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THE MORAL SENSE OF TOLERANCE

A review of the literature on the issue of tolerance argues that thinking about it revolves around the opposition: "tolerance good, intolerance bad." Views on the positive qualities of tolerance today belong to the moral canon of every modern person, and the belief in the salutary effects of tolerance has become the flagship slogan and cultural myth of the 20th century. This myth was not shattered even by the tragic test of World War II. In a bizarre way, it even contributed to its perpetuation. For here the actions of the perpetrators of the crime of genocide are treated rather as an example of extreme intolerance, while forgetting that fascism was born in a society in which ideas of liberalism and tolerance were very popular in many opinion-making circles.

Despite this attachment to the idea of tolerance, among its proponents it is difficult to identify authors who openly and firmly proclaim the demand for unlimited tolerance. Most often it is said: "Tolerance-yes, but up to certain limits". But what should be its limits? This problem will certainly not be solved by the popular contemporary maxim, proclaiming that "there is no tolerance for intolerance", or that "there is no tolerance for evil, crime and genocide." For such and similar limitations of the postulate of tolerance will remain an idle platitude as long as there is no agreement on the meaning of the terms *tolerance*, *intolerance*, *good*, *evil*, and as long as the concept of responsibility for the fate of others is not taken into account in interpreting the limits of tolerance.

The purpose of this article is an attempt to clarify the content of the concept of *tolerance* in its moral meaning, and to show that the postulate of tolerance cannot be treated as unconditionally obligatory, since its respect can (and often does) come into conflict with other moral precepts, especially with the precept formulated in many European ethical systems of obedience to the truth or the precept against injustice.

1. Subject and object approach to the problem of tolerance

The traditional approach to the issue of tolerance and its limits has usually been inspired by the hope of drawing up a catalog of views, tastes or acts that cannot be tolerated for certain reasons. However, as his toric experience of mankind proves, it is not easy to draw up such a catalog, and even more difficult to gain universal approval for it. Due to the "failure of all attempts in the subject": *tolerance*, I will try in this article to change the starting point

and begin the discussion with an analysis of the formal conditions for tolerance, then identify those that give it moral meaning, and finally move on to a discussion of situations in which it may come into conflict with other ethical principles.

As a starting point, let's take as our starting point the common-sense definition of tolerance given by the eminent modern English philosopher and ethicist, R. M. Hare. According to him, tolerance manifests itself in a willingness to respect the views of others as much as one's own¹. However, when we try to take a closer look at the term, a doubt arises regarding the object of this respect, essential to tolerance. For it is possible to understand tolerance either (1) as a readiness to respect views different from our own, or (2) as a readiness to respect people who proclaim these different views. In the first case, tolerance would require affirmation of views with which we disagree to some extent; in the second, it would go deeper, because while demanding respect for others' views, it would also demand respect for the person of the interlocutor. The aforementioned interpretations give rise to quite different moral problems, some of which will become the subject of our further considerations. At this point it is only necessary to emphasize that when in the postulate of tolerance the accent falls on the dissimilarity of opinions, the essential issue becomes what they concern and how the opponents relate to the subject of the dispute. When, on the other hand, the postulate of tolerance is understood as an injunction to respect the person of the interlocutor, the object of interest becomes the interpersonal relationship, and through its prism one should evaluate the practical behavior of the participants in the dispute. Thus, when analyzing the issue of tolerance, we can focus attention either on WHAT is the subject of the dispute, or on WHO is arguing with WHOM and HOW he relates to the opponent.

The first, "object-oriented" approach to the problem, characterizes most of the traditional and contemporary considerations of tolerance. Considering what is in dispute, researchers have traditionally distinguished the following types of it: religious tolerance, defined as the recognition of the right of others to freely proclaim their own faith and to live in accordance with its precepts; intellectual tolerance, manifested in respect for others' views, even though they are incompatible with our own; moral tolerance, manifested in or indulgent treatment of unorthodox behavior, and moral tolerance, which means granting others the right to follow their personal hierarchy of values out of respect for human autonomy.

