

2. Universal toleration becomes questionable when its rationale no longer prevails, when tolerance is administered to manipulated individuals who parrot, as their own, the opinion of their masters, for whom heteronomy has become autonomy.

-Herbert Marcuse, "*Repressive tolerance*" (1965)

The word tolerance has come up ever more frequently especially as the world has been confronted with problems that had never presented themselves at this scale. In fact globalization, in political economical terms, and the widespread integration of cultures, diversity and opinions, have resulted in numerous benefits for humanity yet also in conflict and violence.

Herbert Marcuse sheds light upon the question in his work "*Repressive Tolerance*" and in this particular quote highlights the fact that universal tolerance is put into doubt in certain circumstances. Marcuse explains that tolerance is in fact questioned when its rationale no longer prevails and when tolerance is extended to those who limit themselves to repeating, without thinking, the opinions of their masters.

In this essay it will be shown how philosophical tolerance, as in the acceptance of a myriad of views and opinions, is a fundament of progress where progress is considered as the process initiated by humanity of arriving to a universal truth, if the ones to whom it applies view individuality (in turn the fundament of tolerance) as a mean to reach this truth who presume fallibility of their own opinions. It will also be shown that Marcuse is correct in considering negative for human society individuals who "parrot" the opinions of their masters as well as those who presume infallibility and how tolerance, while being beneficial also presents complications.

### **Diverse opinions and progress**

World literature has dedicated space to the theme of different opinions coexisting with each other especially in the twentieth century, where intolerance was at the base of a myriad of societies with totalitarian governments. As the problem became more and more complex, authors around the world began inciting consciousness through their work, as has been done by Berthold Brecht and Antonio Tabucchi. The first of these through the theatrical script "*Life of Galileo*" portrayed the story of Galileo Galilei's struggle as a philosopher, making scientific breakthroughs in a country where culture was still under the strict control of the Catholic Church, which through repression wanted to avoid the fallibility of its principles. Galileo through the expression of his new theories, in his work "*Dialogue over the two principle systems of the world*" placed the foundations for the scientific revolution, which were of course suppressed by the Catholic Church but brought forward by one of his pupils, to whom Galileo had donated knowledge of his discoveries and his very last book to smuggle into a more tolerant territory. Thus a dissenting opinion from knowledge that was retained true signified the beginning of a revolution.

Similarly Antonio Tabucchi in his work "*Pereira maintains*" narrates the story of a journalist living under Salazar's dictatorship in Portugal. In the story, when the protagonist Pereira finds his courage, lost after the death of his wife, and regained through the acquaintance of a young revolutionary, he fearlessly publishes an article about the actions of the government in repression and suppression of dissent, which provokes a spark and ignites the revolution against the brutal dictatorship.

Both accounts underline how one mere contrasting opinion was able to inspire change and was able to advance truth, in one case scientific in the other political.

But if in literature the conception of difference in opinion as a fundament of truth has been made clear, in science it results just as evident. Science in fact has always been based upon the confrontation between different hypotheses and the continuous proving and disproving of different theories. One could note the famous example of Galilean relativity previously considered to be universally true until Einstein shocked the physical world with his theory of relativity. This shows how the continuous formulation of different theories has led us forward in our search for scientific truth.

### **Justification for tolerance**

We have now considered practical examples of how different and heterogeneous opinions are beneficial to society itself yet how can this be philosophically justified? In order to do this successfully we will introduce a distinction and consider two different cases: the first involves the expression of a different opinion that is wrong, the second of one that is right.

If a wrong opinion were to be expressed, it would still be beneficial to society as if one universal truth were to exist the demonstration of a wrong opinion would only lead us to exclude possibilities and thus be closer to obtaining the universal one, while if universal truth were for us unobtainable, each wrong opinion would only lead us to an opinion that is closer to being true. Some could object that suppressing wrong opinions protects the right one and protects society from wrong, yet this would presume infallibility of the right opinion. In fact, as Popper states, the acceptance of infallibility is the only element that can lead humanity to a more stable and solid truth. Also wrong opinions can only strengthen conviction of the righteous ones, for example under tyranny or under totalitarian governments man is led to value freedom and liberty even more so, as during wars man is led to value peace. History has given us proof of this: after World War II many nations decided to establish federations and pacts in order to maintain peace. Yet wrong opinions can also stimulate us to find different types of proof or demonstrations for right and can thus strengthen our conviction in the more righteous opinions.

