

## TOLERANCE BETWEEN VICE AND VIRTUE\*

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**ABSTRACT. Tolerance Between Vice and Virtue.** The concept of tolerance seems to occupy a very important place in the Western culture, gaining the statute of a supreme unquestionable virtue. Yet, there are also voices that warn about its dangers. Starting from this premise, the present paper aims to analyse different approaches on tolerance and the difficulties they raise. For this purpose, the research investigates the main arguments in favour of tolerance which then serves as a background for a critical examination of the contemporary approaches. The intention is to determine whether the new lines of thought are doomed to failure just like the ones they have replaced.

**Keywords:** *tolerance, freedom, truth, religion, philanthropy*

### Introduction

The concept of tolerance seems to occupy a very important place in the Western culture. In fact, for the multiculturalism of the west, for this postmodern space of reunion and celebration of differences, tolerance appears as an indispensable principle for the existence of culture, without which, as P. L. Berger<sup>1</sup> notes, the culture itself would collapse from the inside. On the other hand, despite its status as a supreme virtue of the postmodern culture, there are voices that warn us that the overbid of this tolerance might turn it into a vice.<sup>2</sup> For instance, Žižek claims that “the liberal idea of tolerance is more and more a kind of intolerance. It means” leave me alone; don’t harass me; I am intolerant towards your over-proximity”.<sup>3</sup> Taking those ideas as a starting point, the present paper aims to analyse

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<sup>1</sup> This is related to the idea of “plausibility structures” which Berger examines in , *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, New York, Doubleday, 1979.

<sup>2</sup> In Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, any virtue is the median position between two vices: the reversal means that vices are an overbid of a virtue.

<sup>3</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Joker apart”, interview with James Harkin, in *The Guardian*, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2005, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/oct/08/internationaleducationnews.highereducation>.

different perspectives on tolerance as an ethical value of the western culture and to evaluate which are the difficulties that they hide. In this respect, my research analyses several aspects related to the problem of religious tolerance, which constitutes the initial framework for the discourse of tolerance, but it partly oversteps the limits of this area in an attempt to investigate the status and establishment of tolerance in the contemporary moral thought. As Lévinas notes, the main problem of religious tolerance is to save religion from its “dramatic fate” of being “torn between charity and truth” when it meets the alterity.<sup>4</sup> Extending on this idea, it could be said that the main dilemma of tolerance is that of having a correct relation to those who do not share the same truths and values.

In the first part of this paper, I will try to follow the evolution of the most important arguments brought in favour of religious tolerance, highlighting the understanding that they assume of the concept discussed. After I have shown the changes that took place in the definition of the concept of tolerance, which, as D. A. Carson points out, involve the transition from “accepting the existence of different point of views” to “acceptance of different views”,<sup>5</sup> I will continue with a critical analysis of the latest perspective. In this respect, I will discuss the consequences of this pluralist approach of tolerance to determine whether this line of thought will lead to a failure just like the ones that it replaces.

Before forging ahead, it is needed to locate the present research in the rich framework of perspectives treating the problems related to tolerance. Most of the present works treat tolerance in relation to prejudices of different types, such as sexism, racism and religious prejudices. Yovel Yrmiyahu distinguishes these criteria of discrimination in two categories: involuntary features, which are acquired by birth, and voluntary ones, obtained by volitional actions of partially free choices.<sup>6</sup> Though in practice things are not completely settled, at a theoretical level, the problems related to racism have been long and amply debated, and no discussion on the superiority of a race over others is still viewed to be acceptable. Hence, the main problem stays with the groups that entail a certain freedom of choice. Each of those groups require a specific approach.<sup>7</sup>

In the area of works that address those groupings mentioned above, there is a variety of perspectives for tackling them, from religious to political, epistemological, ethical, etc. In order to place the present research in the large spectrum of those studies on

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Emanuel Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1990, p. 176.

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, 2012, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Yovel Yrmiyahu, “Tolerance as Grace and Rightful Recognition” in *Social Research*, Winter 1998, 65.4, pp. 898–899.