2. Formal conditions of tolerance. Tolerance as a moral attitude

Most often, tolerance is sometimes treated as a postulate, commanding respect for views, tastes and even acts that differ from what we ourselves right or decent. Naturally, this term is too general and should not be taken as a definition of the concept. However, it allows us to formally characterize situations in which the problem of tolerance may arise. Let us then ask: what are the formal conditions of tolerance?

¹ Cf. R. M. Hare: *Freedom and Reason*. Oxford 1963, p. 177.

Immediately, the observation arises that the problem of tolerance can arise-first, only when there is a disagreement of beliefs on some subject; secondly - it must be a disagreement between at least two people; thirdly, it must be an irresolvable disagreement, so that each side can stay with its opinion. Otherwise, there is no reason to speak of tolerance, just as there is no reason to speak of it when the difference of belief revealed at the beginning of the discussion turns out to be apparent, or when positions have been agreed upon in the course of the dispute. For it is only when an irremovable difference of conviction (and sometimes of action) is revealed that the participants in the dispute are faced with the question: first - how to address the opponent's unacceptable views (or actions): convince him, indoctrinate him, force him by non-verbal methods to change them, disregard them or tolerate them? and - secondly - how to respond to the person of the opponent in this connection. Within the spectrum of these possible behaviors or attitudes is tolerance. Its fourth formal condition, therefore, is the ability to consciously choose the type of one's own behavior. Because of this condition, it is difficult to speak of tolerance in relation to a person who thinks and acts stereotypically, the voice of blind passions or unreflectively adopted patterns of behavior.

Let us note, however, that the possibility of choosing the type of one's own attitude towards intolerable views arises only if the person making such a choice holds some beliefs that he himself considers true or right. But how can he then respect opposing views? Isn't the postulate of tolerance contradictory? Is tolerance logically and psychologically possible? These are the problems we are about to address.

Referring to the term given by R. M. Hare, it should now be that tolerance can be a certain attitude in the psychological sense, an apt synonym for which would be the expression "benevolent openness." For supporters of the idea of tolerance, the formation of such an attitude is an essential task in educating the younger generation for democracy.

Tolerance, however, can be understood not only as a psychological attitude, but, in addition, as a **moral attitude**. The difference between a psychological attitude and a moral attitude is significant, because although every moral attitude is a type of psychological attitude, it differs from the others in that it is an expression of conscious and free choice. With regard to tolerance as a **moral** attitude, it means consciously and voluntarily recognizing the right of others to hold views, beliefs, tastes, etc. different from those of the evaluator. The difference between the psychological attitude of "benevolent openness" and the moral attitude of tolerance is therefore significant enough,

That I will express it again as follows: benevolent openness can come "from the depths of the heart", be a spontaneous act; tolerance, on the other hand, as a moral attitude, requires reflection, implies free choice, and therefore-moral responsibility

3. Tolerance as respect for the autonomy of the opponent

Since we have tentatively defined tolerance as a postulate mandating respect for views different from our own, we are now faced with the question, in the name of what reasons should we do so? On the ground of modern ethics, as indeed on the ground of

the entire humanities, a seemingly simple answer to this question is usually given: we should respect others' opinions (or even actions) out of respect for **the person of the** opponent. After all, every **person** is an autonomous moral subject, who, for this reason, is entitled to the right to self-determination, and therefore the right to freely make opinions and moral judgments. But who is a person in the sense stated above? To whom and why can the characteristic of being a moral subject be attributed? It is not easy to briefly and unequivocally answer these questions.

The traditional understanding of the moral subject allows for a twofold interpretation. This notion can mean—first, a person who has certain rights and duties resulting from membership in a social community. This is a psychological-sociological understanding of this concept. Second - in the philosophical and ethical sense, "person" is treated as a morally law-abiding subject; as a more indefinite, but constitutive component of human being. On the methodological level, the assumption of the personalistic character of human being is most often in the nature of a basic premise from which some specific recommendations are derived, but which is not itself subject to justification. This second way of understanding the person as a moral subject can justify the obligation to respect the opponent's autonomy, but before that it requires the determination of the conditions that the individual who pretends to be a person (an autonomous moral subject) must meet.

