice. Yet, if we take a closer look at Žižek's line of arguing argumentation it appears that it leads to similar aporias and contradictions that he recognizes in this idea. What is more, his objections are very similar in their "leftist" assumptions to those formulated by right oriented Polish philosopher, Ryszard Legutko, who maintains that the liberal tolerant attitude leads to uncritical acceptance of any all form of otherness. In the article we ask the question about the validity of the critical arguing of both, Žižek's and Legutko's arguments, while pointing to the anthropological assumptions of the liberal concept of tolerance that they misrecognize. For it is the concept of the free, autonomous and self-critical human being that is at the basis of this concept and is inherently linked to the origins of the liberal-democratic state.

THE CRITICS OF THE IDEA OF TOLERANCE BY ŽIŽEK

The modern European idea of tolerance has its roots in the tradition of liberal thought and is inherently connected with the rise of the liberal-democratic state. This was one of the main reasons why it has been criticized by the representatives of the political left who usually accused its liberal defenders and followers of false bourgeois consciousness and of typical class hypocrisy. According to these leftist critics the liberals justify the capitalist liberal model of economy and at the same time confirm themselves narcissistically in their high self-esteem. They try to make themselves believe (and the broader public as well) that they are open to different forms of otherness and able to tolerate them. But they in fact repress in this way their bad conscience, while trying to ignore the fate of the exploited working class and other marginalized social groups whose representatives live on the level of animal vegetation.

This way of reasoning is also recognizable behind Slavoj Žižek's latest critique of the idea of tolerance put forward by him in the book *Violence. Six Sideways Reflections*.¹ However, it is worth noting that in outlining the genealogy of this idea he puts the stress on the significance of the religious wars that in the 16th century took place in Europe. According to Žižek, the enormous, horrifying acts of cruelty between Catholics and Protestants during these wars, combined with their disastrous social and economic consequences, prompted John Locke and others to pro-

1 S. Žižek: *Violence. Six Sideways Reflections*. New York: Big Ideas / Small Books 2008.

mote the idea of tolerance as the preferred way of behavior towards the confessors of other religions.

Looked at from this perspective, the idea of tolerance actually only has a negative, that is to say, pragmatic justification: we are ready to tolerate other religions, other political views, other ethical values, etc. only because otherwise it would lead us to war with others.² This is, however, a very weak justification of this idea. According to it, the tolerant attitude is imposed on individuals mainly by the external circumstances in which they live and does not originate in the conviction that they simply have to accept different forms of cultural otherness. These are purely pragmatic and not truly ethical motives.

Žižek supports his critical view on the genealogy of the idea of tolerance on the basis of three arguments. Firstly, he maintains that of key significance for the political career of this idea was the universal character of the logic of the capitalist free market economy that supported it. In this there were the transcultural economic laws serving as the basis of this economy model, laws that were not typical for any particular world-view. This logic corresponds with the liberal postulates of 'free choice' which presuppose the possibility of individual attitudinal distance from any particular customs, values, religious beliefs, etc. The result of this is, as Žižek maintains, that:

it is only modern Western capitalist culture for which autonomy and individual freedom stand higher than collective solidarity, connection, responsibility for dependent others, the duty to respect the customs of one's community.³

Consequently, the 'subject of free choice' as it is presupposed here: 'can emerge only as the result of an extremely *violent* process of being torn out of a particular lifeworld, of being cut off from one's roots'.⁴

The price then that the individual has to pay for his liberal idea of tolerance is his being uprooted from his own culture and the complete indifference towards his own cultural world-view. Yet, what is actually being promoted—and this is the second argument—is modern Western culture, including the liberal interpretation of the rights of the individual. They are, however, not entirely neutral, but have been formulated on the basis of a particularly European tradition. What is more, in spite of the respect expressed towards other views, all manifestations of attachment to particular religions, customs, cultural traditions, etc., are stigmatized as being 'fundamentalist'. Consequently, all individuals that express such attachments are treated as naïve and dogmatic.

2 Cf. *ibidem*, p. 146: "Let us not forget that liberalism emerged in Europe after the catastrophe of Thirty Years War between the Catholics and Protestants. It was an answer to the pressing question of how people who differ in their fundamental religious allegiances could exist."

3 *Ibidem*, p. 144.

4 *Ibidem*, p. 146.

