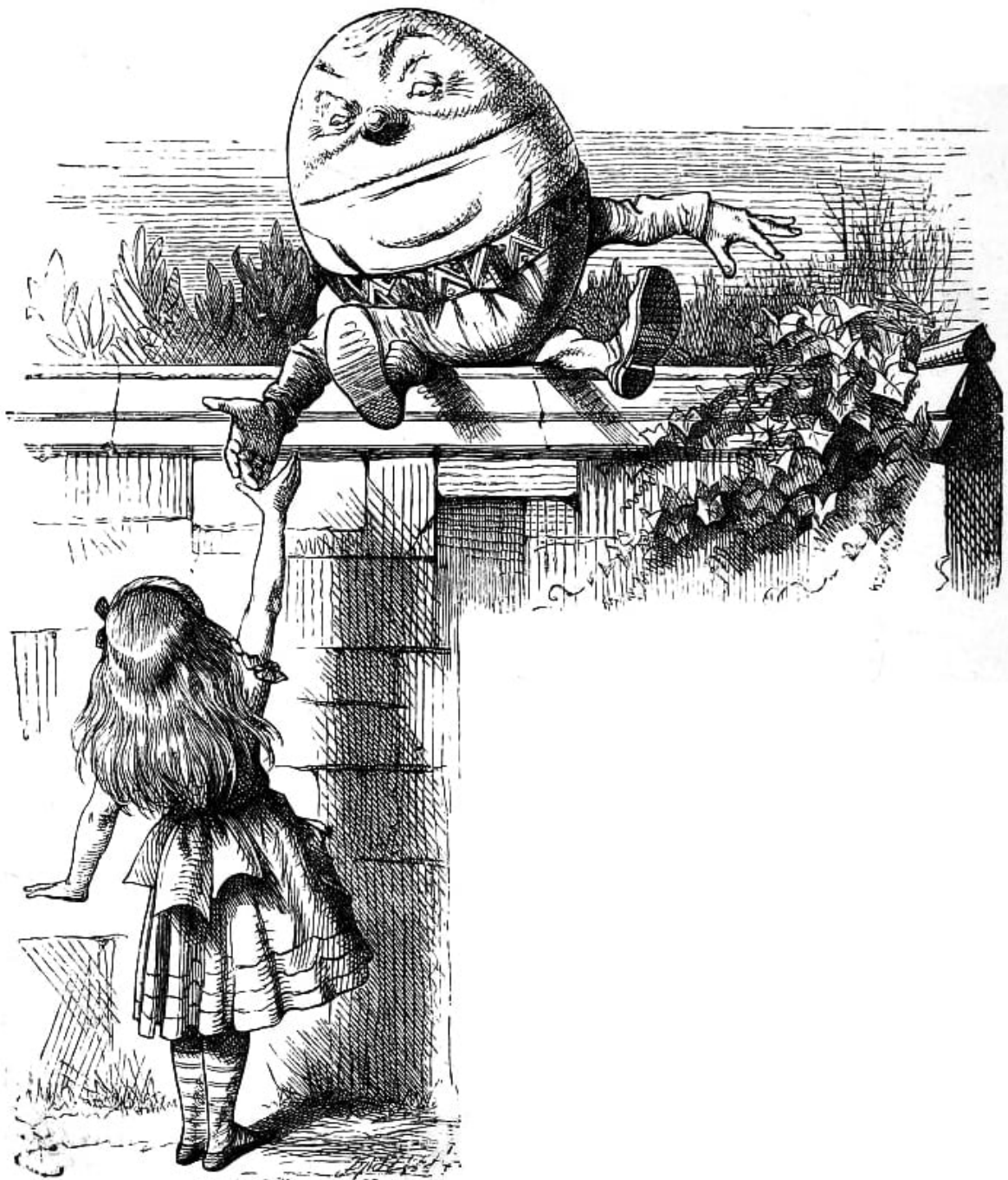


TOLERANCE, RESPECT AND EMPATHY... WORDS OF CONFUSION



by Howard Rotberg

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a

scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.'

'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.'

'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master – that's all.'

-Lewis Carroll, [Through the Looking Glass](#)

The masters of our culture, the elites from academia, media, entertainment and politics understand that the contemporary culture war is all about *power*. And so every culture clash revolves around power and a determination of who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed, who is the victim and who is the victimizer. And our words, which should be the key to good communication and erudite thought have become a tool to shut down communication and thought. Do we not see the irony in the term “cancel culture”?

