Preston King: History Toleration and Friendship
ed. Kipton E. Jensen
New York: Peter Lang US, 2021
ISBN-10 : 1433190907

Chapter 7: Tolerance in an Intolerant Age [pp.125 - 140]

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The study of tolerance and toleration is today well established in the UK and elsewhere, with a strong bibliography consisting of monographs, articles and textbooks, and a research centre at the University of York dedicated to exploring the subject – the Morell Centre for Toleration. Such was certainly not the case fifty years ago; in so far as toleration was studied then it was as a relatively minor side issue raised by theories of liberty – there were virtually no recent studies dedicated to the topic. That changed in the early 1970s, and Preston King was central to the transformation that took place in these years. In 1971 the journal *Government and Opposition* published two landmark papers produced by the Morell Studies in Toleration, written by King and Bernard Crick (King, 1971: Crick 1971). Five years later King published *Toleration*, the first modern book-length study of the subject, reissued in a second edition in 1998 (King, 1976/1998). He can therefore be regarded as one of the modern creators of the discourse of toleration, although his approach to the subject via a detailed, closely-argued philosophical analysis of concept has been less influential than might have been expected – it is interesting that his work is not discussed, and barely referenced, in key texts such as Susan Mendus's *Toleration and the Limits of Liberalism* (1989) or Catriona McKinnon's *Toleration: A Critical Introduction* (2006).

In this essay I will focus not on the academic discourse of tolerance and toleration but on the actual practice, or more accurately non-practice, of the virtue in today's Britain (and, occasionally in the world at large) – not a study of the 'state of the art' but of the 'state of the nation' is my aim. In some respects, as will become apparent, my interest in the subject aligns me

more closely with Bernard Crick's approach than with that of Preston King but I will draw on both of them to define the subject, to establish what we are actually talking about. This will be a task for the first section of the paper which will close with discussion of an example of tolerance taken from Crick's text, chosen to show how far away we are from the world of 1971, in both a good way and a bad. The following sections will explore various battlegrounds where the politics of tolerance are now being fought – the rise of a moral culture of victimhood and the contemporary importance of identity politics and the various crimes and misdemeanours identified by these trends.

The Meaning of Tolerance

Bernard Crick begins his *Government and Opposition* paper with a very simple definition of tolerance as 'the degree to which we accept things of which we disapprove' (Crick, 1971: 144). Both Crick and King then complicate this simple definition by demonstrating that it contains a number of implicit elements.

First, it is clear that we can only tolerate things of which we disapprove. If we approve of something, or are indifferent to it, we don't need to tolerate it. This means that tolerance involves the making of a judgment, and if, as they believed we should, we set aside trivial examples, we are talking essentially about the making of a moral judgement. Of course, what constitutes a trivial matter if not easy to define in advance of specifics, and, as we will see later in this chapter, even to describe something as trivial can be problematic, but we will have to live with that for the time being.

Second, implicit in the idea of tolerance is that we could, if we choose, do something about whatever it is that we are tolerating. It makes no sense to say that I tolerate the fact that it usually rains on English Bank Holidays or that England usually underperform in international football tournaments, because there is nothing I can do about these regrettable regularities. Put differently, power is involved in the act of toleration. Those who tolerate are, by definition, in a position of power, in an unequal relationship with those who are tolerated. Such was clear when religious toleration became a policy

in England after 1688; the dominant Anglican Church, backed by the power of the state, extended toleration to non-conformist sects (but not to Roman Catholics). There is an element of condescension in toleration, an element of *de haute en bas* – in effect by tolerating you or your behaviour I am making a claim to superior power or status, I am saying that I could do something about this situation, but I choose not to. And condescension can mask contempt – the leftist manifesto *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* picked up on this fifty years ago, arguing that tolerance is not just a possible by-product of power, but actually serves the cause of domination – although the right kind of politically conscious toleration can mend the offence (Wolff, Barrington Moore & Marcuse, 1969).

