

De grenzen van verdraagzaamheid

Limits to tolerance. No tolerance without disapproval. Passive tolerance means neglect. Active tolerance means engagement. No progress without response.

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Submission to the 2016 essay contest by NRC-Handelsblad and Koninklijke Hollandsche Maatschappij der Wetenschappen (KHMW). ² This submission has a title in Dutch and a body text in English (the lingua franca of science).



Introduction

Human tolerance – differing from other kinds of tolerance like in plants or engineering – concerns any form of *thought* or *behaviour*. The notion applies also when thought is expressed by behaviour, or when behaviour results into lasting appearances or artifacts or their elimination.

Gerrit Mannoury (1867-1956) defined "significs" as the "theory of the means of human understanding". ³ Many misunderstandings arise when people fail to use the proper means for communication. Issues of tolerance have only real meaning when we are sure that people actually do understand each other. In 1902 Mannoury got his degree of teacher of mathematics. Already before the First World War he wondered about human communication, and the war spurred that interest. In the Second World War, he wrote on his Handbook, that he published in two parts in 1947 and 1948. It is awkward that this Handbook got no translation into English yet. A.D. de Groot (1914-2006) was one of his pupils, and he became known as a co-founder of cognitive psychology, author on the methodology of science, and developer of Forum Theory – see below. ⁴ It is fortunate that the Dutch scientific NWO has a recent project on this origin and influence of Mannoury, even though there has been an intolerant glitch in its execution. ⁵

Let us consider tolerance under the assumption that people understand each other.

- Tolerance is partly a topic of ethics, with all kinds of do's and don't's, ranging from conscious taboo to non-conscious habit. Deontic logic ⁶ gives the threesome of Ought, Allowed and Not-Allowed, and they relate – lexicographically – to the distinction in

¹ Colignatus is the name in science of Thomas Cool, econometrician (Groningen 1982) and teacher of mathematics (Leiden 2008), <http://thomascool.eu>.

² See the disclaimer at the end of this essay.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerrit_Mannoury See also <https://boycottholland.wordpress.com/2015/11/24/a-general-theory-of-knowledge>

⁴ https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adriaan_de_Groot

⁵ <https://boycottholland.wordpress.com/2016/03/21/f-a-muller-everyone-is-welcome>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deontic_logic. Wikipedia is a portal and no source.

economics between preference and indifference and the available budget set. Some aspects are discussed in my book "A Logic of Exceptions".⁷

- History has generated our systems of democracy and law,⁸ with science and education and the free press.⁹ For the democratic aggregation of individual preferences into a collective preference, see my book "Voting Theory for Democracy".¹⁰ Who assumes the existence of God as an independent authority for morality must accept, also for this essay, that science assumes no God, see my essay "The simple mathematics of Jesus".¹¹
- Presumably there are pragmatic issues discussed in psychology, but I have no qualification for this field.¹²

While tolerance also concerns behaviour, the core issue of tolerance concerns *thought*. For this essay, it will be sufficient to look at tolerance w.r.t. free thought and free speech. For example, can we allow people to say what is on their mind ?

The discussion about free speech must be as old as humanity itself. Western Enlightenment came about by Spinoza around 1650,¹³ Hume around 1750 and Kant a bit later.¹⁴

- An important result of Western Enlightenment is that for social harmony it doesn't matter much what people think, and that it suffices to regulate what people actually say. Conventions on politeness help smooth social intercourse.
- Alternatively, man is a social animal and people still tend to want to know what other people think. Then it becomes an issue whether people actually say or don't say what they think. There are frequently issues in society that remind of a "thought police".

A recent case of free speech and tolerance was when German comedian (cabaretier, satyrist) Jan Böhmermann made a "poem" about the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan.¹⁵ Personally, I was sympathetic to Erdogan at the beginning of his political career because I felt that ideas should not be suppressed and that it took courage of Erdogan and his AK-party to express them. Yet, after Erdogan got in power he apparently forgot about the importance of democracy and tolerance, and appears to lean to dictatorship himself too. It doesn't help that the electoral system in Turkey is undemocratic, and it doesn't help that most other countries have such undemocratic electoral systems, like even the USA, England and France, which thus set bad examples.¹⁶ Comedians should consider making jokes about Dutch politician Hans van Mierlo (1931-2010) and his D66-party and their crooked ideas on democracy.¹⁷

Let us first identify key ideas for tolerance and free speech, subsequently identify methods to support an open mind, and then try for a conclusion.

⁷ <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/ALOE/Index.html>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Concept_of_Law

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Freedoms

¹⁰ <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/VTFD/Index.html>

¹¹ <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/SMOJ/Index.html>

¹² <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/Institute/Institute.html>

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baruch_Spinoza

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlightenment_in_Western_secular_tradition Wikipedia quotes Kant 1784: "Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is the incapacity to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. Such tutelage is self-imposed if its cause is not lack of intelligence, but rather a lack of determination and courage to use one's intelligence without being guided by another."

