

THE DISTINCTIVE PARADOX OF  
RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE:  
Active Tolerance as a Mean  
Between Passive Tolerance and Recognition

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Too many political scientists treat tolerance as a single, one-dimensional attitude and overlook that different areas of people's lives require different forms of tolerance.<sup>1</sup> Their work assumes that religion is not essentially different from other elements of people's identities, and that a person who is generally tolerant is ipso facto religiously tolerant. The empirical research which does recognize that different types of tolerance ought to be treated differently focuses solely upon the distinctive nature of racial tolerance.<sup>2</sup>

After 2001, however, the rise of Muslim extremism as a political force and the increasing religious diversity of the United States have brought religious tolerance to the fore. Political conflicts are increasingly rooted in religious conflicts.<sup>3</sup> Religious tolerance also commands particular interest because a peculiar and unique dilemma lies at its heart that has not been adequately addressed in the theoretical or empirical literature. The strength of many Americans' religious beliefs both requires that the state aggressively promote a particularly robust form of tolerance regarding religion and simultaneously places strong limits on what type of religious tolerance the state can legitimately promote.

On the one hand, the centrality of religion to identity and the strong exception many people take to slights about their religion means that it is not sufficient to passively forego support of public policies and laws that discriminate against religious groups to be considered religiously tolerant. People must also take action to protest religiously intolerant public policies. On the other hand, the strength of many Americans' religious beliefs and particularly of those James Davidson Hunter describes as orthodox believers is *exactly* the reason that the state must be careful about what sort of religious tolerance it encourages among believers.<sup>4</sup> An overly vigorous attempt to promote religious tolerance may illegitimately push some believers to betray their faiths by encouraging them to accept the value of religious beliefs contrary to their own.

Two theories of tolerance prevail in the contemporary political science literature. Empirical tolerance researchers emphasize passive tolerance and define citizens as tolerant when they refrain from supporting discriminatory laws or policies. Several prominent political theorists including Charles Taylor argue for a more robust recognition version of tolerance. Recognizing differences requires that citizens be open to exploring in good faith the objective value of a significant number of cultures and belief systems besides their own. The distinctive paradox of religious tolerance renders both models of tolerance inappropriate for religious beliefs. Passive tolerance is too weak to insure adequate protection to religious believers, but the requirements of recognition are too strenuous for many religious believers to accept. Active tolerance, which lies as a mean between the extremes of passive tolerance and recognition, is most appropriate in the case of religion. Active tolerance involves a willingness to take action in private and public spheres to make religious minorities feel accepted based upon an acknowledgement of the subjective value that minorities attribute to their beliefs. Not all citizens will achieve perfect active tolerance, but it proves useful as a standard because it is integral to democratic success.

This article attempts to bridge the gap between political philosophy and empirical political science. Theory and practice must be closely linked in order to better understand what practices are legitimate to promote religious tolerance in a liberal democracy. This essay draws several essential theoretical distinctions between the requirements of religious and other important forms of tolerance to recommend changes in the empirical testing of religious tolerance. The first part of the article examines the centrality of religion to many Americans' identities and several other distinctive aspects of religious belief. The second part examines why these distinctive aspects of religion require a heightened form of tolerance for religion, and the empirical implications of this distinction. Active tolerance of religion is necessary to promote adequate democratic deliberation and vigorous participation by major social groups. The third section asks how tolerant the state should be of seemingly intolerant views about religion. It makes a distinction between state promotion of active tolerance, which is desirable, and state promotion of the recognition of the value of religious beliefs, which may infringe on basic rights of conscience. The fourth section explores the empirical implications of active tolerance for a scholarly literature that is primarily concerned with passive tolerance.

Finally, toleration occurs in different spheres, but the ultimate foundation of tolerance—especially active tolerance—is in moral education. Liberal theorists, perhaps most famously Locke, have recognized the primacy of education to tolerance but many recent theorists downplay the role of education, perhaps because it seems paternalistic. The fifth section explains how active tolerance can be cultivated in public education, and the implications of our arguments for civic education research.

THE CENTRALITY OF RELIGION  
AND OTHER DISTINCTIVE ASPECTS OF RELIGION

Empirical evidence and theoretical arguments attest to the centrality of religion in many contemporary Americans' identities. In a 2004 Gallup Poll, 90 percent of those surveyed said that they believed in God.<sup>5</sup> Fifty-five percent reported that religion is "very important to their lives" while an additional 29 percent described religion as "fairly important," numbers consistent with previous iterations of the survey. Although fewer Americans are highly involved in religious worship, a substantial number—in contrast to other liberal democracies—are avid church and synagogue-goers.

Furthermore, religion often shapes what people believe and feel about other crucial aspects of their identities. Many theologians follow Paul Tillich in describing beliefs about religion as 'ultimate' concerns which have a strong influence upon important life decisions and other subordinate beliefs that individuals hold.<sup>6</sup> Political theorists concur with this conclusion by identifying religious beliefs as comprehensive beliefs. John Rawls explains that a belief is comprehensive when

[i]t includes conceptions of what is of value in human life, and ideals of personal character, as well as ideals of friendship and of familial and associational relationships, and much else that is to inform our conduct and in the limit to our life as a whole. A conception is fully comprehensive if it covers all recognized values and virtues within one rather precisely articulated system.<sup>7</sup>

In light of Rawls's criteria, religious perspectives are not only comprehensive perspectives; they are the most paradigmatic examples of fully comprehensive views. A person's views on religion often shape attitudes toward romantic relationships, professional pursuits, artistic endeavors and many other aspects of identity. Even secularists or atheists depend on religion since their identities are defined in opposition to religious faith and culture.

Why does the fact that religion is a core feature of many Americans' identities mean that citizens ought to strive particularly vigorously to be religiously tolerant? Liberal democratic societies are distinguished by their heightened respect for the dignity of every citizen. Respecting each person's dignity requires not only protection from severe or cruel physical pain, but also protection from excessive mental pain. The centrality of religion to the believer's identity means that believers are likely to be particularly sensitive to slights, and that the threshold for being harmed by religious insults is considerably lower than that for other aspects of identity. A slight about the average person's religious identity or group hurts more than a slight about her membership in a chess club or in a homeowner's association. To borrow from W. E. B. Dubois's reflection upon race in *The Souls of Black Folk*, religious insults often produce a painful double consciousness. Although insults are unlikely to change the ultimate commitments of religious believers, insults

will cause many believers to feel ambivalent about their commitments and even cause some to treat their beliefs as a badge of inferiority.

Not only is religion something about which people feel strongly, it is also the paradigmatic example of a comprehensive belief. This comprehensiveness, religion's ability to organize a life, is the primary reason for religion's distinctiveness and for the need for active tolerance. Other comprehensive "worldviews" deserve similar respect. In practice, however, most comprehensive worldviews are explicitly religious. Outside departments of philosophy, there are few self-proclaimed Kantians who order their lives according to the teachings of the sage of Königsberg.

A person's religion is often essential to her overall lifeplan and her conception of the meaning of life. Religious beliefs not only inform the choices that many make but provide many with a sense of why their life is worth living and their plans are worth carrying out. Liberal societies are particularly concerned with enabling individuals to choose their lifeplans on their own and insuring that individuals have the self-esteem necessary to feel that their lifeplans are worth carrying out.<sup>8</sup> A believer who regularly encounters discrimination or whose religious beliefs are ignored in the public sphere to a far greater extent than mainstream beliefs may be led to doubt the value of his lifeplan and his conception of the meaning of life, and may lack sufficient will to carry out his plans against the grain of public opinion.

Slights about central aspects of a person's identity also produce a sense of alienation from her community. Liberal democratic societies are distinguished by their inclusiveness, recognizing members as citizens and equally valued political participants. To foster inclusion and participation, they strive to make citizens of various backgrounds feel welcome and comfortable. This concern with inclusiveness is evident in the tremendous value that liberal political philosophers attribute to state neutrality; the state must avoid endorsing any conception of the good life lest citizens with competing conceptions feel alienated.<sup>9</sup> A citizen who experiences insults about a central aspect of her identity such as her religion or whose religion is severely ignored relative to mainstream beliefs is especially likely to feel that her community does not accept people like her. She may question whether it is possible to reconcile her religious identity with her membership in her society.