But, third, sometimes I will not abstain – there are some things that we disapprove of that are intolerable, that, if we actually have the power to stop or prevent, we should use it. There is an interesting disagreement here between King and Crick in their 1971 papers. King assumes throughout his paper that intolerance is the opposite of tolerance, while Crick insists that this is not so. For Crick, '[the] opposite of tolerance is indifference (when disapproval does not arise); and the opposite of intolerance is full acceptance or love (when the disapproval vanishes)' (Crick, 1971: 162). This is important; for Crick there isn't a single scale on which all possible attitudes from tolerance to intolerance can be graded. King, on the other hand, by implicitly positing a single scale opens up the possibility of trade-offs between, for example, free speech and social justice, and Chapter 4 of *Toleration* is devoted precisely to the relationship between toleration and the pursuit of justice. Either way, what actually is intolerable is a matter for judgment and, of course, will vary from time to time and place to place.

There is, of course, much more that could be said about these three points and other issues of definition and clarification but my aim in this essay is to focus on the present, so we need to move on. A useful way of linking these early papers with current concerns is to take an extract from Crick's paper that was designed by him to illustrate the nature of toleration, and which we can use to show how different life is today from 1971. Nervous

readers are warned that in this extract Crick deliberately uses offensive language in order to drive home his argument:

> [I] tolerate *queers*, but I simply accept the fact that this friend of mine is a homosexual - so long as this, to me, secondary aspect of his behaviour does not impinge upon me, toleration does not arise. But to take queers as a category, I emphatically do not approve of them, that is a fact for which I will produce rationalizations if necessary (nepotism, decadence, unfair to women, threats to youth, purveyors of rubbish about effeminacy and great art etc.) And I do not think that I am being at all intolerant in expressing my dislike; but I was strongly in favour of changing the law, of extending toleration to them- that is a different matter. And if they feel that this is condescension, well so it is. (Crick, 1971: 151)

The first thing to note here is that it is nigh on impossible to imagine such sentiments towards homosexuals or homosexuality being expressed today in Britain or in the majority of western countries. Then, the decriminalisation of homosexuality brought about by the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 was only four years old, and, even then, extended only to the over 21s; social attitudes were still broadly hostile towards gays and lesbians. Now, the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act of 2013 has legalised equal marriage and social attitudes have changed dramatically. To use Crick's distinction noted above, tolerance has turned into indifference and intolerance has been replaced by (admittedly sometimes grudging) acceptance.

Striking though these welcome substantive changes are, in the context of the current rules for discourse, they are not the most interesting feature of these sentences. The latter are littered with what nowadays would be regarded as 'microagressions' if not outright 'hate speech'. 'Queer' was a term chosen by Crick because it was considered offensive back then. He was intending to shock – now it has been reclaimed by the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) community but is still regarded as offensive if employed by non-LGBT people, as is the term 'homosexual'.[1] Virtually every one of the

[1] LGBT is actually insufficiently inclusive – currently the correct acronym is Lgbtqiapd which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans* , queer/questioning, intersex, asexual/aromantic, pansexual/polysexual, demisexual.

rationalisations that Crick offers for his disapproval are offensive and, nowadays, would not be tolerated, although it should be noted that many of these offensive characterisations are still employed outside of the west – consider, for example, President Putin's response when LGBT people worried about their safety at the Winter Olympics in 2014 'you can be relaxed and calm (in Russia) but leave children alone please' (Walker, 2014).

These linguistic offences are serious, and for them alone Crick, were he to be still alive and expressing himself in the same way (which he is not and would not), would find himself 'no platformed' (i.e. denied permission to speak to university audiences) but a more important problem for a modern reader is indicated by a throwaway line in the first sentence. Crick describes his friend's homosexuality as a secondary aspect of his behaviour, unimportant to Crick because it does not affect their relationship of friendship. Both Crick, and, I think, King think of human beings as, first and foremost, human beings for whom characteristics such as sexual orientation (or for that matter, skin colour, or religion) are essentially secondary. This runs very much against the spirit of our age, where Identity and Diversity are key concepts. In our world, LGBT people are expected to identify as such, as are Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people, and beyond that they are supposed to think in ways that their Identity lays out for them.

