


Productive Intolerance and Utilitarianism

Muhammad Rizkita¹, Kirwan² Muh. Fatkhan³, Niko Sulpriyono⁴
^{1,2,3,4} Program Studi Aqidah dan Filsafat Islam, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga
Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
E-mail: muhammadrizkita25@gmail.com¹, kirwanalkarimy009@gmail.com², muh.fatkhan@uin-suka.ac.id³, nikosulpriyono99@gmail.com⁴

 This is an open-access article under the CC BY-SA license. Copyright © XXXX by Author. Published by Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha.		
Diterima: 08-12-2022	Direview: 22-02-2023	Publikasi: 30-06-2023

Abstract

In its classical understanding, tolerance means restraining oneself and accepting differences even when one may have opposing views. Tolerance is reciprocal and is the essence of liberal democracy. In practice, however, tolerance has limitations, specifically the idea that it is impossible to extend tolerance to individuals who exhibit intolerance. This condition leads to the consequence that there is no way to determine the limits of tolerance, and any attempt to do so would be considered an arbitrary act of intolerance. To address this problem, the concept of productive intolerance is proposed. Through this concept, intolerant actions can be justified based on their consequences. Intolerant actions can be carried out as a form of punishment against specific parties that disrupt the fulfillment of citizens' rights. In order for such actions to be productive, the punishment must be proportionate and serve the utility function for the public, promoting happiness and avoiding pain. The concept of productive intolerance finds its roots in the moral theory of utilitarianism. The argument is that productive intolerance can be highly beneficial in understanding and justifying the repressive actions of the Indonesian government towards radical Islamic groups such as the Front Pembela Islam (FPI).

Keywords: intolerance; productive intolerance; tolerance; utilitarianism

1. Introduction

Rawls believes that in a democratic society, all citizens should have equal opportunities to access public discourse (Sandel, 1994). This means that acts of intolerance are highly detrimental to democracy as they can suppress the ability of minority groups to voice their ideas. In the context of Indonesian society, acts of intolerance are often associated with religious-based violence. After the fall of the Soeharto regime in 1998, violence against religious minority groups has been on the rise. Many scholars have attempted to explain the phenomenon of violence against heterodox religious groups in Indonesia from different perspectives. One of the latest perspectives comes from Jeremy Menchik in his article titled "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance Without Liberalism." Menchik offers a completely different approach in viewing violence against the Ahmadiyya community. Instead of considering intolerance and violence as something that undermines democracy and solidarity, Menchik argues that violence against the Ahmadiyya is a form of productive intolerance because it aligns with Indonesia's ideology of godly nationalism. This article will attempt to analyze the concept of productive intolerance from a utilitarian perspective.

The concept of productive intolerance proposed by Menchik emerges as his attempt to analyze various cases of intolerance involving the Ahmadiyya community as victims (Maharani, 2020; Rizkita & Hidayat, 2023; Tim CNN Indonesia, 2021). This phenomenon caught Menchik's attention because, in his view, the intolerance towards Ahmadiyya involves religious organizations such as NU, Muhammadiyah, and Persis, which are known as the most tolerant Islamic organizations in Indonesia (Menchik, 2016, p. 4). Menchik speculates that the ambivalent stance displayed by these religious organizations is a form of intolerance that involves cooperation between the state and religious organizations. Their specific goal is to strengthen Indonesian nationalism, which Menchik refers to as godly nationalism—a nationalism based on orthodox belief (theism).

Many Indonesian scholars criticize such ideas. R. William Liddle rejects Menchik's notion of violence against Ahmadiyya as something productive. According to Liddle, Menchik overlooks the freedom of religion as a fundamental human right. He argues that the Presidential Decree on blasphemy in 1965, which facilitated intolerant practices, deviates from the 1965 Constitution (Liddle, 2014). Another criticism comes from Ira and Saul Allen, who also disagree with Menchik. They claim that Menchik's view on the relationship between the state and religion in Indonesia lacks clear theoretical foundations (Allen & Allen, 2016). Ahmad Zainul Hamdi, on the other hand, argues that Menchik's idea fails to accurately analyze religious violence, including against the Ahmadiyya. According to Hamdi, Menchik's data is too macro-level and overlooks various regional cases where the Ahmadiyya can peacefully coexist within the Muslim community (Hamdi & Wahid, 2017).

Despite the criticisms from many scholars, I believe that the concept of productive intolerance can be highly beneficial in understanding the repressive actions of the Indonesian government towards radical Islamic groups such as Front Pembela Islam (FPI), which were disbanded by the government based on their contradiction with the Pancasila ideology (Media, 2020). When viewed through the lens of liberal democracy, these government actions can be seen as a form of silencing freedom of expression in the public sphere and as a manifestation of state intolerance towards minority voices. However, by borrowing the concept of productive intolerance, we can consider whether the dissolution of these groups in the name of ideological interests can be regarded as something productive and acceptable. To address this issue, I am interested in applying the ethical theory of utilitarianism, which evaluates actions based on their consequences and put the ideas of *productive intolerance* in depth into toleration discourses

2. Method

This research is classified as a literature review. The primary sources for this study include the book titled "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism" written by Jeremy Menchik, the book titled "Utilitarianism" and "On Liberty" by John Stuart Mill, and "An Introduction to Mill's Utilitarian Ethics" by Henry R. West, as well as various other articles related to productive intolerance and utilitarianism.

