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French philosopher Pascal Bruckner accused Ian Buruma and Timothy Garton Ash of propagating a form of multiculturalism that amounts to legal apartheid. His fiery polemic unleashed an international debate. By now Timothy Garton Ash, Necla Kelek and Paul Cliteur have all entered the ring. Read their contributions as well as Ian Buruma's initial response here.

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The logic of tolerance

In questions of reason and freedom, societies, like individuals, have to make a choice, says Swedish author Lars Gustafsson

Old Thomas Buckle in his "Civilization in England" was rightly convinced that democratic, scientific and technological progress in Europe had its origin in a major change in British mentality in the mid-seventeenth century when, even in the disquisitions of leading theologians, the **demand for infallible arguments** took the place of infallible faith.

This type of rationality, exposed long before the Enlightenment by Descartes and Leibniz, is, if we follow Buckle, not only the foundation of science but of democracy as a whole.

The gist of this is of course the idea that rationality is a method, not a conviction and that this method can be applied to nature, man and society. And even to religion. As Buckle puts it:

"Reason gives us knowledge; while faith only gives us belief, which is a part of knowledge, and is, therefore, inferior to it."

In Buckle's understanding of history this step from dogmatism to methodic rationalism was the decisive one towards **political freedom**.

At the heart of the present debate between Ian Buruma and Timothy Garton Ash on one hand, and Pascal Bruckner and others on the other, seems to be the question whether irrationality deserves the same amount of tolerance as rationality. Or in other words; is the rational approach a creed among other creeds, deserving no more, no less tolerance than the other ones, whatever measure of irrationality and fanaticism they might expose?

This – in my view, rather feeble-minded, relativism, as far as I can see, represented in the debate by among others Ian Buruma and Timothy Garton Ash – makes it possible to accuse those who believe in Western tolerance and democratic freedoms of "Enlightenment fundamentalism."

The idea is obviously that western rationality is a set of dogmas, in no way different from other dogmatic outlooks and demands on the world. Under the dubious pretext of multiculturalism, we are supposed to be obliged to treat all dogmas, all possible

authoritarian political and moral demands with equal respect.

This is of course impossible. Not only because the concept of "culture" is an extremely fuzzy one. At the core is the confusion between dogma and rationality, between Buckley's infallible beliefs and infallible arguments.

Religious creeds and scientific rationality, which is the basis of Western democracy, are simply **not in competition**. There is no Christian or Muslim approach to, say, biochemistry. Religions are obviously not based on empirical observation, measurement, logical inference and deduction.

But more importantly; the demands of all "cultures" are not compatible. Of course monotheists, atheists and polytheists should (in the ideal case) be able to live peacefully side by side. But Sharia law and western democracy, orthodox biblical family law which demands capital punishment for gay relations and modern family law – which in most progressive countries permits sexual relations between persons of the same gender – are certainly incompatible. There is no way to **talk away this incompatibility** by vague reference to multiculturalism.

There is an interpretation of the concept of tolerance where the word becomes meaningless and the concept becomes empty. That occurs when it is applied to anything and everything without discretion. To claim that we owe tolerance to everything and everybody is mindless in the same way that it is pointless to say that everything we encounter is an illusion. Which makes it senseless to make a distinction between true and forged money, hallucinations and everyday experience.

There is a **logic of tolerance**, which remains to be formalized by some future philosopher. Let me, as a starter, suggest two fairly obvious axioms:

- Tolerance of intolerance yields intolerance.
- Intolerance of intolerance yields tolerance.

In other words, in questions of reason and freedom, societies, like individuals, have to make a choice. You cannot have everything at the same time. This holds for original dwellers as for newcomers alike.

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