Crick would, I think, have regarded the BME tag as lazy and insulting; given the meaninglessness of 'race' as a category, assuming that skin colour does, or, worse, should, determine attitudes is deeply disturbing, but some such assumption is nowadays embedded in common attitudes and institutional culture. Proportionate BME representation is sought by bodies such as the BBC, Police and the NHS, on the assumption that BME people have distinctive needs which will be promoted by BME representatives; a diverse workforce is not a workforce with diverse views, indeed, that kind of diversity is often actively discouraged, but rather a workforce that looks diverse, is composed of visible minorities. At least some of the people the

term BME is supposed to cover resent this terminology; for example, former Conservative cabinet minister Priti Patel has described the term as ‘patronising’ and ‘insulting’ (*The Telegraph* 10 March 2018) – but supporters of identity politics describe individuals such as Patel as ‘coconuts’ or (if over-influenced by US cookies) ‘Oreos’, that is dark on the outside white in the middle. Identity politics is a key feature of the current scene and a key generator of contemporary intolerance – failure to acknowledge other people’s identities, or to acknowledge one’s own is widely regarded as unacceptable. The one exception to the latter, rather paradoxically, is that white people are not expected to act as an identity group and will be accused of racism if they do – instead they should acknowledge, and apologise for, their ‘white privilege’; more on the problems this creates below.

Crick’s example of toleration in action can be seen as setting out the terms of contemporary intolerance, as an entry into the looking-glass world of contemporary notions of identity and difference and the ways in which they are enforced. An interesting way into the modern attitudes involved is provided by the notion of ‘cultural appropriation’.

Identity Politics and ‘Cultural Appropriation’

In 1971 both Crick and King made passing reference to clothing styles in their essays. Both agreed that they disapproved of, but tolerated, some contemporary fashions, essentially regarding the offence given as trivial. Many today would agree with both sentiments, but, for others, modes of dress are of much greater importance, and, in particular, it is considered important that people dress and behave in ways consistent with their identity. So, Mexicans may wear sombreros if they wish, but non-Mexicans wearing sombreros are engaged in the act of ‘cultural appropriation’ – I choose this particular illustration because Mexican-themed tequila parties where sombreros are worn have been the subject of numerous newspaper stories about political correctness at universities in the UK. Non-Mexicans who wear sombreros are accused of insulting Mexican culture, of taking something distinctive about that culture and implicitly devaluing it. To

illustrate the concept in its full manifestation, consider the most potent recent illustration of the notion of cultural appropriation has been the affair of the Cheongsam/Quipso in April 2018.

This affair began when an apparently Caucasian girl in Salt Lake City tweeted a photo of herself at her high school prom wearing the said garment; this tweet was answered by one Jeremy Lam thus 'My culture is NOT your goddam prom dress' (Lehman, 2018). This angry tweet was 'liked' 178,000 times and retweeted nearly 42,000 times. Although a rather smaller number of Chinese tweeters replied to the original in much more complimentary terms, happy to see 'their' national dress worn by an attractive young woman, this was seen by the majority of the twitterati as an example of an allegedly privileged white woman allegedly appropriating someone else's culture.

There are two obvious objections to this alleged offence. First, it is clearly the case that all 'cultures' today are intertwined to such a degree that to follow through the anti-cultural appropriation logic would be effectively impossible and, indeed. such has been the case for a very long time. The dress in question (the cheongsam in Cantonese Chinese or qipso in Mandarin) according to its Wikipedia entry was originally Manchu court dress, an alien import into mainstream Chinese culture, although others argue that it draws on earlier pre-Manchu styles. Similar mongrel origins can be found for virtually all cultural indicators, whether referencing clothing or food. Virtually no cultures are self-contained and uncontaminated by outside influences; the declaration that something is a cultural appropriation requires a prior decision to close down the inter-connection between cultures at an arbitrary point – thus the sombrero, a word which in the original Spanish designates a wide brimmed sun-hat, is fixed as a Mexican cultural icon in the way that the British bowler hat or French beret used to be part of the iconography of European nationhood. Nowadays very few Mexicans wear sombreros, and even fewer bowler hats or berets are worn in Britain and France because cultures are not static and customs change, but in a lazy way these items of clothing can still be invested with significance by commentators who are so inclined.

