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“Teach Your Children Well”: Arguing in Favor of Pedagogically Justifiable Hospitality Education

Abstract

This paper is a sequel to the paper which I delivered at last year’s BCES conference in Sofia. Making use of hermeneutic phenomenology and constructive interpretivism as methodological apparatus, I challenge the pedagogic justifiability of the fashionable notion of religious tolerance. I suggest that we need, instead, to reflect *de novo* on theo-(in)tolerance in our present-day pluralistic global society, as well as on its assumed pedagogic relevance. I then proceed to argue in favor of pedagogically justifiable hospitality education.

Keywords: religious tolerance, intolerance, tolerance education, respect, recognition, hospitality

“And you, of the tender years can’t know the fears that your elders grew by. And so, please help them with your youth, they seek the truth before they can die.”
(from the chorus of the 1970-song by Graham Nash: ***Teach your children well***)

Introduction

Six years ago, Afdal argued:

“No serious person or theory operates with absolute tolerance. Even the most tolerant person would admit that there are limits to tolerance and acceptance. This means that both tolerance and intolerance may be legitimate and illegitimate, according to the theory and the understanding of the situation in question” (2010, p. 599).

I still agree with him. In fact, I contend that something is critically amiss with the notion of religious tolerance (hereafter theo-tolerance); especially when considered from a pedagogical point of view. Most people the world over are more or less agreed that the majority of organized religions (if not all) speak openly of love and tolerance. They are eager to inform anyone who would care to listen that no religion in its essence and manifestation advocates intolerance. They are, furthermore, more or less united in their confidence that respect for people, reverence for human life, and communal harmony reflect the essential doctrine of every religion (cf. Sagayam, 1998, *passim*).

Conceptual incarceration

Why then, are acts of theo-intolerance on the increase worldwide, instead of decreasing? Why would some people deliberately and willfully choose to behave in a theo-intolerant manner? Why don’t theo-tolerance-related interventions seem to be making any difference whatsoever as part of our global efforts to curb and, eventually, prevent incidences of theo-intolerant behavior? Is it perhaps because our pedagogical efforts are (at least partially) to blame for this?

I believe that the essential proscription of the mandala of social and moral virtues that are reflected in the religious command “Love thy enemies” (that usually gets operationalized in human endeavors of mutual respect, recognition and hospitality) in favor of the semantically kidnapped, modern *zeitgeist* notion of “tolerance” (especially “religious tolerance”) effectively constitutes conceptual and moral incarceration. I furthermore believe that this is pedagogically unjustifiable. I therefore argue that when the principal yearning and inclination¹ of *homo educationis* (educated man) is conceptually incarcerated, it realistically reduces all subsequent pedagogical attempts to the pursuit of inward-looking, self-righteous, sanctimonious, pretentious, hypocritical and self-justified exhibits of social conduct that are mediated (more often than not) by markedly ill-informed teachers, instructors, coaches, educators and even educationists. In fact, whenever the switch is made in (what are supposed to be safe and dialogical) educational spaces from educated human beings’ primal yearning to look away from themselves towards the Other for assistance, love and companionship-in-relationship, to ventriloquizing the *zeitgeist*-herd’s insistence on using and referring to terms like “religious tolerance”, there is always an educational and moral blackout. For the vast majority of people, this blackout is total and final, for it more or less defines the basis of and rationale for most of their subsequent social conduct.

A pedagogical challenge

It is no wonder then, that more and more scholars are doubtful that theo-tolerance is no longer what it has been cracked up to be (Derrida, 2003; Keet, 2010; Schwab, 2011). Especially since the fourth quarter of 2015, tolerance and education for (religious) tolerance have, consequently, become prime issues on the public agenda in most countries across the globe. More than ever, education is widely regarded as one of the principal redeemers that society (still) has at its disposal to help combat theo-intolerant behavior. So, what should we be doing, then? I wish to contribute to this debate by arguing that us educationists across the globe are pedagogically obliged to reconceptualise the notion of “tolerance” urgently and fundamentally, as well as the way in which most parents, legal care-givers, teachers and teacher trainers currently prefer to engage with and treat the term “tolerance” in pedagogical contexts.

The scholarly literature tells us that theo-intolerance essentially represents a form of religious fundamentalism that is, for the most part, based on a particular conceptualisation of God² and that it can (and usually does, eventually) result in a series of conscious decisions to embark on terror-campaigns against people whom the religious fundamentalists regard as, for example, non-believers. These groups of religious fundamentalist believers — who claim that they are the only true believers

¹ ...namely to think and act away from his or her own ego and to live not for his/her own sake, but for the sake of his/her fellow-man.

² If religion is only a means to reach God and not an end in itself and if religion is not equal to God, then why do religious fundamentalists keep on confusing and, eventually, treating these phenomena as synonymous? If religions are supposed to unite people (according to the Latinate “religare” from which the English term has been derived), then why does religious intolerance end up creating so much social division and hatred?