On the ground of philosophical anthropology, the ability to be an autonomous moral subject - on which the right to self-determination depends - has been determined on the basis of exceedingly diverse criteria. Already from the time of Plato and Aristotle, through successive generations of philosophers and theologians, there have been attempts to identify some set of constitutive features on the basis of which the moral subjectivity of man could be established. Thus, from the history of philosophy, we learn that man is an autonomous moral subject either because, as the only corporeal entity, he possesses an immortal soul (St. Augustine, St. Thomas), or because he is endowed with a free will (Schopenhauer), or because he possesses reason and a good will capable of establishing moral laws (Kant), or because he alone is a being capable of nourishing a conscious desire for life (P. Singer), or simply because he is the only entity possessing self-awareness and freedom (existentialism). These and similar characterizations of the autonomous moral subject can be dragged on almost indefinitely, without coming an inch closer to clarifying the issue of tolerance understood as an expression of respect for the autonomy of the opponent.

After all, it should be emphasized that no matter how one characterizes the property of being an autonomous moral subject (and it will always be a characteristics entangled in the whole context of the philosophical anthropology of a given thinker), what is important in the matter of interest to us is the commonly accepted assumption of the symmetry of interpersonal relations in which the problem of tolerance arises as respect for the autonomy of the opponent. In other words: the issue of tolerance considered in its moral aspect requires the parties involved in the dispute to mutually recognize their equality. In simpler terms: it requires recognition that YOU have the same right as I have to be treated as a free subject. And this - the fifth - condition determines, in my opinion, the moral sense of tolerance.

I think that nothing more can be said about it without deeply entangled in the meanders of philosophical anthropology with its worldview references. Therefore, if we want to remain on the plane of axiologically neutral considerations, we must stop at the above formal characterization of it.

4. Tolerance in the moral sense; its boundary territories

The term *tolerance*, often found in everyday language, does not always retain its moral content and is sometimes used in meanings far from the one adopted in this article. Therefore, I am forced to devote a few words to a discussion of these dissimilarities in order to prevent possible misunderstandings.

On the basis of colloquial thinking, the assumption is taken for granted that we should be tolerant of children or the mentally ill, as they are incapable of meeting the requirements for a normal, mature human being. Such a justification appeals not so much to the idea of the autonomy of the moral subject understood as the right to self-determination, but to the universally recognized duty to care for the weak who have certain rights, although they do not yet (or already) have duties. In other words: these people are considered only as subjects of entitlements, resulting from their membership in the social community - they are granted subjectivity in the first sense, distinguished earlier, and denied subjectivity in the second sense, questioning their right to self-determination.

With regard to this group, tolerance can only mean patience, forbearance and caring paternalism; and it is not and cannot be a manifestation of respect for autonomy, when these people are denied abilities, which are a condition of the right to self-determination, due to their immaturity or illness. Thus, if there is any controversy between a person who has the right to self-determination and a person who, for one or another legitimate reason, is denied this right, already at the outset of the dispute there is a fundamental moral inequality of the participants in the interaction, which makes tolerance in the moral sense impossible. In other words, our relationship to children or other people for whom, for one reason or another, we are responsible, precludes tolerance understood as respect for the autonomy of the opponent. In relation to these people, however, we have, by virtue of a subservient right to care on our part, an obligation to treat them as subjects to the extent that they are, or can become, autonomous persons. Therefore, paternalistically justified coercion applied to children is a practice that is generally universally approved and is not within the bounds of moral tolerance if it is backed by concern for the development of the child's autonomy.

So it must be emphasized that it is difficult to speak of tolerance in the moral sense, understood as respect for the autonomy of the opponent, when the dispute takes place with a clear, dominant advantage of one of the parties-regardless of what this advantage results from; and even more difficult when one party (rightly or wrongly) denies the other the right to self-determination. This is because in such situations the partnership of the interaction is negated, and the participants in the dispute do not treat each other as moral equals.

