

TOLERANCE, PLURALISM AND CRITICISM

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The urgency of the problem of tolerance is evident. Hatred to all that is different, to people who use another language, adhere to other religious beliefs, have another system of values is spreading all over the world. Sometimes it seems that this hatred was accumulated somewhere and now has come out. Local wars and terrorist acts, persecution of national minorities and the crowds of refugees - such are the results of the action of this destructive force, whose name is *intolerance*. My own country is facing now terrible manifestations of this force, in particular the violence of rights of national minorities (including Russian people) in some regions of the former Soviet Union. Events of such a kind are happening constantly on a large scale also in other parts of the world; in some of them these events are the result of the long history, in other ones they have arisen very recently.

The appellation to the idea of tolerance is clear in this context. It is clear also that in some cases conflicting civilisations, cultures, nations, social groups, individuals, if they don't accept the idea of tolerance, can destroy each other. Now tolerance in a more degree than ever in history is not only an abstract philosophical ideal, but the condition of the survival of humankind. Sometimes it seems that it is enough to say: "People, be tolerant to each other, to your differences, to the fact that you are not like each other, that you have different views. Live friendly, come to agreement when you have to solve common problems". It seems that as soon as this slogan is advanced it will be accepted by everybody. Because it is reasonable and practical. If you don't cultivate tolerance you can have only mutual destruction. Nowadays with contemporary weapons it is not difficult to achieve that.

However, the problem of tolerance is more complicated than it seems

to be. This complication concerns not only the practical difficulties in adopting the idea of tolerance (the adoption of this idea presupposes a number of social, cultural and psychological conditions). The main point is the understanding of the very idea of tolerance and the idea of pluralism, which accompanies it.

I try to analyse four possible modes of understanding tolerance and pluralism. I think that these possible modes correlate with conceptions that really exist or have existed. I consider only the fourth mode as fruitful and adequate to the situation which the contemporary civilisation is facing.

I

The first mode was the first also in the historical sense. It is considered as classical one in certain respects and exists as well nowadays. It is connected with the names of Bayle and Locke, with the classical liberal tradition. In the framework of this mode there are conceptions that differ from each other in some respects. The analysis of the rise of this mode, of different conceptions in its framework could be interesting and instructive. But the aim of my paper forces me to abandon the analysis of concrete texts, limiting myself to singling out some essential features of a certain mode of understanding tolerance. In other words I am trying to single out what Max Weber could call "ideal types".

According to the first mode of understanding the truth, basic moral norms, basic rules of political life can be found and rationally substantiated beyond any doubt, and can be reasonably recognised by everybody. It is senseless to speak about tolerance, when we concern these topics, because proof and rational substantiation are convincing for everybody.

Nevertheless people not only share true assertions. They also have different beliefs. Some of these beliefs can happen to be true. But some of them cannot be shown as true beyond any doubt. These are first of all religious views, metaphysical assertions, specific values of different cultures, peculiar ethnic beliefs, some personal predilections. These beliefs are accepted by people on non-rational reasons and are connected with self-identification: cultural, ethnic, personal ones. A person, a human being who is autonomous in his decisions and responsible in his

actions can not exist without self-identification. But modes of self-identification are mostly non-rational and depend on a certain tradition, a place where a human being was born, on the history of his country, on his own biography.

As to true assertions (especially true assertions of science) and rationally substantiated moral and legal norms, one cannot tolerate assertions that contradict them and actions that violate them. People who don't obey basic moral and legal norms must be punished. Nevertheless even in this case one should take into consideration that the truth can not be imposed on a person (by physical coercion or by propagandistic persuasion). A person can accept a true assertion or rational norm only as a result of his own reasoning. So it is necessary to fight against actions that violate the reasonable rules of civilised life and at the same time tolerate within certain limits non-rational views. It is desirable to create such conditions for those who keep these non-rational views in which the latter could come to the acceptance of what is undoubtedly shown as true.

As to beliefs, which can not be substantiated as true, which are accepted on a non-rational base (religious convictions, metaphysical assertions, world outlook views, specific values of different cultures, ethnic beliefs etc.), they can be tolerated (together with the corresponding practices) under condition that they don't violate the rules of civilised life. These beliefs and corresponding practices appear as particular affairs of some cultural, ethnic, social groups or some individuals. The reason of tolerance in this case is that the variety of views, existing beyond the sphere of true assertions and basic moral, legal and political norms, is indifferent to basic values of civilisation and doesn't hinder normal life. Different social, cultural, ethnic groups can have their own churches, cultivate their language, have their customs. Interference into these affairs from outside cannot be admitted (it means both interference of a government into particular affairs of ethnic minorities, living at the territory of a large country, and interference of a state into the affairs of another one). Agreement in understanding of basic moral and legal norms and assertions established in cognition (in particular, in science) is considered a base for normal civilised life. It is important to stress that according to this understanding of tolerance differences in specific cultural values, in world-views will gradually diminish with the development of civilisation. It will be a result of the interaction of different cultures and nations, of the necessity to solve practical problems

together.

