



# Renovating Tolerance: Reframing the Meaning of Equality in a Pluralistic Society - Exploring Søren Kierkegaard's Subject-Subject Relation

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## Abstract

This article explores the nuanced consequences of tolerance within the context of Indonesia's pluralistic society, characterized by a Muslim majority. While tolerance is fundamental for maintaining peace among diverse religious groups, it inadvertently fosters a power imbalance. The central aim of this study is to critically assess how the roles of "tolerator" (majority) and "tolerated" (minority) cultivate an inequitable relationship between a dominant Subject and a subordinate Object. Employing a conceptual analysis anchored in Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy of intersubjectivity, this research investigates the dynamics of the "I" and the "Other I." The findings reveal that tolerance, when construed as an act primarily of the majority, not only perpetuates but also solidifies societal divisions. This binary framing significantly impedes true respect and mutual understanding across different religious communities, particularly in a context where the majority's norms may overshadow minority rights. The study underscores the limitations of relying solely on tolerance for managing inter-religious relations and suggests that acknowledging the equal subjectivity of all individuals is crucial. By integrating Kierkegaard's insights, this paper illuminates the underlying power dynamics within the concept of tolerance and advocates for a framework of mutual recognition and respect. This approach aims to foster a more equitable and inclusive environment in a diversely populated country like Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Equality, religion, tolerance, subject-object, Søren Kierkegaard

## Introduction

Tolerance has been viewed as a cornerstone of democratic societies. It's seen as a virtue that allows diverse individuals with differing beliefs, backgrounds, and identities to coexist peacefully within a shared political framework (Kymlicka, 1995). In democratic nations, tolerance is often celebrated as a key aspect of respecting individual freedom and diversity. Despite its positive connotations, tolerance can sometimes mask underlying inequalities within society (Kaplan, 2007; Bejan, 2017). For instance, the act of tolerating certain beliefs or behaviors implies a power dynamic where one group (usually the majority or those in power) grants permission to another group (usually the minority or marginalized) to exist or express themselves within society. This dynamic inherently reinforces power structures and can perpetuate inequality.



Democracy, as an ideal, emphasizes the principle of equality among citizens. It seeks to ensure that all individuals have equal rights, opportunities, and representation within the political system (Rawls, 1999: 313). However, the act of tolerating certain groups or behaviors without addressing underlying inequalities can contradict this principle of equality. In other words, mere tolerance without addressing systemic injustices may fall short of the democratic ideal of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all citizens.

This article aims to highlight the limitations of tolerance and advocates for love and compassion as more suitable and beneficial concepts in pluralistic societies like Indonesia. The concept of love holds significance in Christianity, as it is employed in the gospel to promote acceptance of others akin to self-acceptance. Søren Kierkegaard interprets love as recognizing the other as an equal "I", akin to oneself, thereby demonstrating the equality of individuals as subjective beings.

## **Methodology**

This discussion and analysis draw upon Søren Kierkegaard's works on love and the role of the subject, as well as a biblical perspective on love. Through the examination of Kierkegaard's writings on love and in particular relation to the "I" and the other "I", this article critically analyses the concept of tolerance and identifies a gap in the common understanding of tolerance. By highlighting the limitations of tolerance, the article suggests alternative concepts for social communities with pluralistic backgrounds, specifically the unconditional love (agape) advocated in the Christian Holy Scriptures. This form of love encourages individuals to embrace one another with compassion and acceptance, transcending mere tolerance to foster genuine connections and understanding among diverse groups.

## **The Inherent Flaws of Tolerance**

Tolerance can be broadly defined as the "capacity to endure pain or hardship; sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own; the ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behavior one dislikes or disagrees with." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2022). Based on these denotations, being tolerant requires openness and acceptance of circumstances that do not align with one's preferences. Robert Erlwine defines tolerance as a principle that claims that more good arises on a societal or a moral level in not acting rather than acting on one's moral disapproval regarding the actions, beliefs, and practices of the other, so long as the other does not obstruct the well-being of oneself or the other (Erlwine, 2010: 7).