If domination takes the form of an advantage in the balance of power or authority, a more appropriate description of the other person's attitude would be the terms patience, powerlessness or helplessness. This is because, while she may not agree with the views of the dominant party, she is unable to take any counteraction, and sometimes she is even unable to express her own views. The syndrome of "master and slave" as described by philosophers is a telling example of this. The "master-slave" relationship precludes tolerance in the moral sense due to the negation of the autonomy of the "slave." His obedience to the "master" and the domination of the latter makes partnership of interaction impossible, and thus constitutes a denial of the personal equality of the opponents. If it is sometimes said that the "slave" tolerates the behaviors and views of the master" or the "master" tolerates the behaviors of the "slave," he rather means that he meekly or indulgently puts up with them. In such a relationship, there is no room for respect for another's autonomy.

If the dominant role of one party is due to the superiority of knowledge, experience, competence and even age, health or fitness - i.e. qualities essential to the creation of authority - then the other person reveals submission, obedience or trust rather than tolerance. This is because tolerance implies disagreement on an issue; authority, on the other hand, implies the opposite. Respect for an authority presupposes acceptance of his views or actions; tolerance, on the other hand, is a special kind of respect for a person, since it does not require or even excludes acceptance of views contrary to one's own.

The characteristic of tolerance in the moral sense of interpersonal partnership, or rather: the symmetry of a discretionary relationship, can sometimes prove to be an illusion when one of the parties involved in a dispute negates the subjectivity of the opponent. Therefore, it is not possible to tolerate in a moral sense (or perhaps in any other sense) intolerance understood as contempt or negation of the other party's autonomy. This is because in such a situation we are dealing with a fundamental disagreement, completely crossing out the symmetry and axiological equality of the participants in the interaction, which goes hand in hand with crossing out the possibility of finding any common ground for communication. Attitudes of overt or covert hostility and even hatred, typical of various forms of struggle and fanaticism, rather than of tolerance, are then revealed.

5. The problem of truth, autonomy and tolerance

A historical review of the various interpretations of tolerance indicates that there are certain regularities in the evolution of the concept, moving in the direction of expanding the boundaries of behavior tolerated out of respect for the autonomy of the opponent.

Let us recall in this connection that tolerance in the classical sense a rather narrow problem: the relationship between philosophical or religious finality and political life. Its proponents proclaimed that we are unable to agree on these matters, so views should not be imposed on anyone by force. Many of them either remain in the realm of faith, or cross the capacities of human reason, or face resistance posed by stupidity and superstition. Therefore, we should be characterized, firstly, by a readiness to take up on a rational level (because no one should assume in advance that the right is only

on his side) of the discussion with views that we ourselves do not believe to be true; secondly, openness to the argumentation of the interlocutor and readiness to change one's own beliefs; and thirdly, in the event that divergent opinions persist: tolerance, that is, granting the opponent the right to hold different beliefs out respect for his autonomy. The classic treatise *On Tolerance* by J. St. Mill², dedicated, among other things, to the problem of tolerance, was based on these complexities. The limit that this author sets for tolerance is the consideration of another's harm. For this reason, we should assign a greater scope to freedom of speech than to freedom of action; but even freedom of speech cannot be limitless if someone uses it to instigate a hurtful action. In short, Mill understands tolerance as a postulate of non-interference with another's freedom (moral autonomy), and considers it right and worthy of practical application, on one condition, after all: that the action we tolerate does not violate the other person's freedom or autonomy. Undermining anyone's right to such freedom relieves us of the obligation to be tolerant and imposes an obligation to interfere with the freedom of the perpetrator of the injurious act. For the limit of an individual's freedom is the freedom of others. Mill considers tolerance on this plane of axiological equality of moral subjects and therefore believes that the condition for its validity is mutual respect for the autonomy of subjects.

The concept of J. St. Mill, recalled here by way of illustration, is based on the following complex of the impossibility of reaching some objective, absolute truth (or perhaps even questioning its existence³). Therefore, the aforementioned author attached great importance to freedom of speech and tolerance, seeing them as means of leading to some kind of social consensus and harmonizing social coexistence.