As an author of five books on ideologies and values, I have become very sensitive to the use and misuse of problematic terms in the service of the various ideological wars stemming from political correctness, cultural and moral relativism, wokism and diversity, equity and inclusion.

In this essay, let's examine three confusing words that seem to require some thought – *tolerance*, *respect*, and *empathy*.

1. Tolerance

In my book, *Tolerism: The Ideology Revealed*, I have examined the use and meaning of the word “tolerance” and what I call “tolerism” or the ideology of excess tolerance.

In the Western World, a good portion of liberal academics, journalists, clergymen and politicians now preach that terrorist violence against civilians is not due to lack of tolerance by the terrorists for the liberal west, but that it

is due to lack of sufficient tolerance of the liberal west for the “root causes” of the violence espoused by the terrorists.

Once upon a time, a progressive was somebody who believed in social and democratic progress, so that all citizens could share fairly in the bounty of our productive societies. Now, however, people who call themselves “progressive” are often those who tolerate the intolerant terrorists for using violence against civilians, because these terrorists, being minorities with less power than Western governments, are by that reason alone, being oppressed. These progressives think that the more violent these minorities are, the more this proves that they are being oppressed and we in the liberal democracies are the ones doing the oppression. Many also think that we in the West are somehow proto-fascist and have no right to tell other peoples that they are being illiberal.

Sir Karl Popper, the great Austrian/British philosopher lived through the cataclysmic events of Stalinism and Naziism and argued that these totalitarian movements created a paradox for philosophical toleration. He put it this way:

“If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them. ... We should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant.”

Philosopher [John Rawls](#) devoted a section of his influential book [A Theory of Justice](#) to this problem: whether a just society should or should not tolerate the intolerant. He also addressed the related issue of whether or not the intolerant have any right to complain when they are not tolerated, within their society.

Rawls concluded that a just society must be tolerant; therefore, the intolerant must be tolerated, for otherwise,

the society would then itself be intolerant, and thus unjust. However, Rawls qualified this conclusion by insisting, like Popper, that society and its social institutions have a reasonable right of self-preservation that supersedes the principle of tolerance. Hence, the intolerant must be tolerated but *only insofar as they do not endanger the tolerant society and its institutions*.

Indeed, Popper himself wrote in 1981's "Toleration and Intellectual Responsibility" that we should tolerate intolerant minorities who wish to simply publish their theories as rational proposals, and that we should simply bring to their attention that tolerance is based on mutuality and reciprocity, and that our duty to tolerate a minority ends when they resort to violence.

More difficult, says Popper, is when an intolerant minority passes from rational thought to violence – for example, what of incitement to violence or conspiracy to overthrow liberal democratic institutions? Popper says that the difficulty in finding the dividing line between criminal and non-criminal acts or words should not pose more of a problem here than in other areas of the law, where illegality is a matter of degree and jurisprudence.

Popper states:

"We must not tolerate even the threat of intolerance; and we must not tolerate it if the threat is getting serious."

This does not mean that we should give up on rational refutations of their intolerant ideas, and their advocacy of violence. Popper argues that almost all such parties seek to justify their violence in a similar way: they allege that our tolerance and our democracy is just a sham, and that we, the allegedly tolerant, were first to use violence and in fact we use violence all the time. Popper draws on the events of his lifetime: he notes how in 1917 it was argued in support of

the Communist violence that it was Capitalism that was really the violent system. This was of course followed by an orgy of killing and imprisonment by the Communists. Then came the horror of the Nazi years and the pursuit of the utopia of the Third Reich, based on the slaughter of millions.

Says Popper: **“After these events in Germany, I gave up my absolute commitment to non-violence. I realized there was a limit to toleration.”**

And so the Western world advised Israel to tolerate the last twenty years of terrorism and rockets launched from Gaza against peaceful Israeli civilians which fostered a terror state using supplies for weapons and tunnels rather than social good. This led to an extremely barbaric massacre on October 7th by what can only be termed a genocidal hate cult.

The facts:

A poll was conducted of Palestinians by the Arab World for Research and Development, a research organization based in the so-called ‘West Bank’, carried out after the Oct. 7 attacks and following Israel’s military invasion of Gaza.

To the question, “How much do you support the military operation carried out by the Palestinian resistance led by Hamas on October 7th?” 59.3 percent supported it strongly, with another 15.7 percent of people supporting it somewhat – **a combined total of 75 per cent backing the slaughter of men, women and children.**

Would you tolerate twenty years of rockets by a neighbouring country run by a terrorist organization which has a charter calling for the genocide of the Jewish people in Israel? Would you use the word “tolerance” as a prescription for Israel given the facts of what happened even after Israel completely pulled out of Gaza in 2005 to see how a “two-state solution” would work out?