In Indonesia, tolerance holds significant importance, rooted in the core social value of Pancasila, particularly concerning religion (Ramage, 1995:1). The nation's founders prioritized tolerance as a means of uniting people from diverse backgrounds. Over time, the concept of tolerance has evolved to encompass non-judgmentalism, recognition, acceptance, and even, to some extent, affirmation and respect. However, this interpretation of tolerance can sometimes shift into a vague form of indifference, manifesting as a 'live and let live' attitude toward those around us. Consequently, the true meaning of tolerance can become ambiguous, elusive, and occasionally contentious. Y.B. Mangunwijaya, a prominent Jesuit priest and humanitarian activist, contends that all nations have limits; in Indonesia, this means neither an Islamic nor a communist state will ever be acceptable. Pancasila establishes these boundaries by promoting a state that embraces religious diversity and inclusivity of all ethnic groups (Ramage, 1995:3).



Multiculturalist thinkers often criticize tolerance and freedom as inadequate or even illusory. The assertion that tolerance falls short is based on the idea that it is an unsuitable framework for navigating conflicts between diverse lifestyles and groups in modern society. For instance, Tariq Ramadhan argues that tolerance no longer carries positive virtues. He believes tolerance has lost its constructive essence because it no longer challenges the existing power structure. Ramadhan contends that calls for tolerance now merely reinforce prevailing power dynamics, urging those in authority to temper their power and limit their potential to conflict harm. This acceptance of power imbalances has implications for relationships between the state and individuals, the police and citizens, or between colonizers and the colonized (Ramadhan, 2010: 47).

Critics of tolerance advocate for moving beyond mere acceptance of diversity to a more active engagement with difference. This includes fostering genuine understanding, mutual respect, and dialogue across cultural, religious, and ideological divides. Instead of tolerating diversity as an afterthought, proponents of a more inclusive approach suggest that society should celebrate and embrace differences as a source of strength. Frank Furedi, an expert in sociology, has also been involved in the contentious discussion surrounding the complexity of tolerance. According to Furedi, tolerance has become intertwined with the politicization of identity and is often reduced to a form of polite etiquette (Furedi, 2021).

The concept of tolerance requires a certain level of openness, mutual agreement, and courteous interaction among multiple parties to uphold societal peace and harmony. Furedi's concern about tolerance becoming entangled in the politicization of identity is evident in Indonesia, where relationships within the community are often viewed through the lens of tribe, religion, and race – known as SARA (*Suku, Agama, dan Ras*) (Saragih, 2020:54). In recent years, the significance of racial and tribal issues has diminished in Indonesia, yet religious tensions have become increasingly divisive. Religious matters consistently inflame societal conflicts, even though Indonesian citizens are largely aware of the potential dangers. Rational thinking is frequently overshadowed by politicians' rhetoric, which is manipulated for pragmatic purposes. As Indonesia navigates these complex dynamics, it faces the challenge of fostering a more nuanced understanding of tolerance – one that balances respect for individual differences with the promotion of a cohesive and inclusive national identity.

In Indonesia, tolerance appears to align closely with Thomas Scanlon's definition. He describes tolerance as requiring us to accept people and allow their practices, even when we strongly disapprove. This stance embodies an intermediate position between full acceptance and outright opposition (Erlewine, 2010:7). Philosophers like Jay Newman, Nick Fotion, and Gerard Elfstrom reinforce Scanlon's view, noting that tolerance as a concept often entails a hierarchy of beliefs. In this hierarchy, one's practices and beliefs may be seen as more valid, ethical, or valuable than those of others. This framing of tolerance reveals its inherent complexities and potential drawbacks. While it promotes coexistence, it also suggests an unequal relationship between those who tolerate and those who are tolerated. This subtle imbalance can lead to challenges in achieving genuine equality and mutual respect in diverse societies.