Tolerance in such understanding appears as *indifference* to the existing different views and practices, because the latter are considered non significant in the face of the main problems with which civilisation deals.

II

The second mode of understanding tolerance doesn't share the assumption of the first mode: the idea that it is possible to draw a sharp line between a true assertion and a mere opinion, that there are true cognitive assertions and norms of a civilised life which can be established beyond any doubt. This mode of understanding uses the results of contemporary cultural-anthropological research, some results of historical studies of science, of social studies of scientific cognition, some contemporary conceptions in the philosophy of science. According to this understanding, religious and metaphysical views, specific values of a certain culture are not something non-significant for human activity and for the development of a society, but determine the character of this activity and the ways culture develops. The pluralism of these views, values and modes of practice is unavoidable as it is connected with the nature of human beings and their relations with the real world. Pluralism concerns also cognition, as one can not speak about the advantages of a certain form of cognitive activity in comparison with other ones. For example, it is impossible to think that the magical interpretation of the nature and different practices based on this interpretation (invocations, dances etc.) are inferior to scientific interpretation and technological practices based on scientific knowledge. The same can be said if we compare natural sciences, attempting to predict new phenomena with the help of scientific laws, with humanities which use the method of hermeneutical interpretation. As to natural science itself, different conceptual frameworks (paradigms) are equal in some respects and principally incommensurable. All cultures and forms of cognition are equal and incommensurable. There is no privileged system of views and values. The only exception is the idea that all people, independent of their race, sex and nationality have a right to physical existence and cultural development.

According to this position my own views are not privileged either. But, being equal and deserving respect, different systems of views (cultures, paradigms) cannot interact with each other, as they are closed, incommensurable. Self-identity of different cultures is based on the fact that they don't touch each other, exist in different worlds. Certainly, I can learn a language, customs, can accept the values of another culture, I can accept another cognitive paradigm. But it is important to stress that according to this understanding, when I accept another system of values or another paradigm, I stop living in my previous system of values. I can transit from one cultural and cognitive world to another (according to Thomas Kuhn it is like the switching of gestalt). But I can not live in different worlds at the same time.

Tolerance in this understanding appears as *respect* to another, that I cannot understand and with whom I can not interact. It something as Leibniz's image: the world of isolated monads, not having windows.

III

It is possible to object against this mode of understanding tolerance and pluralism. The objections can be of two kinds.

(1) It is possible to show that in reality there is mutual *criticism* between different systems of values and conceptual frameworks (one can call them paradigms, although not in the kuhnian sense of this term). It is a fact of the history of culture and the history of science. As a result of this criticism some of values and conceptual frameworks leave the stage, give way to others. Because different systems are not equal and not incommensurable. In reality there is a constant competition between different systems of values, different traditions, different conceptual frameworks. In the process of this competition different systems try to show their competence, to demonstrate the possibility to solve with their help technological, social and intellectual problems which contemporary civilisation is facing. As a result of this competition the selection of system of values, norms and intellectual traditions corresponding to the changing situation takes place.

(2) It can be shown that the system of norms, views and values, which I accept, is not equal to others and not inferior to them in principal respects. I adhere to a certain system not simply because it is *my* system,

but because I consider it as superior to others, because from my point of view my system can better solve those problems with which I and other people deal. If I had thought in other way, I would have refused my system and accepted another, that which is superior from my point of view. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that in any case my system will have advantages in comparison to all other ones. A system of norms and views, to which I adhere, will always correspond to standards and criteria which I keep (and with the help of which I evaluate the advantages of any system).

This understanding of pluralism proceeds from the idea that there is a privileged system in a variety of cultural, value and intellectual systems. This system includes traditions and values of my culture and my personal views in the framework of this culture. Norms and values, not corresponding to mine, are considered as inferior to latter.

I can show that other views are untenable, I can give *criticism* of them. But I have no right to coerce my convictions to other people or values of my culture to other cultures. Because convictions can be accepted only by a person himself. Someone else as an individual or as a representative of another culture can give evidence that in some essential respect he (or she) is inferior to me (less educated, can not think correctly, is inclined to irrational influences etc.). It is senseless to have a critical discussion with such a person. But according to the third position (or the third mode of understanding tolerance) I hope that in the future my views will be accepted by everybody.