<sup>7</sup> In a research of the EU, *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination. An European report*, there is no difference mentioned between the groups facing discrimination such as ethnical, religious and of a sexist orientation. In what concerns religious groups, there is only a mention of the prejudices towards Islam, but nothing related to the prejudices faced by the Christians in a secularized environment, in *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination. An European report*, Nora Langenbacher, FES, Forum Berlin, 2011, p. 13

tolerance, I will use the classification made by Forst.<sup>8</sup> He talks about a vertical approach, which focuses on political theories meant to settle the relation between the state and the individual, aiming to protect and guarantee the freedom and peace of each individual or group of individuals. This line of thought is represented by thinkers such as Michael Waltzer, Eric Voegelin, Wendi Brown and others. On the other hand, Forst speaks of a horizontal perspective which deals with intersubjective relations. In this framework, the statute of tolerance is that of a virtue, a personal attitude displayed in relation to the other. Though the two lines partially overlap, the second one has been expanded with the emerging interest for the problem of tolerance after the second half of the 20th century, through voices such as J. Derrida, E. Lévinas, Axel Henneth, Charles Taylor etc. The main concern of this line is not a normative or epistemological one, but rather ethical and deontological. To some extent, one could claim that tolerance is no longer needed in a liberal democracy which claims equal rights to all individuals.<sup>9</sup> Yet, Žižek explains the status of tolerance as a “post-political ersatz (...) due to the retreat, failure, of direct political solutions”. Thus, “political inequality, economical exploitation, etc., are naturalized/neutralized into «cultural differences», different «ways of life», which are something given, something that cannot be overcome but merely «tolerated»”.<sup>10</sup> In this context, tolerance as an ethical and personal value becomes a desirable virtue for each individual.

In what follows, the paper deals with the second perspective, namely, that of the horizontal intersubjective, reckoning that this perspective envisions aspects related to both religious tolerance and those that pertain to the existence in a multicultural society.

As already mentioned, I will start by sketching a short history of the evolution of arguments in favour of religious toleration. This phase distinguishes four main periods determined according to the statute of the Christian religion. A first stage comprises the first three centuries of Christianity, when this was an unacknowledged and sometimes unpermitted religion within the Roman Empire. Then, the beginning of a second phase is marked by the Edict of Milan which established a new relationship between state and church, an interested collaboration. A third phase which debuts with the beginning of Modernity, displays a perspective dominated by the humanist theories of secularization while religion and its role are marginalized. Finally, one can speak of a fourth phase referring to the contemporary approaches; the status of religion in this period as that of an opinion among others.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Rainer Forst, *Tolerance in Conflict: Past and Present*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, pp. 3–6.

<sup>9</sup> This is the questions that sets the base for Anna E. Galeotti’s *Toleration as Recognition*, “The inclusion of the ideal of toleration in constitutional rights as a means of protecting individual freedom of conscience, expression and association seems to render the very notion of toleration superfluous”, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Tolerance as an Ideological Category” in *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, 2007 available at <http://www.lacan.com/zizek-inquiry.html>.

## 1. Short Evolution of Arguments in Favour of Tolerance

A discussion on the problem of religious tolerance in the context of western cultures involves understanding it in its historical context. Although there is no one acknowledged source of this idea, in what follows, the inquiry investigates some of the main ideas which were most influential in what one could call the history of religious tolerance in the West. Just as Derrida remarks, the discourse of tolerance has religious roots,<sup>11</sup> and therefore it is necessary to go back to the beginnings of Christianity in order to find out the origins of the discourse of tolerance.

When the subject of Christianity and tolerance is brought up, opinions are divided between authors who consider that the history of Christianity proved itself to be the most intolerant of all religions,<sup>12</sup> to authors who suggest that the western idea of tolerance is mostly due to the influence of the Christian thinking. However, most of them subscribe to Voltaire's statement that "of all religions, the Christian one should of course inspire the most tolerance (...)"<sup>13</sup> Why would Voltaire say that despite this sad story of intolerance, Christianity should be the ground of the greatest tolerance?

Authors such as Perez Zagorin cannot give an answer to this question, because he looks for the origins of tolerance only in the time of the emergence of Protestantism at the beginning of Modernity. Yet, a step forward in searching the origins of tolerance is taken by Rainer Forst. He starts from the idea that the essential arguments in favour of a broader tolerance are usually developed by the victims of persecution and oppression, who oppose the existing social order.<sup>14</sup> Hence, he offers more attention to the timespan of the first centuries of Christianity, when this was not an accepted religion, and many times it was even persecuted. Yet, he treats the idea of tolerance in biblical texts only fugitively, focusing on the patristic literature.<sup>15</sup> However, following the roots of tolerance in the Christian tradition, one should start from the biblical texts.

