Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Toleration, Proselytizing, and the Politics of Recognition", in Thomas Banchoff, ed. *Religious Pluralism, Globalization, and World Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2008).
Selected highlights

Proselytization is central to some religious traditions – for example, Christianity. Christ calls his disciples to go forth and preach the gospel to all lands. This is to be done peacefully, but it is to be done. One does not impose one's faith, in this vision, but one makes it manifest, preaches it, calls upon others to consider it. A decent, tolerant society should have no problem with this. Indeed, public freedom to proselytize is part and parcel of a robust regime of toleration – what one might call *deep toleration* – based on the insistence that we can, at one and the same time, tolerate religious pluralism and advocate for the truths of our own faith.

Deep toleration speaks to the respect for persons that lies at the heart of democratic possibility and should inform international community.

The story of toleration has included the privitization of religion, and privitization has let to subjectivization and interiorization of religon: you have your "spirituality" and I have mine. If faith is narrowed to the pinpoint of one, proselytization comes to seem a violation of toleration, as if toleration means I expect no one – ever – to challenge my faith, my spirituality. Why? Because it is mine. So we collapse coercion, manipulation, and persuasion into one unsavory mix and spit them all out.

Proselytization takes place when I knowingly and determinedly set out to change someone else's mind about something basic to his or her identity and self-definition, like religious belief. Toleration requires that I learn to live with deep differences even though I may disagree profoundly with another's beliefs and identity. In its classical form, toleration did not require suspending judgment as between contrasting beliefs, identities, and way of being; rather, it required not coercing those whose orientations one might find unintelligible, even distasteful, so long as these orientations neither posed a threat to public safety nor undermined the overarching orienting framework of toleration itself.

The standard version of the story goes something like this: mandated liberal toleration saved religion from its own excesses and absolutist demands. By forcing a regime of toleration on religion, liberalism in its constitutional forms demanded that religion act more tolerantly. And so it came to pass that both "sectarian" groups (meaning religious groups, of course) and nonsectarian groups (all others organized along the lines of the liberal mandate) would learn to live happily or, if not that, at least peacefully with and among one another. This truce is insistently represented as a fragile one by contemporary civil libertarians and the most ardent secularists. If religion threatens to get out of hand, it must be beaten back. Often the Spanish Inquisition is trotted out in argument as if this were a serious historic possibility in twenty-first-century Western societies.

Of course, there are other ways to tell the tale. One would be to take note of the fact that were one to do something as unseemly as a body count of victims, the antireligious ideologies of the twentieth century would win that contest hands down. Murderous intolerance leading to a quest to silence or, worse, to eliminate those who challenge one's own views is no exclusive purview of those with religious convictions. To this would be added details of the many ways that the regime of liberal tolerance has imposed real hardships on the free exercise of religion. These restrictions on free exercise derive from the suspicion that religious intolerance is more to be feared than anything else and that such intolerance is to be found lurking in the interstices of even the most benign forms of religious expression. One way or the other, this rebuttal would hold, religion per se is not the primary problem in the late modern Western democracies but, rather, a dogmatic, highly ideological disparagement of religions and their faithful as an in situ threat to constitutional order.

Religious faith has not escaped this subjectivist-expressivist juggernaut. If I am right, Locke did his part to put Western selves—Protestant selves, initially, as Catholics were omitted from his regime of toleration—on the pathway toward privatizing whatever grates, or is discordant with reference to, the dominant liberal, eventually market, paradigm. Taylor notes the struggle "between technocracy and the sense of history or community, instrumental reason versus the intrinsic value of certain forms of life, the domination of nature versus the need for reconciliation with nature."6 Whether one casts the battle lines this way or not, it is undeniably the case that that which was privatized over time became subjectivized and reducible to private experience. This undermines any

robustness to the notion of a community of faith having a form of membership that exerts strong claims on its members. But back to the main story.

This privatizing, even subjectifying, of religion feeds into the bad odor currently surrounding any hint of proselytization. Proselytizing seems at its best bad manners; at its worst, it is a way to try to force something on me that I do not want, am not interested in, but may be gulled or intimidated into accepting. The general animus against proselytizing flows from a conviction that those driven in that direction will, almost invariably, be persons of overly strong religious conviction; those, therefore, who, should they become dominant, would move to end the very toleration that has made their open proselytizing possible. (The association of the word, and process, with religion does not help, of course. Somehow no one speaks of proselytizing when I try to convince you to change your political party. But if I urge you to change your religion, I am engaged in proselytizing and fall under suspicion.) So, in the name of preserving a regime of toleration, we must not tolerate unrestrained proselytization.

