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*'Tolerance' and 'Toleration'*  
*towards the 'Uncertainty Virus' in the Pandemic Era\**

1. *Introduction*

The spread of SARS-CoV-2 has led scholars to question the importance of tolerance conceived not only as a virtue to face Covid-19 but also as a natural consequence of human frailty as to the impact of uncertainty itself<sup>1</sup>. But what about 'toleration'? Can there be toleration without tolerance? If the roots of the word 'toleration' etymologically go back to the Latin word *tolerantia*, in English there are usually two concepts that derive from the Latin word *tolerantia*: 'tolerance' and 'toleration.' The former depicts a general attitude, a willingness or ability to tolerate, whereas the latter refers to a religious or political action which implies the practice of tolerating. Thus, toleration assumed the meaning of forbearance of what is unapproved, which founds its roots in actual resistance to tyranny and repression, long before the word 'tolerance' gained wide currency in scientific terminology<sup>2</sup>. However, in everyday western discourse the two terms 'tolerance' and 'toleration' are also used interchangeably<sup>3</sup>. In this article I intend to explore the two terms 'toleration' and 'tolerance' separately in order to undertake a deeper analysis of the pandemic discourse. I will be resorting to some modern and contemporary philosophical theories which refer to the political state level and institutional behavioral phenomenon based on the propagation of tolerance as a more substantive virtue, functional to the

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<sup>1</sup> See M.P. PATERNO, *Paura del virus e angoscia pandemica: passioni e politica all'alba del XXI secolo*, in «Politics. Rivista di Studi Politici», 15, n. 1, 2021, pp. 231-245.

<sup>2</sup> See P.T. KING, *Toleration*, Allen & Unwin, London 1976, p. 12; J. HORTON, *Toleration*, in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by E. Craig, Routledge, London 1998, pp. 429-433.

<sup>3</sup> See V.A. SPENCER, *Introduction*, in *Toleration Comparative Perspective*, ed. by V.A. Spencer, Lexington Books, Lanham-Boulder-New York-London 2018, p. X.

building of a universal human rights theoretical framework. The paper will focus on the conceptual and functional notion of ‘tolerance’ as the process of acceptance without compromise, and ‘toleration’ as the acceptance with compromise of a high degree of uncertainty towards the near future. I will be dealing with the epistemological issues of some doctrines related to social justification which are necessary to the rethinking of mutual preservation of self and the others at a global level.

At the present time the concern regarding the spread of Covid-19 and the political measures adopted to contain it seem to have taken a back seat in Europe to give the floor to other international questions such as the fear caused by the ongoing wars, the energetic crisis, environmental disasters and the new frontiers of artificial intelligence. Consequently, the lurking virus of uncertainty is revealing its power in a more evident way. So, if on the one hand, the ‘uncertainty virus’ makes all of us equally vulnerable and fragile, democratically infecting everyone at a global level, on the other hand it ‘forces’ us to be more tolerant – even if this may sound a contradiction in terms – towards not only the near future, conceived as the best example of uncertainty, but also towards the present time when changes happen more rapidly than we can expect and perceive them. If we widen our geographical horizons and think, for example, of the riots and episodes of violence which occurred in China in 2022 when thousands of people protested against the *Zero-Covid policy* adopted by the government to contain the new wave of Coronavirus, we can start reflecting on the concept of ‘tolerance’ applied to the pandemic context even to reshape the old parameters of this idea as well as to discover new linguistic boundaries to tackle today’s political issues.

## *2. Learning to tolerate the fear of uncertainty*

Recent studies have mostly focused on the association between the Covid-19 emergency situation and depressive and anxiety symptoms. In this regard, many data in literature confirm the increasing prevalence of all types of anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, and sleep disorders but also an additional clinically interesting disturbance, concerning the relationship between Covid-19 and obsessive-compulsive disorder<sup>4</sup>. From these scientific

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<sup>4</sup> There is a long list of articles related to this last clinical aspect. I mention here just two of them which mark the beginning of these studies and the most recent results after three years of pandemic crises. See A. CHAKRABORTY, S. KARMAKAR, *Impact of Covid-19 on Obsessive Compulsive Disorder*, in «Iranian Journal of Psychiatry», July 15, n. 3, 2020, pp. 256-259; M. DEGHANI, H. HAKIMI, M. TALEBI, H. REZAEI, N. MOUSAZADEH, H. AHMADINIA, S.

