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INTRODUCTION

During the spring of 2000 I attended a cockfight in Collinsville, Oklahoma. I tell the tale of that visit and reflect on its significance in the epilogue, but here the point regards the confusion and puzzlement it precipitated. I went to Collinsville as a citizen seeking information about an activity that many in the state wanted to ban. A referendum was scheduled for later that year, and I had never seen a fight. My hunch was that I would find it objectionable and yet tolerable. I assumed that I would vote against the ban in solidarity with the rural and Native peoples who opposed it. But I was mistaken. In fact, I found the fights horrific in their seductive violence and vile in their visible effects. I left Collinsville thinking that the proponents of the referendum were right. Cockfighting was intolerable; a ban would be best.

This judgment was unexpected and disorienting. It caught me off guard, and after a week I came to doubt it. Or rather, I came to doubt that I understood it well enough to maintain it. Did my conclusion that cockfighting was unbearable bear witness to my own intolerance? Intolerance is a vice. Its act wrongs other another person. It denies them a good they are due. (But what was that good and under what conditions was it due? I didn't know.) Did this mean that my refusal to honor this request for toleration was somehow unjust? More troubling still was another thought: was the solidarity I felt for my fellow citizens who led rural lives and claimed Native identities in fact false? Did my refusal to tolerate this violent and (to my mind) objectionable portion of their local traditions signal my own smooth hypocrisy? Was my claim to solidarity more apparent than real? And then the worst thought of all: was I being played? In the stories of tolerance that we tell, hardscrabble towns in the American Bible Belt are not its natural home, and yet toleration was precisely what the members of cockfight clubs across the state were asking from people like me, urban and suburban inhabitants of Tulsa and Oklahoma City. Was their request as much a semblance as my solidarity? Was it a mask that they would remove once they secured the tolerance they wanted but would never offer in return?

After a while I tried to revise my judgment, muster some tolerance, and so escape these discomforts, but this didn't work. The act was too difficult, its odd combination of objection and endurance, and besides it felt wrong. To my mind, cockfighting wasn't just objectionable, but intolerable. So I tried indifference. I tried not caring about cockfighting, about the tasks of citizenship, and about the solidarity I felt, whether real or imagined. But this didn't work either. Like Augustine so many centuries before, I had *seen* a cockfight. I had chosen to attend, and I had been captivated by its spectacle, its strange combination of violence and beauty.¹

INITIAL DISCOVERIES

The truth is, I didn't know how to tell the tale of that trip to Collinsville, to say what I had seen and give an account of its significance. So I did what I have been trained to do. I read around in the relevant literature, some of it scholarly, some of it not. My reading led to a course, the course to a handful of articles, and the articles to this book. It also led to three initial discoveries. First, I discovered that my discontent was widespread. Whatever I read, wherever I turned, there it was. Journalists, theologians, moral philosophers, hipster youth pastors, political theorists, popes, radical critics, college evangelists, political operatives, and scholars of religion—all could be found exploring the resort to toleration in response to the differences that divide us, resenting the praise this act so often receives, and resisting the thought that a virtue might be its cause.² The sources of their discontent turn out to be multiple, and yet as we shall see in chapter 1, criticism of tolerance and its act, whatever its source, typically functions as a medium of discontent with modernity. By these lights, toleration is a distinctively modern response to disagreement and difference, and its ills are variations on modernity's own. When it is endorsed nevertheless, the act must be unmasked as a swindle, as a cover for either domination or moral collapse. It must be replaced with some other response. A just political society will leave it behind. A community of hospitality and welcome will proceed without it.

1 *Libuit attendere*, says Augustine, when he saw two cocks fighting in a courtyard. He attended to them. He chose to do so, and it pleased him. *Ord.* I.8.25. For Burkean reflections on suffering that captures our attention, reflections designed to diminish our habit of moralizing our captivity see Bromwich, "How Moral Is Taste?"

