

That famous bastion of intellectual freedom and tolerance, Universities, have lately been accused of hypocrisy: tolerant only of those ideas believed by the majority and unwilling to give ear to opposing views. The terminology covering this has given rise to a new term: political correctness. Only certain ideas are correct and all others are false.

Voltaire is attributed to have said: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." Today, we hear more: "I detest everything you might say, so you may not say it here."

We intellectuals do seem to have lost the ability to debate ideas. I remember one famous 1973 Cambridge University debate between Germaine Greer, a famous Australian feminist, and William F. Buckley, the best mind in the American Conservative movement

The topic was: Should this house [Cambridge Debate Society] support Women's Liberation? Each gave their speech, and then the audience voted with their feet, pro or con winning the debate by walking out to the left exit or to the right. To Greer's amazement, she won, despite opening her speech with the comment that she expected no fairness from "this bastion of male privilege." That is what university education should be.

But another issue of tolerance faces us today: should tolerance be unlimited? I would make the case that no matter how good being tolerant might be, it should have limits in reality. There should be no tolerance of someone rousing a mob to mayhem any more than we should tolerate someone shouting "fire" in a theater when there is none, causing panic and even death. Nor should there be tolerance (citing freedom of speech) of videos of terror attacks in progress, the case recently in New Zealand.

We honor the sanctity of the family, urging tolerance of some differences, but who then will protect the children in an abusive home? It is rare, but there are sadists who use their authority over their children to torture them.

We honor the differences in religions and protect their practices with tolerance, but should we tolerate religious excuses of those who murder their wives or daughters for disobedience or "shaming" the family? Do we tolerate a religious practice that lets a child die from a burst appendix rather than getting medical help? Our society's values do matter, and there are some behaviors that are assaults on life.

Should we tolerate the believers in conspiracy theories about the dangers of childhood inoculations (with few exceptions for those with impaired immune systems), bringing back to the world diseases that we had almost eradicated? Should we tolerate Muslim clerics in Pakistan and Afghanistan who lied that vaccinations were a plot of the Imperialists to make children sterile? This evil act has only multiplied the number of crippled beggars in the streets who might otherwise have been safe from Polio. Conspiracy theories are, by their very nature, imaginary, with no evidence to defend them.

We must tolerate the religious beliefs of some that abortion and birth control are against the will of God. But they must tolerate the legal actions of women seeking medical care for a pregnancy that cannot or should not be continued. One's belief must not trump another's legal rights.

The new social media are the wild west, with no sheriff in sight. People who are taken in by anything they see on the computer assume that if it is in print, it must be true. They also have no habit of asking the first question of those trained in critical thinking: "Where did you get that?" When we cannot know the source, and have no way of vetting whether that source is reliable, this is conspiracy and not fact, nor do we know the motive behind the statement.

Climate deniers are mistaking weather (a local phenomenon) for climate, a global phenomenon. A cold winter is no proof that the globe's climate is not warming. Non-scientists (our President) mistake carbon, a building block of life, for carbon dioxide, a poisonous pollutant. Look for credible sources; don't tolerate the bunkum of the ignorant.

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