contributions it is possible to deduce that intolerance to uncertainty seems to be a real virus in that it is a psychological construct consisting of the presence of excessive worry about what is not controllable or predictable. This kind of intolerance causes a cognitive distortion to such an extent that it is frequently associated with the presence of obsessive manifestations as well as health anxiety. An interesting study conducted by some scholars has shown that intolerance to uncertainty is also a widely present construct in individuals who manifest an anxiety reaction that is excessive with respect to the fear of Coronavirus contamination<sup>5</sup>. The invisibility of the virus to sensory optical perception is disturbing in itself. If we add to this the fact that millions of viruses around us have inhabited the earth for at least three billion years, while we human beings – often identified as the evolution of another species of virus for the planet – date back about three hundred thousand years, which means we are infants in comparison, there is enough to feel unsure of our place and role in the natural world.

If we reverse, however, our perspective, looking at the situation not from the point of view of dead or sick people, but from the point of view of healthy ones, more precisely the so-called asymptomatic who, despite being positive, do not develop the disease, we find that they are in large numbers. These asymptomatic people seem to practice a 'virtue' that medical scientists have called 'tolerance'. This means there are many tolerant individuals who seem to have entered into a pact of non-aggression or mutual coexistence with the virus, which also dwells in their biological system. We do not know why certain individuals enjoy this kind of 'tolerance'. Yet, we do know that it does not depend on antibodies. Following this perspective, the question seems to be not «how we can fight the virus» but rather «how we can generate, develop and increase tolerance to it». This last point transcends conventional virology. It affects the complexity of our biological ecosystem, influencing at the same time our lifestyle, the interaction among living things and with nature, but also social and political aggregations.

If we consider our contemporary political society as a place where everyone is supposed to be right, we are inevitably led to foresee a disheartening

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ALMASI, *The Relationship between Fear of Covid-19 and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*, in «BMC Psychology», n. 133, 2023, pp. 1-7. The results of this second study show that after three years people have adapted to the pandemic conditions, reducing their fear of the disease: <https://bmcpyschology.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40359-023-01112-7>.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. M.G. WHEATON, G.R. MESSNER, J.B. MARKS, *Intolerance of uncertainty as a factor linking obsessive-compulsive symptoms, health anxiety and concerns about the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the United States*, in «Journal of Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders», n. 28, 2021, available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211364920301263?via%3Dihub>.

scenario in which every word seems to be shouted instead of simply said in a harmless psychological language. Every action is governed by the brutish Hobbesian affirmation of human self-interest and by what Rousseau terms the spasmodic search for selfish love and appearances. We need to reflect on the importance of a silent but eloquent tolerant society in which tolerance is conceived not only as a 'virtue' to face Covid-19 against the feeling of fear or anxiety, enshrined in the virus of uncertainty, which is widespread among human beings but also as a theoretical pillar around which it should be possible to re-build a new humanist framework to be applied in our changing world. Before discussing this issue, it is worth focusing on the semantic aspect trying to disambiguate the twin terms 'tolerance' and 'toleration', concentrating our attention on their definitional meaning and usage.

### 3. *Disambiguating 'tolerance' and 'toleration' in political discourse*

In everyday Western political discourse, it is observable that the terms 'tolerance' and 'toleration' are often used interchangeably. However, it is possible to conceptually distinguish between the term 'toleration' employed for institutional or behavioral phenomena – as social and political practice; and 'tolerance' used to refer to a more general set of attitudes. This approach suggested by Andrew R. Murphy aims at avoiding any conceptual confusion that disorients many. Murphy argues that the interchangeable use of the two terms leads to the misunderstanding of the concept of the liberal legacy and causes the terms themselves to become elusive. He maintains, in fact, that «severing tolerance from toleration provides a more nuanced understanding of individual, social, and political life»<sup>6</sup>. Although 'toleration' theoretically involves a complex blend of rejection and acceptance, it is strictly speaking a negative freedom, a kind of liberty that fits in with the classical understanding of liberalism and other traditions that usually define it in the absence of constraints. According to Murphy, while 'toleration' is integrally and necessarily linked to liberal tradition, 'tolerance' is not. He totally excludes the conceptual understanding of toleration outside the liberal tradition and he comes to such a conclusion by examining the theories of early modern thinkers.

If we start, for example, by briefly analyzing *A Letter Concerning*

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<sup>6</sup> A.R. MURPHY, *Tolerance, Toleration and the Liberal Tradition*, in «Polity», IV, n. 29, 1997, p. 616.