The problem of tolerance, freedom and human autonomy is presented differently in philosophical or religious concepts that assume the existence of some objective and absolute law, on the basis of which the social order and the system of interpersonal relations - including moral ones - is to be built. An example of such a concept is the philosophical thought associated with the Catholic religion. And it is she who will serve us as an illustration of a diametrically opposed approach to the problem of truth, its relationship to tolerance and its limits.

The aforementioned concept is based on the belief in the existence of a single, objective and absolute truth that is believed to guide human life and conduct. In fact, it is a revealed truth to which all owe obedience – especially if they declare themselves to be its adherents. The history of the institution of the church convinces that differences of opinion among adherents were tolerated only insofar as they did not concern fundamental dogmas, but only secondary matters. Often, however, even in such matters the individual was not left free to adjudicate because the institution set up to settle all doctrinal and practical disputes was the church and the authorities it accepted. Thus, there was an obligation to conform to authority rather than tolerance. If here and there

² J. St Mill: *Utilitarianism. On freedom*. Warsaw 1959.

³ Cf. J. St. Mill: *System of Logic*, vol. 2. Warsaw 1962, pp. 670-690; *John Stuart Mill's Philosophy of Science Method*. E. Nagel (ed.). New York 1950, pp. 400-410.

the name *tolerance* appeared, it was understood as the Christian's duty to patiently and humbly endure the unpleasant inconveniences of personal fate.

Let's try to explain this problem in more detail, because the relationship between the understanding of truth and the understanding of tolerance seems important also from a moral point of view. It is also important because, on the one hand, the assumption of the existence of a single truth is characteristic of almost all European culture, and especially Christian thought; on the other hand, the same culture, and within it Christian thought (though not only it) is unquestionably attached to the idea of the self-nomy of man and his dignity. The question then arises: how to reconcile these ideas-truth and autonomy? How to understand tolerance in this context?

An example of solving this problem by recognizing the priority of Truth (naturally, this is religious truth, identified with truth in general) over freedom and autonomy, are the thoughts contained in John Paul II's Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. There we read that "true moral autonomy of man by no means signifies rejection, but precisely the acceptance of moral law, God's commandments: "The Lord God gave man this command." Man's freedom and God's law meet and are called to interpenetrate each other." The relationship between truth and freedom is further made explicit by the Pope: "Truth directs freedom. Freedom is subordinate to truth."

The limitation of the autonomy of the moral subject by religiously or metaphysically conceived truth means that tolerance, understood in the sense adopted here as respect for the autonomy of the opponent, must be limited by the "obedience to the law of God." Thus, it is possible only in relation to people with the same worldview, because only in relation to them can relationship of equality of subjects be preserved: they remain sovereign to the same degree, limited by obedience to the truth.

The negation of this limitation by one of the parties to the dispute results in the disappearance of equality of subjects, flowing from the attribution of different scopes of autonomy. In such a situation, is tolerance understood as respect for the autonomy of the opponent and as granting him the right to make autonomous moral judgments? I think not, because in the light of this view the right to make autonomous judgments, especially moral ones, is attributed jointly to God and His earthly representatives.

Thus, recognizing the primacy of the value of truth over the value of autonomy or freedom leads to giving the concept of tolerance a sense in which this word means only permissive forbearance, and not respect for the autonomy of the opponent. For if a person is denied the right to make autonomous moral judgments and is required to obey rules given "from above," then the only scope of autonomy left to him is limited to making judgments as to whether a given act or view is in accord with or contrary to what is commanded or given to believe. This, however, causes us to revolve around the concept of legality rather than - morality.

The subordination of autonomy or freedom to truth, however, occurs not only in the field of religions, especially monotheistic ones. Indeed, a similar phenomenon is encountered in the field of philosophy.

We know from the history of philosophy that the belief in the existence of a single truth - this time in the epistemological sense – has a pedigree older than the tradition of the Christian religion, and – as we know – this view was sometimes upheld not only by Descartes. However, the adoption of this epistemological assumption causes – as in the case of religious truths – that tolerance, in this case intellectual tolerance, is at least limited, and in fact becomes impossible. After all, if there is only one truth about a subject, then the dispute over it must be ultimately resolvable – if not now, then in the future. The belief that the dispute is fundamentally resolvable makes tolerance difficult, if not impossible, because it induces opponents to stubbornly cling to their own rationale, which over time can lead to dogmatism.

