

Tolerance or Respect?

Respect is (1) an alternative to tolerance and (2) the better one.

It is an alternative because it concerns the same issue: how to live with fellow humans who appear to be identically constituted in their need to formulate opinions and to assert them in speech (not always in that order) but disparately developed in their capacity for making sense. I put it to myself so invidiously because I want to hold onto this distinction: that some opinions are more nearly right and others wrong, that between opposite opinions one is the better. Were it not so, life would be stymied, decision frustrated, determinacy dissolved. This appeal to the practical needs of living and thinking is, I recognize, an insufficient grounding for the ontological necessity of truth. (The fancy word "ontology," incidentally, is a part of the way I talk to myself: Greek shorthand for an "account of the way things are.") I'll let myself get away with this pre-judgment for now.

Respect is better than tolerance (1) for the very reason that it discriminates, applies criteria, finds fault and functions despite that. No, better: I'll have to think out an intimation I have that I respect the mistaken opposition not in spite of but because of its error. (Curious, obscure coruscations— that my tent stays up and taut, tugged by the guys, the stays of opposition. Reminds me of that most beautiful Frost sonnet, "The Silken Tent," all whose ropes relent,

*So that in guys it gently sways at ease,
And its supporting central cedar pole,
That is its pinnacle to heavenward
signifies the sureness of the soul.*

That's the way to be!) But in any case, the flabby

forbearance, the implied indifference to the way things are that tolerance falls into has far less dignity for me than the tensed, staunch judgmentalism that accords aware respect.

Respect is better than tolerance (2) for the very obverse and complement of its sternness: It does not just “bear” the others, nor just forbear to judge them. It takes them seriously, for respect is engaged regard, even appreciative receptivity. Tolerance permits, even finds, convenient slanting glances, averted eyes; respect looks the others full in the face, hears their words.

(from [Homage to Americans: Mile-High Meditations, Close Readings, and Time-Spanning Speculations](#))

This blog post has been reproduced with the permission of [The Imaginative Conservative](#). The original blog post can be found [here](#). The views expressed by the author and The Imaginative Conservative are not necessarily endorsed by this organization and are simply provided as food for thought from Intellectual Takeout.???????????

Image Credit: Bikes and Books bit.ly/liowB8m