Emphasizing religious believers' heightened sensitivity to explain why democratic citizens should be religiously tolerant might still seem to beg the question. Tolerance scholars debate whether tolerance should be defined according to standard criteria or be defined subjectively by the alleged victim of intolerance. For instance, a Christian who asks a Sikh co-worker why he wears a turban may commit an intolerant act even though he does not intend to insult. Especially if Sikhs are a minority in the office, the Christian's target might alienate the Sikh because it singles him out as different from his co-workers. Can one objectively determine whether the Christian's question is intolerant or whether the Sikh is

being overly sensitive in this case? Instead of striving to reduce religious intolerance, perhaps our society's main focus should be on reducing the religious believers' excessive sensitivity to slights.<sup>10</sup>

One reason to choose greater tolerance instead of lesser sensitivity in the case of religion is that many religious believers feel their beliefs are immutable or non-negotiable. Liberal citizens have a duty to provide heightened respect to beliefs or characteristics that are or are felt to be outside of a person's discretion because people should not be blamed for matters outside of their control. Unlike other important aspects of a person's identity such as race and sex, however, a person's religion is not physically immutable. Nor is it clear that religion is intellectually immutable. Many religions allow for rational discussion, conversion, and evangelism. Indeed, a 1978 Gallup poll found that 80 percent of Americans agreed that "an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any churches or synagogues."<sup>11</sup> To understand why it is possible for people to change their religions while simultaneously feeling their religious beliefs to be immutable, consider converts' typical reasoning processes.

One prevalent reason for conversion is a person's introduction to particularly compelling arguments that their current belief system is deficient and that another belief system is more fulfilling. When this occurs, people explain their conversion in non-voluntary terms. A Baptist who is persuaded by argument to convert to Catholicism will reason: "Given the compelling evidence in favor of Catholicism that I have discovered through study and reflection, I have no other choice but to abandon Baptism and convert to Catholicism." Another prevalent reason for conversion is the experience of a sudden revelation or direct communication from a divine being like the one Saul had on the road to Damascus. In these cases converts reason: "Since God commands me to change my religion, I have no choice but to change it." In both cases, even though individuals are in some sense choosing their new beliefs, they still feel their religious beliefs to be immutable because they have changed their beliefs for reasons they believe are outside of their control. The same types of reasoning occur when individuals and religious groups discuss and change aspects of their religions without leaving their denomination.<sup>12</sup>

The distinctive way in which religion is immutable also has important consequences for tolerance. A person's race or sex is physically obvious but very few religious groups in contemporary America such as the Amish, Sikhs, and Hasidic Jews are required to physically demonstrate their religions through distinctive dress or physical attributes. Religious believers are more likely to be capable of concealing their religious identities than other minorities. That religious people sometimes conceal their religious identities, however, should by no means be taken as evidence that such concealment is satisfactory to them. Almost all religious believers who engage in concealment do so because it is the lesser of two evils.<sup>13</sup> In extreme cases religious groups have no choice but to conceal for the

sake of survival. Consider the Marrano Jews during the Spanish Inquisition who remained faithful to their religion in private while publicly professing Catholicism to satisfy Inquisitors. Concealment occurs more often, however, in uncomfortable rather than dangerous environments. A lone Muslim American at a workplace composed of Christians may choose to conceal his religious identity because he feels the revelation of his religion may trigger insults and conflict. Members of minority religions may also conceal the degree of their religious commitment to avoid comments or insults from peers even when they are open about their religious identity. Religious believers who conceal their beliefs feel doubly pained by a sense of betrayal of their faith and the inability to protest when peers make hurtful comments about their religious beliefs.

The ability of religious believers to conceal their beliefs has particular implications for religious tolerance. The absence of discriminatory policies or overt slurs and insults does not equal tolerance. Such an environment may indicate the dominance of a religious group that does not need to publicly discriminate or insult vulnerable and smaller religious groups because it does not feel threatened by the presence of these groups. Religious minorities cannot be certain in these situations whether a robust expression of their religious identity and views would be welcome or at least not mocked. They may conceal their beliefs in order to prevent discriminatory policies or insults, “covering” their true identities.<sup>14</sup>

Religious tolerance requires the establishment of an environment where believers are able to feel comfortable expressing their religious identity. Creating such an environment will not only prevent painful and inauthentic concealments of religion, but will further the cause of liberal democracy. The ability of citizens to interact with people they disagree with is integral to the flourishing of a liberal democratic society. One cannot learn to get along with others who hold different viewpoints without being aware of disagreements. For such an environment to exist, members of dominant religious groups must provide members of small and vulnerable religious groups some sign that expression of their religious identities is acceptable. One way this can happen is if the members of dominant groups take political action to protect the rights of minority groups. Such action by private citizens as opposed to government officials will work to counter the sense of alienation and insecurity that religious minorities are likely to feel as a result of their minority status. Religious minorities are likely to feel truly welcome and included in their communities when their neighbors and co-workers rally to their support.

Even though this essay contends that paying attention to subjective offense is important, it does not intend to establish a legal standard for offense. The goal of active tolerance is not to silence all criticism of belief, for some individuals may take offense too easily, but to create a fair process for discussing religion. Whether one party takes offense is simply one measure for a conversation’s fairness. In this usage, offense is something that creates lasting harm rather than

temporary discomfort. It is the dull pain of exclusion rather than the sting of being forced to explain one's convictions. The legal system's demand for evidence forces courtroom arguments about religious discrimination to turn on evidence of harm. The best way to navigate the murky ground between offensive speech and reasoned discussion, however, is through conversation, not law. Protestants can, for example, raise questions about the authority of the Pope as long as they do so in an appropriately civil fashion, as a way of defining themselves rather than attacking others.

Another essential way to make religious minorities comfortable in expressing their beliefs is for dominant religious groups to cultivate some understanding of their beliefs. A person's religion is more than an aspect of her identity. For many, a religion is a comprehensive belief system that organizes the individual's activities and thoughts, commands adherents to engage in certain behaviors and prohibits them from engaging in others. Since a person's religion can be relevant to a wider range of activities and beliefs, religious tolerance in many cases consists in understanding the various implications of religion rather than ignoring them. To be tolerant of religion, citizens must know something about the practices that religions enjoin.

This knowledge can enable citizens to better respect everyday religious practices and the political demands that religious beliefs occasionally entail. To use a relatively simple example, without an understanding of the dietary restrictions religions impose, a person may place a co-worker or neighbor in an awkward situation by offering a prohibited food or by failing to provide adequate alternatives to a prohibited meal. Understanding the religious justification for the dietary restrictions or the way they are related to central tenets of the faith will deepen appreciation for the restrictions. To use a more explicitly political example, greater knowledge will also enable citizens to understand the logic of religious minorities who request exemptions from military service or from material in the compulsory public school curriculum they find objectionable. In both cases, when dominant religious groups display understanding of the practices of minority religions, minority religions are more likely to be willing to share and express their beliefs both religious and non-religious.

Finally, the need for a heightened form of religious tolerance is the result of our current political environment. While liberal democratic citizens always possess fundamental rights and all liberal democratic societies bear an obligation to promote tolerance, the specific type of tolerance that liberal democratic societies are obliged to promote is context dependent. A basic example of a contextual consideration that tolerance scholars must take into account is whether a country faces a legitimate threat to peace and security. The type of skills and information citizens need to be tolerant after the events of September 11, 2001, are different than what they needed to be considered tolerant before these events. Numerous tolerance studies suggest that one of the factors most strongly related to intolerant

beliefs is threat perception.<sup>15</sup> It is commonplace in the literature to recognize that groups which are seen as threatening are more likely to be disliked and experience intolerance.<sup>16</sup> Individuals who perceive a threat, especially to the “American way of life,” are less likely to hold abstract democratic principles supportive of liberty. Even when citizens hold these abstract principles, they are less likely in times of heightened perceived threat to apply these principles to groups they feel threatened by. The onus on a liberal democracy to promote tolerance is particularly strong when it is at war with groups or nations who share nominal characteristics with a significant proportion of its citizens.

These considerations are relevant to the contemporary American situation because of our engagement in the war on terror.<sup>17</sup> Young people in the United States are growing up in a culture which stresses that they live in a dangerous world, conditions which could foster intolerance. In particular, there is disturbing evidence that Americans have become more suspicious of Muslims in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001. An ABC News poll found that from January 2002 to September 2003 the number of Americans who think Islam encourages violence rose from 14 to 34 percent while the number of Americans who have an unfavorable view of Islam rose from 24 to 34 percent during the same period.<sup>18</sup> The Council on American-Islamic relations, an Islamic civil rights groups, recently released a finding showing a 15 percent increase in incidents of violence, discrimination and harassment of Muslims in America since 2002.<sup>19</sup> In addition to Muslims, citizens of the United States must learn to coexist with increasing numbers of immigrants from Asia and Africa who are not part of the Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>20</sup> Religious tolerance becomes all the more important in a climate of increased diversity when religious differences are at the heart of foreign and domestic policy issues.