At the same time the liberal defenders of the idea of tolerance—and this is the third of Žižek's arguments/objections—preach the uncritical acceptance of all forms of otherness. Such otherness is glorified and fetishized by the very fact of being other. Consequently, adherents of this view are not able to critically reflect upon the assumptions that underlie different forms of otherness (p. 150–153).

Yet, if we take a closer look at these three arguments/objections it appears that they contradict each other. The way in which they relate to each other is very much similar to that which underlies the well-known story from Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*.⁵ Here, the person who borrowed the cauldron, puts into question the objections of its owner that it has been ruined, by saying:

1. I am returning the new cauldron to you.
2. The holes were already in it when you lent it to me.
3. In fact, you never lent it to me.

If we apply this logical scheme to Žižek's reasoning, we can then characterize it in this way:

Liberalism prefers the ideological neutralism and free play with the elements of tradition. This results in the indifference to particular worldviews and in holding everyone in (secretive) contempt who identifies himself with a particular tradition, religion, or set of customs. All these individuals are treated as obtuse 'fundamentalists'.

In fact, however, liberalism represents a very particular worldview, one that is deeply rooted in the intellectual tradition of the West and prefers particular values, and that imposes them by force on the other cultures.

The quintessence of liberalism is the postulate of unconditional respect for other cultures only because they are other. This results in the uncritical idolatrous acceptance of them for themselves and, at the same, time in the degradation of one's own culture.

Liberalism is therefore simultaneously characterized by: (1) ideological indifference (2) fundamentalist Euro-centrism and (3) the uncritical acceptance of all forms of otherness. If there were really so the tolerant attitudes as they are promoted by liberalism underlie the assumptions that exclude each other. Consequently, the liberal idea of toleration of different forms of otherness relies on assumptions that exclude each other.

The question then arises, how was it possible that the founders and followers of this philosophical tradition did not see it? What is more, how have the liberal attitudes that rely on such contradictory assumptions become the elements of social practice? How could the individual think and behave in such an absurd way?

⁵ Cf. S. Freud: *Interpretation of Dreams*, transl. by A. A. Brill, New York: The Macmillan Company 1913, New York: Bartleby.com 2010, p. 110.

But perhaps the problem lies rather in the contradictory logic of Žižek's own objections against liberalism. Perhaps it is his way of arguing that itself bears the marks of the absurd logic of the borrowed cauldron.

TOLERANCE AND THE RISE OF THE LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC STATE. THE VICISSITUDES OF ŽIŽEK'S ARGUMENTS

As mentioned above, Žižek's critique of the idea of tolerance, if regarded in the context of Marxian and leftist tradition, is nothing new. It refers to the well-known objections of the representatives of this political orientation who saw in it mainly the element of bourgeois hypocrisy typical for the well-off social classes that, while talking about the right of the human being to wide area of individual freedoms, in the private and public spheres were at the same time blind to the fact of deep social inequalities.

Although there is a grain of truth in this line of argument, such a devastating leftist critique of the idea of tolerance is one-sided and subjective. For at the basis of this idea is not only the pragmatic calculation (better to tolerate the different views of others than be at war with them) and the expectation of financial profits from the proliferation of 'liberal' free market economy, but also, of crucial importance, the appearance of entirely new concepts surrounding the free and rational human subject as drawn up in the important philosophical concepts of 17th century (e.g. Locke, Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz). These concepts implied that the human subject is in its essence a self-conscious, rational being that is in its nature good and responsible. Therefore, this subject has the right to individual freedoms and autonomy. In other words, it has to rely in its worldly being on its own reason and not on the eternal truths as they have been declared by the Church and imposed on it by its unquestionable authority.

Considered in this context the idea of economic freedom cannot be treated as the main source of the liberal concepts of individual political freedoms but rather as its effect. In other words, it was first of all the deep transformation of self-understanding of some influential social groups in the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe, as had been initiated by the philosophical concepts mentioned above, that contributed to the introduction of multiple political freedoms into the legal system of the modern democratic-liberal states. It was, first of all, on the ideas of political liberalism inherently connected with the philosophical tradition of rationalism and empiricism and not on the liberal economic concepts that the foundations for this state were laid.