Second, even if this were not the case, it is very unclear what harm is done by this kind of cultural ‘appropriation’. The latter term is highly questionable in this context – colonial settlers have appropriated the land of indigenous peoples throughout history just as imperialists have appropriated the resources and sometimes the bodies of conquered peoples, but in those cases when something is appropriated it usually means that it is no longer available to the original owners. This is generally not the case when cultural appropriation is involved. It might be, of course, that the way in which a particular custom or cultural symbol is adopted might give offence, might indeed be designed to give offence – such might be the case if religious symbols are used merely as jewellery – but this was clearly not the case with the famous prom dress. Indeed, in some circumstances adoption of particular forms of dress may be designed to show respect and may be accepted as such – witness the way in which Samantha Cameron gained kudos for carrying off wearing a sari at Diwali celebrations while supporting the quite successful appeal for Indian and Sikh votes of her husband, Britain’s then Prime Minister, David Cameron. Admittedly Prime Minister David Cameron’s own turban-wearing was rather less successful, but no one in the relevant community was offended, as opposed to amused.

To get to the heart of the issue of cultural appropriation it may be helpful to examine another example, apparently very different although the logic involved is quite similar. Priyanka Chopra is an Indian actress, a former Miss World, the star of an American TV drama and a friend of the recently-minted Duchess of Sussex. She has been repeatedly trolled online by Hindu nationalists for wearing western dress, most recently for the offence of not wearing a sari at the Royal Wedding in May 2018. She has also been trolled for being photographed with what looked like an Indian flag while wearing a tee shirt and jeans, and for wearing a dress which exposed her legs when meeting Indian Prime Minister Modi (*The Indian Express* May 31, 2017). This is revealing in another way. Usually cultural appropriation is made manifest as a matter of westerners taking up non-western garb or customs, but Chopra can hardly be accused of appropriating western culture, and, in any case, no westerner has actually objected, Lam-style, to

her mode of dress. Instead, the attacks on her suggest that the real offence in her case, and perhaps all the others, is that of not allowing oneself to be defined by one's culture. It is this that is intolerable to some people. Identity politics requires that people think with and through their own identity and someone wearing clothing associated with an identity that is not 'theirs' is letting the side down and not to be tolerated. If such behaviour is allowed to go unchallenged, if everyone can wear whatever they want, then ultimately the identities upon which identity politics relies will be seen for what they really are, arbitrary differences which ought not to be politically significant. This cannot be allowed, and hence the online abuse.

'Microaggressions' and a Moral Culture of Victimhood.

I have described the intolerance involved in the notion of cultural appropriation as linked to identity politics. Another way of describing the same phenomenon, along with other so-called 'microaggressions' is as forming part of a culture of victimhood. Sociologists Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning link microaggressions, safe spaces and the new culture wars to *The Rise of Victimhood Culture* (2018). They set out three ideal-typical moral cultures, of Honour, Dignity and Victimhood. The Honour Culture, dominant in western societies until the mid-nineteenth century (and still to be found in some, usually low social-status, western communities today) prizes physical bravery above all other attributes and as a result encourages individuals to be sensitive towards perceived insult and to be always ready to take offence and defend their honour. The bourgeois Dignity culture that largely replaced the Honour culture in the West in the late nineteenth century encouraged instead a dignified indifference to insult on the principle that 'sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me'. Dignified individuals will attempt to compromise if their interests are harmed or, as a last resort, appeal to law, but they will not be personally aggressive, they abhor the practice of duelling and take 'live and let live' as their mantra.