In this mode tolerance appears as *indulgence* to the weakness of others, accompanied by some *contempt* of them.

IV

According to the fourth mode of understanding tolerance and pluralism there is not only competition of different cultures and systems of value, different philosophical views and principal theoretical frameworks. In reality each culture, cognitive and value system not only struggles with other systems, but tries in some way to take into account the experience of others, thus extending the horizon of its own experience. This is a fact of the history of culture and the history of cognition, in particular the history of science and philosophy.

The outstanding Russian philosopher and theoretician of culture Michail Bachtine has elaborated an interesting conception of a *dialogue* as a base for understanding a human being and culture. According to Bachtine the very nature of consciousness is dialogical. I am not like a Leibnizian monad, as my consciousness is not closed, but is open to another human being. Relation to self as I, an elementary act of self-reflection is possible only on the base of my relation to another human being. This act presupposes the possibility of my relation to myself as to another person. This means that in my thoughts or in my imagination (as a rule not being aware of that) I can occupy the position of another. Each person not only has self-identity. He can change, develop this self-identity. This problem is especially acute nowadays, when complicated processes in social and cultural world sometimes create the crisis of individual, cultural and national self-identities. Overcoming this crisis and developing self-identity is possible only as a result of constant communication with other people, of a dialogue with other points of view, positions, as a result of attempts to understand other positions and to look at myself from another point of view. (Bachtine has elaborated in this context an interesting dialectics of "I for myself", "I for another", "Another for me" etc.).

Relations of different cultures are also dialogical according to Bachtine, although the degree of this dialogism and especially the awareness of it varies in different cultures and at the different stages of their development. There are cultures (to be more exact it is necessary to say that there have been until recently such cultures) which seem to exist in practical isolation from other cultures. According to Bachtine it is nevertheless possible to show that each culture does not exist in itself, but in interaction with other ones, "at borders", as he said.

But what acted as a certain hidden mechanism of the development of culture, what was not understood and was not always successful, should be cultivated nowadays. As the current civilisation is facing the situation, when it is clear that we cannot be satisfied by present relations of people to the nature and people to each other. The experience accumulated by different cultures in the sphere of these relations is not sufficient today. It is necessary to extend this experience. It is impossible to achieve this without taking into account the experience of each other. This does not mean uncritical acceptance of other experiences. It means only that it is possible to see in another position, in another culture, in another system

of values something not necessarily hostile to my position, but something that can help me in solving problems, which are not only mine, but also the problems of other people and other cultures, other intellectual and value systems. In this dialogue not only individuals, but also cultures can change their self-identity.

Contemporary world is facing a dilemma: the collision of different civilisations (which can lead to a war between them, if Huntington is right), or the organisation of a dialogue, attempts of mutual understanding, mutual criticism, self-criticism and mutual changes.

Interaction with other positions, the comparison of my arguments with the arguments in the defence of another point of view appears as a necessary condition of the development of my own views. I can be sure of the advantages of my views, my system of values, my conceptual frameworks. I can try to demonstrate these advantages. At the same time I admit that in some points I can be mistaken. I admit that if the criticism of my views is convincing, I will refuse my views in favour of other ones. I take the views of others seriously and think that it is necessary to understand the arguments in favour of different positions, that it is useful to look at my position from another point of view (not necessary in order to give up my views, it can help me to find weak points in my position and change it in some respect, develop it). In this case pluralism is not a hindrance for my position, but the necessary condition of its development, and a mechanism of the development of a culture as a whole.

The rise of new conceptual frameworks in scientific cognition does not necessarily mean that the frameworks that existed in the past and left the stage in the history of science are failures in all respects. These conceptions can have ideas which turn out to be fruitful under new conditions. So respect for the history of culture, cognition, a critical dialogue with the past is included in the mechanism of creating new knowledge. Albert Schweitzer talked about the principle of respect for life. The last mode of understanding presupposes respect for other cultures and respect for the past.

Tolerance appears here as *respect* for a different position in combination with the intention of mutual *change* of positions (even in certain cases the change of individual and cultural self-identity) as a result of a *critical dialogue*.

Certainly, the acceptance of this understanding of tolerance and

especially the cultivation of it can seem to be utopian. I don't think so, although I agree that its practical realisation is difficult. Nevertheless I think that in order to avoid the confrontation of civilisations, the possibility of which is real, it is necessary to organise a critical dialogue of cultures, to give up individual and cultural self-centrism, to search and find compromises and agreements, and to solve the difficulties which contemporary technological civilisation is facing together.

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