

TEXTE MICHAEL WALZER

Now, what does it mean to tolerate excentric and dissident groups? Understood as an attitude or state of mind, toleration describes a number of possibilities. The first of these, which reflects the origins of religious toleration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is simply a resigned acceptance of difference for the sake of peace. People kill one another for years and years, and then, mercifully, exhaustion sets in, and we call this toleration. But we can trace a continuum of more substantive acceptances. A second possible attitude is passive, relaxed, benignly indifferent to difference: « It takes all kinds to make a world ». A third follows from a kind of moral stoicism: a principled recognition that the « others » have rights even if they exercise those rights in unattractive ways. A fourth expresses openness to the others; curiosity ; perhaps even respect, a willingness to listen and learn. And, furthest along the continuum, there is the enthusiastic endorsement of difference : an aesthetic endorsement, if difference is taken to represent in cultural form the largeness and diversity of God's creation or of the natural world ; or a functional endorsement, if difference is viewed, as in the liberal multiculturalist argument, as a necessary condition of human flourishing, one that offers to individual men and women the choices that make their autonomy meaningful.

But perhaps this last attitude falls outside my subject: how can I be said to tolerate what I in fact endorse ? If I want the others to be here, in this society, among us, then I don't tolerate otherness – I support it. I don't, however, necessarily support this or that version of otherness. I might well prefer another other, one who is culturally or religiously closer to my own practices and beliefs (or, perhaps, more distant, exotic, posing no competitive threat). And in any pluralistic society there will always be people, however well entrenched their own commitment to pluralism, for whom some particular difference – perhaps a form of worship, family arrangement, dietary rule, sexual practice, or dress code – is very hard to live with. Though they support the idea of difference, they tolerate the instantiated differences.

Michael Walzer (1935-), *On Toleration*, Chapter 1 « Personal Attitudes and Political Arrangements », 1997.