### 1.1. Addressing the Concept of Tolerance in Biblical Texts and in the First Centuries of Christianity

I will proceed by briefly presenting some of the main ideas related to tolerance that are found in the neotestamentary texts and which serve as the background of the further

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Deconstructia politicii*, Idea Design and Print, 2005, Cluj, p. 134.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Perez Zagorin, *How the idea of religious toleration came to the West*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2003, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Voltaire, *Dictionar filosofic*, Polirom, Iași, 2002, p. 393.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Rainer Forst, *Tolerance in Conflict: Past and Present*, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> With regard to the scriptural texts, Forst only mentions two passages which use the expression "patient-endurance of suffering" as the translation of *tolerantia* and the Greek *hypo-mone*, translated as the patience of those who trust in God. These attitudes are exemplified by the Parable of the sower from Luke 8.15 and the chapter of love in 1 Corinthians 13.4-7, *Tolerance in Conflict: Past and Present*, pp. 37–38.

Christian approaches to the subject. Firstly, one of the main ideas is that which will be later called the theory of the two kingdoms. The kingdom of Christ is not from this world, but it refers to a spiritual realm. Secondly, there is the sermon on the mount, which encourages Christians to rejoice even in persecution and to turn the other cheek to the hand that slapped the first, knowing that there will be a reward in heaven awaiting. Another relevant passage is the commissioning of the disciples (Matthew 10.28, Luke 10, and Acts 1): they are warned that they are sent as sheep in the midst of wolves. Finally, though there is more which could add to it, long-suffering is one of the virtues that are required from a Christian. Following Christ involves carrying one's cross, a denial of one's self and patience in suffering. For all these, Christ promises His disciples to give them the needed strength for suffering and a heavenly reward.

The idea shared by all these passages is that the follower of Christ is called to suffer and endure the injustice and pain caused by the other. Christianity is the religion of the turned cheek.

The same perspective is to be found in the authors of the first centuries of Christianity. As they were faced with outbreaks of rejection and persecution, they found strength in their trust in the Lord. Hence, for Tertullian, tolerance represented a virtue given by God to face persecution. Similarly, Cyprian talks of tolerance as the power to endure the evil ones, and for him this is what renders the faith beautiful. Though this interior strength seems to be no different than the stoic one, Forst notes that in Christianity, tolerance (as strength to suffer from evil) is not just an attitude to one's self, but „it is expanded to a relation to *the others*, though the latter, of course, is always mediated by a relation to God”.<sup>16</sup>

### **1.2. The Change of Perspective: Edict of Milan**

Things take a completely different direction starting with 313 A.D., with the Edict of Milan and then the Edict of Thessalonica. In a very short time span, by Emperor Constantine's embrace of Christianity, this passes from a persecuted church to the only accepted church and soon after, to a persecuting church. While the Empire was using the church to reach its own political purposes, the church would use the power of the state for its purposes, and as Errington remarks, supporting the unity of the church was a joint agenda.<sup>17</sup>

From this moment on, one could speak of a radical turn in the Christian discourse on tolerance, which was marked by Augustine. He soars in an impossible project which is described by Taylor as an “attempt to marry the faith with a form of culture and a mode

<sup>16</sup> Rainer Forst, *Tolerance in Conflict: Past and Present*, pp. 38–39.

<sup>17</sup> R. M Errington, *Roman Imperial Policy from Julian to Theodosius*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2006, p. 215–216, aput Dragş Boicu, “Teodosie cel Mare și Edictul de la Tesalonic (28 februarie 380). Circumstanțe, Comentariu, Receptare” in *Revista Teologică* 2/2012, Andreiana, Sibiu, p. 190.

of society".<sup>18</sup> With this background, Augustine develops a theory of persecution meant to help him face the Donatists, which were perceived to be not just heretics but also rebels towards the existing social order. Hence, Augustine finds himself in the position to save both the social order and that of the church.