### **Inequality in Tolerance: *Who is to tolerate? And who is to be tolerated?***

This paper suggests that the concept of tolerance warrants reexamination, as it can inadvertently reinforce socio-political imbalances and polarize individuals into 'tolerating' and 'being tolerated' groups. Typically, the practice of tolerance involves individuals or groups characterized as 'tolerant' toward others, while those who benefit from the tolerance are 'being tolerated'. For instance, in educational settings, teachers often occupy the role of 'tolerating'



concerning their students, possessing the authority to extend deadlines for assignments. Conversely, students must adhere to these allowances. Similarly, within the domestic sphere, parents are positioned as the 'tolerators' in guiding their children on what to do or avoid. In broader society, groups or communities with greater membership or influence tend to occupy the role of 'tolerating' smaller, less powerful groups. This dynamic can perpetuate existing hierarchies, necessitating a thoughtful review of tolerance as a guiding principle."

The examples demonstrate an "asymmetrical relationship" between the "tolerant" party and those "being tolerated." The "tolerant" party, such as teachers, parents, or larger groups, holds authority and control, while those being tolerated, like students, children, or smaller groups, are in a submissive or vulnerable position. This relationship appears in situations such as students facing penalties for late submissions, children receiving discipline for not following rules, and smaller groups experiencing societal exclusion or discrimination for deviating from dominant norms. These asymmetries highlight the inherent challenges in the concept of tolerance as it is often practiced. While it may enable coexistence, it can also perpetuate imbalances in power and authority, placing the 'tolerant' in a position to dictate the terms and conditions of engagement with those 'being tolerated.' This dynamic calls for a critical examination of how tolerance is applied in various contexts to ensure that it does not inadvertently sustain or exacerbate existing inequities.

In Indonesia, societal relationships are often viewed through the lens of majority and minority, particularly regarding religion. The 2010 census data shows that 87% of Indonesians practice Islam, leading some to push for an Islamic state. The dominance of Islam influences laws and prioritizes its adherents' interests. As a result, the majority wields significant control over various aspects of life, shaping Indonesia's cultural, social, and legal landscape. In this context, religious minorities may struggle to gain recognition or influence policy. A more equitable approach is needed to ensure all voices can contribute to and benefit from the nation's development and to promote harmony and sustainability.

In Indonesia, there is a systemic bias where the Chinese population dominates the business sector but is mostly excluded from politics. The case against former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) highlights how the majority can influence the justice system, accommodating its interests. Similarly, while minority religious groups such as Christians, Hindus, or Buddhists can become civil servants, they rarely reach high government positions. Proposing a non-Muslim candidate for the presidency is unlikely in the current climate. Intolerant groups within Islam actively try to shut down places of worship or block the establishment of new ones, even when legal requirements are met. This trend threatens Indonesia's commitment to religious diversity and tolerance, highlighting the need for a more inclusive approach to governance and society (Hasani, 2008).

### **Subject-Object Relation as Unequal Relation**

According to Martin Buber, every individual is born as a 'subject,' not an 'object' or 'it' (Buber, 1938:5). This inherent subjectivity signifies the equality of all human beings; each person should be regarded and treated as an equal subject. When individuals treat others as objects, or as objectified others, the relationship becomes asymmetrical, leading to domination and submission. Such dynamics often manifest in societal tensions between the majority and minority, where those in power may seek to exploit and control those with less influence. The subject-object relationship creates friction, as individuals inherently resist being treated as objects and instead strive to assert their subjectivity. This quest for recognition and equality often sparks struggles against marginalization, discrimination, and oppression. Groups that are subjected to objectification will use their resilience and resources to challenge these



imbalances, seeking acknowledgment and the restoration of equitable relationships within society.

In a democratic society, the foundational principle is that all individuals are equal in their rights and opportunities, including those from minority groups. The system supports the pursuit of equality, ensuring that all citizens have access to opportunities and representation. However, the reality is often more complex due to the influence of numbers in democratic decision-making processes. In such a society, majority rule is a key aspect of governance, which can lead to the voices of the majority being more prominent and influential than those of the minority. This dynamic can create an imbalance of power (Rawls, 1999:313-318), where the majority group holds the ability to shape policies and public opinion, potentially at the expense of minority perspectives. As a result, the majority often assumes the role of the 'subject' with the authority to define and categorize others as 'objects' based on their status as a minority. This power dynamic can lead to the marginalization and objectification of minority groups, who may find their needs and concerns overlooked or dismissed.