### ACTIVE TOLERANCE AND DEMOCRACY

Scholars most often define tolerance as a passive virtue that requires citizens to refrain from taking discriminatory or hurtful action, but the previous section suggests that tolerance regarding religion must involve a more active component. Active tolerance broadly defined involves the willingness of citizens to act on behalf of others who are discriminated against in public policy or law, or who are the targets of slights and insults. To be actively tolerant citizens, for instance, must not only refrain from preventing Muslim groups from holding rallies in public parks, but must actively protest if their local government enacts such a ban. In addition to a willingness to counter discrimination, active tolerance requires engagement with other religions. Recognizing and encountering members of other traditions both increases knowledge and, in many cases, decreases threat. In addition engagement promotes the mutual trust that is the foundation for social cooperation and flourishing in democratic society. Active tolerance is founded in two kinds of knowledge. The first, basic knowledge of religious traditions, is a

tool with which to reduce perceived threat. The second, knowledge of the democratic process and the American religious and political tradition, contributes to a feeling of duty for and efficacy in policing intolerance that can help maintain civil peace and expression.

Active tolerance is a high bar, though. Given the reluctance of many Americans to participate in public affairs in general, perhaps it is unrealistic to expect a significant number of Americans to engage in actively tolerant behavior. It is important to keep in mind, however, that there are different degrees of active tolerance. The most obvious examples of actions or behavior intended to combat discrimination would involve citizens taking public action such as protesting a discriminatory policy against religious minorities by signing a petition, writing a letter to a local newspaper, or organizing a protest march. This type of public behavior clearly has a heartening effect for religious minorities, and our society should strive to encourage these forms of behavior as long as they do not coercively indoctrinate citizens or disrespect their right to freedom of conscience.

At the same time, even small gestures can have significance for members of alienated religious minorities. In a recent op-ed letter to the *New York Times*, Fatima Abdrabboh, a Muslim-American student at Harvard's Kennedy School who wears a hijab, begins by discussing the increasing alienation she felt as a result of the U.S. government's recent treatment of Muslims at home and abroad, and the hostile stares her headdress has drawn. A recent experience at a local gym, however, brightened her outlook. While exercising on the treadmill, she inadvertently dropped her keys. When she looked up, her keys were thoughtfully handed to her by former Vice President Al Gore, who happened to be exercising in the same gym. She concludes:

It was nothing more than a kind gesture, but at that moment Mr. Gore's act represented all that I yearned for—acceptance and acknowledgement. There in front of me, he stood for a part of America that has not made itself well known to 10 million Arab and Muslim-Americans, many of whom are becoming increasingly withdrawn and reclusive because of the everyday hostility they feel.<sup>21</sup>

In short, Ms. Abdrabboh claims that Mr. Gore's gesture provided the sense of inclusion and comfort with expressing identity that active tolerance is intended to achieve.

The effects of active tolerance are, of course, not as easily achieved in all cases as they are in this anecdote. Many active tolerance actions in the public sphere demand greater effort and even sacrifice. Nevertheless, small gestures in private do have a significant effect. Some citizens will be too preoccupied with family and work responsibilities to engage in significant public action, but even here smaller gestures feed a sense of inclusion and are within reach of all citizens. The anecdote also usefully reminds us that private actions can have just as much significance as political actions. Passive tolerance scholars who concern themselves solely with discriminatory public policies neglect the fact that even if egalitarian laws

and policies prevail, taunts and slights in private arenas such as the workplace, school, or one's neighborhood or even being given the cold shoulder can alienate religious minorities. Active tolerance strives to provide religious minorities with a sense of inclusion in the private as well as the public sphere.

Even if active tolerance is realistic, passive tolerance scholars may question whether cultivating active tolerance among the general population is *necessary*. Given that Americans have always demonstrated measurable levels of passive tolerance and that most true democracies have stable political systems, is cultivating active tolerance among the general public necessary for liberal democracy? The usual view is that the implications of intolerance—the suppression of rights and liberties through law and social movements—turn on the conduct of elites. Community leaders, lawyers, newspaper publishers, and public officials are presumably more amenable to democratic values, and there may even be something about the experience of being a leader that functions as a civics or tolerance course, exposing elites to problems which force them to confront the distinction between belief and behavior and to question the link between the perception of threat and tolerance.<sup>22</sup> The ability of elites to temper intolerant attitudes when making policy is of only small comfort, though. At some point, the political incentives for inciting intolerance or for restricting basic civil rights and liberties become too great to resist. Many legislators during the Cold War, for instance, found it politically profitable to play upon public fears of Communists just as legislators today might exploit, and arguably already have exploited hostility toward Arab Muslims.

Instead of relying on the experience of being a leader to override the political incentives for appealing to intolerance, a democratic society must prepare its citizens to resist appeals to prejudice. It is important to note that the active and passive varieties of tolerance are intertwined. If a significant proportion of citizens mobilizes to counter intolerant acts and to make efforts to engage with other religious traditions, then the cumulative effect will be an environment in which intolerant acts are unacceptable and intolerant beliefs remain private. Concealing intolerant beliefs about race or gender may not be desirable. Nevertheless, tolerance requires protecting a certain degree of religious intolerance, at least in the private realm, because religious liberty requires that people be able to disapprove of other religions to a degree that would be unacceptable in the area of race. Liberal values, today at least, do not easily admit of distinctions based on race and especially racial superiority or inferiority. In contrast, liberal societies assume that no final answer is possible about the truth of religion or, at least, that no final collective answer is necessary for a prosperous society.

Political scientists and philosophers cannot rest content with concluding that America is a religiously tolerant nation merely because a significant majority of citizens refuse to support discriminatory laws. Minorities may not always feel that an environment without discriminatory policies or overt slurs and insults is

necessarily tolerant of their beliefs. Dominant groups do not need to publicly discriminate or insult weaker religious groups when they can simply assume dominance. Like “symbolic” or “modern” racism, religious intolerance could flourish through a combination of hostile affect toward religious groups and support for traditional liberal or conservative values.<sup>23</sup> Intolerant conservatives could discriminate against Muslims or Jews not because of perceived threat but because of negative attitudes justified through concerns about whether these groups believe in American values such as self-reliance and the Protestant work ethic. Liberals could discriminate against orthodox religious believers in a similar way: by pledging support for free exercise of religion while justifying intolerance on the grounds that evangelicals or orthodox Jews are not supportive of traditional American values of autonomy, openness, and free expression.

Our point is not to silence principled disagreement but to encourage scholars to study tolerance in a way that makes room for free expression of members of all religious groups that have common ground with liberalism as well as for people who profess no religion. Religious tolerance in particular requires an environment where believers feel comfortable expressing their beliefs. Members of dominant religious groups need not censor their beliefs but they should be committed to protecting the rights of minority groups. Active engagement—standing up for a beleaguered minority or recognizing religious diversity for example—is necessary because religious minorities may feel alienation or insecurity in an environment where dominant groups are only passively supportive of basic rights and liberties.

A vibrant democracy requires that citizens tolerate others’ political participation, even the participation of those who take unpopular positions. It is a commonplace that self-government is at the core of democracy, and achieving self-government requires high levels of political participation through political institutions and voluntary associations. This essay goes a step further and argues that democracy depends upon active tolerance, and not merely upon the respect for civil rights and liberties, because engagement with other social groups and active defense of their rights strengthen the bonds of social trust on which democratic vitality and voluntary associations depend.

Active tolerance furthers democratic success because it fosters trust—an essential ingredient in pluralist societies which do not share a common culture. If all citizens, no matter how much they disagree with each other, can trust that the political system is fair and open to them and that they can exercise their fundamental rights and goods as humans by speaking freely and voting in elections, then they will have reason to feel efficacious and to participate in politics. A substantial core of citizens who practice active tolerance ensures that everyone’s rights will be defended and that there will be sufficient familiarity within a community to build trust. If losers in one round of the political process trust that the system is fair, then they have reason to continue peaceful involvement and not withdraw or resort to force.<sup>24</sup> The empirical literature supports the link between

trust and participation. Inglehart finds that citizens of countries that have cultural resources sustaining democracy also report high levels of interpersonal trust and general life satisfaction.<sup>25</sup>

Even relatively homogenous societies require trust borne out of active engagement with others in order to prosper. Robert Putnam made this point with his famous paradox: Why is northern Italy so much more productive than southern Italy when both have similar political institutions?<sup>26</sup> Putnam found that northern Italians were embedded in social networks and practiced general reciprocity that led to high levels of interpersonal trust. Cohesive northern Italians were able to effectively organize and act collectively, while in regions with less “social capital” people were less law abiding, less trustful, and consequently more likely to demand harsh government action to control corruption and police their fellow citizens. The link between trust and participation holds at the individual level; people with high levels of interpersonal trust are more socially engaged.<sup>27</sup>

General trust of fellow citizens, a key ingredient for democratic success, requires a substantial amount of active tolerance. In religiously diverse societies, vigorous protection for the rights of religious minorities to express their beliefs is crucial. They must be made to feel comfortable practicing their religion, as long as it does not infringe on the rights of others, and they must trust their fellow citizens to respect their conscience and to interact with them fairly. The requirements for active tolerance presented here are no more and no less than the standard recipe for good citizenship in liberal democracy, albeit more of a challenge in an age of increasing religious diversity. Not all citizens will take action on behalf of persecuted minorities, and of those that do not all will take actions that impose a high cost. Nevertheless, a certain number must cultivate active tolerance to ensure democratic flourishing. Without active tolerance, and without civic education of the young that walks the fine line between encouraging active tolerance and preserving space for religiously intolerant beliefs but not actions, society runs a risk identified by the Tocqueville, and indeed all republican theorists. Without a certain amount of virtue among the people or, in more contemporary language, active tolerance of the fundamental ethical commitments, often religious, of others, citizens can descend into privatism. When people are concerned only with private and individual affairs, the public sphere may be taken over by tyrannical public opinion that undermines mutual trust and possibilities for deliberation.