It is worth noting that in their early book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe show an even clearer understanding than Žižek for the significance of liberal ideas of freedom and autonomy. In this book Laclau and Mouffe maintain that the liberal ideas of freedom and tolerance cannot

be interpreted as the signs of class 'egoism' and the hypocrisy of the bourgeois ruling classes. On the contrary, they became the core elements of self-understanding of modern societies and therefore cannot be ignored in the political programs of the left.⁶

Another aspect of the question is that this 'positive' justification of the idea of tolerance does not free us from its negative side, connected with the original meaning of the term *tolerare*, that is to say, the state of not being able to bear somebody. On the one hand it is true that what is behind the tolerant attitude is not the pragmatic calculation of gains and losses but the respect for the individual freedoms of the other and of his rights as a human being. On the other hand this does not mean that the tolerant person does not face a problem with the claims of those who maintain that only his own religion is 'true', his own political views are correct, the customs of his own culture the only proper ones, etc. One can tolerate other religions, political views, customs, etc. and at the same time be deeply convinced that the confessors of other religions believe in the 'untrue' God, followers of other political parties are mistaken, the participants of other cultures follow bad customs, etc. In other words, one can be at the same time deeply convinced about the superiority of one's own religion, political views, culture, customs, etc. and still treat one's own tolerant attitude as imposed on oneself by force. Does then such a tolerant attitude have anything in common with the true tolerance that has to be accompanied by the stance of respect towards that which it tolerates?

The demand that the tolerant person has to show respect to people who have different beliefs, views, opinions, follow different customs, act according to different ethical values, etc. implies that it has to overcome any negative feelings towards these peoples and their beliefs. One then can speak about tolerance in the proper meaning of the word. This is no doubt a very noble postulate; not only the acceptance of different forms of religious, political and cultural otherness but also the holding of those others in high esteem. However, there arises here the question of whether or not the acceptance of this demand by the tolerant individual enables him to overcome his primordial ambivalence towards what he tolerates. How is it possible at all that he, while being confronted with others who believe in another God, have different political views, follow different customs, etc., not only entirely overcomes his own aversion to them but in addition tries to hold them in high esteem? Do we not expect from this individual something that is impossible? Does this not impose on the individual an entirely abstract demand for a premature, hyper-positive stance? Do we not have to do here with a desperate attempt to negate that which is repressed and to neutralize it, while, in fact, all such attempts at abolishment and removal have failed? From whence is this esteem for the other to come, in the face of individual differences in religion, politics, customs, etc.?

6 Cf. E. Laclau / Ch. Mouffe: *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. London / New York: Verso 1985, especially pages 158–193.

The demand to hold the others in esteem would seem to resemble the particular circular way in which, according to Freud, the Super-ego addresses its orders to the human being. The argument of the tolerant Super-ego would then be: you have not only to accept the other but also hold him in esteem precisely because he is the other! If it is really so, then this is a truly irrational demand. Be tolerant and hold in esteem any form of otherness because I have ordered it to you! Full stop. This is then that the real meaning of the liberal idea of tolerance has assumed the form of an apodictic demand that one hold the other in esteem and become at the same time an inherent part of the *political correctness* of today.

In accordance with this view Slavoj Žižek criticizes this idea and demonstrates that it leads to the unsolvable aporias in the self-consciousness of the tolerant subject:

Respect for others' beliefs as the highest value can only mean one of two things: either we treat the other in a patronizing way and avoid hurting him in order not to ruin his illusions, or we adapt the relativist stance of a multiple 'regimes of truth', disqualifying as violent imposition any clear insistence on truth.⁷

The posture of holding the other in esteem can be then either accompanied by the patronizing stance of treating him from above, or by the relativist attitude in which the tolerant subject puts into question the claim to truth of all possible views, beliefs and convictions of others. In the first case the tolerant subject artificially enforces upon himself the posture of esteem towards the other while at the same time maintaining that only his religion is 'true', only his political views are correct, only the customs he follows are right, etc. In the second case, the posture of esteem towards the other is undermined by a sort of intellectual nihilism. If there is no religion, political ideology, scientific theory, etc. that could conceivably put forward the claim to truth, then they all cannot be treated by me seriously. In fact they all rely on naïve and illusory ideas that are worth nothing. Therefore, it is not a problem for me to tolerate them.

The internal contradiction of these two postures manifests itself particularly in the attitude of tolerant individual towards the representatives of other religions. In the first case he has to hold in esteem the others who believe in a God whom he cannot accept as the embodiment of religious truth. In philosophy, science or in politics it is possible to modify or change one's own views in confrontation with other ones without putting the former entirely into question. The religious individual cannot perform this because of the absolutist claim to truth that underlies the very essence of religion. Therefore to assume a tolerant attitude towards the followers of other religions is for him the real challenge. He has in a way to act against himself and pays for it with his own inner discrepancy.