The majority's dominance can perpetuate systemic biases and inequalities, reinforcing existing power structures and limiting the ability of minority groups to participate fully in the democratic process. This can lead to the exclusion of diverse voices and perspectives, undermining the principles of equality and justice that a democratic society aims to uphold. In Indonesia, the sociological discourse and public sphere regarding religious matters are predominantly influenced by Islam, which shapes public opinion and state policies despite the official recognition of six religions. Hardline Muslim groups have exerted influence on political and judicial affairs, at times employing the threat of violence to sway outcomes in their favor. This poses a significant challenge for minority religious groups, as it conveys an implicit message from the majority that they should adhere to dominant cultural and religious norms. Addressing these challenges requires a commitment to safeguarding the rights and representation of minority groups, including policies that actively promote inclusivity and encourage diverse participation, fostering a culture of respect and recognition for all citizens.

Such dynamics can lead to a chilling effect on the expression of minority perspectives and hinder their ability to fully participate in the public sphere. The presence of these hardline groups and their influence on the state can also contribute to feelings of exclusion and marginalization among religious minorities, raising concerns about the state's commitment to upholding freedom of religion and equal treatment for all citizens. Addressing these challenges requires a robust commitment to protecting the rights of minority groups and ensuring that all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, have equal opportunities to participate in the country's political and social landscape. This includes enforcing laws that safeguard freedom of religion and expression and actively countering any efforts by hardline groups to intimidate or silence dissenting voices.

### **The Subject-Subject Relation According to Søren Kierkegaard**

Søren Kierkegaard is a Danish philosopher and is well known as the founding father of existentialism. He elaborates on the essence of equality based on the Christian perspective in one of his writings, *Works of Love*. According to Kierkegaard (1996),

The root of equality is in the unchanging relationship of individuals with God. In the Scripture, you will never love the crowd – but only loving our neighbor as you love yourself. As such, you isolate your neighbor from the crowd or public, which is anonymous, so you treat your neighbor as a singular individual. Only when you love your neighbor as yourself do you



testify about 'the equality' of every individual standing in front of God. And you have to do it personally. Every man should love the other: it is the truth and the highest appreciation, neighbour-love (p.32)

By embracing the profound notion of loving our neighbor, we can discover the inherent "equality" that every individual possesses in the eyes of God, who serves as the ultimate source of love and compassion. To stand before God in this manner requires each person to engage in unconditional love, transcending biases and prejudices. Through acts of genuine love, individuals who love their neighbor establish a deep, personal connection with others as fellow human beings, not as faceless entities within a collective. This intimate form of love allows us to see those around us as unique individuals who can be embraced, recognized, and appreciated for their intrinsic worth and dignity. In this way, the practice of neighborly love fosters a relationship of equality, where individuals acknowledge and respect one another as equal subjects, sharing a common humanity and purpose. This connection nurtures a sense of solidarity and mutual understanding, paving the way for harmonious coexistence and a more compassionate, equitable society.

Kierkegaard's emphasis on the importance of loving one's neighbor is, in part, a critique of the marginalization faced by those who are at the lowest rungs of society – those who are poor, oppressed, exploited, and disenfranchised. When he insists that loving one's neighbor means "essentially to will to exist equally for unconditionally every human being," he is advocating for an approach that prioritizes a tangible, practical understanding of equality. Kierkegaard's insistence on a concrete interpretation of equality underscores the need to recognize the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of their social or economic status. (Kierkegaard, 1996: 80).