A whiff of this intolerance for proselytizing comes through in the comments of one of Alan Wolfe's respondents in his book One Nation after All. One "Jody Fields" is quoted as saying: "If you are a Hindu and you grew up being a Hindu, keep it to yourself. Don't impose your religion, and don't make me feel bad because I do this and you do this."7 Embedded in this comment is an intolerance of religious pluralism should that pluralism reveal itself in a robust, public way. Telling a Hindu to hide being Hindu is scarcely a picture of liberal pluralism: or so, at least, one would think. One way or the other, the continuing privatizing of religion—or the view that that is what it is all about—means that when religion shows its face, it must not take the form of actually trying to persuade someone else of the truth of the religious beliefs being displayed. "Keep it to yourself."

**Toleration Challenged**

As if this were not enough to mull over, let us add a more recent trend to the mix. I have in mind the attack on the very notion of tolerance and toleration emanating from a postmodern direction and from those most tied up in the identity politics tendency. The argument goes roughly like this: toleration was always a sham, a way to enforce a particular Eurocentric, patriarchal, heterosexist, Christian worldview. It was a cover story for hegemony. (And, of course, there is always just enough truth to be found in such blanket charges that one cannot simply dismiss them out of hand.) What atheists, or pagans, or non-Western religious devotees, those with once-hidden sexual orientations, those who are "third world" or nonwhite, seek is not toleration but equal normative acceptance. This equal acceptance will be attained only when the society—any society—refuses to make any normative distinctions between and among any and all comprehensive understandings of what makes a life good, or worthy, or a belief true, or a way of structuring families better than some other, and so forth. Laws, public policies, the cultural ethos must practice total nondiscrimination, in the sense of refraining from making any normative distinctions as between modes of belief and ways of life. Thus, for example: sexual sadomasochism between consenting adults is not to be construed as a problematic way of ordering a human existence by contrast to a faithful monogamous relationship between adults.

All in all, we are enjoined to abandon orienting frameworks that offer criteria whereby we can, and are obliged to, make qualitative distinctions as between alternative orientations. Taylor's insistence that human beings cannot but orient themselves to the good is stoutly denied: we not only can but we should if we are going to move beyond toleration to validation of the "free choices" made by selves; if we are going to resist being "judgmental"; if we are going to affirm and "validate" without distinction any and all (or nearly so) ways of being in the world. Those pressing the antitoleration argument see toleration as negative, a grudging thing. They want "validation" and approval—even as they simultaneously proclaim the radical and dangerous nature of what it is they are saying or doing, as if one could have full societal validation and yet remain a permanent voice of radical dissent—but that is another issue.

Those who defend toleration point out that the alternative to toleration historically has not been a happy pluralism where we are all equally delectable peas in the pod but, instead, very unhappy, unpluralistic orders in which religious minorities and dissenters were exiled or tortured or forced to conform; in which political dissenters often faced similar assaults; in which any inkling of a sexual orientation other than that which is considered normal was grounds for imprisonment or worse, and so on. The defenders of toleration would argue that it is foolish to the point of suicidal for those who are a minority—in any sense—to undermine support for toleration. Toleration is their best bet as the world of indistinguishable "differences" is a chimera. There never has been such a world and never will be.

One may be obliged to recognize another as a being of equal worth even as one repudiates that being's choices as unworthy and demeaning precisely to one whose worth is given by virtue of his or her humanness.

Those of us who grew up in Christian households will recall the times a mother or father said we were to "love the sinner but hate the sin," or to "walk around in the other person's shoes for a while" and then our hearts would unlock to pity, not as a sickly attitude of paternalism but as a humble recognition of the humanity of another self. Perhaps something like that is implicated here. We need to recognize the worth of another in order to be motivated to deepen our awareness of human commonalities. This awareness of commonalities, through dialogical possibilities, will highlight particular and individual qualities that we do not want swamped by the commonalities: "I want to be me," and so does he, and she.

Perhaps I am simply redescribing the problem. Using Taylor's essay "Self Interpreting Animals," let us try again.

