

## Resenha

Toleration in Conflict: Past and Present<sup>1</sup>

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Tolerance and toleration, especially at times of conflict are, indeed, hard to come by. But what are exactly these words? What do they mean? Forst addresses these questions in a thorough manner. He argues in favor of recognizing that there is but one concept of *toleration*, and four conceptions of it. But first let me set the stage of what are the four meanings of “toleration in conflict”: 1) it can be “an attitude or practice that is only called for within social conflicts of a certain kind” (Forst 2013:1), not solving conflicts, merely containing them; 2) that the demand for toleration arises with conflicts — not existing prior to nor beyond them, toleration is an integral part of conflicts being, itself, an “interested party”; 3) that toleration not only is an interested party in conflicts but also the object of conflicts itself; 4) that there is a conflict within the concept of toleration itself, derived from the fact that there is only one concept of toleration, even though differing conceptions have been formulated over time.

Having said that, Forst addresses the pressing issue of concept and conceptions of toleration. A concept can be defined as basic semantic components, whereas conceptions are interpretations of these elements/components. There are six such components that, taken together, form the concept of toleration: the context of toleration; the objection component; the acceptance component; the limits of toleration; that tolerance is exercised by one’s own free will; and that the concept of toleration can subsume either the need to contemplate minorities with certain rights and personal tolerance towards practices one is not personally fond of. To better grasp the concept one needs three elements: to understand the history of the conceptualization of toleration; to examine the concept in its normative and epistemological dimensions; and to situate the concept in today’s conflicts, evaluating its content objectively.

As for the conceptions, the first one is the “permission conception” — the majority allows the minority (ies) to keep on exercising their convictions and going about their businesses so long they do not question the authority of the majority. Furthermore, so long the minorities do not demand equal political status based on equal rights they can be tolerated according to a twofold paradigm: 1) pragmatically, for, they do not disturb the law and order; and 2) in terms of normative principle for, as being viewed as illegitimate, they are not expected to be able to convince “dwellers” of the majority to “change sides”. Here the toleration relation is vertical. The “coexistence conception” presents some attributes in common with the first view, but also has its own idiosyncrasies. The pragmatic dimension of toleration is maintained. Its instrumental dimension is not. Now there is no dominant majority and no practically irrelevant minorities, but groups of roughly equal sizes

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1 FORST, Rainer; “*Toleration in Conflict: Past and Present*”; Cambridge University Press, United States of America, New York, 2013; 662 pp. ISBN: 978-0-521-88577-5 Hardback.

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that recognize that they must exercise toleration to further their own interests. This happens because, being the social groups of roughly equal strength, they realize that not to tolerate one other can lead to a fraying of the social fabric that, *ad postremum*, can prove to be the undoing of society. Here the toleration relation is horizontal. Adversely however, if one group can manage to get the upper hand over the others the “reason to tolerate” whilom present is completely wiped out.

The “respect conception” is grounded on mutual respect. Even though the tolerating parties have differing visions about a great variety of things they tolerate one another as autonomous individuals and as equals, part of a political community which functions under the rule of law and norms that do not privilege any particular group or community and that have general and reciprocal validity. As for the “esteem conception”, it presupposes a more inclusive view of mutual recognition. More than respecting other convictions, practices and creeds, these sets of ideas and actions are esteemed as being ethically valuable. However, so that the objection component is not lost, Forst argues that one is advised to treat the “esteem conception” with certain reservations.

Forst’s conceptualization of toleration is an enormous contribution to the debate. The discussion is important to better grasp the subject, what contributes to a more tolerating society. The issue is specially pressing for societies are becoming more and more plural and we are experiencing the rise of new conflicts and the worsening of old ones. Examples are legion but the case of Europe is notably enlightening.

The book is divided into two parts. In the first Forst analyses historically the discourse of toleration with two objectives in mind: 1) to highlight the social and normative dynamics of the concept and the legitimization relations that ground it, be they questioned or not; and 2) to present their strengths and weaknesses, in order to construct a theory that goes beyond them. In the second part the author presents the kernel of his proposed concept of toleration.

The book makes us think about the importance of toleration, either internationally or domestically. Additionally it also discusses the virtues of tolerance and the qualities and prospects of a more tolerant society. In a world in dire need of more understanding and dialogue between different cultures and reduction of violent conflict levels, derived, in no insignificant part, from lack of tolerance, it is only evident the significance and appropriateness of a book put together along these lines. It is an excellent read that might interest International Relations, Sociology and Philosophy students and practitioners.

**Key-words:** toleration; concept; conceptions

**Palavras-chave:** tolerância; conceito; concepções

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