- 2002 to 2014 – 20,000 rockets (Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005)
- 2014 – 4000 rockets and 31 mortars
- 2015 – 49 rockets and 8 mortars (Israel withdrew in August)
- 2016 – 4600 rockets and mortars
- 2017 – 35 rockets and mortars
- 2018 – 395 rockets and 5 mortars
- 2019 – 796 rockets
- 2020 – no statistics available
- 2021 – 4388 rockets
- 2022 – 1179 rockets
- 2023 – 8500 rockets

2. Respect

American President Barack Obama chose to make his first overseas appearance in Egypt where he said: “I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect; ... (we) share common principles – principles of justice and progress, tolerance and the dignity of all human beings”.

Hillary Clinton, who almost became President, spoke about using her feminine skills to create something she called “Smart Power” – “using every possible tool...leaving no one on the sidelines, **showing respect even for one’s enemies.**” (emphasis added). Respect for one’s enemies? Respect, according to the *Oxford Dictionary* is defined as “a feeling of **deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements.**” (emphasis

added).

Islamism, or radical Islam, seeks a world-wide Caliphate achieved by Jihad, adherence to Shari Law, trickery and forced conversion. Islamism being the goal of Iran and its proxies and other terrorist groups who use beheadings, other murders, torture, persecution of ethnic and religious minorities and gays, and their forced genital mutilation of young girls, their abuse of women and their general disregard for individual human rights, does not deserve our “deep admiration” and does not show any great “qualities” or “achievements”.

3. Empathy

Hillary Clinton also advocated “empathy” as part of her notion of “Smart Power”. Let’s dig a little deeper also into the whole concept of “empathy” for one’s enemy. The idea of empathizing with the enemy was first popularized by the film, *Fog of War*, about former Defense Secretary in the Johnson administration, Robert McNamara, who made it one of the eleven lessons he learned during the Vietnam War. The concept of empathy is also something that has received the study of humanist psychologists, who are well-meaning in their attempts to aid interpersonal relationships and help people understand and therefore overcome misunderstandings in difficult relationships.

Carl Rogers, an important American academic psychologist of the twentieth century promoted the concept of empathy, or being empathetic as a process leading one to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the “as if” condition. Thus it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and to perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is “as if I were hurt or pleased and so forth. If

this "as if" quality is lost, then the state is one of identification.

Rogers reasoned that:

"An empathic way of being with another person means entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever that he or she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in the other's life, moving about in it delicately without making judgements; ...It means frequently checking with the person as to the accuracy of your sensings, and being guided by the responses you receive. You are a confident companion to the person in his or her inner world.

"To be with another in this way means that for the time being, you lay aside your own views and values in order to enter another's world without prejudice. In some sense it means that you lay aside your self; this can only be done by persons who are secure enough in themselves that they know they will not get lost in what may turn out to be the strange or bizarre world of the other, and that they can comfortably return to their own world when they wish."

One can only conclude that real "political" empathy is for only the strongest, most intelligent intellectuals and politicians of our time, who are most secure in their liberal values and their constitutional limits and duties. If the person is not so strong, this journey into what can be "a strange or bizarre world" may result in the person feeling more comfortable in **that** world or identifying with that world.

Feeling more comfortable in that world may result in something way more than tolerant empathy and may result in conversion or **submission**. This is not a job for postmodernists, but only for those with the clearest and most certain confidence in

American values. Without clear values, and a fixed sense of right and wrong, and good versus evil, postmodernist empathy will make it harder and harder for the empathizer to return to their own world, especially if his President has said that America is no more tolerant than Islam, that American standards of justice are no better than Islamism's and that countries that have banished all Jews and most Christians share the same view of dignity of all persons.

And so, when Western political leaders advocate tolerance, respect and empathy for our enemies one wonders if tolerance, respect and empathy will more likely lead to submission. I tackle that difficult subject in my book, *The Ideological Path to Submission... and what we can do about it*.

Howard Rotberg is the author of *The Second Catastrophe: A Novel About a Book and its Author*, *Tolerism: The Ideology Revealed*, and *The Ideological Path to Submission... and what we can do about it*. He has written many essays for New English Review, Frontpage Magazine and Israel National News. His new book *Second Generation Radical: The World Through One Man's Second Generation Lens* will be released at the end of January.