

Obstacles and Limits to Tolerance

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We have presented tolerance, right from the foreword upon which the present study opens, as the difficult course of a crested road between intolerance and the intolerable. Intolerance constitutes the obstacle never surmounted, the intolerable, the limit opposed to the abuses of a tolerance that has slid to indifference.

The three articles reunited in this last section echo those which have been placed under the title: to think tolerance. As has once been said, to think, it concerning a difficult virtue, is to think twice against: against that which makes obstacle, against that which disarms and denatures. The first of these three articles shows, in the dissonance between the respect owed to human rights and the respect asked by all cultures, the ultimate source of intolerance, which makes of it at the same time the first intolerable. It is principally no longer the imperialism of great cultural monologues that makes for a problem today, but pluralism itself behind its multiple faces. The perils of difference succeed then to those of identity. The non-allowance of prohibiting must in its turn henceforth find its limits. Posed in these terms the problem has an epistemological dimension, to the extent that the criteria of validity applied to beliefs are put into question; but it includes also a moral and legal dimension, to the extent that the question of limits touches upon the right to expression; finally a spiritual problem, to the extent that the balance between obstacle and limit rests on a practical wisdom capable of inspiring the education of tolerance.

The second article takes the difficulty to its radical degree, since the ultimate request within which tolerance is summed up consists in recommending to tolerate that which we don't like, that which we morally disapprove. It is in this that tolerance proves to be a virtue. It is as virtue that it encounters its limit with the question: "how far tolerate?" If it concerned myself alone, I would say:

“all the way !” It concerning license in public space, one has to say: up to the point in which intolerable wrongs in the eyes of enlightened consciousnesses would denounce tolerance as a passivity in the face of the wrong committed, and consequently in the face of the wrong suffered by the most vulnerable.

It is to this function of alarm and alert of the intolerable, it is said in the third article, that the indignation sparked by the intolerable addresses itself, when the asceticism of tolerance, exceeding in a sense its goal, turns against itself in the figure of indifference.