2 Here's a representative list of the discontented, one of each. Niebuhr, *Beyond Tolerance*; Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness*, 121–126; Herman, "Pluralism and the Community of Moral Judgment"; Dobson, *Be Intolerant*; Brown, *Regulating Aversion*; Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*; Žižek, *Violence*, 105–139 and "Tolerance as an Ideological Category"; McDowell and Hostetler, *New Tolerance*; GOP chairman Reince Preibus (Elbow, "Reince Preibus Doesn't Like the Word 'Tolerance'"); and William O'Meara, "Beyond Toleration."

Of course, I also discovered friends of toleration, those who endorse the act, praise its performance, and admire its prominence in modern lives and politics. Still, whatever I read, wherever I turned, there was very little talk of the virtue that perfects resort to this act, even among its friends. This was my second key discovery. Tolerance is infrequently theorized as a virtue, as a habitual perfection of action and attitude. Few make the effort; some even deny that tolerance is a virtue.³ Instead, most scholars and critics, friends and foes alike, have subjected the *act* of toleration to scrutiny, the act of patiently enduring a person, action, or attitude that is thought to be objectionable in some way, and this has put the debate on precisely the wrong footing. As we shall see, an act of toleration can be good or bad, right or wrong, depending on the ends and circumstances of the act. Some objectionable differences should be patiently endured; others should not. But this means that those who care deeply about certain resorts to the act, who defend those resorts as right and required, and who, as a result, are inclined to declare the act itself essentially good will be accused of moral blindness by those who concentrate on examples of the act that fall short of the right. So too, those who feel nagged or coerced to endure what they consider intolerable and who, as a result, are inclined to declare the act itself essentially bad, will be counted among the intolerant by those who consider the act essentially just and good. So goes the contemporary debate, or at least a good portion of it: misguided judgments about the moral status of the act in general are used as proxies, as smokescreens, in debates over specific instances of the tolerable and the intolerable, over what should and should not be patiently endured, while the virtue that attends to this distinction is hardly considered.

Given the sources and motivations that have shaped the revival of virtue theory in recent years, this might seem understandable. That revival has, for the most part, looked to premodern accounts for inspiration, to the ancients and medievals. If toleration is, as most assume, a modern response to the moral and political challenges posed by diversity and difference, then we should not expect the revivalists to care about the virtue that causes right

3 The logic of these explicit denials will be considered in chapter 1. For examples, see Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, chap. 1; Hauerwas, “Hauerwas on ‘Hauerwas and the Law’”; Heyd, “Is Toleration a Political Virtue?”; and MacIntyre, “Toleration and the Goods of Conflict,” 153–154. To his credit, MacIntyre admits that *acts* of toleration can be just, but he does not consider whether these just acts require a distinct virtue that belongs to justice. He also insists the acts of *intolerance* can be *just*, and this odd sounding remark should have prompted him to ask about virtue and vice. In the current generation of moral philosophers, theologians, and political theorists, only a handful have: Compton-Sponville, *Small Treatise on the Great Virtues*, 157–172; Fiala, *Tolerance and the Ethical Life*; Forst, “Tolerance as a Virtue of Justice” and *Toleration in Conflict*, 502–517; Horton, “Toleration as a Virtue”; Newey, “Tolerance as a Virtue”; Oberdiek, *Tolerance*; Sabl, “Virtuous to Himself”; Tinder, *Tolerance and Community*; and Vainio, “Virtues and Vices of Tolerance.”

resort to this act. They don't find it in the premodern sources they borrow and adapt; they don't even look. And why should they? After all, for many, the point of the revival is to locate alternatives to the moral discourses and practices of modernity, discourses and practices that toleration is thought to exemplify, that elicit our discontent, and that provoke the search for moral resources in a time before tolerance, before the eclipse of virtue.