Moreover, if one accepts the assumption of the singularity of truth, then granting someone the right to remain with one's own opinion, which one believes to be false, is in fact to allow one to wallow in error. And error in epistemology cannot be tolerated - just as religious error, i.e. sin, cannot be tolerated, i.e. respected. The dispute, therefore, must continue until the views are agreed upon. However, if they are agreed, the possibility of tolerance does not either, because there is no difference of opinion that can be tolerated by the opponents.

Taking all this into account, modern adherents of the idea of tolerance emphasize that Western culture has a paradoxical character. For, on the one hand, it has forged the idea of the autonomy of the moral subject and the idea of tolerance based on granting all autonomous subjects the right to self-determination; on the other hand, however, autonomy is limited by subordinating it to truth, religious or epistemological, which in practice leads to intolerance.

In the more ambitious versions of this view, the belief is expressed that since the main cause of intolerance is the idea of freedom to rights, this idea must be removed, and this can be done by overturning the category of absolute truth. Once it disappears from our thinking, we will be free of that hubris that makes us treat those who think differently with contempt. And since the category of truth stems from classical metaphysics and epistemology, so they are the primary source of untruth and should be rejected for the sake of human welfare and autonomy. Thus, in some modern authors (e.g., Derrida or Rorty), the dispute over tolerance takes the form of a dispute over the classical concept of truth.

Supporters of the idea of the primacy of freedom over truth often seek support for it in non-European cultures, especially in the religions and moral thought of the Far East. There, a completely different solution to the problem of truth is adopted, assuming in advance that the search for truth is a never-ending process, so no one can usurp the right to be ultimately right. Characteristic of this style of thinking are the views of Mahatma Gandhi, more widely known in Poland. He wrote thus: "I do not like the word *tolerance*, but I do not find a better one. For tolerance may bring to mind that another faith is inferior to our own, while *ahinsa* teaches that one should have the same respect for one's neighbor's religion as we have for our own faith - whose imperfection we recognize. Such an attitude will be easy for one who seeks the Truth (...).

If we would come to the full vision of Truth, we would no longer be seekers, but would be one with God. For Truth is God. (...) If all the religious concepts that people create for themselves are imperfect, there can be no question of the superiority or inferiority of one over another. "⁴

As can be seen from the above, Gandhi initially assumes that to tolerate means as much as to treat leniently. However, he goes on to distance himself from such an understanding of tolerance and emphasizes that it requires recognizing one's own faith (or, more broadly, one's own views) as imperfect, just as the views of the opponent are considered imperfect. In his view, such an approach is possible only on the assumption that truth is sought collectively. This assumption, present in many Eastern religions, seems to be a basic condition for communication and interaction, as it implies the equality of interaction partners. To put it somewhat pathetically: Eastern culture assumes the equality of people in Ignorance; Western culture, on the other hand, seems to elevate one over the other, granting them a monopoly on the only Truth.

6. The logical possibility of tolerance in the moral sense

In connection with these cultural differences in the approach to the issue of truth, the question arises whether the conviction, present in Western culture, of the possibility of certain (in the sense: unquestionable) knowledge does not exclude tolerance understood as respect for different opinions? Does the conviction of having the only one, "the truest truth" can - from a psychological point of view - foster an attitude of tolerance understood as respect for the autonomy of the opponent? In both of these questions, the issue is a substantial one: in the first case - tolerance possible in a logical sense?; in the second - is it possible in a psychological sense?

Opponents of tolerance, coming from among the adherents of the only truth, religious or epistemological, repeatedly emphasize that the postulate of tolerance understood as respect for unaccepted opinions necessarily leads to an internal contradiction, since it devalues the value of one's own opinions. Indeed, if someone claims A and at the same time respects the opinion of another person who claims not-A, we have a certain logical contradiction. In view of this, is tolerance logically ruled out?