Victimhood culture, the authors maintain, is a new set of ideas, currently mostly to be found in universities but spreading, which combines

elements of the preceding two cultures. On the one hand individuals are quick to take offence and specifically reject the idea that, 'words will never hurt me' – in this respect they follow the extreme sensitivity to insult of an Honour culture. But, unlike in an Honour culture, individuals are not expected to defend themselves from insult – instead, they appeal for assistance to 'the authorities' and for the support of their fellows, thereby casting themselves as victims, a status no man or woman of honour would readily assume. The logic here can be seen in the case of the famous prom dress; the complainant believed himself to have been insulted by the appropriation of the mode of dress in question, casting himself as a victim and appealing for support.

Part of the sensitivity to insult, illustrated by this case, is that the intention of the 'insulter' is irrelevant – what matters is that offence is taken not that it is intended. All that matters is that the complainant is offended by the act in question, and it is no defence to say that offence was not intended or, crucially, that the complainant is being unreasonable in taking offence. As in an Honour culture, the individual who is offended cannot be told that they are being unreasonable or 'blowing things out of all proportion' or 'making a mountain out of a molehill' – these are sayings appropriate to a Dignity-based culture, neither people of honour nor victims can be fobbed off in this way. This is the case with all forms of microaggressions, which are defined by one of the leading advocates of the notion as 'the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial, gender, and sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group' (Donald Wing Sue cited in Campbell and Manning, 2018, p. 3). Here, 'whether intentional or unintentional' reinforces the point that the motives of the offender are irrelevant. The effect of this, of course, is to make the charge of having committed a microaggression impossible to answer – if the alleged target believes him or herself to be the victim of a microaggression that is the end of the matter, the only possible response is that the charge of committing a microaggression itself constitutes a microaggression against

the original microaggressor. But this, as we will now see, is not a response available to all.

Interesting in the above definition is the identification of the potential targets of microaggression, namely, race, gender, sexual orientation and religion, and, in particular, the fact that social class does not appear on the list. This is interesting in the context of this essay, because in the early 1970s, in the world inhabited by King and Crick, class was one of, if not the, most important ways in which people were distinguished one from another, a point that will be returned to below. But what is interesting about the absence of social class from the list in the contemporary context is that it reinforces the idea that everyone except white men can be victims. A favourite contemporary saying is that white people, especially white men, should 'check their privileges' and, if social class is irrelevant, that means all white men including those who do not perceive themselves to be privileged in any meaningful way. A recent minor *cause celebre* illustrates the point – a senior Cambridge academic of Indian origin has tweeted her offence at the behaviour of the Head Porter at King's College Cambridge in referring to her as 'Madam' rather than by her academic title of 'Doctor' as she would have preferred – a classic microaggression, even though 'Sir' and 'Madam' are the customary ways in which college porters address university faculty (Kinchen, 2018). It might be thought that by publicly calling him out in this way the academic in question was herself committing a microaggression, but as the above definition makes clear, a working class white man cannot be a victim, even though the differences in status and privileges in this particular case are almost entirely to the advantage of the complainant. White men, unless from a religious minority or gay, cannot be victims – and, interestingly, the LGBT+ forum of the national Union of Students in Britain has recently dropped the practice of having a gay man's representative on local LGBT+ groups because gay men allegedly no longer suffer oppression.[2]

There are other problems with the identification of victims. The notion of 'intersectionality' proposes that different forms of oppression, different

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[2] For commentary see https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/media-statement/statement/stonewall-comments-nus-motion)

sources of victimhood, work together and reinforce each other, but sometimes this is not the case, or can only be made to be the case with some fancy intellectual footwork. For example, tradition Christian doctrine on subjects such as equal marriage, abortion and transgender issues is clearly unacceptable, and it is legitimate, indeed mandatory, to condemn these views because Christianity is part of the dominant world view that the victimhood culture opposes. But it would be quite wrong to condemn traditional Islamic doctrine on these issues even though they are more or less identical to traditional Christian thinking – Islam is protected from criticism in the way that Christianity is not because it occupies a different position in the general moral culture of victimhood. Muslims are, by virtue of being Muslim, potential if not actual victims and to criticise their religion is not just to be guilty of a microaggression, but to suffer from a mental illness, Islamophobia, even if the basis of criticism is one that would be legitimate if directed against Christianity. There are distinctions here which are very difficult to explain to those who are not adherents of this worldview.