Not surprisingly, most friends of toleration are willing to accept this story that pits act against virtue across the threshold of the modern. For them, a perfectionist account would only entangle toleration in the metaphysical complications and moral compromises of premodern virtue. Such an account would have to refer to ends given by nature and thus to a myth that naturalizes what is in fact contingent, presumably to the benefit of some and the detriment of others. It would have to speak of communal norms and tradition-bound lives and thus endorse an implicit patriarchy. It would accent the imitation of moral exemplars and thus threaten the individuality and special dignity of persons. And its account of desire, intention, and happiness would betray a disregard for duty and allow self-interest to infect even the most praiseworthy actions. Better then, to theorize the act not the virtue, toleration not tolerance, and thus avoid perfectionism's difficulties, or so these friends of toleration conclude.

With friends and foes of toleration largely united in their disregard for the virtue that perfects resort to the act, it's hard to presume otherwise. And the difficulty is compounded by the fact that most historians believe that toleration emerged in the modern period, not as a virtue was cultivated and praised, but only as self-interest took hold and swords were sheathed at the conclusion of the wars that followed the Protestant Reformation. But then there's this. In some circumstances, in response to some persons and objectionable differences, an act of toleration is clearly right and good. In some instances, its patient endurance is clearly required and failure to respond with this act is plainly unjust. Moreover, the conflicts of judgment and love, attitude and action, that afflict our various social and political relationships would seem to make right and regular resort to this act indispensable for their persistence and flourishing. No doubt, participation in this activity, this regular resort, can be difficult and devotion to its ends unstable, but once its special goodness is conceded, it's hard to avoid speaking of degrees of excellence, of better and worse, with respect to participation and devotion. And of course, once there is an aspiration to do better, perhaps even habitually so, then talk of the virtues that perfect participation in this activity, in its judgments and loves, will be hard to resist.

Third, and finally, I discovered that the confusion and discontent that surround toleration, the assumption that it appears only as modernity does, and the refusal to find its source and perfection in a moral virtue have made it nearly

impossible to see its relationship to love's endurance or consider the virtue that perfects this work of love, the virtue that the Apostle Paul calls forbearance.⁴ Both the tolerant and the forbearing respond with patient endurance to at least some of the differences, disagreements, and moral imperfections that afflict their relationships and communities. For the tolerant, this act comes as right and due, for the forbearing as love's endurance. Given the identities and differences that unite and divide these virtues and acts, we might expect to find them treated together, as the siblings that they are, and yet this happens rarely and almost always to ill effect. Scholars who see their relationship and treat them together tend to be Christian theologians, and they tend to pit forbearance *against* tolerance. They draw a distinction between the two in order to mark the boundary between good and evil, sacred and secular, grace and nature, ancient wisdom and modern hypocrisy, real virtue and clever vice—vice that parades in virtue's garb. No one, as far as I can tell, has tried to regard them together, as sibling virtues, while simultaneously resisting the temptation to scapegoat tolerance in order to secure advantage for a certain interpretation of sin and grace, a certain account of secular modernity, or a certain position in contemporary debates about the tolerable and the intolerable. I discovered, in other words, that the confusions and resentments that confound contemporary attitudes toward tolerance have not only distorted Christian appropriation of this Pauline inheritance, but also prevented scholars and critics of all kinds, whether Christian or not, from reflecting on love's response to disagreement and difference.

TASKS

My efforts in this book follow from these discoveries. First and most basically, I explicate and defend a perfectionist account of tolerance, the virtue that belongs to justice as one of its parts. There are many studies of toleration understood as an act or a set of practices or policies. Some accent historical emergence; others attend to theoretical justification. But we have very few historically informed, conceptually nuanced studies of tolerance, the associated virtue. My efforts supply just that, and in this respect they open up

4 Paul assigns the perfection to God and uses the word ἀνοχή (*anoché*) (Rom 2:4) to describe its act. He also locates an equivalent norm and activity in the community created by God's forbearance. Here he uses the words βαστάζειν (*bastazein*) (Rom 15:1) and ὑπομονή (*hupomone*) (Rom 15:4–5). The members of this community are to endure each other's differences, retain each other's company, and so bear each other's burdens. He implies that this activity recapitulates and so bears witness to divine perfection. It helps sustain the community that God's forbearance and Christ's sacrifice have created (Rom 15:1–6).

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