— often congregate in collective movements that share the same fundamentalist belief matrix. We have witnessed the horrendous effect of this phenomenon yet again in the very recent past. With the rising and socially unsettling influx of refugees in European countries like Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary and the Netherlands since the second half of 2015, most European societies (for an example) are continuing to suffer from, amongst others, (serious) incidents symptomatic of theo-intolerance. On 18 and 19 November 2015, for an example, a hate-fuelled festival of violence was unleashed on hundreds of Parisians by the Islamic State jihadists. Before Paris, there was Beirut and on a Friday in early November 2015, the terror struck Mali yet again. On 14 January 2016, six bomb explosions, apparently imitating the terror attacks on Paris in November 2015, traumatised Jakarta. Twelve people lost their lives on that day: seven civilians and five attackers who were members of the “crusader alliance” of IS.

It is clear that both the intent and incidence of particular fundamentalist groupings’ collective theo-intolerant behavior is gaining exponentially in terms of its extant threat potential. It increasingly endangers human lives and livelihoods the world over, and it jeopardizes the social fabric of civilization itself (UNESCO, 1995, p. 2; cf. also Van der Walt, Potgieter & Wolhuter, 2010; Van der Walt, 2011; Van der Walt & Potgieter, 2012; Potgieter, 2014; Potgieter & Van der Walt, 2014; Potgieter, Van der Walt & Wolhuter, 2014; Wolhuter, Potgieter & Van der Walt, 2014). Twelve years ago already, Pearse (2004, p. 12) discreetly described this lamentable state of affairs as follows:

“The currency of the term tolerance has become badly debased. Where it used to mean the respecting of real, hard differences, it has come to mean instead a dogmatic abdication of truth-claims and a moralistic adherence to moral relativism. Where premodern tolerance allowed hard differences on religion and morality to rub shoulders and compete freely in the public square, liberal tolerance wishes to lock them all indoors as matters of private judgment; the public square must be given over to indistinctness.”

It would seem that besides the fact that all proponents of theo-intolerance tend to filter the religious command “Love thy enemies” through a mindset of highly selective sympathy, they essentially all peddle a three horsemen-like noxious cocktail of prejudicial behavior, namely ignorance, intolerance and belligerent nationalism (cf. Leon, 2015, *passim*).

It is my contention, therefore, that we urgently need to reflect *de novo* on theo-(in)tolerance in our present-day pluralistic global society, as well as on its assumed pedagogic relevance.

Reflecting on tolerance and intolerance

Theo-tolerant, as well as theo-intolerant behavior both reflect an excluding and exclusive gaze inwardly, instead of an including and inclusive outreach outwardly. Theo-tolerance, according to Derrida (2003, p. 16), effectively means that the Self accepts the Other as a subordinate and not as an equal. Extending theo-tolerance towards someone else remains a “...charity [...] a paternalistic gesture” (ibid.). It seems that the notion of tolerance mostly designates a reluctant acceptance of someone less than myself. As such, it gestates dependency and subordination. It cultivates silence and marginalization (to be shunted aside) and it incubates social

invisibility. Theo-intolerant behavior is at the same time self-shutting and self-disconnecting. It makes it possible for human grief and suffering to be inflicted on the Other. Theo-intolerant behavior is rooted in prejudice, fear, ignorance and the distortion of verifiable facts. It gives rise to skepticism, distrust, contempt, backbiting and defamation. Theo-tolerance, as well as theo-intolerance, are essentially self-directed and self-focused. Both theo-tolerant and theo-intolerant behavior degrade and reduce the Other to an example of everything that I do not wish to be myself. Because theo-tolerant as well as theo-intolerant behavior make the likelihood of and opportunity for an interactive encounter with the Other realistically unattainable, it effectively pronounces the Other as being fundamentally unfamiliar and essentially anonymous.

Theo-tolerance and theo-intolerance furthermore focus (and depend) both on so-called “human differences”, instead of on human sameness(es). Accordingly, theo-tolerance (between the person who is tolerating and the person who is being tolerated) is essentially distance-forming, dissociating, detaching and, eventually, alienating. Social distancing and dissociation also work in a restricting, hampering fashion and, above all, it leads to the creation, propagation and diffusion of incapacitating, disqualifying, restricting and, ultimately, damaging prejudices, including the risk of inflicting harm, sorrow, grief and pain. These are some of the reasons why all forms of theo-(in)tolerant behavior usually lead to misunderstanding and the proliferation of inaccurate/false information.