The political implications of the culture of victimhood are still unclear because this culture has not yet been fully absorbed by the wider society, on which topic see the next section, but it does seem to be the case that part of the support for Donald Trump amongst working-class white men and women stemmed from a perception that Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton was prepared to support the claims of all 'minorities' but had little concern for the hardships or values of the white inhabitants of the rust-belt states. Trump's contempt for any manifestation of political correctness was and is anathema to the university-educated middle class but seems to have done him no harm at all with blue-collar voters. The rise of populist parties in Europe – and the crisis of European social democracy – is, it seems likely, motivated by the same dynamic. The sense that the old political class is no longer responsive to working-class concerns, but instead is over-sensitive to the needs of new arrivals in Europe, may well be inaccurate or at least exaggerated, but it seems to have been behind the rise of populist movements in Germany and Italy, as well as driving the 'Leave' vote in the Brexit Referendum in Britain.

Intolerance and the Modern University

In the early 1970s the limits of free speech in the academy were already being explored. Scientists who carried out research that could be seen as supportive of the US war in Vietnam were routinely prevented from speaking on university premises, as was anyone whose work was regarded as obviously racist. Classical J S Mill style defences of toleration stressed the importance of the free expression of ideas and, in principle, defended the right of individuals to advocate ideas that went contrary to the spirit of the age, but most people accepted that there were limits to the kinds of position that could legitimately be tolerated. Some ideas really were intolerable. Bernard Crick, for example, was prepared to tolerate the views expressed by Enoch Powell, much as he disliked them, but was not willing to tolerate 'scientific' racism, on the principle that the concept of race was scientifically indefensible and, in this case, the notion that scientific progress took place by contestation was inappropriate. This was a settled matter, there is no scientific basis for racist views. For the same reason, many today would prevent Holocaust Deniers from propagating their views, although others would argue that criminalising those views actually gives them a degree of credibility by implying, wrongly, that they cannot be refuted by the usual processes of argumentation. Preston King was prepared to go rather further than this. A critical review of his 1976 book described him as endorsing the NUS's practice of 'no platforming' people who engaged in research on war or race, on the basis that such policies were not really attacks on free speech at all and did not involve attempts to stifle inventiveness and free-thinking (James, 1977: 178). King rejected this interpretation of his work, but certainly he gave more weight to the promotion of social justice as an aim of social policy that could outweigh the value of free speech than a strict Millian would allow (King, 1977).

In the 1970s 'no platforming' was in its infancy and generally applied to individuals whose views were widely regarded as beyond the pale. In the age of victimhood culture, the practice has been given much wider

application, since the giving of offence is now something to be avoided at almost all costs, and whether offence is taken is no longer something that can be given rational consideration – as we have seen, it is entirely up to the victim to decide whether they have been offended, and their decision cannot be challenged. The result is that many potential speakers are excluded because they hold views that might offend – a classic example here is the exclusion of feminist thinkers whose views on transgender issues are unacceptable to transgender students and their advocates. Such figures, Germaine Greer being their poster woman, are defined as 'Terfs' – Trans-excluding radical feminists – and refused a platform (Parker, 2018). There are two additional features of these exclusions that are particularly noteworthy; first, a kind of second-order 'no platforming' can occur when people who complain about other people being excluded are themselves excluded – various 'free speech' advocates have been prevented from accepting invitations to speak at universities because their views offend the people who were offended by the views of the originally excluded. Second, it should be noted that some university authorities are, effectively, complicit in no platforming when they introduce restrictions based on 'health and safety' – instead of providing an environment in which all views can be rationally examined, they exclude speakers on the basis that their presence will be disruptive, effectively rewarding those who intended to disrupt (*Spiked,* 2018). Add these factors together, and a quite striking reversal has occurred – whereas, in the 1960s and before, universities were characteristically places where the free exchange of views could take place, now such free exchange can only take place off campus.