⁷ Žižek, *op. cit.* p. 139.

In the second case the relativist tolerant individual assumes a stance that is in contradiction with the absolutist claims to truth of any religion as mentioned above. At the same time the stance of esteem for the religious beliefs of the other is in contradiction with the very essence of this stance. For how can I hold in esteem the religious views of the other if in my opinion they have no worth at all?

Žižek, who unmasks the discrepancy that underlies these two postures, both the religious and the relativist one (and the particular sort of hypocrisy that accompanies them), proposes his own solution to this dilemma. While criticizing the (allegedly) tolerant attitude of enlightened Europeans towards the believers of Islam, he at the same time maintains that instead of artificially holding a posture of esteem towards them one should perhaps submit: 'Islam – together with all other religions – to a respectful, but for that reason no less ruthless, critical analysis'.⁸

The question is however, of what this "esteem" towards the followers of Islam should consist? Do we not here see a return, in new clothing, of the liberal aporia that was initially laughed at by Žižek? On the one hand the 'unconditional critical analysis' that unmasks the illusory character of religious beliefs, on the other hand the respect/esteem shown to them? Has not the liberal hypocrisy been replaced here by the leftist-critical one? And there is of course the question of whether or not the followers of Islam are at all able to accept any 'unconditional critical analysis' of their own religion.

TOLERANCE AND THE COURT OF REASON. LEGUTKO'S FEARS

Interestingly, there are some striking similarities between Žižek's critiques of the idea of tolerance and that of Ryszard Legutko, a Polish philosopher and politician representing the national-Catholic option:

[...] tolerance tries to rejoin two contradictory and difficult to bring together human emotions – disapproval and esteem. It promises to hold in esteem everything that we shall disapprove of, and this even before our disapproval will appear and we will have the opportunity to verify if something deserves esteem at all [...]. If we treat disapproval and esteem as empty forms that almost automatically could be applied in any future situation, we create at the same time the strong temptation to ideologize the notion of tolerance. We make disapproval and esteem independent from that which, as it seems, should permanently accompany them, from the reflection on its plausibility and this is to say from the habit of reasonable analysis of our own feelings and of that to which they are related.⁹

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

⁹ R. Legutko: *Tolerancja. Rzecz o surowym państwie, prawie natury, miłości i sumieniu* [Tolerance. On the Severe State, Natural Law, Love and Conscience]. Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz_Terytoria 1997, p. 214.

According to Legutko the fundamental weakness of the concept of tolerance consists in the postulate assuming the posture of esteem towards any form of otherness before the individual performing the critical reflection could evaluate and possibly disapprove of it. This results in a discrepancy between non-reflective acceptance by the individual of different forms of otherness that are incompatible with his own religious beliefs, political views, systems of values, etc. that should actually be thrown away by him along with the tolerant posture of esteem towards them that he assumed automatically.

The weakest point of Legutko's arguments is the lack of attention paid to the difference between on the one hand those forms of otherness that are not in deep conflict with one's own views and systems of values, that is, those of which one need not disapprove, and on the other hand those forms of otherness that for various reasons are unacceptable to the individual. Legutko seems to assume that everything related to the idea of tolerance is to be disapproved of and thrown away simply because it is different.¹⁰ This way of arguing implies that all forms of cultural otherness are highly suspicious and should be thrown away because they are ... other. While criticizing the idea of tolerance for its one-sidedness, since it dogmatically requires respect for all forms of otherness, Legutko sets against it another form of dogmatism. His argument implies that the assumption of critical reflection prompts the individual to disapprove of and throw away all forms of religious, cultural or political otherness. Those forms are simply to be disapproved of precisely because they differ from that with which one identifies.