*Toleration*, written by John Locke and first published in 1689<sup>7</sup>, we can notice that it still holds great relevance because, according to the philosopher, tolerance – which is basically built on the concept of religious 'toleration' in his case – is the foundation of politics while intolerance is the driving force behind politics, a kind of situation that could be reproduced even today. Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration* is among those classics that are useful for understanding social rifts. Whether it is religious, as in Locke's *Letter*, or of any other kind, what triggers intolerance is always the same thing: the fear and revulsion of the uncertainty of any change and diversity. Locke therefore asserts that if diversity does not threaten public order, it should be tolerated, with an emphasis always placed on the theoretical aspect of 'toleration'. Although the assumptions are quite different, diversity and intolerance in Europe are still today at the heart of politics and power embodied by men. Diversity of orientations, ways of experiencing pandemic crises or cultural differences are the basis of a policy that nurtures intolerance and feeds on it, therefore dictating homogeneous ways of living. However, if we transpose Locke's opinions to recent times, magistrates and politicians cannot legislate what does not concern the public. In other words, Locke brings into play the distinction between the public and the private. What he calls the care of the soul is the private space, the inner dimension, in which human beings take care of themselves, i.e. are being tolerant towards themselves, and in which the public, embodied by the politician, cannot have any decision-making power.

Politics must thus be based on tolerance rather than on toleration, because, according to Locke, guaranteeing rights means guaranteeing the possibility for individuals to take care of their own souls. As long as public peace is not threatened, the private space of communities or single individuals should not be reduced or repressed. Today we live in a phase of human history in which the public increasingly encompasses the private, and thus the latter is engulfed by judgment, prying eyes and the constant threat of being stigmatized. However, Locke's *Letter* teaches that the judgment and power of men must have a limit in order to guarantee that general peace, which is the goal of politics.

The contemporary scholar John Dunn refers to religious toleration as the single most important application of the Lockean theory<sup>8</sup>, while

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<sup>7</sup> See J. LOCKE, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), ed. by M. Montuori, M. Nijhoff, The Haag, Netherlands 1963.

<sup>8</sup> See J. DUNN, *Consent in the Political Theory of John Locke*, in «The Historical Journal», II, n. 10, 1967, pp. 153-182, reprinted in ID., *Political Obligation in its Historical Context: Essay in Political Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1980, pp. 29-52.

Richard Ashcraft sees it as an essential condition of the historical political movement in which Locke played a crucial role, a core issue around which other problems were linked<sup>9</sup>. Thus, arguing for toleration involves the acceptance of any dissent at an institutional level or in the form of politics as can be seen in Locke's arguments for religious toleration. Besides, Susan Mendus in her article *My Brother's Keeper: The Politics of Intolerance* asserts that a necessary condition of toleration is the presence of disapproval or hostility<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, toleration is minimal and negative; it is evoked or demanded for a general public good. It is merely a legal issue. In a broader sense, it is therefore opposed to the understanding of liberty because it is inherently intolerant in nature as it can only be practiced through a political system which limits and controls the hate of differences. Tolerance, on the other hand, as recognized by Murphy, is an attitude or disposition that does not require a practice of a typical tolerationist approach; it is opposed to the institutional, political and official implications of the term. More simply expressed, it is a general «willingness to admit the possible validity of seemingly contradictory viewpoints, a hesitancy to pass value or 'truth' judgements on individuals or group beliefs»<sup>11</sup>. In the term 'tolerance' there might be some underlying skepticism concerning ethical, ideological or moral acceptability, yet tolerance is always a disposition to be patient with diverse opinions. As a result, freedom exists without bigotry or without any harsh judgement. It is what Thomas Hearn terms «a disposition to rational deliberation» of ideas or practices that people might disagree on<sup>12</sup>. In brief, toleration needs institutional, political and legal conditions to be practiced whereas tolerance does not.

However, if contemporary scholars have delineated the two terms and quite often concluded that 'tolerance' is conceived more as a general attitude of tolerating while toleration as a practice in a political institutional context, historically speaking there are still more underlying complexities as to the differences between the two terms. Murphy reached his conclusions about both expressions by analyzing the Lockean argument of toleration, considering tolerance outside the liberal tradition. But, historically throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the usage of both terms 'toleration' and 'tolerance' can easily be found, especially in the course of the Enlightenment.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. R. ASHCRAFT, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises of Government*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1986.

