

Beliefs, Persons and Practices: Beyond Tolerance

Wibren van der Burg

Summary

The central thesis of this paper is that, for most issues of multiculturalism, regarding them as a problem of tolerance puts us on the wrong track because there are certain biases inherent in the principle of tolerance. These biases - individualism, combined with a focus on religion and a focus on beliefs rather than on persons or practices - can be regarded as distinctly Protestant. Extending the scope of tolerance may seem a solution but if we really want to counter these biases, the principle of tolerance becomes so general that it loses any distinctive meaning. Therefore, we should accept the limited scope of tolerance and its biases. The principle of tolerance can still be useful for some problems where there is a clear and direct link to political or religious beliefs. Moreover, it should be cherished as a more general attitude or practice in Dutch society. For most problems of multiculturalism, however, we should appeal to broader theoretical frameworks that do justice to persons and practices.

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