Yet the expression of different opinions results beneficial also if what is proposed is right. This results obvious if what is right is not already known, which would cause the wrong to be abandoned. Though if one degree of right is known and another is proposed, two different cases must be considered: if universal truth exists and we are already in possession of it, a different formulation can only remind us of it and prompt us to demonstrate it in a different way thus avoiding truth to become a dogma; if we are not in possession of the universal truth than another degree of truth can only help us obtain it or lead us closer to it.

This shows that the critical spirit that can be applied in a context where many opinions exist is the foundation for the process of acquiring a more stable truth. This though has value when all of the components of the system accept fallibility or that their opinion could be wrong. This means that these members are inclined to change opinion when another more convincing one is put forth.

### **Individuality and tolerance**

We have now demonstrated why philosophical tolerance and thus the existence of different opinions, may they be right or wrong, is beneficial to society and to each component of it as it leads us to truth. Yet what happens when this tolerance is extended to those who limit themselves to

repeating without thinking the opinions of others? For Marcuse universal tolerance, which we have demonstrated to be beneficial is put into question.

In fact the proof that we have given in the previous section works if and only if all of the members of society that are acting in the system of tolerance are rational and accept fallibility of opinions. In this case one that proposes an opinion would immediately reject it if a more convincing one were put forth. Yet it is easy to say that this does not happen and two reasons can be noted: 1) tolerance itself is a mean to defend individuality, 2) individuality is not for everyone a mean to reach truth.

Individuality is what John Stuart Mill defines as being foundational to the research of truth, in fact the variety of opinions that characterize individuals with different lives, backgrounds and views is what drives progress (intended as the obtainment of truth or a higher degree of such). It is also important to note that tolerance itself would not exist without individuality as it would not exist if there were no different opinion to tolerate. The problem thus becomes how individuality is perceived: some, those who accept fallibility and accept and embrace critical spirit, consider individuality as a mean to reach truth; others, those who do not accept fallibility and do not embrace critical spirit, consider individuality as a mean to impose the truth that they believe to be so or to impose their control over others (the "masters"); the remaining ones are those who do not exercise critique and who limit themselves to following and repeating opinions of others without thinking (the "indoctrinated individuals who parrot"). Only the first type of people are the ones who apply to Mill's vision of individuality and who are able to make the expression of different opinions beneficial.

The masters and their followers, as Marcuse implies, pose a great threat to society, which can be observed in our own world today. People who possess radical views such as religious extremists are so convinced of the infallibility of their opinions that they try to impose their beliefs upon others through violence (one could note the terrorist attacks committed by extremists). Those who are recruited and those that are attracted by the violence that is put forward by these individuals, limit themselves to following this nonsense without even the slightest of doubts and without any sort of reflection. Yet also some of those who propose solutions to the problem of religious extremism provide examples for this type of behavior. In fact those who propose cultural closure, isolation, mass deportations and other populist views presume infallibility and are followed by those who, by not reflecting, are attracted to solutions which seem simple and rapid.

Because it results evident that our present society is not entirely composed of individuals who view individuality as a mean to obtain truth and that in this society the coexistence of different opinions can lead to benefits but also conflict, two options can be found: 1) exercising intolerance toward those who presume infallibility and those who solely follow and do not reason, 2) continuing the practice of universal toleration. The first of these solutions results inadequate as intolerance would have to be exercised by the group of people that accept fallibility, yet they would be by exercising intolerance to others presuming infallibility itself, thus halting the process of the acquisition of truth.

The only option that seems viable is to continue exercising universal tolerance. Yet there are some steps that can be taken to ensure that more and more people begin to accept fallibility and contribute actively and positively to society such as expanding education and in particular of history and philosophy. The study of history is in fact, as the famous historian Massimo Salvadori affirmed, the search for answers to present problems in the past; this results true as through the study of past events such as the horrors that traversed the previous century, man is able to gain more consciousness of how intolerance, repression and individuality as a mean to impose one's control or one's opinion is able to damage society and its components. Also the study of philosophy helps man

understand the power of confrontation, of critical spirit and the importance of diverse opinions, which if accompanied by a conscious individual are solely beneficial to society.

### **Conclusions**

It has now been shown how the existence of different opinions contributes to the obtainment of truth when the individuality upon which this form of self-expression is based is viewed solely as a mean to reach truth (thus presuming fallibility of opinions) and not as mean to impose oneself or one's opinions on others (thus presuming infallibility) and how the ones who do not use reason and who just follow opinions pose a threat just as great. Though practicing intolerance towards these figures seems like a solution, it is just as negative, as those who presume fallibility would do the opposite by limiting tolerance. Tolerance thus results essential and must be preserved, our only hope is that through education those who harm society can become conscious of their mistakes and begin contributing themselves to the common good.