This situation is more and more common for the centuries to follow and because of that Forst suggests that it is impossible to follow the evolution of tolerance during the medieval times. Moreover, he notes that there are no new perspectives brought on the problem of tolerance, except for some of those brought about by Toma d'Aquinas who, just like Augustine, also justifies intolerance. By his time, the official church had subordinated the temporal power to the spiritual one by imposing an intellectual scheme that could include all types of people, from believers to pagans and heretics.<sup>19</sup>

This is the dominant perspective which is generally accepted with regard to the practice of intolerance in the heyday of the universal church. Yet, I consider that this perspective minimalizes the other side of the story, namely the existence of some groups of Christians, the so-called heretics, who objected to intolerance. It is necessary to recall the fact that according to Forst, it is among those groups that the arguments in favour of tolerance should be found. However, writings pertaining to those groups are rare and they did not have a significant influence.

### ***1.3. Modernity: The Rebirth of Tolerance through Secularization***

In some sense, it could be said that the history of tolerance experiences a new birth with Modernity and with the new ideological framework created by it. From the events that marked the beginnings of Modernity, Žižek notes that liberalism emerged in Europe after the catastrophe of the 30 year war between Catholics and Protestants, as „an answer to the pressing question: how could people who differ in their fundamentally religious allegiances co-exist?“ He continues by showing that there was need for something more than „tolerance as a temporary compromise“.<sup>20</sup>

It's probably not by mere chance that this time gives rise to a series of philosophers and thinkers who give special attention to the problem of religious freedom and tolerance. This multiplicity of voices that breaks out at the beginning of Modernity is the resurrection of the concept of tolerance. Among the thinkers that stand out in this context, one must mention Sebastian Castillo, whom Perez Zagorin calls "the first champion of religious freedom", Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, Pierre Bayle, Voltaire and others. The main change that they bring to the discourse of tolerance lays in its establishment in the human rights and in the ideal of freedom of consciousness and equality in front of the law. The writers of this period wanted to transform the meaning of

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity?*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Rainer Forst, *Tolerance in Conflict: Past and Present*, p. 59.

<sup>20</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Tolerance as an Ideologica Category*.

the concept of tolerance from that of an unmerited grace bestowed by a strong position according to a changing will, to “rightful recognition”, as Yovel Yirmiyahu puts it.<sup>21</sup>

Though for a long time Christianity remained a dominant ideology for the western world, the ecclesiastical institutions have been destitute of their former possibility to exercise their discipline outside the area of church life. Hence, the answers to the problems of life pertaining to the public sphere of the next centuries have been looked for in an opposite direction, making way for the humanist-atheist philosophies. To make a long story short, this trust placed in the political ideologies to solve the problems of humanity was revealed to be a failure, climaxing with the atrocities that marked the mid of the 20th century.

This new failure of Europe gave birth to a new wave of ideologies and discussion on the theme of tolerance, meant to fight against repeating such events as well as to solve the problem of diversity of opinions existing in the western cultural space, which surpass the possibilities of the political sphere. Hence, the discourse of tolerance has turned its focus towards its ethical dimension, meant to fill those spots that the politics cannot regulate.

#### ***1.4. Contemporary Approaches to the Ethics of Tolerance***

Starting with the second half of the 20th century, it can be said that there is a new direction of interest in approaching the problems related to tolerance, and the loss of faith placed in politics lies at its base. The main changes of paradigm that bring this new understanding of the concept of tolerance could be summed up by the aspiration to neutrality of the liberalist theories and the pluralistic turn. With regard to the first one, it appears as a necessary condition of existence, once the collective faith in politics has dropped. Hence, in what concerns the government, the accent has slipped from the exercise of the sovereignty of a majority to the guarantee of individual rights and to the means of protecting the minorities. Politics loses its globalizing aspirations. It can no longer provide answers about the meaning of life at a large scale, as those can only be found at an individual level. Neutrality becomes the main characteristic of politics and this assumes an attitude which guarantees each individual the freedom to seek their own personal interest.

The loss of a universal sense makes way to an individual sense. As Gianni Vattimo states in his essay “Toward a Nonreligious Christianity”,<sup>22</sup> this context favours a new model of emancipation based on pluralism. But, the pluralism of values does not suppose only a tolerance towards the values of others, but also a relinquishment of the pretence of an absolute truth.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Yovel Yirmiyahu, *Tolerance as Grace and Rightful Recognition*, p. 898–899.

<sup>22</sup> Gianni Vattimo, “Spre un creștinism nereligios” in eds. John D. Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *După moartea lui Dumnezeu*, Curtea Veche, București, 2008, pp. 64–65.