His focus on the 'subject-subject' relation is a call to acknowledge each person as a subject in their own right, worthy of mutual respect and consideration. Kierkegaard (1996) emphasizes his explanation of the 'subject-subject' relation as follows:

If anyone thinks that he is in profound error by falling in love or finding a friend, a person has learned Christian love. No, if someone is in love, and in such a way that the poet would say of him, "he is really in love," well, then the love commandment, when said to him, can be changed a bit yet say the same thing. The love commandment can say to him: Love your neighbor as you love the beloved. But does he not love the beloved as *himself*, as the commandment speaks of the neighbor's commands? Certainly, he does, but the beloved he loves as *himself* is not the neighbor; the beloved is **another I**. Whether we speak of the **first I** or the **other I**, we do not come a step closer to the neighbor because the neighbor is the **first you**. The one who self-love, in the strictest sense, loves the **other I** because the **other I** is he himself. Yet this certainly is still self-love. But in the same sense, it is self-love to love the **other I**, who is the beloved or the friend. (p. 57)

The passage touches on the nuanced distinctions between self-love and the love of others, particularly focusing on the differences between loving another individual as oneself and loving the neighbor. When one loves the "beloved" or the "friend," it often involves seeing another person as an extension of oneself, leading to a kind of self-love projected onto another. This relationship remains rooted in one's subjectivity and sense of self. However, this differs from the concept of loving one's neighbor, who is described as the "first you." The neighbor is not just another "I" in the same way a beloved or friend is. Instead, the neighbor represents a distinct, separate individual with their subjectivity and identity.



Kierkegaard's discourse on love is rooted in the concept of Agape, emphasizing selfless, unconditional love that seeks to bridge the gaps between individuals. By situating love within inter-individual relationships, Kierkegaard offers a potent remedy for the deep-seated issues stemming from the traditional 'subject-object' paradigm in human history. Instead, he advocates for a 'subject-subject' relationship, fostering mutual recognition and respect among individuals. While Kierkegaard himself does not explicitly use the term 'subject-subject relation,' his ideas resonate with Ernesto Laclau's vision of radical emancipation through the Protestant notion of Agape (Laclau, 2007:1-17). This perspective aligns with Kierkegaard's emphasis on universal love, as it champions the equal treatment and empowerment of all individuals, regardless of their race, religion, or gender. Through the lens of Agape, Kierkegaard's thought thus speaks to the transformative potential of love in achieving true equality and dismantling oppressive power structures.

One of his later works reaffirms the radical commitment to human equality central to Kierkegaard's ethical philosophy. In his piece titled *Preface* (written in 1851) – part of the collection of *Without Authority*, Kierkegaard asks readers:

Allow me, however, to express only this, which in a way is my life, the content of my life, its fullness, its bliss, its peace and satisfaction – this, or this view of life, which is the thought of humanity and humanity equality; Christianly, every human being (the single individual), unconditionally every human being, once again, unconditionally every human being, is equally close to God – how close and equally close? – is loved by Him (p. 165).

What Kierkegaard means by the “infinite equality between human beings” is not a naive or cavalier dismissal of socioeconomic differences. The ground of this claim lies in the equal closeness of each person to God. The only ‘difference’ is that ‘one person bears in mind that they are loved, while another person perhaps does not think about their being loved. Emphasizing that God loves each person might seem to result in an abstract leveling of human beings. However, that each person is loved does not tell us how each person is loved, and Kierkegaard will later rejoice in how God celebrates diversity and loves each of us in our unique distinctiveness (Feraira, 2001: 47). Kierkegaard's message is both radical and comforting: radical in its assertion that every person, regardless of their background or circumstances, is equally loved and valued by God; comforting in its affirmation of the deep, intrinsic worth of each individual. This perspective offers a profound ethical foundation for understanding and treating all people with respect and compassion, fostering a sense of shared humanity and interconnectedness.

### **A Biblical Interpretation of Love**

The Christian Holy Scripture presents four distinct forms of love, each of which is represented by a unique Greek term: Eros, Storge, Philia, and Agape. These words capture the diverse ways in which love is experienced and expressed within the Christian faith, offering a multifaceted understanding of love's role in human relationships and the divine relationship with God. Agape is the highest and most profound form of love found in the Christian Holy Scripture. It embodies God's unconditional and selfless love for humanity, which serves as a model for how individuals should love one another. Agape is sacrificial and pure, transcending all other forms of love and emphasizing the importance of self-giving, compassion, and grace in human relationships.