#### ACTIVE TOLERANCE VS. RECOGNITION

Perhaps the fundamental problem with active tolerance, however, is not that it is too strenuous but that it is not strenuous enough. In his essay, “Multiculturalism and ‘The Politics of Recognition’” Charles Taylor claims that equal respect for other cultures involves some recognition of the values and beliefs that these cultures hold dear. Taylor rejects the idea that liberal democracies should instruct citizens to treat “all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some

considerable stretch of time” as having equal or even considerable value.<sup>28</sup> He does argue, however, that citizens should treat the “presumption” that all cultures are of equal value and thus entitled to equal respect as a “starting hypothesis.” Citizens must make a good faith and open-minded effort to explore the objective value of other cultures. Active tolerance calls for an increase in understanding and knowledge about other cultures, and a change in behavior based on this awareness. Recognition, however, involves an internal change in perspective that does not only consist of learning about what people do or believe in other cultures, but requires, in Gadamer’s phrase, a “fusion of horizons.”<sup>29</sup> Recognition demands openness to changing the standards and norms used to evaluate cultures and an acknowledgment that the premises used to evaluate cultures may be tainted by ethnocentric bias. Although recognition theorists usually focus upon race, gender, and sexual orientation, the discussion in the previous two sections suggests that the centrality of religion to identity means that it too should be accorded recognition.

This section uses previously discussed and newly introduced distinctive aspects of religion to argue that encouraging recognition of diverse religious beliefs violates the special consideration to which religiously *intolerant* beliefs are entitled. It simultaneously explains why religiously intolerant beliefs are entitled to a degree of consideration other forms of intolerant beliefs do not merit. Since Taylor’s recognition argument serves as a primary justification for teaching multiculturalism in schools, this essay makes an extended comparison between two hypothetical multicultural education courses to underscore the problems that the standard of recognition poses for religion. This comparison also prepares the reader for a discussion of the civic education implications of the argument in the concluding section of the article.<sup>30</sup>

Imagine a school district with a policy to promote racial and ethnic tolerance. The goal of this policy is to teach students that people of all races and ethnicities are equal not only in terms of their rights but also in terms of their intellectual and moral potential. The school board and administrators decide, however, that it is necessary but not sufficient to teach abstract formulations of tolerance. In addition, the school develops a curriculum that teaches students about members of different races and ethnicities who have achieved positions of influence and power in mainstream America. Since race and ethnicity are central to many individuals’ identities, individuals should have the ability to express their racial and ethnic identity and to have the importance of their identity acknowledged by mainstream culture, and, the argument goes, the only way this can happen is if students learn to take pride in their racial and ethnic history and heritage. The promotion of racial and ethnic pride is especially important because mainstream American culture has often suppressed the expression of racial and ethnic identity, and in the past denigrated the culture and history of minority races and ethnicities. To achieve this result, the district decides to implement a multicultural education encouraging students to accept that the practices and belief of a variety of racial

and ethnic groups are legitimate. To enable African-Americans to take pride in their heritage and encourage other students to acknowledge that the ancestors of African-Americans belonged to flourishing cultures before their forcible incorporation into American society, teachers ask students to consider the merits of African art, music, distinct family organizations, and attitudes to the relation between humans and nature. Students are taught that while some practices in these cultures might be harmful, there might also be some advantages to these perspectives that are lacking in mainstream American culture.

Now imagine that the school board decides to take similar approaches to encourage religious tolerance. Textbooks could show people of different religions fulfilling the same public functions: a Sikh with a headdress serving as a judge or teacher, a Buddhist as president, and so on. Most readers would not find this Benetton "world of many colors" approach problematic. It is not disrespectful and does no violence to religious belief. Problems are likely to arise, however, if the district takes a more explicitly multicultural approach to religion. The specter of relativism arises if the curriculum encourages students to treat the beliefs and practices of other religious groups as legitimate ways of worshipping the divine, and teaches students to compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of each religious tradition. A similar danger accompanies teaching that all religions have the same basic teachings. To be sure, influential Christian apologists such as C. S. Lewis in *The Abolition of Man* have made this point. In less skillful hands, however, it can reduce religion to the Decalogue and the Golden Rule and ignore the role of practice, sacraments, and sacred space and time which form the core of many Christian and non-Christian forms of religion.

Most readers will have a visceral reaction against the religious tolerance curriculum that would be absent in the case of an aggressive racial tolerance curriculum. Multicultural education regarding race and ethnicity is, of course, controversial, but the main objections are political. Right-leaning critics like Dinesh D'Souza claim that for the United States to be an effective player on the world stage, citizens must have confidence in the superiority of mainstream American beliefs and practices.<sup>31</sup> Even some left-leaning critics like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. warn that excessive emphasis upon the differences between Americans will produce a Balkanization of American society.<sup>32</sup> A multicultural education for religious tolerance is likely to provoke a more normative and severe type of reaction. Besides the political implications of this education, many will feel that religious multicultural education violates the personal rights of students in a way that education for racial and ethnic tolerance does not. What explains these different reactions to two apparently identical curriculum policies? Is the distinction legitimate or are our instincts wrong and is it merely that there is a greater conventional taboo against racial intolerance than against religious intolerance?

The most persuasive distinction between these two curriculum policies has to do with the differences between the nature of beliefs critical of races and those

critical of religions. Beliefs critical of religions possess some merit that racially intolerant beliefs do not. A society risks eliminating potentially valuable perspectives when it encourages students to accept the legitimacy of religious beliefs and practices beside their own. This is not to categorically assert that racist beliefs lack normative value. The very fact that racists hold these beliefs strongly is normatively significant to some, however weak, extent because encouraging them to change their beliefs would cause them some degree of psychological suffering.

The amount of pain caused by changing or muting racist beliefs should not be sufficient to guarantee protection for those beliefs, however. Even if racist beliefs possess some normative significance, they fail to meet the threshold of normative significance required for protection required in a liberal democratic society. An instructive analogy can be drawn between our approach and the compelling interest test that the Supreme Court has used most notably in First Amendment and Equal Protection cases. In cases involving especially important rights claims such as the right to free exercise of religion, the Supreme Court requires the government to meet a special threshold to override these rights claims by demonstrating that its actions are based upon a compelling interest. The promotion of racial and religious tolerance in our society and the corresponding rights to be free of racial and religious discrimination are especially important. To override these claims by protecting racially and religiously intolerant beliefs to at least some extent requires showing that racially and religiously intolerant beliefs not only possess some merit but possess a special degree of merit and thus that government has a compelling interest in protecting them. In short, religiously intolerant beliefs are normatively significant to a much greater extent than racially intolerant beliefs, and this normative significance entitles them to a greater degree of protection from state interference.

One possible basis for the legitimacy of the distinction has to do with the social value of devoutly religious views. Theorists from Tocqueville to Robert Booth Fowler have cogently argued that religion can be a sanctuary from the capitalist ethos.<sup>33</sup> In America, in particular, where rampant consumerism reigns, religion can remind people that there is something outside the self and material values. The presence of robust religious worldviews can reinforce individual autonomy—a central liberal democratic value—by encouraging individuals to critically examine liberal society and by presenting alternative ways of life. The absence of robust religious perspectives and communities can lead to a flat and homogenous social landscape. Religion has often served as an equally effective tool for challenging questionable majoritarian norms and policies. Religions hold that there is a higher, natural law that can be used as a standard to evaluate the laws and policies enacted by states. The belief in natural law mobilized resistance to slavery among abolitionists and to segregation laws during the civil rights movements.