The pluralist turn creates the possibilities for legitimating the beliefs of other individuals, abolishing any proselyte tendencies and the pretence of a unique truth. Faith becomes an opinion among others and it cannot be seen as intrinsic or superior.<sup>23</sup> In this context the meaning of tolerance has changed, as it does not mean the endurance of evil, but rather a respect for opinions contrary to one's own which is meant to guarantee a good functioning of the society.

Having this background in mind, the critique of the traditional concept of tolerance is taken one step further by postmodern philosophers among whom I will mention Derrida and Žižek. The first one sees tolerance as a mask for violence and for some relations based on power, because tolerance legitimates the superiority of one side. In change, Derrida argues in favour of an unconditional hospitality, an idea that I will discuss in more detail later on. Similarly, Žižek argues that instead of tolerance, we need to engage on behalf of the excluded ones, proposing as a solution the universalization of the particular, such as: we are all immigrants.<sup>24</sup>

## **2. Critical Perspective on the Postmodern Ethics of Tolerance**

In this last section I will discuss several critical perspectives referring to the postmodern approach to the ethics of tolerance. They will be grouped under two themes, namely a critical perspective on pluralism and neutrality and a critical perspective of the unconditional philanthropy.

### **2.1. A Critical Perspective on Pluralism and Neutrality**

Outside the borders of a religious discourse, tolerance was founded on the recognition of universal human rights. In this context, tolerance becomes what Yirmiyahu calls "rightful recognition". This recognition that works at the political level, as a consequence of the loss of a globalizing vision of politics, sets the base of a neutral character meant to make way to a freedom that allows each individual to pursue one's own interests. Though this perspective seems to be a functional one, in what follows I will look at two of its weak points: the first one refers to the exclusivism implied by the pretence of neutrality while the second tackles the impossible relationship between religious truth and pluralism.

With regard to the former, Taylor shows that the freedom favoured by pluralism and neutrality is one that denies any vision the right to become dominant, resulting in a weakening of Christianity as well. The message it transmits is that the human life is better

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Marcel Gauchet, *Leșirea din religie*, Humanitas, București, 2006, p. 108.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Slavoj Žižek, "Political Subjectivization and Its Vicissitudes" in *The Ticklish Subject: the absent centre of political ontology*, Verso, London, 1999.



without any voice of the transcendental. This leads to the conclusion that “the development of modern freedom is identified with an exclusivist humanism that is to say, one based exclusively on a notion of human flourishing, which recognizes a valid aim beyond it”.<sup>25</sup> Peaceful coexistence seems to be the primordial purpose of this line and any other aim beyond this is perceived as dangerous for modern freedom. However, Taylor strikes the sensitive chord when he poses the question whether we really have to pay “this price – a kind of spiritual lobotomy – to enjoy modern freedom?”<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, the pluralist solution for solving the conflict between kindness and truth is that of giving up any pretence of universal truth. This perspective transforms post secular religion into identities meant to render meaning to the life of an individual. Hence, as Gauchet explains, religion plays the role of a source of values among others with the same value. Its relevance is limited to answering the need for meaning of a private life.<sup>27</sup> Talking about this chance, Carson argues that the denial of any public dimension of religious truth would lead to nothing else but the trivialization of religion. And a religion that bears no relevance, a religion that has no pretence of truth is a religion that does not deserved to be followed.<sup>28</sup>

## **2.2. A Critique of the Unconditional Philanthropy**

In light of unconditional hospitality, Derrida shows that morals have to pass beyond right, duty and obligation. This idealism displayed by Derrida reminds of the Kantian deontology, which he aims to surpass through the theory of unconditional hospitality. What he fails to see is that this ethics is doomed to fail in the same way as its precursor. Analysing the modern project of morality, Macintyre notes that modern ethicists have tried to legitimate the same values that they have inherited from the previous centuries while denying their finality. Hence, “the moral scheme that creates the historical background of their thinking had a trifold structure made of the natural human nature, man-as-he-could-be-if-he-would-fulfil-his-telos and the moral precepts that allow him to pass from one stage to the other”.<sup>29</sup> He explains that the modern thinking has dropped the telos, which causes the relation between the other two to become unclear. The loss of the telos made moral impossible. This is also available for the hospitality described by Derrida. He talks of an unconditional opening to the Other, towards the one that is a complete Stranger. Derrida sees in this attitude an outpass of the problem of

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity?*, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Marcel Gauchet, *Ieșirea din religie*, p. 60–119.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. D. A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance*, p.123–126.