In the statement quoted above we can recognize the typical way of thinking about the idea of tolerance of the representatives of the national-Catholic option in Polish politics. However, what is particular in Legutko's argument is that he claims to give 'scientific' justification of his standpoint. According to him it is possible to carry out a 'reasonable critical analysis' of all possible forms of otherness. Yet, the question is what we are to understand by the 'reasonable' character of this analysis? Evidently the author has in mind a sort of superior element of the human

10 This critical attitude of Legutko has its roots in his deeply sceptic evaluation of modern European democracy whom he would like to oppose the "good political system" while being deeply convinced that he disposes over the proper definition of it. This has to be the republican definition of it at the basis of which is—as J. P. Chudzik notices correctly—"the Aristotelian-Tomistic concept of virtue, and with it of the state that has the hierarchical structure, establishes the relationships of superiority and obedience, promotes the values of honor and devotion to higher concerns, that is to say to common good" in: J. P. Hudzik: *Trzy studia o metafizyce, pamięci i demokracji* [*Three Studies on Metaphysics, Memory and Democracy*], *op. cit.* p. 219. This type of republican concept of state that is at the basis of Legutko's truly biological aversion to democracy and idea of tolerance could perhaps have turned out to be effective in Middle Ages or in Austrian Galicia in 19th century. Hudzik who enters into polemics with this concept remarks correctly that republicanism does not imply necessarily the hostility towards the idea of democracy and concludes that the author of *Tolerancja* represents in fact the anachronistic model of conservative political thinking at the basis of which lies the entire misunderstanding of changes that the democratic system underwent in the twentieth century.

mind, something like the Kantian ‘court of reason’, on the basis of which one could objectively decide which forms of otherness are to be disapproved of and thrown away. Regardless, the question remains of whether or not the assumption of such an over-historical element in human mind with access to objective truth testifies to the intellectual dogmatism of the author. Does not Legutko’s court of justice consist in fact of Catholic-national ideas and values that are treated by him ‘uncritically’ as absolutely true? Do they not in the last instance enable him to decide a priori—read: automatically—about the worthlessness of the other ideas and values?

Although both Žižek and Legutko point to some real weaknesses of the liberal idea of tolerance, their own proposals, a leftist-radical and a Catholic-national argument respectively, are equally unconvincing. The first gets entangled in the aporias of the tolerant attitude it initially criticizes. The second argues in the style of an ‘enlightened’ Catholic fundamentalist and tries to make us believe that the only right ‘scientific’ attitude towards all forms of cultural otherness is to be suspicious and critical towards them. However, in this concept the ‘scientific’ criticism serves to legitimize the utmost non-tolerance: to throw away any form of otherness only because it is other. Consequently, the allegedly non-critical liberal cult of the otherness for itself is replaced in Legutko by equally non-critical disapproval of otherness.

TOLERANCE AS A MODE OF CO-EXISTENCE WITH OTHERS

What is specific about the European idea of tolerance is that at the basis of it is the postulate of acceptance of the right of followers of other religions to believe in their own God. This postulate was followed by another postulate, one that was first clearly formulated by John Locke in his well-known letter on tolerance: the separation of Church from the state.¹¹ This second postulate opened the space for the secularization of the public sphere in which the claims of different religious groups to absolute truth could be suspended and replaced by the discussion over common issues in which it was possible to reach in the end rational consensus. Regarded in this context, the idea of tolerance is inherently connected with the concept of the liberal-democratic state that is ideologically neutral and that guarantees its citizens a wide area of individual freedoms. Therefore, all radical critics of this idea actually put into question the constitutional and legal foundations of this state.

The state that claims to be the embodiment of one religious truth liquidates by its essence the free space for tolerant attitudes towards the followers of other religions. The absolutist claim that underlies any religious truth is here transferred

11 J. Locke: *A Letter Concerning Toleration and Other Writings* (1789). Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 2010.

onto the public and private sphere that are then subordinated to different legal interpretations of this truth and shaped by them. If there are found, in such a fundamentalist state in which the institution of the Church has grown deep into secular state institutions, different religious groups whose members raise similar absolutist claims related to their own true God, then there exists the permanent danger of religious wars. The European religious wars of the 17th century, in which all sides displayed enormous cruelty to each other, testify to this danger.

It is only when we take into account this particular historical context that we are able to realize what enormous challenge faced Locke while writing his *A Letter concerning Toleration*. In a sense, he had to reconcile water with fire; to defend religious tolerance while at the same time acknowledging that the absolutist claim to represent the only one Truth makes up the essence of each religion. He did it by referring to the Christian commandment of love of the other, while at the same time stressing the voluntary character of any identification with a particular faith and a particular church, and in the end by pointing to the necessity of maintaining social peace (the pragmatic argument).

