

Hard to accept. New perspectives on tolerance, intolerance and respect

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With the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity that is a feature of European societies today, pluralism is experienced in new and challenging ways. In many places, an urban cosmopolitan mix sits side by side with group-based expressions of faith and culture. The debate about the types of ‘acceptance’ that these situations require tend to follow new patterns. Increasing openness and respect for some may rest upon a reinforced intolerance towards others. This complicates and challenges our understanding of what it means for societies to be accepting, tolerant or respectful of cultural diversity in its various forms. This volume seeks to meet this challenge with perspectives that consider new dynamics towards tolerance, intolerance and respect.

All contributions engage in the important work of mapping out the meaning and scope of acceptance. They consider what role various types of acceptance can play for understanding and resolving challenges. Most significantly, they suggest that crucial issues arise in the ‘boundary areas’ between intolerance, toleration and respect: contemporary expressions of cultural difference, where the *public recognition* of identity is involved, are often said to go ‘beyond’ toleration. Yet in many European countries it is claimed that there has been too much leniency and too little insistence on shared values. A new principled *intolerance* is seen as necessary to protect the rights of individuals, and the rights, values and the identity of the majority.

Responding to these developments, contributions in the book illuminate our contemporary situation: where claims coincide and where the definition of the scope of acceptance in public debate – how far tolerance may go, or what respect entails – needs to be of new interest. In light of the new diversity in many European cities, but also in response to new cross-cultural encounters with parts of the world, such as North Africa, that are undergoing radical transformations, this is a timely and important objective. A substantive afterword by Bhikhu Parekh extends the perspective beyond Europe and discusses how we may benefit from a consideration of Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic traditions.

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