<sup>10</sup> See S. MENDUS, *My Brother's Keeper: The Politics of Intolerance*, in *The Politics of Toleration: Tolerance and Intolerance in Modern Life*, ed. by S. Mendus, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1999, pp. 1-12.

<sup>11</sup> MURPHY, *Tolerance, Toleration and the Liberal Tradition*, cit., p. 600.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. TH.K. HEARN, *On Tolerance*, in «Southern Journal of Philosophy», n. 8, 1970, p. 227.

If we turn, instead, to David Heyd's definition, we can affirm that toleration is not a matter of politics but of private morals; it is not a virtue but rather an attitude or a mode of judgment which does not imply obligation but supererogation<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand, Catriona McKinnon considers toleration as an attitude which is too close to indifference<sup>14</sup>. It is clear that we have a wide and divergent variety of opinions that not necessarily fit in with the concept we intend to develop when we deal with the pandemic aspects related to the fear of uncertainty toward the near future. However, the question is, why should we speak about 'toleration' rather than 'tolerance' if we refer to a society affected by the pandemic crises? Maybe because we are dealing with a feeling of personal, social and political vulnerability similar to the one perceived in the Lockean context, where social uncertainty and political chaos could be resolved thanks to the idea of toleration conceived as a unique universal faith? In a way, we are obliged to be tolerant with a clear perception of a certain asymmetry of perspective as if we were looking at pandemic crises in their uncertain development regardless of the kind of human beings we are. However, if we dwell on the general uncertainty caused by a pandemic, the perspective becomes a symmetrical one that we share with the rest of the community, and therefore it turns into a much more inclusive attitude than is normally depicted by the term 'toleration'.

#### 4. *'Tolerance' and 'toleration': old questions and new trends in contemporary debates*

Regarding the present approach underlying the practical role of the concept of toleration, Hugh Barr Nisbet tells us that «It should also be noted that until fairly recent times 'toleration' referred primarily to religious toleration; whereas presently, the idea is more often applied to the toleration of cultural and ethnic differences»<sup>15</sup>. Hence, the question is: does the idea of toleration, presently attributed to reconciling multiculturalism under the banner of the so-called third-generation rights, favor the set of liberal ideologies it was suckled with? Well, seeing the changing direction of secular

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<sup>13</sup> See D. HEYD, *Is Toleration a Political Virtue?* in *Toleration and its Limits*, ed. by M.S. Williams, J. Waldron, NOMOS XLVIII, New York University Press, New York-London 2008, p. 172.

<sup>14</sup> See C. MCKINNON, *Toleration and the Character of Pluralism*, in *The Culture of Toleration in Diverse Societies*, ed. by C. McKinnon, D. Castiglione, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2003, pp. 58-59.

<sup>15</sup> H.B. NISBET, *On the Rise of Toleration in Europe: Lessing and the German Contribution*, in «The Modern Language Review», IV, n. 105, 2010, p. XXIX.

needs in history, it is irrefutable to acknowledge that there has been a progressive mutation in the inherent theoretical nature of toleration together with the need for it as a tool to mediate social peace and co-existence in the current era – that is tantamount to saying that toleration has broadened its scope from the sole purpose of vindicating religious pluralism and each individual's conscience to multiculturalism and collective consciousness.

In the last few decades Susan Mendus and other liberal scholars have conducted researches to understand the new aspects of racial and sexual toleration too, beside the religious one. However, the analyzed existing literatures are still predominantly based on the theories provided by the canonical historical and philosophical secular texts like that of John Stuart Mill *On Liberty*, which is still considered as one of the most relevant contemporary writings on toleration<sup>16</sup>. Mendus does acknowledge, however, that the history of toleration is rather a progressive one as it has always undergone conceptual changes depending on the practical social needs of the ages. She thinks that from the seventeenth century to the present day, the concept of toleration has always been implied by philosophers in their arguments aimed at solving the practical problems of their societies. According to John Locke, for example, religious intolerance in seventeenth century Britain was the concern of his times; the writings of Hannah Arendt were influenced, instead, by the worries of the Jews forced to flee from Germany; the book of Stuart Mill *On Liberty* represented political thought against the tyranny of the government that suppressed public opinion in Victorian Britain<sup>17</sup>. In addition, the concept of toleration must be viewed also within the framework of the globalization process that should break down the boundaries between nationalism and internationalization, with religious pluralism turning into multiculturalism in order to meet the practical needs of the present era. However even if 'multiculturalism' is a term that pertains to the political arena of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Robert Wokler affirms, it was predominantly generated in context of notions of community in North America with respect to the Bosnia civil war; nonetheless the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century debate on civil and political rights, including the concerns stemming from religious life, have persisted and remained outstandingly familiar and not alien to recent times<sup>18</sup>. Though contemporary discourse on toleration