Yet, of crucial importance was his deep conviction that to assume a tolerant attitude the individual has to distance himself from both himself and from others. This conviction implicitly underlies Locke's arguments. This is also the point in which his concept of tolerance decisively differs from the traditional one found in the notion of *Lebenswelt*, according to which individuals have to tolerate the multiple differences that are spontaneously produced by social life itself. In other words, the liberal attitude of tolerance as conceived by Locke does not belong to the realm of the life-world but rather the Christian individual has to impose it on himself so as to rise to the challenge put before him by the history of religious wars. He has to meet this challenge by drawing on both the commandment of Christian faith that demands love towards the other, and the understanding of the individual as a free person who prefers the maintenance of social peace over involvement in heated religious quarrels. One can of course—and this is one's right—treat the other religion as mistaken or false, this does not mean however that one can coerce the other to the 'true' religion by force.

In putting forward the idea that, in religious matters, human beings should tolerate each other's faith, Locke was confronted with the question of whether or not this attitude of tolerance has to be unlimited and concern all religious confessions. From the contemporary point of view, the answer he gave to this question is highly intolerant. Namely, he stated that the British state cannot tolerate Catholics and atheists.¹² This statement shows how much he was still influenced by the political and religious prejudices of his time. In his eyes The Catholics were traitors to the British Empire who should be driven out of it, and atheists were highly immoral persons whose denial of God and religion was the worst conceivable blasphemy.

12 Locke excluded also all religions, whose rituals imply making offerings from people since they break the Christian commandment of love of the other.

However, what is interesting in this case is the fact that the postulate of tolerance is here immediately confronted with the question of its limits. On the one hand, the attitude of tolerance in religious matters demands from the individual a sort of self-renouncement, since it is in conflict with the claim of his own religion to be the only true one. On the other hand, the individual must at the same time find an answer to the question of which forms of otherness he can tolerate and which forms he can not. In order to accept some of them, the individual has to overcome two different obstacles, one of an inner nature and one of an outer nature.

In this double limitation of the posture of tolerance one can see its weakness and point to aporias in which it is embroiled. This is the way in which Legutko and Žižek argue against it; pointing to the fact that the individual has then to impose on himself the attitude of acceptance of some forms of the otherness that are in fact unacceptable for him. This leads either to hypocrisy (Žižek) or to putting into question one's own tradition and consequently to moral relativism (Legutko). Although these two authors argue from standpoints that are extremely opposed to each other they both point to real difficulties that individuals are confronted with if they try to realize their tolerant attitudes in social practice. Therefore there is a grain of truth in their arguments. However, they fail to recognize that what is at stake in this case is not first of all social peace, and it is not even the guarantee of the wide sphere of freedom and autonomy of the other. What is at stake is the creation of a sort of counterbalance to the otherwise very natural human tendency to degrade and rule out multiple forms of otherness—religious, political, cultural etc.—only because they are... other. While this takes place on the level of *Lebenswelt*, where the differences that are created spontaneously by the process of social life itself are usually not in conflict with each other, behind these seemingly innocuous differences in religious beliefs, political ideologies, and philosophical and scientific theories, lay different claims to truth that often exclude each other.

Therefore, the first natural reactions of a human being who is confronted with these other claims are suspicion and aggression towards them, a reaction that has its roots in the feeling of being endangered at the very foundations of one's own world-view. Consequently, one attempts to eliminate these other views and to support one's own understanding of the world in which everything is hierarchically ordered according to a single, unitary type of values. In this way, the world is seen in all its aspects as the embodiment of one truth to which there is no alternative.

Contrary to this way of thinking, the tolerant attitude—as initially drawn up by Locke—relies on the postulate of openness towards multiple religious, cultural, ethnic, etc. groups whose members put forward different 'competitive' claims to truth. This postulate is rooted in the conviction that tolerance towards co-existing competitive claims (they sometimes exclude each other) in different areas of human activity is the precondition for the preservation of a wide area of human freedoms within the liberal-democratic state. Without this conviction that lies at the basis

of liberal anthropology, the idea of tolerance, as it was primarily drawn up by Locke, could have never become the inherent element of inter-human relationships within the state. It implies the concept of the human being who is free and autonomous and is able to accept by way of critical self-reflection the different forms of freedom of the others (i.e. freedom of religious beliefs, of political views, of scientific convictions, of moral opinions, etc.). In other words, it presupposes a concept of tolerance that is very much different from the 'natural' attitude of acceptance of multiple forms of otherness as they appear at the level of social *Lebenswelt*. In this last case the 'tolerant' acceptance of these forms by the individual is not a problem at all since they are the natural effect of the process of life itself and do not lay absolutist claims to truth. These claims are, on the contrary, inherent to all religious beliefs, political views, scientific theories etc. as typically human creations. Therefore they cannot be accepted as natural life-products but their toleration demands from the individual the engagement of his self-critical reflective attitude. In other words, he can tolerate them only if he perceives in the others who created them free persons who have the similar right to their own beliefs, opinions and views, and he can possibly speak with them about these issues.