Taylor describes the ways in which I can make claims on others and they, in turn, on me. He gives an example of a "felt obligation" in the Good Samaritan story. One is called upon to help the other—or so Jesus insisted—simply because this wounded and bleeding person is a child of God, a fellow creature, a moral being. To move on by, as several had done in the parable, because the man left dead by robbers and lying off the side of the road is a Samaritan and Israelites have nothing to do with Samaritans, is a sinful act of cruel negligence that narrows the boundaries of the moral life. Jesus lays on a strong obligation, clearly, and Taylor rightly names it as an obligation of charity.

One is called upon to act, not simply to feel the right way or think good thoughts. And we are called to act because we are creatures of a certain sort as is the one who makes a claim on our help. An ability to respond to the claim of the stranger presupposes moral formation of a certain kind, and Taylor stresses that identities can be forged in such a way that we experience felt obligations and act on them. Although Taylor really prescinds on the formation question, his entire argument is parasitic upon some such notion. No doubt there is some sort of bioevolutionary template for empathic response or the human species would not have survived. But we know well enough that fellow feeling can be frozen, rejected, or fail to develop in the first place.

**Toleration and Power**

Those who see toleration as just a puny thing, best exposed as bogus and done away with, construe any attempt to proselytize in negative terms because this is, by definition, an assault on someone else's identity. The issue of toleration and the complexities of proselytization have been heavily psychologized in our time. Whatever makes somebody else uncomfortable is to be eschewed. But, of course, any strong articulation of a powerful religion or a powerful political position is going to make somebody somewhere uncomfortable. Does this mean we are all reduced to bleating at one another across a vast distance, but that any attempt to persuade is cast as proselytizing and that is bad by definition?

Let us unpack this issue a bit. Somewhere along the line—certainly in the last thirty years or so—a view of power took hold that disdains distinctions between coercion, manipulation, and persuasion. If I change my mind about something after an encounter with you, or after having spent some time in your religious community, the presupposition is that I have been messed with: gulled or brainwashed or taken for the proverbial walk down the primrose path. It is an odd business, power, because when we say, as many do these days, that every encounter involves power, we make it harder to distinguish between instances of real intimidation and, by contrast, those of authentic persuasion.

In instances of intimidation, there is an implied threat of harm unless you convert to my point of view. In instances of manipulation, I sneakily get you on my side. Neither of these views respects you as a moral agent who can freely weigh alternatives and make up his or her own mind. Persuasion, by contrast, begins with the presupposition that you are a moral agent, a being whose dignity no one is permitted to deny or to strip from you, and, from that stance of mutual respect, one offers arguments, or invites your participation, your sharing, in a community and its rhythms and rituals. You do not lose something by agreeing. One never simply jettisons what one has believed before. But one may reject it. (And those are not identical.) Even among persons religious, however, proselytizing has come to have an unpleasant ring to it. Evangelizing sounds better. The picture of the proselytizer is of some latter-day Savonarola, severe and intimidating, or an "Elmer Gantry"–type huckster. The upshot of all this would seem to be

that both toleration and proselytizing are badly battered as concepts and as practices. Is there any way to redeem one, or the other, or both? I think there is.

My example of redeeming both toleration and proselytization comes from Pope John Paul II's pastoral visit to Kazakhstan in September 2001. Something struck me in a report I read of that visit in which the pontiff, in his greeting to "Dear Young People!" last September 23 in the capital city, Astana, said:

> Allow me to profess before you with humility and pride the faith of Christians: Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God made man two thousand years ago, came to reveal to us this truth through his person and his teaching. Only in the encounter with him, the Word made flesh, do we find the fullness of self-realization and happiness. Religion itself, without the experience of the wonderful discovery of the Son of God and communion with him who became our brother, becomes a mere set of principles which are increasingly difficult to understand, and rules which are increasingly hard to accept 8.

I found this moving, and I want to explore why briefly. Certainly the combination of pride and humility is a part of it. One places before another, in all humility, one's most profound beliefs, beliefs one holds with pride—not boastful self-pride but with dignity—knowing that these beliefs may well be repudiated or ignored. Also powerful is John Paul's recognition that turning God into a metaphysical first principle is not only "increasingly difficult to understand" but "increasingly hard to accept." Here there is a fascinating dimension to his words to Kazak young people for he is also proselytizing to those who are already Christians, reminding them of what their profession is all about.