Suggesting hospitality as an alternative

Hospitality, in contrast, concentrates on human sameness. By comparison, hospitality is essentially distance-crossing, closeness-generating, nearness-promoting and inviting. Hospitality, in contrast to theo-(in)tolerance, therefore creates interaction; it creates a safe “tending space”; a dialogical sanctuary in which both the Self and the Other feel that they are accepted completely and that they are genuinely trusted. This tending space and dialogical sanctuary then provide the potential for their being together (social association) ultimately to intensify to a more intimate, fonder, more confidential and encountering relationship (cf. Du Plooy, Griessel & Oberholzer, 1990, p. 118). As such, hospitable behavior is dependent upon the assumption that the kind of dialogue that is allowed to develop inside this dialogical sanctuary does, indeed, have something worthwhile to reveal about each other. Hospitality (especially in the form of unreservedly open, authentic dialogue) is therefore a fundamental means of being-in-the-world. Consequently, it becomes easy to understand that the precondition for hospitable behavior is fundamentally entrenched in indebted respect (i.e. in the kind of unconditional **RE**-spect that is owed to the Other simply because s/he is a human being deserving of such respect), as well as in the intelligibility and comprehensibility of human traditions and human diversity.

Other essential features of hospitality include the continuous **RE**-cognizing, **RE**-ceiving and obliging, accommodating welcoming of the Other. A hospitable person is someone who is eager to learn from the Other and also to offer (of) the Self to the Other, so that s/he, in turn, might learn. It is, therefore, an active, reiterative, dialogic process that is focused and trained on the establishment and maintenance of an authentic existential encounter with the Other (effectively a fundamental

liebendes-mit-einander-sein) (Binzwanger, 2005, p. 189) with reciprocity as its essential feature. It brings us to encounter the Other face-to-face in his or her irreducible uniqueness as an individual who should never be reduced to mere group membership (Conway, 2014, p. 30). As such, hospitality is a configuration of human behavior that continually confronts and challenges self-illusion, self-delusion and eventual misunderstandings.

Hospitality, together with its constituent compartments, namely *RE*-spect and *RE*-cognition, is also a sobering, humbling process that forces the Self to acknowledging modestly how little we know of and about each other and how much we always have to learn from and in an authentic existential encounter with the other. The following quote from Conway (2014, p. 29) captures this pivotal argument:

"Rather, one may stand confidently committed to the truths of the home tradition into which one has been raised and enculturated, but in recognizing the centrality of beliefs, claims and practices to the shared life of one's own community and tradition, one reasonably must extend such recognition to other communities. One must acknowledge that other persons also come to this encounter from a locally situated shared social world shaped by a complex array of commitments and practices that form an intelligible view of and way of being in the world. Recognizing this, one attends to other persons as dwelling within a cultural form of human life that can be meaningfully articulated and understood."

On the basis of all of the above, it could be argued that tolerance as hospitality is, indeed, a precondition for the successful burgeoning of humanity, as well as for the establishment and maintenance of harmonious social inter- and intra-cultural relations. It gives effect to the notion of humanity as being, essentially, a shared, *common* humanity. Hospitality makes it possible for the Other always to be recognized, viewed and treated as neighbor and "guest" (from the Middle English root *gest* for "stranger"). Literally all other persons are "neighbors" (from the Middle English root *neih* translated as "near"), that is, beings close to us on the basis of our shared, *common* humanity (Conway, 2014, pp. 29-31). Hospitality implies, as well as presumes, purposeful engagement as authentic existential encounter (*liebendes-mit-einander-sein*); social interactive behavior that is driven by the unreserved, unconditional acceptance of responsibility for the Other and by a selfless commitment to being available to and for the Other.

Conclusion

We should teach our children well. We should all teach them from now on that unconditional acceptance of the Other is likely to lead conclusively to peaceful human co-existence through hospitality as (a) *RE*-spect and (b) *RE*-cognition. Flourishing, prospering hospitality, which is undergirded by sincere mutual respect and responsible, honorable and reciprocal respect and recognition, is undoubtedly pedagogically justifiable – anywhere on the face of this planet...

Unless tolerant religious behavior intensifies and thickens into hospitable religious behavior, it will remain of very little meaningful use to anybody anywhere. The reason is that hospitality fundamentally implies, presumes and demands an altogether different configuration of human behavioral acumen than apathetic carelessness, aloofness, nonchalance, indifferent toleration, or so-called "non-

interference on principle”. Hospitable behavior is welcoming, open, generous, cordial and non-judgmental behavior. As such, it always commences with the simple, yet powerful procedure of continuous **RE**-cognition of the fact that the Other is present in our space and the s/he announces his/her presence with the memorandum: “*Here I am. Where are you? I am a human being among fellow human beings. I am your equal. Acknowledge, respect and recognize me. I, too, have a countenance, a voice and a point of view that deserves to be respected, recognized, heard and, above all, understood.*” Let us help our children seek the truth. They need it, before they can die.

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