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<sup>16</sup> See J. HORTON, S. MENDUS, *Introduction*, in *Aspects of Toleration: Philosophical Studies*, ed. by J. Horton, S. Mendus, Routledge, London-New York 1985, pp. 1-15.

<sup>17</sup> See S. MENDUS, *Introduction*, in *Justifying Toleration: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives*, ed. by S. Mendus, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988, pp. 1-20.

<sup>18</sup> R. WOKLER, *Multiculturalism and Ethnic Cleansing in the Enlightenment in Toleration in Enlightenment Europe*, ed. by O.P. Grell, R. Porter, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 69.



has not just remained fixated on the problems of religious pluralism but also deals with pluralism of different kinds and individual freedom which cannot exist without independence, economic and health security<sup>19</sup>, even many liberal philosophers now consider the traditional conception of toleration too limited, in that it lacks the appropriate receptivity to difference so as to fulfill the legitimate objectives associated with the multiculturalist ideal<sup>20</sup>.

John Rawls, for instance, drifted from the traditional aspects of toleration in elaborating his theories of political liberalism with secular overtones and aligned his arguments about toleration as a contemporary extension of the political arguments developed during the Reformation and its aftermath<sup>21</sup>. This is quite common with many scholars who have tried to find a common significance of religious toleration in accordance with present needs. In the context of historical religious pluralism, toleration by definition was supported by the idea of morally accepting the unacceptable. Likewise, Anna Elisabetta Galeotti affirms that «Tolerance is the disposition to refrain from exercising one's power of interference on others' disliked actions and behaviors, which are considered important for both the tolerator and the tolerated»<sup>22</sup>. It is an unconditional, systematic application of a tolerant attitude towards a person or any group despite differences of any kind; conditional acceptance can only be linked to the attainment of social peace. Along these interpretative lines, the champion of religious toleration in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Sébastien Castellion, perceived this idea as a plea and a Christian duty of forbearance for social stability and coexistence in the face of disagreements; he advocated radical religious individualism, theological minimization, and some sort of toleration of religious pluralism<sup>23</sup>. He was thus also credited with giving important contributions to the modern understanding of individualism implicit in confessional pluralism together with the idea of limited government interference that became politically

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<sup>19</sup> See S. FREDMAN, *Human Rights Transformed: Positive Duties and Positive Rights*, in «Legal Research paper series», n. 38, 2006, pp. 498-520.

<sup>20</sup> See J. HORTON, *Liberalism, Multiculturalism and Toleration*, in *Liberalism, Multiculturalism and Toleration*, ed. by J. Horton, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2016, pp. 1-17.

<sup>21</sup> J. RAWLS, *Political Liberalism*, Columbia University Press, New York 2005, p. XXIV.

<sup>22</sup> A.E. GALEOTTI, *Do We Need Toleration as a Moral Virtue?*, in *Toleration, Neutrality and Democracy*, ed. by D. Castiglione, C. McKinnon, Kluwer Academic Publisher, Dordrecht-Boston-London 2003, p. 48.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. S. CASTELLION, *Fede, dubbio e tolleranza*, a cura di G. Radetti, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1960; J.R. COLLINS, *Redeeming the Enlightenment: New Histories of Religious Toleration*, in «The Journal of Modern History», III, n. 81, 2009, p. 612; M. VAN DOORN, *The Nature of Tolerance and the Social Circumstances in which it emerges*, in «Current Sociology Review», I, n. 23, 2014, pp. 905-927.

more evident with Locke and his contemporaries.

Somewhat along the same lines as Castellion, John Rawls viewed toleration as a necessary social condition of a just society where all practices and beliefs must be tolerated despite their incompatibility with social co-existence. Though Rawls' toleration theory is still a contemporary extension based on the traditional one that started with the Reformation, his justifications for toleration do not remain totally hinged outside the contemporary political discourse. What is more, Rawls addresses toleration as an international issue and as a concern for value pluralism, defending personal and political practices as well<sup>24</sup>.