These examples remind us that religious intolerance is often valuable because a main function and purpose of religious beliefs is their intolerance of unjust and evil beliefs and practices. An overly vigorous attempt to erase religious intolerance may have the perverse effect of eliminating legitimate objections to evil based in religion. “Metaphysical relativism,” tolerance scholar Jay Newman writes “is likely to lead a man to do too much tolerating; it would seem to promote moral weakness, apathy, and passivity rather than genuine tolerance, tolerance of what ought to be tolerated.”<sup>34</sup>

Although the curriculum policy for religious tolerance will erode socially dangerous views based on religion, it is problematic because it might simultaneously erode robust religious perspectives that have real social value. Racially intolerant views, by contrast, do not seem to possess any socially redeeming characteristics; they are unmitigated obstacles to a society’s welfare. Proponents of racist beliefs might respond that the elimination of these views would also flatten and homogenize American society. But such an argument relies upon the premises that diversity is valuable for diversity’s sake, and that all forms of diversity are equally valuable. A rich cultural landscape does not depend upon the availability of all possible beliefs, but only upon the availability of a significant diversity of beliefs. If, for instance, a sufficient variety of religious, national, and ethnic views are already present and flourishing in a liberal democratic culture, there is no need to insure that worthless racially intolerant beliefs and communities flourish as well.<sup>35</sup>

Even more important than the social harm that would be caused by the religious tolerance curriculum outlined above, however, is the harm that would be caused to individuals’ consciences. The basis for this harm and another essential distinction between beliefs critical of religion and those critical of race is that the truth claims of different religions are often mutually exclusive while beliefs about racial and ethnic identity are less likely to be mutually exclusive. Most people do not believe that the achievements and positive attributes of one race are negated or diminished by accepting the achievements and positive attributes of other races. The mutual exclusivity of religious beliefs is most clear in the case of monotheistic religions and perhaps most true of Christianity. Many Christians—particularly fundamentalists and those believers James Davidson Hunter describes as orthodox—believe that to reconcile themselves to the belief that there are many ways to be saved denies the central role that accepting Christ plays in salvation.<sup>36</sup> Islam is more ecumenical insofar as one school of Islamic thought believes Jews and Christians are eligible for salvation because they have received a true, if partial, revelation. A Muslim would betray his faith, however, if he were to accept the view of Jews and Christians that Muhammad is not a true prophet. Even the most ecumenical of faiths view other religious beliefs as incompatible with their own. The henotheistic belief that it is possible to worship one deity without denying the worship of other deities is central to Hinduism. But it is exactly this belief in

henotheism that renders Hindus unable to accept the legitimacy of truth claims made by monotheistic religions that there is only one God and that the worship of several deities is idolatrous.

The distinction between race and religion on the grounds of mutual exclusivity does not merely rest upon the fact that more Americans are more likely to view religious beliefs as mutually exclusive. Even if citizens held mutually exclusive views about race and ethnicity in equal numbers, race and religion would still be distinct because the consequences of accepting alternative truth claims for religious believers are greater than the consequences racists endure when they are encouraged or required to accept the value of the beliefs and practices of other races. Intolerant religious believers and racists alike may face temporal consequences for embracing the value of alternative beliefs such as the loss of community, family and friends. Many religious believers, however, hold that there are eternal consequences for accepting the legitimacy of other religions' truth claims. Many Christian parents feel that by being encouraged to accept the legitimacy of belief systems that deny Christ's divinity their children risk betraying God and earning damnation. Orthodox Muslim parents will feel similarly about an education that encourages children to accept the legitimacy of beliefs that deny the centrality of Muhammad's revelation and behavior to human experience. For many orthodox and fundamentalist believers, it is not even necessary to permanently change beliefs or hold that there is more than one path to salvation to risk damnation. Merely entertaining doubt and skepticism about one's religion for any considerable period may produce this result.<sup>37</sup> In addition, previous sections of this essay noted the connection between religious beliefs, a person's lifeplan, and her self-esteem. Encouraging doubt and skepticism about religious beliefs may undermine some believers' confidence in their lifeplans and their esteem about the value of their activities. Policymakers should be wary of encouraging the acceptance of alternative beliefs if this acceptance might have such profound consequences.

But secularists and more progressive religious believers may question why they should care that religious believers hold that there are eternal consequences for accepting alternative religious beliefs. Aren't beliefs about eternal consequences, they might ask, grounded only in subjective opinion? A similar question might be posed concerning the mutual exclusivity of religious beliefs. Even granting that religious beliefs are irreconcilable and that the belief in eternal consequences is only subjectively held and without objective basis, religious beliefs still deserve special respect because their believers hold them so strongly. Consider a hypothetically analogous situation.

Imagine that the majority of American voters are single and concerned about overpopulation and the costs they and their society bear for supporting schools. This majority decides to enact a legal regulation in America identical to China's one-child policy. To protest this policy, parents desiring more than one child

could make an objectively verifiable argument and attempt to provide empirical evidence demonstrating that children who grow up with siblings tend to be more successful and happy than only children. But what if such evidence was not available or if the preponderance of evidence showed the opposite to be the case? Would there still be grounds for validating our visceral belief that such a policy is inconsistent with basic liberal democratic norms?

The more basic problem with this policy and the reason that decisions over procreation deserve special protection in liberal democracies is that interfering with these decisions would interfere significantly with a central part of the lifeplans of would-be parents, and because would-be parents would feel their decisions were not fully their own. Parents often feel that their decisions about having children are driven by biological and moral imperatives. Nevertheless, the reasons for special protection given to children are clear to anyone with a sympathetic imagination. Single people not only *can* imagine the value of having children, but they *ought* to engage in sympathetic imagination and consequently accept the special protection given to procreative decisions. Similarly, it is not necessary for us to be certain that religious truth claims are in fact irreconcilable and that there are eternal consequences for betraying one's faith to justify special protection for religious beliefs. It is sufficient that religious believers believe that truth claims are irreconcilable and that they believe there will be eternal consequences for betraying their faith.

The intellectual belief in mutually exclusive religious truth claims manifests itself in practice as well. Friendships and marriages traverse racial, professional, and political lines, but these connections become difficult between members of different religions if those religions are taken seriously. To be sure, one can have friends of different faith traditions, but if that faith is fundamental to a person's identity, then there is only so far such a person can go before reaching a fundamental disagreement with someone of a different faith. For instance, intermarriage is of particular concern for many religions because it leads to controversy over the religious education of children produced in mixed marriages. This concern is strongly related to beliefs in the mutual exclusivity of religious truth claims. Many religious communities hold that an upbringing exposing a child to two different views of religious truth is likely to dilute the child's commitment to the truth claims of each religion. Abstaining from close relationships with members of other religions is highly evident among religious fundamentalists, and of separatist communities such as the Amish community, which go so far as to engage in shunning of individuals who have left the faith. More importantly, this practice is also engaged in by other orthodox or traditional religious groups.<sup>38</sup> These groups engage in mainstream American society and constitute a significant portion of the population.

If recognizing the legitimacy of the truth claims of other religious groups often involves a negation of the believer's own truth claims and causes religious

believers to feel they are betraying their faith, the state's encouragement of this acceptance is clearly problematic. The multicultural education for religious tolerance outlined above would involve a violation of liberal democratic norms of state neutrality in several ways. On a general level, it would run the risk of placing excessive emphasis upon the similarities between religion, and discouraging students from realizing the way in which their religious traditions believe that religious truth claims are mutually exclusive. More specifically, it would at least implicitly bias students toward a pluralistic or henotheistic conception of religious truth inconsistent with monotheistic religious traditions. Conversely, it would illegitimately encourage members of henotheistic and ecumenical groups to accept the legitimacy of monotheistic beliefs. Even if such an education did not achieve its intended effect of having students accept the legitimacy of a variety of religious views, it might violate neutrality by encouraging students to hold a more skeptical view of the religious traditions they come from. The encouragement of skepticism would most strongly conflict with the views of orthodox and fundamentalist religious believers. As mentioned above, some members of these groups stress that even temporarily entertaining doubts about the truth of one's religion could interfere with salvation, which requires a whole-hearted commitment to the central doctrines of one's faith and leaves no room for skepticism.

Promoting religious tolerance requires more care than promoting other important forms of tolerance because beliefs critical of other religions must be protected. A multicultural education for recognition may be appropriate for race and ethnicity but it is inappropriate for religion. Taylor's recognition argument implies a strong relationship between external behavior that makes minority groups comfortable and internal beliefs about the objective value of these groups' beliefs. Recognition requires not only tolerant behavior, but the reduction or elimination of prejudice. Prejudice involves internal attitudes and beliefs regarding alternative belief systems or characteristics different than one's own. Minority groups will only feel sufficiently respected when state-sponsored education and other state legislation recognize the objective value of their beliefs. Ordinary citizens will only feel sufficiently motivated to act in ways consistent with respect for minorities when they acknowledge or at least explore in good faith the objective value of their beliefs.