John Paul's words on this remarkable pastoral visit constituted an eloquent defense of toleration in another of his homilies in Kazakhstan:

> When in a society citizens accept one another [notice that what is being accepted is one another as citizens, in one's civic status] in their respective religious beliefs, it is easier to foster among them the effective recognition of other human rights and an understanding of the values on which a peaceful and productive coexistence is based. In fact, they feel a common bond in the awareness that they are brothers and sisters because they are children of the one God.

This is a reference to toleration among religious believers.

Unbelievers, presumably, have their own resources to draw upon to respect human rights, but the pontiff suggests that the bond of coexistence will have a different valence between believers and unbelievers than between believers and believers. He reminded his listeners that in Kazakhstan today there are "citizens belonging to over 100 nationalities and ethnic groups" and they live—they have no choice but to live—side by side. Coexistence is a necessity. But "bridges of solidarity and cooperation with other peoples, nations, and cultures" are an immanent possibility that should be realized even as the gospel in all its fullness is preached "in all humility and pride."

This is not pie-in-the-sky stuff at all but, rather, a filling out and in of what a commitment to authentic toleration means as a baseline that one is invited—or called to move beyond in the direction of equal affirmation—or not, as the case may be. Toleration rightly understood permits more robust ties of civic sisterhood and brotherhood to grow and to flourish, perhaps between religious believers whose comprehensive understandings differ but whose anthropologies overlap. Toleration also permits more distance when, for example, I simply cannot affirm your life choices and comprehensive views. I need not validate them at all. In fact, toleration means I may actively loathe them and argue against them. But, unless you threaten the civic order in a central way, I am not permitted to deny you your "free exercise."

Deep toleration, to characterize the position schematically, does not require privatizing our deepest convictions. We live, therefore, in a dialogic community, and our selves are defined and refined within this web. That being the case, the dialogic nature of selves and communities means one always remains open to the possibility of proselytizing and being proselytized. The dialogic community in which deep differences become occasions for contestation with the ever-present possibility of persuasion is pluralistic without being fragmented. Taylor has made clear his position against fragmentation of the sort that takes as a starting point a kind of incommensurability as between positions; politically this means hard-edged identity politics of a kind that insists, "You just don't get it," as both the beginning and the end of conversation.

Taylor's position is, as he has argued, neither essentialist nor deconstructionist. Within the position of deep toleration I here articulate, the essentialist position is at odds with toleration, as is deconstructionism. Essentialism grates against toleration because differences are so hardwired, cut so deep, and define us so thoroughly that the dialogic nature of selves is denied. Denying that dialogic dimension to selves means one cuts off the possibility of a dialogic community. The irony, of course, is that one remains defined in important ways by the very community whose dialogic features one denies. Because deep toleration is open to proselytization and transformation of identity, the essentialist cannot go for it.

What of the deconstructionist? Here, too, deep toleration is opposed, oddly enough, because if there is no truth to be found there is nothing to have deep dialogue about and, further, because that which most deeply defines us is thinned out to consist in privatized ironies. If the beliefs that constitute the core of a dialogically understood self and community are privatized, it cuts off the dialogic moment. Deconstructionism, for all the talk of multiculturalism associated with it, seeks not toleration but validation of all positions absent an airing of what holds those positions together and whether each is equally worthy of endorsement. There are no shared standards for evaluation, in any case, on this view. So, each in its own way, both essentialism and deconstructionism, pushes in the direction of antidialogic monologism. This is not the stuff out of which deep toleration is made. I hope I have said enough to demonstrate that Taylor's view is not only capacious enough to encompass that which we tend to drive apart—efforts to proselytize and toleration—but that his argument helps to define and refine a position of deep toleration.

Deep toleration that allows for the possibility of persuasion and proselytization is more, not less, vital in the international context. At a most fundamental level, deep toleration resonates with the idea of universal human rights. Opposition to proselytization is opposition to a central dimension of religious freedom and therefore incompatible with a robust international human rights regime. To draw a distinction between having a religion and sharing that religion with others is to truncate religious freedom. It is also to curtail freedom of expression, assembly, and political participation. A robust norm of international religious freedom, including the right to proselytize, is central to any coherent understanding of universal human rights.

Deep toleration—an encounter among religious individuals and groups that is open to transformation—represents a just and workable foundation for peaceful engagement in a spirit of truth.