The tolerant self-reflective attitude appears here as the result of a radical transformation of the previous one, that of a natural kind. It is the continuation of the latter but at the same time it is radically opposed to it. The openness of tolerant individuals towards different forms of otherness with differing truth-claims, presupposes a self-reflective attitude in which one is confronted with oneself. This moment of critical self-reflection is then the indispensable condition that enables one to overcome one's naturally suspicious and aggressive attitude towards these 'higher' forms of cultural otherness, instead assuming the posture of 'anticipating openness' towards them. In this way one comes to see in them not as much the threat to his own world-view and the values that underlie it, but rather the chance to go beyond it and gain new knowledge about oneself and others. What characterizes this posture is the readiness to accept other religious, cultural and political views, although at first glance it often seems that they have no sense, that they are even strange or absurd. For only then the individual could possibly 'learn' something from them and change his own world-view.

Of course, this tolerant posture of openness has its limits, since at the basis of it is the concept of the free and autonomous human individual as primarily drawn up in the tradition of European rationalism and empiricism. In other words, it is first of all in the particular context of European culture that the fundamental freedoms and rights were established, propositions that served to establish what could or could not be tolerated. What is more, the reach of what can—or should—be tolerated changes permanently with time under the pressure of new political circumstances, of the information politics of the mass-media, of new scientific theories, new philosophical concepts, etc. Therefore there is a well-defined list of beliefs, views, opinions and attitudes that the liberal subject cannot tolerate: racism,

misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia, sexism, anti-Semitism, etc. This sort of non-tolerance differs decisively from the fundamentalist ones because the latter propagate intolerance as the basis of their world-view. In other words, whereas for the latter intolerance (and together with it suspicion and aggression) is the point of departure of their attitude towards different forms of otherness, the liberal individual begins by specifying the widest possible area of different forms of otherness he can tolerate. And it is this widely opened perspective, built upon thinking of the other as a free and autonomous individual, in which one encounters the end the limits of his tolerant attitude. In this case intolerance appears at the fringe of his tolerant attitude. Such intolerance is incommensurate and incompatible with this attitude like a piece of rubbish, that once acknowledged would disrupt this attitude from inside and lead to its annihilation.

The difference between the non-tolerance that appears at the limits of tolerant attitude and the programmatic 'manifesto' intolerance that determines the point of departure to different forms of otherness is then not relative or only a quantitative one as Žižek and Legutko maintain. This difference has the character of an ontological abyss. These two postures are incommensurate; one cannot relativize the difference between them.

CLOSING REMARKS

The tolerant attitude that I have drawn up above allows one to see in the different beliefs and views of other not a danger to one's own world-view, but the chance to go beyond it and change it. It is only when the reasons behind other views put into question my understanding of human freedom and rights can I be prompted to be non-tolerant towards them. In other words, it is impossible to tolerate the standpoint that is based on fundamental intolerance.

As much as it would be difficult to imagine a state (or society) in which a lack of tolerance would characterize all areas of social life, so too would it be difficult to imagine a state that would realize the program of absolute tolerance. Yet, this does not mean that the dispute about tolerance has to concentrate only on how and where to define its limits. As we have seen on the example of Žižek's and Legutko's standpoints it also concerns the very idea of tolerance itself. This implies the question of how we are to relate to different forms of otherness in our social, political and cultural life.

In this context it should be stressed that various currents of philosophical and humanist thought in 20th century are attempting to ontologically 'rehabilitate' the experience of the other and of different forms of otherness. There is the Judaic thought of Buber and Rosenzweig, Gadamer's and Ricoeur's hermeneutics, the phenomenology of Husserl, Schütz and Levinas, and multiple poststructuralist (e.g. as seen in Lacan, Derrida, and Kristeva) and feminist (e.g. as seen in Irigaray, and

Butler) concepts. In this multifarious tradition can we find entirely new arguments justifying the tolerant attitude of openness towards different forms of otherness.