Following some historical perspectives, we can notice that toleration represented a requirement that was rooted within the three-fold discourse of citizenship, religious disposition supported by strong advocacy for individual civil and political rights and the authoritarian role of the state system. Therefore, the development of toleration was built around historical and political philosophies that promoted individual rights, civil liberties, democracy and free enterprise against the tyranny of the state sovereignty. For this reason, the concept of toleration was articulated mainly along those lines and appeared within the context of the state regime only. However, in the earliest accounts, which can be traced back to the second century, in *The Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, toleration was not conceived in the context of a nation-state, but in general for all humans. Marcus Aurelius, in fact, wrote that «all men are made one for another: either then teach them better, or bear with them»<sup>25</sup>. He considered toleration as a moral conception and not as a political one. This is what John Lombardini emphasizes when writing about both Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius; toleration is also conceived as a social virtue – i.e. tolerating others who disagree with us is an obligation that we have towards them as fellow rational creatures. In neither of these two thinkers was toleration discussed as a political concept, but as a rational attitude<sup>26</sup>. This is because until the seventeenth century, the concerns regarding the nation-state and citizenship issues were not quite in focus; but with the advent of such concerns, the idea of toleration was expanded

<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. RAWLS, *The Law of People: with "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited"*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge-London 1999. See also D. KABASAKAL BADAMCHI, *Is Toleration Possible and Morally Relevant in the International Realm?*, in «UI-Uluslararası İlişkiler International Relations», 8, n. 31, 2011, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, trans. by M. Casaubon, Enhanced Media, Los Angeles 2017, p. 83.

<sup>26</sup> See J. LOMBARDINI, *Stoicism and the Virtue of Toleration*, in «History of Political Thought», 36, n. 4, 2015, pp. 643-669.

by John Locke in relation to the role of a magistrate and the rightful role of a citizen and his conscience. Toleration until the early Enlightenment was mainly seen as a moral necessity for social peace; however, it soon became a political issue along with human rights and citizenship rights across Europe. However, toleration was to remain for a long time a concern only for fully fledged citizens; the rights of foreigners or stateless people were not much spoken of, at least not until the aftermath of the Nazi atrocities.

In the early phase of the history of human rights, toleration was discriminatory and did not recognize the 'other' as deserving any sense of respect. However, many contemporary scholars think that such a view has changed over time and the concept of toleration is now founded on the idea of respect and stems from the very notion of 'personhood', which can also be understood in terms of the individual rights and human dignity that people hold by the sole virtue of being human<sup>27</sup>. For instance, UNESCO's *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance* promotes 'tolerance' that is ingrained in the concept of 'respect', 'equality in dignity', and recognition of the rights of 'individuals and groups' which on many aspects embeds the classical meaning of 'toleration'<sup>28</sup>.

The idea of toleration has developed ever since the Early Reformation era, through the Enlightenment project and through the history of democratic revolutions, which has not just elevated the idea of toleration beyond the narrative – where 'state' was the only agent of toleration to democratic citizens<sup>29</sup> – but it has also gained attention in terms of egalitarianism of human rights, especially inherent dignity. Therefore, the concept of toleration now has broadened and tends to vindicate the fundamental rights of every person, who is not merely a citizen of any sovereign state but a global citizen according to the principle of universality of human rights. So forth, the concept of toleration as depicted in the international agendas of human rights norms, which recognize each human being as a global citizen – equal before the law – needs a more accurate analysis especially in relationship with the so called 'emerging human rights' that aim to provide fundamental rights for all people of the world.

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<sup>27</sup> See *The Palgrave Handbook of Toleration*, ed. by M. Sardoč, Springer International Publishing, Cham 2021.

<sup>28</sup> *The Declaration of Principles on Tolerance*, Proclaimed and Signed by the Member States of UNESCO on 16 November 1995, Article 3.3.

<sup>29</sup> See, R. FORST, *Toleration in Conflict. Past and Present*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013; Id., *Toleration, Power and Reason: Continuing a Dialogue with a Political Realist Friend*, Biblioteca della libertà, Centro Einaudi, Torino 2019, pp. 41-47. This version is available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/222604>.

Thus, the narrative of toleration advocating cultural pluralism with the advent of the new aims of the international community has now moved along the internationalization and universalization views rising from the debris of the past at the same time accommodating the present global practical challenges characterized mainly by multicultural issues.