¹⁵ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36317006>

¹⁶ <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/VTFD/Index.html>

¹⁷ <https://boycottholland.wordpress.com/2015/05/12/d66-con-on-the-2015-uk-general-elections> In Dutch (1) <http://thomascool.eu/Thomas/Nederlands/Wetenschap/Artikelen/2013-02-14-PasOpMetWiskundeOverVerkiezingen.html> and (2) my pamphlet "Laat D66 zich opheffen" <http://thomascool.eu/SvHG/LDZO/Index.html>

Key ideas for tolerance and free speech, and a lack of proper focus

The label "tolerant society" doesn't exclude agreement but merely emphasizes the response to disagreement. For acts of tolerance, the English psychiatrist Theodore Dalrymple is quoted for "No tolerance without disapproval".¹⁸ For this essay we concentrate on disapproval. It is part of free speech that listeners may not only experience disapproval but actually show it. What to think about this action and reaction?

Key ideas for tolerance and free speech are, see also the Table below:

- Conventional discussion on free speech – see the Böhmermann / Ergogan case – concerns the distinction between on the one hand "speaking truth" – including speaking truth to power – and on the other hand (the risk of) giving offence, including blasphemy and insulting people. Some speakers may actually have the objective of insult, as a way to pry open closed minds, if not the minds of their target but those of bystanders. Bickering and insulting people may also be an expression of the "thought police". This conventional discussion is of lesser importance however than the next issue.
- Freedom of speech is useless when others will not listen. Progress in understanding requires that people respond to what is being said. Engagement can be called *active* tolerance. The alternative is neglect, e.g. as *passive* tolerance. Put each and everyone in (steel) bubbles apart from others, and let people say what they like: and there will be no communication. Sometimes neglect might be a good response to bickering. Then, however, the emphasis is on *bickering* and *social strife*. To avoid bickering, the proper response however is not neglect but engagement with an open mind. Neglect need not only be *passive* tolerance but can actually also be an *active* form of intolerance, namely with the objective of burking.

These ways to deal with disapproval are collected in the following Table. The conventional discussion opposes tolerance to intolerance as (a) to (d). However, the real threat is (b). The overall solution is (c). The real issue is to have an open mind.

<i>Forms of behaviour</i>	<i>Tolerance</i>	<i>Intolerance</i>
<i>Neglect</i>	(a) Against bickering	(b) Burking
<i>Non-neglect</i>	(c) Engagement	(d) Thought police

Option (c) of engagement has a subdistinction. (c1) My emphasis is on *reply on content*. There is also the aspect (c2) of regulation, that looks at *form*. For example the law may enshrine tolerance in rules of conduct. If there would be abuse under (d), then the response could be under (c2) to protect *proper* free speech by *censoring abuse*. Courts would establish what abuse is.

Legal issues can be complicated. Consider e.g. muslims who do not denounce terrorism and who might be accused of thus allowing for it. They might feel obliged to contest that accusation. In some realms of law one accepts implicitly any accusation that one does not contest explicitly. Some realms of law cannot force people to speak. It is not inconceivable that remaining silent might potentially be insulting too. Legal considerations would require an essay on law, for which I am not qualified. Hence, this essay looks at engagement on content.

Engagement *on content* appears to be a much neglected *core issue* for current society. By not-neglecting old ideas but approaching them with an open mind, new ideas will tend to arise. Neglect by others of such new ideas blocks advancement. This has been the theme of my 2012 book collection of columns "Festival van Ongehoorde Ideeën" (FOI) (Festival of Unheard-Of Ideas).¹⁹ FOI has been published but has typically been neglected, which again shows that publication is necessary but not sufficient.

¹⁸ <http://www.khmw.nl/actueel/prijsvraag-2016/234>
¹⁹ <http://thomascool.eu/SvHG/FOI/Index.html>

I have advised twice that Dutch Parliament makes an enquiry. There has been no reply on content. This neglect basically implies that I would give such advice without sound thought. This neglect thus is rather insulting. There is no protection against such insult. One learns to live with it by reminding oneself that these are the conditions of the current state of democracy. "Forgive them, they don't know what they are doing."

- The first advice dates from 1990 and concerns the causes of mass unemployment and the role by policy preparation, in particular the role by the Dutch Central Planning Bureau (CPB). This has been updated after 2007 with the financial crisis and the euro.²⁰
- The second advice dates from 2008 and concerns education in mathematics and the confusion with so-called "mathematics".²¹

Ways to support an open mind are science and education

Ways to support an open mind are available in science and education. Mannoury, mentioned above, also looked at these ways.