In Matthew 22:34-46, Jesus discusses the Greatest Commandment, emphasizing the importance of love in its purest and most selfless form, known as agape. This divine love calls individuals to love God and their neighbors without conditions or expectations. Agape love



requires a complete dedication to oneself, encouraging individuals to treat others with the same care and compassion they would extend to themselves. This love is not rooted in a desire for reciprocation or reward; instead, it stems from a genuine wish to give freely and generously. By embodying agape, one can create meaningful connections with others and positively impact their lives. Although there is no expectation of receiving anything in return, the act of loving selflessly often leads to unexpected blessings and deeper fulfillment. This form of love aligns with Jesus' teachings and serves as a guiding principle for fostering harmony, empathy, and unity within the community. Christ is the head and the body, with the church being the *Laos tou Theou*, the Nation of God. The 'people of God' are the guardians of all truth, including Christian doctrine which stresses the aspect of agape love (Nicolaidis, 2010).

Agape allows us to embrace the circumstances and opportunities that come our way with an open heart. It is not naive; rather, it is imbued with a deep, unconditional quality that transcends judgment. God did not send Christ as a reward for human obedience but instead as a sacrifice for those who have strayed. Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus exemplified this boundless love through his actions. He healed the sick without expecting gratitude, demonstrating humility despite his divine origin. Even on the cross, Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of those who crucified him, a profound testament to the depth of his love. In this way, love parallels the act of salvation, extending beyond boundaries and limitations. Christianity indeed has a huge role to play in life and in spreading love and understanding contemporary spirituality and religious life (Nicolaidis, 2022). God's love is all-encompassing and does not discriminate; his salvation is meant for all the world. This universal love serves as a guiding principle, encouraging us to extend grace and compassion to all people, regardless of their past or present circumstances. Through this love, we can strive to create a world that reflects God's acceptance and mercy.

## **Renovating The Concept of Tolerance**

This article seeks to revitalize the concept of tolerance, aiming to transcend the inherent imbalances that create a divide between people as subjects and objects. By delving into Kierkegaard's nuanced perspective on love as a relationship between two equal subjects and exploring biblical insights on love, this article introduces a transformative approach to tolerance. It proposes infusing tolerance with the values of equality, compassion, and love to create a more inclusive and harmonious society. Through this reframing, the article envisions a brighter, more vibrant understanding of tolerance that celebrates our shared humanity and fosters genuine respect for one another.

### **a. Equal-Toleration**

The concept of tolerance is inherently fraught with challenges due to its intrinsic inequality. This dynamic has been recognized by various philosophers and sociologists who have grappled with the sociopolitical complexities it presents. The core issue lies in the subject-object relationship, where individuals as subjects often tend to objectify others. This objectification fosters a competitive dynamic, as the subject strives to assert dominance over the object, while the object, often representing a minority, seeks special treatment or recognition. This ongoing competition manifests in nearly every facet of daily life, perpetuating imbalances and reinforcing existing power structures.

Resolving the challenges posed by tolerance necessitates a shift in perspective that recognizes the inherent equality between oneself and others. This means developing an inner awareness that one is not only a subject but also that every other individual who stands before them is an equal subject. By cultivating respect and love for others as they would for themselves, individuals can begin to reframe tolerance more equitably. This redefined





tolerance approach involves a genuine acceptance of others without imposing conditions or expectations. It requires acknowledging each person's right to exist and be valued as an equal, without hierarchy or superiority. By embracing this mindset, tolerance can be revitalized as a practice that fosters true mutual respect and understanding between individuals. This transformation can lead to a more inclusive and compassionate society where all people are treated with dignity and regard.