These claims are empirically questionable. There may be other ways to motivate citizens to make minorities feel comfortable and respected besides having them explore the objective validity of minority beliefs, values, and practices. Minorities may feel comfortable expressing their views and participating sufficiently in politics even if the objective validity of their beliefs is not widely held. Nevertheless, these empirical doubts are of little concern in the case of race and ethnicity. Even if widespread recognition of the validity of minority views is not indubitably necessary to make racial or ethnic minorities feel comfortable, it is still a good idea for the state to encourage this openness because the relationship

between denying objective value to minority beliefs and practices and intolerant behavior may well exist. Furthermore, this state action does not infringe on the legitimate claims of racists.

Attempts to encourage recognition, reduce prejudice, and change internal attitudes about the objective value of beliefs are more problematic in the case of religion because religious prejudice is connected to the freedom of conscience and is more worthy of protection than prejudice toward physical characteristics. If Taylor's beliefs about the relationship between the reduction of prejudice and tolerant behavior are correct, then society is necessarily faced with a tragic choice between promoting recognition and the reduction of religiously intolerant behavior on the one hand, and the protection of legitimate religiously tolerant beliefs on the other.

The importance of both promoting religiously tolerant behavior, and protecting beliefs critical of religion, however, imposes an obligation on tolerance scholars to explore whether it is possible to do both simultaneously. The concept of active tolerance is intended as a more legitimate and less intrusive means than tolerance as recognition of securing sufficient respect for religious minorities. Active tolerance primarily attempts to secure respect for religious minorities through a change in behavior and actions toward religious minorities. Active tolerance, however, does not maintain perfect neutrality regarding religious prejudice and internal beliefs but rather tries to bring about an increase in respect through a less intrusive change in beliefs than does recognition. A multicultural education for recognition is problematic because it encourages citizens to explore and acknowledge the *objective* value of alternative religious beliefs. However, encouraging citizens to understand the *subjective* value that people of various religions find in their beliefs does not involve a violation of religiously intolerant beliefs. Encouraging an Orthodox Jew or a fundamentalist Christian to accept that Muhammad is or may be a legitimate prophet of God is mutually exclusive with his core beliefs, but encouraging Orthodox Jews or fundamentalist Christians to realize the strength of Muslims' belief in Muhammad's legitimacy as a prophet and the consequences of this for Islamic beliefs and practices is not. The state violates neutrality when it encourages a religious believer to explore whether a religious belief is valid for everybody, but it does not violate neutrality when it encourages citizens to recognize that other religious believers feel strongly about their beliefs and are deeply offended by disrespectful actions or speech concerning their beliefs. It is legitimate to bring about active tolerance by using the latter approach.

Abstract comparisons of the virtues of active tolerance with passive tolerance and recognition can only do so much before empirical questions arise. Aggressive proselytizers provide the most serious challenge to the appropriateness of active tolerance as a standard. For some religions, proselytizing is an obligation. Full respect for religious identity requires some accommodation for aggressive proselytizers yet these same proselytizers could infringe on the religious rights of others and cause the harm and "covering" that are so destructive to democratic life.<sup>39</sup>

Active tolerance demands that even religious believers who regard aggressive proselytizing as an obligation command respect. But this respect is for the dignity and centrality of their religion as a part of their identity and as a tradition linking them with the past and the future. If proselytizers use aggressive tactics that do not respect others' identities, then their tactics need not command respect or approval. Respect is a mutual quality that requires both sharing things that are important and listening to what is important to others.

In practice, most believers who regard proselytizing as an obligation should be able to practice active tolerance. As long as conversion attempts try to build on faith that the believer already holds, they are legitimate.<sup>40</sup> Cultivating active tolerance in citizens would likely satisfy many with firm religious commitments because it would lead to a greater public appreciation of religion's importance. Many of Hunter's "orthodox" believers care less about their particular religion being affirmed and more about providing a religion a more exalted place in the public sphere.<sup>41</sup> Aggressive proselytizing in which the believer is ignorant of the potential convert's background is often counterproductive.<sup>42</sup>

## EMPIRICAL IMPLICATIONS

### *A. Passive and Active Tolerance*

The political science literature portrays tolerance as a passive virtue. Sullivan and Marcus, for instance, explain that tolerance is the "willingness to 'put up with' those things that one rejects. . . . Politically it implies a willingness to permit the expression of ideas or interests one opposes. . . . [O]ne is tolerant to the extent one is prepared to extend freedoms to those whose ideas one rejects, whatever these might be."<sup>43</sup> This literature treats people as sufficiently tolerant when they express support for basic civil liberties and as intolerant when and only when they support government policies that infringe upon the important rights of particular groups.<sup>44</sup> There is a good reason why much of the literature has such a low bar for tolerance: the earliest studies found that Americans were surprisingly intolerant. Stouffer's groundbreaking work showed that two-thirds of the public agreed that a store clerk should be fired if he was found to be a communist, and much of the literature ever since has been devoted to examining whether Americans are or are not more likely to allow basic rights for disliked groups than they were during the 1950s.<sup>45</sup>

Studies of tolerance either ask how willing individuals are to extend civil rights and liberties to particular groups, as in the Stouffer study, or they employ the least liked groups approach. Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus developed the latter measure after noticing that Americans had become more tolerant of communists but not necessarily of others.<sup>46</sup> What if Americans had simply shifted their intolerance toward new groups? Sullivan and others sought to measure a general level of tolerance by asking respondents which group they liked the least and then asking a series of questions about granting rights and privileges to that group.

The strength of the least-liked groups approach, its ability to encompass all possible objects of intolerance, is also its weakness. The approach includes religious as well as political and ethnic groups as possible disliked groups, allowing researchers to develop general theories which are fundamental to social science. Since the least-liked questions do not force respondents to identify their disliked groups, however, researchers cannot very well understand the sources of intolerance. For example, Americans might either be reasonably intolerant of Al Qaeda because they believe it poses a genuine threat to the nation or they might dislike the group because of deep-seated hostility toward Islam. Without questions about specific groups, scholars cannot begin to provide answers that would be sufficiently informative to be useful. Research suggests that Americans become more tolerant as they gain knowledge about a group; people seem to be more willing to give rights to homosexuals as they learn more about how AIDS is and is not transmitted.<sup>47</sup> Could more knowledge about the Islamic world increase tolerance toward Muslims? The task for tolerance researchers is to learn more about the foundations of intolerance toward particular groups. Then, the next step would be to educate people about these groups so that people would come to tolerate those that do not pose a real threat while harboring legitimate suspicion toward groups that do pose a danger to the democratic order.

Both the Stouffer approach and the least-liked group questions measure *intolerance* more than tolerance. They ask whether people support basic rights and liberties—an important series of questions, but one insufficient to know whether full religious liberty is protected. While the least-liked group approach is valuable, researchers also need to ask about particular groups, both to understand the targets of intolerance in a particular context and to better understand the sources of intolerance, whether perceived threat or negative affect. Finally, measuring active tolerance, especially in the case of religion, requires asking a new set of questions. As a starting point, researchers need to assess the level of knowledge about religious traditions and about the political system and political efficacy. Then, surveys can ask a battery of questions about how willing individuals are to not only support basic rights and liberties but to stand up to protect religious minorities and to engage with other religious traditions.

### *B. Tolerance, Prejudice, and Recognition*

The empirical literature on prejudice shares much with “passive tolerance” and asks few, if any, questions about active tolerance for religion or respect. The traditional view is that a number of psychological factors lie behind prejudice toward a particular race, ethnicity, class, religion, or sexual orientation. Early theories located the roots of prejudice in the development of individual psyches and in the wounds suffered at the hands of authoritarian parents and strict child-rearing practices.<sup>48</sup> More recently, scholars have developed explanations based on social conflict and group threat, moving away from exclusively cognitive

explanations. Whatever the cause, prejudice can be reduced through a combination of factors: greater education, more knowledge about public affairs, and a less anxious outlook toward life. A host of other factors matter, too; the young are less prejudiced than older people, and women less so than men. People from the South can be more prejudiced than those elsewhere, and fundamentalist beliefs can lead some Christians to be prejudiced toward Jews. The surest way to move an individual from prejudice to greater tolerance is to increase education through formal schooling and greater knowledge of public affairs.

The standard continuum of tolerance and prejudice is generally helpful, but it does not quite suit the particular demands of religious tolerance.<sup>49</sup> In theory, religious tolerance and prejudice are discrete and can coexist. This amalgam is exemplified in Voltaire's classic statement "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." One can recognize that a person has a right to an opinion and that one has a duty to defend this right even if one believes that the opinion is false. At the same time, prejudice often leads to intolerance, and a reduction in prejudice often helps a person to be more tolerant. Given the importance of the public-private distinction to liberalism, it does not seem that the state has the right to reduce prejudice when it is unconnected to intolerant behavior.<sup>50</sup> But the state does have an obligation to eliminate prejudice when it leads citizens to infringe on the basic rights and liberties of those with whom they disagree.