- For finding truth there is science and its *methodology*. See the Table below for the general idea of the design of cheaper tests to distinguish scientific claims (with golden standard) from pseudo-science. A.D. de Groot originally concentrated on more objective methods but observed that these had their limitations. Subsequently he focused on behaviour by scientists, and developed Forum Theory.²² Forum theory indeed looks at form again, but it is targeted at causing *reply on content*. This got some opposition by A. Smaling.²³ De Groot observes that one must make a choice on what is the null hypothesis about scientific truth and what are the alternatives. The issue itself may be undecided but it is not without consequence when the Forum chooses something as the null hypothesis. Smaling emphasizes dialogue and empathy as opposed to such tough choice. Indeed, in research one has the luxury of postponing a decision. However, in society there are decision makers who require immediate policy advice, like when testing children for their school careers.²⁴ It is advisable that Forum Theory gets more attention.
- Education tends to present results of science, and should rather also present science as a quest. In education there is the theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Lev Vygotsky).²⁵ For example, in Plato's "Meno" about 350 BC, there is a dialogue between Socrates and an anonymous slave boy.²⁶ The topic is the application of the Pythagorean Theorem to the diagonal of a square. The boy has some geometric insight in the right hemisphere of his brain but no relevant numeric and linguistic connections to this information in the left hemisphere. Socrates guides the boy, by using leading questions, to establish some connections, till "the coin drops". The philosophical discussion of this phenomenon has been awkward for 2350 years. It is advisable that philosophers adopt the empirical science of didactics of mathematics as their foundation in empirics, to help prevent that they get lost in abstraction. See my book "Elegance with Substance".²⁷

<i>Test quality</i>	<i>Scientific claim</i>	<i>Pseudo-science</i>
Test positive	True positive	False positive
Test negative	False negative	True negative

²⁰ http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/PE_werk_CPB

²¹ <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/tk-onderzoek-wiskundeonderwijs>

²² <https://www.knaw.nl/nl/actueel/publicaties/het-forumwaarmerk-van-wetenschap>

²³ <http://www.epub.nl/boeken/510/dialogoog-en-empathie-in-de-methodologie>

²⁴ A.D. de Groot helped found CITO. <http://www.cito.nl>

²⁵ Quoted from <http://www.simplypsychology.org/Zone-of-Proximal-Development.html>

²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meno's_slave (and check the diagram there)

²⁷ <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/Math/Index.html>

Conclusion

The conventional approach to problems with free speech and tolerance is locked in the space that is set by the parameters of "thought police" and neglect of bickering. One can learn to neglect what others say, and there is only need of intervention for violence.

This convention derives from newsmedia that must sell subscriptions and advertisements. Little sells better than controversy. This convention creates limits to tolerance, but actually the approach itself is limited.

Instead, neglect is the core problem of our society. What we need is listening and reply on content. Science and education are ways to support this. Who will listen to this ?

Disclaimer for my website – No part of the essay

This disclaimer is for my website and is no part of this essay.

This essay has not been written under full freedom. The title and some conditions have been set by the editors of the essay contest. Since it concerns a contest, the presumptions of the sponsors and jury (editors) are that the author has the objective to win, and that he will do so against the backdrop of his own expectations of what competing authors will write about. The author is expected to imagine all possible essays that he and others might submit, and then select the best essay. If there is no fair chance of winning then the author should save both himself and the jury the tedium of submission. However, it is also possible that the author submits a fine essay and then, when it has been not been chosen as the winner, can argue that this again shows that Holland has a closed mind. This development depends upon the quality of the essay that the jury will select, for it is always possible that another essay indeed is better.

The conditions of this NRC-KHMW 2016 essay contest have been, in translation:

- (1) The title: "De grenzen van verdraagzaamheid" (Dutch for "The limits to tolerance").
- (2) The explanation: "The English psychiatrist and author Theodore Dalrymple said: "No tolerance without disapproval." Tolerance is something else than indifference, and certainly no passive virtue. If disapproval is also an essential component of tolerance, how does the balance come about between "disapprove" and "allow" ?" (My translation.)
- (3) The editors / jury: "Peter A.H. van Lieshout, professor on the theory of care, member of the scientific council for government policy. Ineke Sluiter, professor of Greek. Christiaan Weijts, author with a degree in Dutch literature."

Perhaps this is the place to congratulate my former colleague Bart Kuipers who won the contest in 2014 on the question of what would be the most important invention of the last century. His answer back in 1996 and for this essay in 2014 was: the container (in transport).²⁸ I may admit that the container also affected my life²⁹ but in my view the answer to this question is computer algebra, i.e. doing mathematics on the computer. This invention can be equated to the invention of the wheel or the alphabet. I already stated the latter in my "The Economics Pack. Applications of *Mathematica*", and I saw no reason to write an "essay" on this.³⁰ It is unfortunate that the world of education is very slow in accepting computer algebra, so that this insight has no general recognition yet.

²⁸ <http://www.nrc.nl/handelsblad/2014/10/11/ja-de-container-is-uitvinding-van-de-eeuw-1427438>

²⁹ <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/TSOM/Index.html>

³⁰ <http://thomascool.eu/TheEconomicsPack/index.html>