It might be thought that this intolerance does not affect the core research and scholarship role of universities and that academic freedom protects the ability of scholars to follow whichever lines they think will be most productive. There are, however, warning signs to the effect that this freedom is under threat. In September 2017 the respected journal *Third World Quarterly* published an article 'The Case for Colonialism' by Bruce Gilley. Uproar ensured, 15 members of the editorial board of the journal resigned and the article was withdrawn by the publishers because of

'serious and credible threats of personal violence' directed at the editor – it is now available on the author's website at Portland State University.[3] The academic quality of the article was challenged as was the rigour of the peer-reviewing that led to its publication, but the latter was subsequently vindicated by an investigation carried out by the publisher. In effect, Gilley was deemed to be guilty of 'thought crime' – his call to reassess the balance sheet of colonialism ran against the orthodox views of 'post-colonial' scholars and could not be countenanced. When it come to a consideration of the record of colonialism, only one conclusion is possible, that colonialism had no positive virtues – a balanced view of empire, which is what Gilley offered, could only be racist and fascist and must be suppressed, even if this could only be achieved by threats of physical force.

The lesson was repeated later in the year when Oxford professor Nigel Biggar, a distinguished theologian and ethicist, announced a five-year project on Ethics and Empire under the aegis of Oxford's Macdonald Centre. The result was an open letter by other Oxford scholars effectively condemning the project.[4] Although the latter agreed that Professor Biggar 'has every right to hold and to express whatever views he chooses or finds compelling, and to conduct whatever research he chooses in the way he feels appropriate', the gist of the text was that there was only one acceptable ethical approach to empire, that of condemnation and, as with Gilley, to attempt to draw up a balance sheet of empire was simply unacceptable. Some scholars who were committed to the project withdrew under peer pressure. The project is continuing, but seminars take place behind closed doors.

Although disturbing in their own terms, these events are not yet indicative of a general censorship of academic research, but it certainly is the case that the range of views that can be expressed through scholarship is narrower today than it once was, and it seems likely that this narrowing will continue. Universities in general, and especially elite universities, are at

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[3] http://www.web.pdx.edu/~gilleyb/2_The%20case%20for%20colonialism_at2Oct2017.pdf

[4] For the project and the letter see http://www.mcdonaldcentre.org.uk/ethics-and-empire, and https://theconversation.com/ethics-and-empire-an-open-letter-from-oxford-scholars-89333

the centre of the culture of victimhood, the homes of the 'woke', the 'social justice warriors' who are on the alert for microagressions of all kinds, and it is difficult to see how this environment could not affect research cultures. Some topics are already very hot to handle, and more will earn this status over time.

An interesting and important question is the extent to which attitudes current in the universities will in time spill over into the wider society – as 'woke' students graduate, will they leave behind the norms of the victimhood culture? There is insufficient evidence to answer this question, but it does seem that public sector bodies in the UK – the National Health Service, Police etc.- are beginning to show the same desire to avoid microaggressions that is characteristic of universities. Public opinion polling suggests that the wider public is still broadly supportive of freedom of speech, in the US more so than in Europe, although it is interesting that according to the Pew Research Center younger American respondents are more likely to agree that government should be able to prevent people from making statements that are offensive to minority groups than older respondents.[5] The same survey suggests that 59% of America respondents agreed that 'too many people are too easily offended these days over the language that others use' although, interestingly, this is a very partisan issue, with the figure for Republicans being 78%, for Democrats, 37% agreeing. Amongst Donald Trump supporters the figure was 83% - given that the latter were less likely to be university graduates than supporters of Hillary Clinton, only 39% of whom agreed, this suggests that attitudes common in the universities are gradually seeping into the wider society.

Toleration, Then and Now.