To achieve equal tolerance in a culturally diverse society like Indonesia, it is crucial to address several key issues. In most philosophical discussions on the notion of toleration in multicultural, modern societies, respect for others is often considered to be the most critical factor. Firstly, the language used to categorize groups as "majority" and "minority" can perpetuate divisions and hierarchies that hinder true equality. By finding alternative terms that promote inclusivity, society can move away from labeling and categorization that emphasize differences. Secondly, the inclusion of religious columns on Indonesian citizens' identity cards can create challenges for individuals who do not conform to traditional categories or who wish to keep their beliefs private. Allowing greater freedom in how individuals identify themselves on official documents could foster a sense of respect for personal beliefs and experiences. Additionally, ensuring equal treatment for all religious adherents, including followers of local beliefs, is essential. This means not only providing the same legal protections and rights but also actively working to eliminate biases and discrimination. Lastly, the treatment of individuals who have not decided on their religion deserves careful consideration. Creating a safe space for those exploring their beliefs without pressure or judgment is vital to maintaining a harmonious and tolerant society.

## **b. Toleration with Love and Compassion**

Tolerance infused with love and compassion elevates our understanding of human differences. Dissimilarities, distinctions, and diversity are, in essence, neutral and essential for recognizing each individual's unique identity. These variations—stemming from birth, social standing, circumstances, education, and more—are integral to our existence. The biblical and Kierkegaardian teaching to love one's neighbor as oneself encourages us to embrace and appreciate these differences with warmth and empathy. Through such love, we find a higher form of tolerance that goes beyond mere acceptance and leads us toward genuine connection and mutual respect.

In this context, we must approach others without bias and acknowledge the distinctions that diversity brings. When we reflect upon ourselves, we recognize that beyond variations in color, height, and build, we share the commonality of being human. This unique species is set apart from others, as Martin Heidegger suggests, with attributes that cannot be matched by any other living beings (Dreyfus & Hall, 1992). Humans can only be compared with one another. Upon examining our likeness, it becomes clear that despite superficial differences, we share a fundamental resemblance that binds us as one species (Gelven, 1989). This shared humanity provides a solid foundation for embracing one another unconditionally, with love and compassion, transcending mere tolerance. By adopting this perspective, we foster a more profound and genuine acceptance of each other.

## **Conclusion**

Kierkegaard's philosophy, paired with biblical reflections on Christian love, offers a foundation for revitalizing the concept of tolerance. By infusing equality, love, and compassion into the definition of tolerance, individuals can commit to treating others as they would themselves. When others receive such dedication, they are likely to respond in kind. Those who embrace a subject-subject relationship can practice unconditional tolerance towards others.



Recognizing the significance of treating others as equals leads to the realization that a life without tolerance – grounded in equality and love – is not worth living. This paper advocates for a nuanced understanding of equality and unconditional love, emphasizing that these concepts do not require self-denial or self-forgetfulness. Instead, it proposes a socio-political reimagining of tolerance, where each person cultivates a profound awareness of equality and compassion within themselves. By integrating these values into their lives, individuals can practice a form of tolerance that is deeply rooted in mutual respect, empathy, and love for all humanity and this is critically important in building a harmonious society with people from all walks of life living happily together.

Love and compassion might not be popular in the political arena since it is laid in man's heart, at the very core of human beings, while tolerance is created in a political world where people are reluctant to open their hearts to show their love and compassion for others due to the egotistic ethic of self-preservation. Toleration could be seen as an act of compromising love, a conditional love, or a love that is a prison for the sake of vested political interests. Toleration, as described here, can sometimes resemble a pragmatic approach to managing differences rather than an authentic expression of acceptance and understanding. This compromise might be perceived as a dilution of genuine love (agape), reducing it to a conditional exchange rather than a boundless, selfless commitment. Love in the Christian essence and in most religions, in its truest form, should transcend political maneuvering, but in practice, it can be constrained by the desire for power or influence and even greed. However, there is potential for the political realm to embrace love and compassion more fully. By recognizing these qualities as strengths rather than as weaknesses, political leaders and institutions could and must strive to foster more inclusive and empathetic communities where love resides. This shift could pave the way for a more just and equitable society where tolerance is not just a compromise but a genuine embrace of diversity and humanity irrespective of one's religion.

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