This problem requires a longer discussion than the framework of this article allows. Thus, I must only limit myself to the observation that the charge of illogical tolerance would retain its force only if the concept of respect were identical with the recognition as true of the opponent's views. However, it is not at all clear that the concept of respect can be reduced to this only. After all, if one gives it another meaning, such as moral, and if one agrees that respect does not refer to conflicting opinions on a certain subject, but characterizes the relationship between partners in a dispute, then tolerance is logically possible. For it is possible to have respect for autonomy of the opponent, in the name of this to refrain from counteracting and at the same time consider his views as false and his actions as wrong.

⁴ M. Gandhi: *Tolerance, or equality of religions*. In *Panorama of modern thought*, edited by G. Picon, Paris 1960, p. 472.

Moreover, tolerance in the logical sense is possible if one gives up the idea of certainty of cognition - as Gandhi said - and if one considers the search for truth (whether religious, cognitive or otherwise) as a never-ending process. Rejecting certainty of cognition and believing in the possession of absolute truth is more conducive to positions of tolerance, while fanaticism usually goes hand in hand with a sense of certainty about one's own beliefs.

However, the logical possibility of tolerance is not the same as its practical possibility. For as the European struggles for tolerance testify, it is not at all easy to fight sin and respect the sinner at the same time.

7. "Weak" and "strong" understanding of tolerance

Another paradox related to the concept of tolerance in its moral sense, i.e. tolerance understood as respect for the autonomy of the opponent, stems from a "strong" interpretation of this demand.

For tolerance, considered from the side of its practical consequences, can be interpreted "weaker" and then reduced to a postulate of not interfering with views, qualities or deeds disapproved of by the evaluator - out of respect for the autonomy of the opponent. This is the kind of tolerance that

I. Lazari-Pawlowska calls tolerance passive or negative⁵.

However, the aforementioned author singles out a "stronger" interpretation of this, whereby tolerance would consist not only in refraining from counteraction out of respect for the autonomy of the opponent, but also in the duty to support the actions taken by the opponent - to "support another's difference."

However, if we agree with the latter interpretation of the concept of tolerance, we must remember that it will lead to an injunction to support unacceptable views or actions. Does respect for the autonomy of the opponent-what we have taken to be an essential feature of tolerance in its moral sense-really require this? If so, then tolerance in the moral sense would impose on us an obligation to act in a non-moral way, since actively supporting something that is considered wrong or wrong seems downright immoral. Moreover, the duty to support "someone else's difference" must be based on a belief in the opponent's dependence, in his or her weaker position in some respect - which contradicts the formal condition of tolerance, defined as the symmetry of interpersonal relations.

8. The dispute over the moral permissibility of suicide and the problem of tolerance

Another problem with tolerance-this time understood colloquially as an absolute prohibition on coercion-is questionable because of our equally obliging duty to defend the wronged. An extreme case of the conflict between the principle of tolerance (still understood as an expression of respect for the autonomy of the opponent) and the principle of preventing harm that someone can do to himself is the situation in which the suicide puts us.

⁵ I. Lazari-Pawlowska: *Three concepts of tolerance*. "Philosophical Studies" 1984, no. 8.

Therefore, the moral assessment of suicide is a distorting mirror in which many adherents of the idea of tolerance understood as respect for the autonomy of the opponent can view themselves. Therefore, it is worth taking a closer look at this issue, because the dispute over the moral permissibility of suicide is also a testimony to the evolution of contemporary attitudes towards the problems of tolerance.

As is well known, examples of actions in which someone only causes harm to himself are sometimes most often cited as an illustration of the duty of tolerance. Often quoted here is the opinion of J. St. Mill, who argued that if the act involves the perpetrator himself, no one has the right to interfere and he should be left free to choose, even if we don't like it for some reason. Examples of "making people happy by force" and examples of exuberant paternalism are given as proof of the reprehensibility of the behavior of intolerant people who think they "know better" what someone else's well-being is all about and violate someone else's freedom, and sometimes even autonomy, in the name of that well-being.