Arguably, toleration is a virtue only in a society governed by the moral culture of Dignity, and the (for the moment partial) replacement of such a culture with the culture of Victimhood is one of the most important differences between the operation of toleration when Crick and King were

[5] http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/12/americans-more-tolerant-of-offensive-speech-than-others-in-the-world/

writing in the 1970s and now. Still, before expanding this point, it is also worth emphasising the role of new social media in undermining the idea of tolerance. Many of the examples discussed in this essay could only have occurred in the era of Twitter, Instagram and other modern media. Before Twitter, the prom dress of the girl in Salt Lake City would have been admired, or disapproved of, only by those who were actually present or read the school newspaper in which the account of the prom would have been written up. If someone local had disapproved he or she could only have muttered his or her discontent to friends and family, or perhaps written a disgruntled letter to the local newspaper. Instead, today, perhaps to his surprise, the initial complaint of Mr Lam was retweeted and retweeted again, until it echoed around the world. Again, the disgruntled Cambridge academic would have had no possibility of sharing her annoyance with the world at large before Twitter became available. Comments which in the past might have been shared with friends and family only, now have the potential, for better or worse, to stimulate national or even international debate. Jokes that might in context have been mildly funny can now ruin lives when they are read out of context and the worst possible construction is put upon them. All these points are relevant to a comparison of tolerance then and now, but their importance can be exaggerated. It may have been more difficult to generate instant outrage in those days, but the potential was always there – it is a mistake to underestimate the potential of the Roneo'd leaflet or the crudely produced broadsheet; John Wilkes in the eighteenth century was pretty good at generating rent-a-mobs in London to support his causes without even the advantage of the duplicating technology available in the 60s and 70s.

In short, the differences between now and then are not simply a matter of technology and social media, they involve the different moral cultures prevailing then and now, but technology certainly can be an important driver of contemporary intolerance. Thus, to return to the opening of this essay and the definitions offered by Crick and King, to tolerate something is to disapprove of it but to take the conscious decision not to act on that disapproval. Tolerant people, by definition, have the power to act but

choose not to use it, but this, of course, means that the choice of intolerance is always available. If toleration is to be the norm, then the people with the power to be intolerant must feel sufficiently secure in their position not to feel they need to use this power. In the past the people who set the terms of toleration were the beneficiaries of social inequality, top dogs in society who could afford to tolerate the underdogs – adherents of minority religions, or non-heteronormative sexual identities. Now, via the new technologies, toleration has been, in a strange way, democratised – literally anyone can be intolerant of anyone else and allow the world to know it. In particular, those previously only tolerated are now in a position to do the tolerating, determining what sorts of behaviour, which identities, are worthy of acceptance. And, returning to Bernard Crick's distinction, acceptance is key not indifference; we are not to be indifferent towards non-majority identities or behaviours, we are to be accepting of them – indifference leads to microaggressions.

In some respects, Preston King was more prescient about the possibilities here than Bernard Crick. One theme that runs through King's books and articles on toleration is the importance of social justice and the need to strike a kind of balance between the demands of justice and the requirements of toleration. King was more prepared to sanction restrictions on the freedom of speech in the interests of a more just world than the classic defenders of freedom of speech would allow. At least the germ of the idea of hate speech is present in his work, and he is rightly critical of some controversialists who exploit the idea of absolute freedom. Interestingly, given her role in current controversies over transgender issues, Germaine Greer features in *On Toleration* because of her use of racially offensive language to make a point (King, 1976: 213) – one feels that King would not have approved on Crick using the term 'queer' in the way he does, whatever the intention behind the term. It would, of course, be wrong to suggest that King's work anticipates the modern culture of victimhood – indeed one of the defining features of his life is, I think, his refusal to think of himself as a victim, even though for many years he could plausibly have claimed that status. Also, and crucially, removing the inequalities of class was for him a

central aim of social justice. Still, I believe that in those early debates of the 1970s and in particular in King's work, some of the elements of the later discourse of toleration and intolerance can be discerned – in any event, those writings are well worth revisiting.

[2018]

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