At the same time, the state must be more careful in its attempts to reduce prejudice toward religious views than in attempts at reducing prejudice toward external characteristics or toward behavior of religious believers. Attempting to reduce prejudice toward religious beliefs is illegitimate because this may require a betrayal of the believer's faith and bring about eternal consequences. This is particularly the case when a person's dislike of other beliefs is based upon accurate information about those beliefs. A Christian who rejects Islam because he believes that the Quran requires the killing of innocent, non-Muslim civilians in the name of jihad has a less acceptable belief than a person who rejects Islam because he can not accept that Muhammad was a true prophet or that Muhammad's prophecy overrides Jesus' revelation. Scholars should never assume that tolerance requires religious relativism since the freedom of conscience allows individuals to believe that other religions are inferior to their own. Instead, scholars should seek to understand how appeals to prejudice can dampen support for the liberties of minority religions. Put differently, studies of tolerance must distinguish acceptable forms of prejudice, based on a legitimate threat from a religious group or on disbelief in the truth claims of a religion, from unacceptable forms, which are based on negative affect.

The respect due some forms of prejudice leads to the profound dilemma at the heart of religious tolerance. The strength of religious convictions requires that society promote a strenuous brand of tolerance. It is not sufficient for society to

encourage citizens to restrain from making religiously intolerant public policy. A liberal democratic society must insure that its citizens develop both passive support for rights and liberties and active engagement with other religions while preserving citizens' own freedom of conscience. Indeed, the demands of religious tolerance are stronger than the demands of tolerance for characteristics of race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation because religious tolerance requires a respect for prejudices, the judgments of conscience and intellect, that are not as acceptable in arenas outside religion.

This dilemma leads us to use political theory and empirical investigation to resolve important questions regarding the place of religious tolerance in a pluralist democracy. Just because active tolerance, in theory, seems to bring about religious respect in a more legitimate way than recognition does not, however, mean that it will succeed in practice. One set of questions concerns the nature of the relationship between prejudicial attitudes about alternative religious beliefs and intolerant behavior or the willingness to engage in intolerant behavior. Is there a strong or weak correlation between the two? Active tolerance relies upon related claims that action to defend and engage minority faiths, and an acceptance of the subjective value of beliefs, is sufficient to make religious minorities feel respected and comfortable enough to participate in public sphere. To replace this model with an alternate one requires an empirical test. Specifically, scholars should recognize models beyond passive tolerance and examine Taylor's thesis that active tolerance is insufficient and that respect requires full-fledged recognition of the objective value of beliefs. Similarly, is prejudice based on inadequate information about alternative religious beliefs more likely to lead to intolerant behavior than prejudice (or legitimate distaste) based on accurate information?

A first step toward an answer to these questions is to construct surveys to gauge the difference between tolerance and relativism. People probably distinguish between support for rights and liberties of minority religions and the legitimization of all religions as equally valid. The second set of questions concerns what steps society ought to take to remedy religious intolerance. Is it possible in practice for a society to promote the strenuous form of religious tolerance that religion seems to demand without at the same time illegitimately promoting the recognition of a variety of religious beliefs? Given the distinction between distaste for religious beliefs based upon insufficient knowledge and the opposition to such beliefs stemming from sufficient knowledge, the survey can also ask a more specific question. Is it possible in practice for society to promote a more accurate understanding of a variety of religious beliefs without illegitimately discouraging distaste for religious beliefs based on adequate understanding? Although recognition of the subjective importance and objective validity of religious beliefs is distinguishable in theory, it may not be so in practice. Perhaps Christians who are introduced to arguments about how strongly Buddhists or Muslims feel about their beliefs will inevitably proceed to examine whether these beliefs may have some objective

validity or even some direct relevance to their own lives and religious practices. The implications of this question are most obvious for educational practice, and so the final section turns to a discussion of civic education.

### THE PARADOX OF CIVIC EDUCATION ABOUT RELIGION

Major tolerance research stresses that education is the primary way to promote tolerance. McClosky and Brill, for instance, attribute the significant rise in tolerant attitudes between the 1950s and 1970s to the dramatic increase in the number of Americans who participated in higher education.<sup>51</sup> Education seems to increase tolerance either by making individuals more aware and thus more sympathetic to the plight of others or by increasing the chance that people are aware of and will conform to the norms of the dominant culture, which rejects intolerance.<sup>52</sup> Whatever the case, belief is connected to behavior; individuals who believe in the principles of tolerance, not surprisingly, also express tolerance in particular situations.<sup>53</sup>

What type of education regarding religion is consistent with the distinctive and contrasting demands of religious tolerance? One strategy would involve placing a strong emphasis upon rights in the classroom. Schools could teach students that the rights for religious minorities are an essential part of the American democratic tradition. High school and government civics classes as well as programs for immigrants take this rights-based approach. Though a rights-based education may be necessary for promoting citizenship, it is more consistent with the promotion of passive tolerance than sufficient for promoting active tolerance. For students to be willing to actively defend religious minorities, they must have a sense of sympathy for groups vulnerable to persecution and a strong sense of objection to the injustice of religious intolerance. Protesting injustice is not easy, and it takes a significant degree of motivation, for instance, to write a letter to a politician on behalf of a group being discriminated against or to organize a petition supporting the rights of that group. Furthermore, citizens who stand up in support of rights for targets of discrimination are likely to experience animus and criticism from those supporting discriminatory policies, who may include co-workers, classmates, neighbors, and even relatives and friends. The opponents of intolerance need a strong motivation in order to resist negative peer pressure.

Both a strong sense of sympathy for persecuted religious groups and a sense of outrage for the injustice of religious intolerance depend upon a robust knowledge of religion and its centrality to some people's lives. To understand, for instance, why repeatedly attempting to persuade a Hindu to convert to Buddhism is so noxious, one must understand the tremendous value that Hindus find in adhering to their religion.<sup>54</sup> Since a rights-based education will not provide students with sufficient knowledge of religion, it is unlikely to offer the sympathy or sense of outrage necessary for active tolerance.

Similarly, a rights-based education alone is unlikely to generate sufficient tolerance in the private sphere. If students do not appreciate the privileged role that religion plays in the lives of others, they will not realize the profound effect of their comments in arenas such as the home and school. Furthermore, even if a rights-based education supplied students with the motive to avoid comments in private, it will not instruct them how to avoid offending members of other religions. As this essay has shown, comments that are not intended to cause harm may still do so if they touch on a particularly sensitive aspect of an individual's belief system. To avoid making comments that alienate religious believers, students must be familiar with the basic tenets of major religious viewpoints. Finally, a rights-based education alone is unlikely to convince students of the importance of allowing members of religious minorities to express their religious beliefs and have these beliefs acknowledged. Students are likely to emerge from a rights-based education with the belief that they fulfill their duties as democratic citizens merely when they do not infringe on the political rights of religious minorities.

Scholars should thus pay attention to attempts to remedy the inadequacies of a rights-based education through curricula that provide students with a robust exposure to a variety of religious traditions. Particular attention, however, must be paid to what type of exposure students receive. Liberal political theorists concerned with civic education such as Amy Gutmann and Stephen Macedo stress the importance of exposing students to alternative beliefs to promote tolerance and individual autonomy.<sup>55</sup> Liberal political theorists, however, often ignore the distinctive requirements of exposing students to a variety of religious beliefs. On the one hand, active tolerance requires strengthening typical exposure by coupling it with an emphasis upon students' obligation to learn about other religions to avoid slights and take positive action on behalf of religious minorities. On the other hand, measures must be taken to avoid having exposure to different beliefs serve as an illegitimate encouragement to recognize the value of other beliefs. Exposing students to diverse beliefs without adequate guidance may lead to this result. As much as possible, students must be encouraged to recognize the subjective force other beliefs hold for their adherents without being urged to accept the objective value of these beliefs for all.

This could be done by providing students with explicit verbal instructions from teachers about the purpose of exposure to alternative religious views including a disavowal of encouragement to recognize the objective value of other religions.<sup>56</sup> The same goal could also be reflected implicitly in the course's material and structure. Exposure to religion for active tolerance should take a descriptive rather than evaluative approach. Specifically, schools might avoid having students read extensively from sacred texts because this might encourage exploration of the validity of alternative belief systems; schools could instead use objective textbooks written by academic religious scholars, and testimonies of religious believers about the strength of their beliefs. Classes should only concentrate on

the justifications of religions when the justifications are inextricably tied to understanding central practices of religions students must know about to cultivate respect. Exams and assignments should test students' knowledge about the beliefs and practices of other religions rather than ask them to assess comparatively the validity of different traditions.