## 5. Conclusion

The pandemic crisis has become in many countries a powerful accelerant for the current global authoritarian drift. The question that arises is whether the principle of toleration could remain an important key concept, that is the true founder of human relations in order to rethink human rights concretely, even «emerging last generation rights»<sup>30</sup>, both at local and global levels or whether it is an old-fashioned idea, a utopian model which belongs to the past. To combat this sense of fear which is generated by the uncertainty about the near future, the outcome of Covid-19, ongoing wars and the increase of authoritarian regimes, one possible solution could be reconsidering the beneficial effects of the ancient idea of toleration integrated with a renewed vision of tolerance conceived not in the simplistic meaning of forbearance or passive acceptance of uncertainty but in a more inclusive and universalistic sense: an active theoretical inclination which could promote multilevel solidarity and strengthen human rights in a multicultural world with a new awareness of human fragility. A high level of 'tolerance' conceived as an extensive theoretical aptitude regarding uncertainty about the near future could better help people to reduce the high public degree of 'toleration' towards the authoritarian drifts of some regimes which often resort to emergency measures adopted under the guise of protecting public health. This was, for example, the case of Hungary, where in 2020 the prime minister Orbán, used Coronavirus to undermine the fundamental principles of democracy, or the case of China where the implementation of the *Zero-Covid policy* adopted by the General Secretary Xi Jinping brought about episodes of human rights violation. Even Brazil, although it offered a different and opposite model, provides an interesting example of what we can call 'authoritarian tolerance'; the policy based on the lack of restrictive measures to face Covid-19 used by President

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<sup>30</sup> See S. DOMARADZKI, M. KHVOSTOVA, D. PUPOVAC, *K. Vasak's Generations of Rights and the Contemporary Human Rights Discourse*, in «Human Rights Review», 2019, pp. 423-443.

Bolsonaro became a sort of instrument of persuasion in order to manipulate the population, dominating fear but at the same time, generating a conflict between the country's economy and public health and consequently causing the death of thousands of citizens.

What are, then, the beneficial effects of 'tolerance' and 'toleration' in the age of the pandemic? If the word 'tolerance' has gained a great deal of prominence over the term 'toleration', as can be seen in the general drift of article 1 of the *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance* proclaimed and signed by the member States of UNESCO on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1995<sup>31</sup>, the same idea of 'tolerance' applied to the pandemic discourse could become ambiguous because it refers to two different areas of investigations: the first one concerns the metaphorical implications of the widespread fear of the 'uncertainty virus' while the second one deals with the concrete consequences related to health issues. From a strictly metaphorical point of view, considering 'tolerance' as a means to fight the 'uncertainty virus' could help us to overcome the limit of human frailty brought about by the fear of the unknown in critical situations of global proportions such as that resulting from the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic. On the other hand, in a more concrete sense, 'tolerance' of the 'uncertainty virus' could be useful to avoid the authoritarian political drifts that are often concealed behind containment measures, which are sometimes too restrictive, or the political manipulation of the population through the circulation of the virus, which in this case is considered from the epidemiological perspective.

To conclude, it can be said that although from a theoretical point of view we prefer to use the category of 'tolerance', from a more concrete and practical standpoint and with a more inclusive attitude regarding external actions, we use the concept of 'toleration' in the sense of acceptance that can combine individual freedom with the protection of the community according to the teachings of John Stuart Mill. The idea of tolerance towards the 'uncertainty virus' can therefore help us overcome that sense of fear, estrangement and loneliness generated by the experience of a disease

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<sup>31</sup> In the UNESCO *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance* we can find the term 'tolerance' and not 'toleration' in accordance with the recent literature that belongs to the third generation of human rights discourse. Hence, it is worth quoting the first article of the *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance* proclaimed and signed by the member states of UNESCO on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1995: «Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace». Art. 1, § 3.9.

that has become an epidemic; it enables us to be part and parcel of a humanitarian project based on the sharing of an abstract concept but with a real and concrete applicability whose roots can be found in the renewed meaning of the term 'toleration' in the modern sense of social virtue and rational attitude. Redefining these two categories of 'tolerance' and 'toleration' could also be seen as a valid contribution to the current debate about the *International Pandemic Treaty*, in that it strengthens the integration of health issues and at the same time promotes peaceful cohabitation among individuals and States at a global level.