If then in the appearance of the idea of tolerance in European modernity the stress was laid on the original meaning of *tolerare* as the act of 'standing' or 'suffering' something that is different from our own world-view, with time the accent was shifted to an attitude of openness towards different forms of otherness. They cease to be treated like a necessary evil that the individual has to endure but on the contrary, the opened tolerant experience of them offers the chance to learn something from them and to deeply transform one's own self-understanding.

Locke himself was not able to wholeheartedly assume such a positive posture of tolerant openness towards other religions and cultures, and to see in them the chance of one's own self-understanding. For Locke, the fact that from the beginning of human history there have been different cultures whose participants believed in distinct Gods and followed distinct customs was an inherent part of the 'human condition' and something that one simply had to 'stand' and accept. The radical change of this attitude was only possible due to, first, the subsequent establishment in Western Europe and in North America of liberal-democratic systems and secondly, of the ontological "rehabilitation" of the experience of the other as developed in the philosophy and the human sciences in 20th century (as mentioned above).

This later 'ripe' model of tolerance is very much similar to Michael Walzer's fourth classification of tolerance, as defined in his well-known book *On Toleration*. Walzer writes that this kind of tolerance is characterized by a attitude of: 'openness to the others; curiosity; perhaps even respect, a willingness to listen and learn'.¹³

Walzer is no doubt right when he stresses the advantages of this fourth type of tolerant attitude. Yet, in his book he presents a systems approach to it and treats this particular type of tolerance as simply one of many possible types. In my opinion this model represents the ripest form of toleration of otherness, one that is based on a mostly opened attitude towards them. It implies that to tolerate another religion, culture, political view, etc. means not only to let them and their followers exist beside us, but also a certain openness towards them that includes their ability to influence and even change our own self-understanding. This, however, is not understood in the way of non-critical acceptance of them for themselves, but in the permanent confrontation with them in which we ask them different questions, explore their implicit assumptions, etc.

Strictly speaking, the question of toleration of different forms of cultural otherness had not yet appeared when, in the 15th century, religious wars flared up in Western Europe. It appeared much earlier, this is to say, precisely at the moment in which human beings invented his first gods and cultural values. Consequently, humans lost the simplicity of the primordial, natural posture that included the

13 M. Walzer: *On Toleration*. New Haven / London: Yale University Press 1997, p. 11.

spontaneous acceptance of all differences produced by life itself. Instead of this humans become deeply convinced that only their own gods and customs are the true ones, whereas those of the others are, at best, a ridiculous caricature of them. In fact, they are the unforgivable blasphemy that has to be eradicated together with those who believe in them.

This is the moment in which the Babel Tower falls apart and the participants of different cultures begin to believe that only they are in possession of religious truth. Only then could the question of toleration of different forms of cultural otherness arise; a form of toleration that could prevent the devastating consequences of religious wars, irrespective of how it has been formulated in each particular case. However, this question has assumed a new form today, since, on the one hand, in philosophy and the human sciences we are witnessing various attempts to 'deconstruct' the concept of onto-theological unity with its universalists claims to represent ultimate truth, while on the other hand there exist attempts to 'rehabilitate' the experience of different forms of cultural otherness. This process influences our contemporary understanding of the idea of toleration that in some essential points differ decisively from the way in which it has been conceived by Locke, Hobbes, Mill or other classical liberal thinkers. Admittedly, we have lost the innocence of the natural acceptance of differences produced spontaneously by the process of life itself. We have replaced that innocence with the heroism of self-reflective acceptance of different cultural forms of otherness, an acceptance that rises above the fears and 'pains' related to the experience of the other. At the same time, however, within this intellectual heroism there has survived the desire to transform it into something as natural as the air that one breathes.

Yet, today, this desire is like the dream. In order for this one day to come to pass, human being would have to free himself from his fear of otherness that emerged in him precisely at the moment in which he invented the idea of the one true God and identified himself with one system of 'true' cultural values. In other words, he would have to get rid of his claims to possess ultimate Truth and of his conviction that he is in a privileged position in relation to it. Consequently, he would have to learn to 'sublate' in his self-reflection all his prejudices and fears related to the different forms of cultural otherness. Only then, believing in the possibility of regaining of some primordial innocence, would he come back to the place in which—as he imagines—he already was. Yet, the problem is that this place, in fact, never existed. There is then no sense in trying to come back to it, for we will meet there only our own shadow that flies before us and dissolves into Nothingness.