The importance of these distinctions, however, can only be founded on improved empirical research. Since the 1980s, school districts around the nation have increasingly experimented with innovative elective and compulsory classes regarding religion.<sup>57</sup> The Modesto School District in California, for instance, requires all ninth grade students to take an extended course devoted to the study of world religions.<sup>58</sup> Given the importance of religious tolerance, research on the successes and flaws of these programs is vital. Theorists calling for an even higher standard of active tolerance can sound a little like King Canute ordering the waves to cease; it is up to empirical political scientists to discover whether individuals can maintain strong beliefs about religion while also being actively tolerant, and whether institutional interventions through schools, churches or politics can make a difference.

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## NOTES

1. The least-liked groups approach, discussed later in the essay, is the most prominent research program that treats tolerance as a one-dimensional attitude. There is, however, no way to do full justice to all the important works in this genre. Instead, this essay attempts to identify the limits of past research on political tolerance by focusing on representative and highly influential works, including Sullivan and Marcus 1979; Sullivan and Marcus 1982; Marcus et al. 1995; McClosky and Brill 1983; Stouffer 1955; Prothro and Grigg 1960. This essay intends to supplement this literature by adding to the range of concerns that political tolerance usually takes into account.

2. Political scientists have tested theories of symbolic racism or "racial resentment," which examine how racism can exist even if people give tolerant answers to traditional measures (Kinder and Sears 1981, p. 416; Kinder and Sanders 1996). There is no similar research which analyzes the peculiarities of religious tolerance. In one recent study of racial attitudes, Sniderman and Piazza (2002) also examine religious tolerance by analyzing African-American views about Jews but they approach the subject as a case of ethnic bias. In many cases, religion is indistinguishable from ethnicity, but religion can also be the foundation of ethnic identity and a possible source of common ground. Many substantive political disagreements over group tolerance have their roots in religious faith, whether in Jewish or Muslim requests for exemptions to humane slaughter laws or in conservative Christians' objections to homosexual rights.

3. Norris and Inglehart (2004, p. 26) note that the expanding gap between sacred and secular societies "provides an important challenge to social tolerance."

4. Hunter 1991, p. 43.
5. From the Gallup Poll, May 2–4, 2004. (N=1,000 adults nationwide and MoE +/- 3).
6. Tillich 1958.
7. Rawls 1993, p. 13.
8. Rawls 1993, p. 77.
9. Sher 1997, p. 20ff.; Galston 1991, p. 79ff.; Waldron 1993, p. 143ff.
10. Weissberg 1998, p. 77ff.
11. Bellah 1986, p. 228.
12. There are, of course, other, more anthropocentric reasons that people change their religion, and it is unlikely that people who convert for these reasons hold their religious identity to be immutable. Proving the importance of religious tolerance only requires showing that many people, not all, feel their religion to be immutable.
13. The exceptions are members of esoteric sects such as the Eleusinians in ancient Greece or Freemasons who pride themselves on holding their religious beliefs in secret.
14. Goffman 1963.
15. Marcus 1995; Feldman 1997; Duckitt and Fisher 2003; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991.
16. Duckitt and Fisher 2003.
17. Intolerance is not simply a function of individual characteristics; the level of intolerance in a society can rise or fall according to societal changes. Increases in immigration and economic dislocation, of example, can cause an increase in hostility toward immigrants (Coenders and Scheepers 1998). Similarly, perceived threat or negative affect toward out-groups can lead to intolerance (Tajfel 1981; Sniderman et al. 2000).
18. ABC News Poll, Sept. 4–7, 2003. (N=1,004, MoE  $\pm$  3).
19. Council on American-Islamic Relations 2004.
20. Wuthnow 2004.
21. Abdrabboh 2005.
22. Intolerant elites can foster repression, as during the McCarthy “red scare,” but on average elites are more tolerant than the mass public (Sullivan et al. 1993; Gibson 1988).
23. Kinder and Sears 1981, p. 416; Kinder and Sanders 1997.
24. This same logic motivates Gerard Alexander’s (2001) criticism of the path dependence literature.
25. Inglehart 1997. “Interpersonal trust” is shorthand for generalized interpersonal trust which is a summary of questions that measure trust in general and not of particular people or groups. One example of such a question is “Some people say that most people can be trusted. Others say you can’t be too careful in your dealings with people. How do you feel about it?”
26. Putnam 1994.

27. Brehm and Rahn 1997.

28. Taylor 1992, p. 66.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

30. Other political theorists provide alternative interpretations of the requirements of recognition. Criticizing Taylor's requirements for recognition as too strong, Anna Galeotti (2002) argues that recognition requires symbolic public acknowledgement of important cultures and identity aspects. Her public policy recommendations include allowing Islamic female students the right to wear veils in public schools, and the legalization of homosexual marriage. The discussion in the first section of this article suggests that Galeotti's form of recognition is too weak regarding religion in two related ways. Galeotti exclusively stresses government's role in providing recognition to minority cultures, and neglects the obligations that ordinary liberal democratic citizens have to make religious believers feel comfortable. As a result, her version of recognition only guarantees adequately respectful treatment to minorities in the public sphere, but fails to provide adequately respectful treatment in semi-public and private spheres. Active tolerance requires that ordinary citizens have an obligation to make religious minorities feel welcome in the private as well as the public sphere.

31. D'Souza 2002.

32. Schlesinger 1992.

33. Tocqueville 2000; Fowler 1989.

34. Newman 1982, p. 59.

35. Opponents of the curriculum for racial tolerance might invoke John Stuart Mill's well-known argument in *On Liberty* that valuable and true beliefs can only flourish when contrasted with evil or worthless beliefs. This essay does not claim, however, that racist views should be censored or banned, but only that schools should discourage these beliefs. Mill recognized that state toleration of worthless or evil views could and should be coupled with state and social discouragement of these views. Furthermore, using critical reading and discussion of racist texts such as *Mein Kampf* in order to reinforce racial tolerance is perfectly consistent with the racial tolerance curriculum outlined above.

36. The views of the Christian fundamentalist parents in the federal court case of *Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education*, which involved a dispute over students' exposure to a variety of religious beliefs in the public school curriculum, are illustrative of this point. One parent said, "We cannot be tolerant in that we accept other religious views on an equal basis with ours." The school board stipulated that an education exposing students to alternative religions which aimed to convince students that "all religions are merely different roads to God" would be unconstitutional (*Mozert*, 1069). Note that not all evangelicals are fundamentalists, but some traditionalist Catholics and others may share this label.

37. Matthew 22:37; Stolzenberg 1993, p. 594.

38. Marty and Appleby 1991; Hunter 1991.

39. Yoshino 2006.

40. For example, a proselytizer might say "I know why you find your religion valuable, but that value is actually better realized in a different religion," and thus leave the target of conversion with feeling that proselytizer has some genuine concern for him and

his religion, and that he can opt out of proselytizing discussion or perhaps even respond in kind. Conversion attempts that tear down other religions or criticize them for what they lack are much more problematic from standpoint of active tolerance because they fail to appreciate the value that targets of conversion attribute to their religion.

41. This is why alliances between Christians and orthodox Jews are not uncommon. See, for example, Neuhaus 1984.

42. Bergner 2006.

43. Sullivan and Marcus 1982, p. 2.

44. To be fair, some studies do include feeling thermometers toward different groups, but these do not exactly measure tolerance; instead they measure homophobia or racist attitudes. See Sniderman et al. 1991.

45. Stouffer 1955, p. 53.

46. Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus 1979, p. 792.

47. Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991, pp. 31–57.

48. For a review of the literature on prejudice, see Fiske 1998. The classic statement of the social basis of intolerance is Tajfel 1981. An early work on prejudice among Christians is Glock and Stark 1966.

49. Two recent studies of prejudice and tolerance are Sniderman and Piazza 2002 and Sniderman et al. 2000.

50. The classic statement on this point is Jefferson's Query 17 in the *Notes on the State of Virginia*: "But it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg" (Jefferson 1977, pp. 157–161).

51. McClosky and Brill 1983, p. 395.

52. Selznick and Sternberg 1969.

53. Chong 1993; Sullivan, Marcus, and Piereson 1982.

54. Carey 2000.

55. Gutmann 1999, p. 101ff.; Macedo 2003.

56. This suggests that the exposure to alternative religions should take place at the high school level when students are mentally prepared to appreciate subtle distinctions like this.

57. Wexler 2002.

58. Our survey of 400 public high school students in Modesto, California, both before and after they took a required high school world religions course, suggests that instruction and discussion can increase tolerance. Students on average give more tolerant responses to questions after taking the course. They are also more likely to think that major world religions share the same basic values *without* believing that all religions are equally valid.

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