<sup>29</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, „schema morală care formează fundalul istoric al gândirii lor avea o structură care presupunea trei elemente: natura umană naturală, omul-cum-ar-putea-fi-dacă-și-ar-împlini-telos-ul și percepțiile morale care îi permit să treacă de la o stare la alta”, în *Tratat de morală: După virtute*, Humanitas, București, 1998, p. 79–80.

tolerance and intolerance involved by it. Yet, what is missing is a base and a reason that would determine one to expose himself to the unanticipated danger of the visit implied by that “hospitality of visiting” for the one who is an “absolute stranger”, “non-identified”, “unpredictable, the absolute other”.<sup>30</sup>

In a similar manner, in “A Catholic Modernity”, Taylor argues that “a solidarity ultimately driven by the giver’s own sense of moral superiority is a whimsical and fickle thing. We are far, in fact, from the universality and unconditionality which our moral outlook prescribes”.<sup>31</sup> He goes on by showing that the danger that threatens any perspective that “aims higher than its moral sources can sustain”<sup>32</sup> is to repeat the same mistakes of the past that it seeks to avoid. The hidden side of this philanthropy anchored in humanism is the continual disappointment caused by human failure, which will finally lead one to withdraw or to force the other to “help themselves”. Hence, this reality of human failure will eventually cause the action that started as philanthropy to incorporate aggression and even hatred. Ironically, Taylor notes that humanism makes itself guilty of the same despotism that it criticizes in the medieval societies dominated by religion. On the other hand, the anti-humanists don’t place much hope in men, but they are also not interested in investing in philanthropy. This line of thought would eventually adopt indifference as their attitude towards other.

The question that ultimately raises is, from Taylor’s perspective, “how to have the greatest degree of philanthropic action with the minimum hope put in mankind?”.<sup>33</sup> He suggests that the only solution is to maintain an unconditional love for the beneficiary. Yet, this thing is only possible for us, human beings, “to the extent that we open ourselves to God, which means in fact overstepping the limits set in theory by exclusive humanism”.<sup>34</sup> Hence, the value does not lay anymore in what one accomplishes in oneself, nor in what one accomplishes in the other, but in the main feature that lays at the base of human action, namely that of being created in God’s own image. This becomes the source of any identity and the source of philanthropic action.<sup>35</sup> This consciousness of being created in God’s image is not something that one applies only for oneself, but the principle is extended to any human being. In this respect, Yirmiyahu describes a tolerant mentality as one that engulfs the capacity of seeing the human value of the other as an echo of one’s own humanness. The decision to respect someone whose way of life and principles one disapproves of, comes from the condition of perfectibility of ones still open human possibilities, which he calls “the right to err”.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Deconstructia politicii*, p. 135.

<sup>31</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modenity?*, p. 31.

<sup>32</sup> *Idem*, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> *Idem*, p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> *Idem*, p. 35.

<sup>35</sup> The idea is similar to what Forst noted relatively to tolerance in the Christian understanding: it is more than a relation to the self or to the other, it is a relation to God.

<sup>36</sup> Yovel, Yirmiyahu, “Tolerance as Grace and Rightful Recognition”, pp. 909.

### 3. Several Conclusions

The problem of tolerance is a very complex subject and the present paper, as I have already mentioned, approaches just a limited part of it, focusing on the relations and consequences brought about by the claim of neutrality and pluralism as well as the lack of a functional foundation of the postmodern moral ideals. Although this process of analysis does not allow one to come up with a new formula of tolerance, there are still some preliminary conclusions that can be drawn with regard to its conditions of possibility.

First of all, tolerance implies and requires the freedom to believe what one acknowledges as true. It presumes to have a position that one stands for and to establish a right relation with the people whose ideas one disapproves of. Only the consciousness that is engaged in some belief can be tolerant. Otherwise it is about indifference. The solution for the dilemma of goodness and truth is not to give up truth (actually, history gave us the lesson that when compelled to choose between life and truth, many had chosen truth).

Besides having a position that one stands for, tolerance implies valuing the other as a human being beyond one's beliefs. This is only possible when, as Lévinas notes, tolerance is an intrinsic value of the adopted belief system.<sup>37</sup> This requires a faith that would value the other not for what he or she believes, but even against that.

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<sup>37</sup> Lévinas, Emanuel, *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 173.

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