However, the matter is not as simple as it seems on the surface. For there are situations in which a conflict arises between the principle of responsibility for the fate of others and the duty to respect their autonomy (or privacy). A drastic illustration of this moral dilemma is the question of the limits of responsibility and non-interference with regard to people attempting suicide or people demanding that others bring about a "good death."

As is well known, opinions, both on suicide and euthanasia, are extremely diverse. Persistent beliefs in the absolute value of life lead some ethicists (especially Catholic ethicists) to formulate an obligation to prevent all suicide attempts, and therefore to save man from himself-even at the expense of violating his autonomy. This is the reasoning of those who place man's life higher on the scale of the hierarchy of values than his freedom. To justify such interference, the autonomy of suicidal decisions is often undermined, and it is assumed in advance that no one "in his right mind" can bargain for his life. Therefore, since someone decides to do so, it means that he does not know what he is doing, so we have a duty to counteract. In this way, the charge of disrespecting another person's autonomy is evaded.

Treating all acts of self-harm in terms of psychic pathology, however, is not supported the facts. For there are people who, being of full mental capacity, for one reason or another, decide to part with their lives. In such cases, are we obliged to interfere? Or on the contrary: respecting their autonomy, refrain from interfering?

Those ethicists who hold freedom and respect for human autonomy particularly dear argue that every normal adult has the right to decide both his life and his death - especially when he has no duty of care. It follows that others have a duty not to interfere, and so, while respecting the autonomous decision of a potential suicide, they should allow self-destruction.

Thus, suicide is a situation that provokes reflection on the hierarchy of duties incumbent on us. The question of whether or not to interfere in the case of a attempt, resolved in favor of , can and is sometimes considered by many to be an example of extreme intolerance or even a kind of coercion, since rescuing someone against his will is tantamount to imposing on him a duty to live. In turn, the same question, resolved in favor of non-interference, raises other doubts, mostly stemming from the fact that one can never be quite sure whether the suicide decision was made fully consciously and voluntarily, and therefore - whether it meets the criteria of an autonomous act.

Ongoing discussions on euthanasia and the human right to dignity death testify to the fact that there are increasing doubts about the obligatory assumption in European culture that a person has the right to self-determination to the exclusion, after all, of the right to decide about his life or death - even if he subjectively considers continuation of life senseless. Some thinkers even go so far in endorsing the right to self-determination that they impose an obligation on third parties assist in committing suicide if the author of the desperate decision is physically unable to carry out his decision. The postulate of tolerance, that is, the duty to respect another's autonomy, is interpreted by proponents of this view in its "strong" version⁶.

The dispute between supporters and opponents of euthanasia is a modern-day mutual dispute over the limits of tolerance. It reveals that the moral evaluation of tolerance made according to the scheme: "tolerance is good, intolerance – evil," is by no means transparent. The duty to respect the autonomy of the opponent, which is essential for tolerance, is sometimes limited by the recognition of the priority of other duties, such as the duty to save someone's life in a situation of uncertainty about the autonomous nature of his or her decision (this is the situation most often faced by doctors). It is also sometimes limited by the recognition of the priority of other values, such as the value of life or the duty of care.

The discussed dispute superficially concerns only the limits of tolerance, but in essence it is a dispute about right and wrong, as well as about hierarchy of values and the priority of duties. And since the parties involved in this dispute appeal to superior reasons - philosophical and religious - to justify their views, dispute takes on a worldview character. For this reason, there is no chance of resolving it, and it is likely that each side will remain with its opinion.

This kind of situation raises the possibility of tolerance understood as respect for the autonomous views or decisions of the opponent - but only a possibility. For as I have shown in these considerations, tolerance presupposes a conscious choice of the type of behavior toward the opponent. However, in a situation where one party claims a monopoly on truth or goodness, tolerance-if it is possible at all-can only concern secondary matters. After all, it is difficult to argue seriously whether a person's life or autonomy is of greater value with someone who *a priori* accepts only one answer as true: the one he himself believes in.

⁶ A clear testimony to this is the Dutch law legalizing euthanasia "on demand."