3. Discussion

Tolerance has been explored as a complex, paradoxical, and multidimensional construct in the literature. There have been various forms and distinctions proposed. Walzer (1999) for example, claims that there are five types of tolerance for cultural and religious differences, ranging from resigned acceptance for the sake of peace to ardent support for diversity. Similarly, Forst, (2013) distinguishes four conceptualizations of tolerance: permission, coexistence, respect, and esteem. Others distinguish between tolerance in the fields of politics, social relations, and moral issues, demonstrating experimentally that these are distinct issues (Lee, 2014; Vogt, 1997). Tolerance has also been defined as an attitude, a belief, a virtue, a value orientation, a discourse, and a practice (King, 1997).

In general, though, two basic conceptions of tolerance can be identified. The concept of classical tolerance can be understood as the awareness to restrain oneself and accept, even when disagreeing with something. Tolerance involves an attitude of accepting different perspectives on something as a necessity, even though it may seem unpleasant and negative (Cohen, 2004; Gibson, 2006; King, 1997). In practice, tolerance is characterized by accepting the practices and beliefs of other groups, even though internally one may disagree (Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2017). The degree of tolerance is cultural and uncertain. However, certain beliefs and behaviors that contradict morality, such as injustice, oppression, and violence, cannot be tolerated. The open-minded, virtuous, and progressive citizen is pitted against the conservative bigot. Conservatives can use the classical tolerance discourse to respond to the charge of intolerance by arguing that the so-called tolerant believe they have the moral high ground and are thus remarkably intolerant of people with opposing viewpoints and ideological beliefs, as well as their right to free speech: the (classical) intolerance of the (modern) tolerant (Carson, 2013).

We wish to draw attention to three features of this remark. The first is that the classical definition of tolerance is used, which emphasizes endurance and forbearance of opposing activities. Tolerating others' dissenting beliefs and practices is construed as transgressing or deviating from what is considered appropriate and right in this discourse: it "manages the demands of marginal groups in ways that incorporate them without disturbing the hegemony of norms that marginalize them" (Brown, 2006). Those who require tolerance are labeled as

undesirable, marginal, or inferior: tolerance as endurance implies power and normativity. It can conceal injustice and oppression by confirming and explaining existing power disparities and the minority group's disadvantaged position. Classical toleration can legitimize and reinforce the dominance of those who extend tolerance (the subject of tolerance), while also confirming the inequality and relative powerlessness of those who are tolerated (the object of tolerance): "Tolerating someone else is an act of power; being tolerated is an acceptance of weakness"(Walzer, 1999, p. 52)

Second, there is a separation between "us, the tolerant," and "them, the intolerant." Tolerance, in its classical definition, is highly respected and is commonly viewed as a sign of virtue and moral character. People who exercise self-control and tolerate things they dislike may feel morally superior to others who tolerate them. Those who are tolerated are placed in a position of moral inferiority, and they should be grateful to a more virtuous person for allowing them to exhibit their minority identity. Tolerance can thus be used not just to argue for acceptance of opposing ideas and behaviors of immigrants and minority groups but also to draw a moral intergroup distinction in which "they" are defined as failing to fulfill "our" moral standard of tolerance.

The third point to note pertains to the linkage between tolerance and reciprocity, as highlighted in the concluding section of the cited passage. Reciprocity is posited as a crucial factor for the effective exercise of tolerance. The statement aligns with the classical philosophical concept known as the "paradox of tolerance," which posits that it is impossible to extend tolerance to individuals who exhibit intolerance (Popper, 2011). The act of exhibiting tolerance towards entities that do not exhibit a corresponding level of tolerance undermines the advantages of civil liberties and equality, and as such, cannot be deemed acceptable. The utilization of slogans such as "no toleration for the intolerant" is prevalent in multiple regions throughout the Western world and is often employed by populist politicians to quell minority Islamic groups, who are commonly viewed as being radical and intolerant.

a. Classical Tolerance Paradox, Productive Intolerance and Utilitarianism

The 'Paradox of tolerance' issue has been widely discussed by scholars. This is because tolerance is the essence of liberal democracy. Königs (2022) highlights several important points regarding the ambiguity of tolerance. (1) The first paradox is the paradox of moral tolerance, which arises from the conflict between the rejection component and the acceptance component of tolerance. Tolerance requires us to accept beliefs or practices that we find unacceptable. However, it seems paradoxical that accepting what we consider wrong should be considered a virtue. (2) The second paradox is the paradox of self-destruction, which refers to the fact that unlimited tolerance will lead to the destruction of tolerance itself. Paradoxically, for a liberal society to survive, it must be intolerant towards certain groups, namely those who seek to undermine the liberal society. (3) The third paradox is the paradox of drawing the limits, which relates to the determination of the boundaries of tolerance. Skeptics have argued that there is no neutral or universal way to draw the limits of tolerance, which means that any way of drawing the limits would itself be an arbitrary act of intolerance. Lastly, (4) the fourth paradox is the paradox of the tolerant racist, which demonstrates the peculiarity of the commonly accepted concept of tolerance. If tolerance is to accept what we find unacceptable, then a racist who accepts people of other races should be considered tolerant. However, the idea that a racist deserves praise as a tolerant individual contradicts our intuition.

As I mentioned earlier, tolerance involves reciprocal values. Tolerance has certain prerequisites. A tolerant attitude will only be shown towards groups or parties that are also considered tolerant. At the same time, this condition opens the way for intolerant behavior as long as it can be justified. As stated by Blommaert & Verschuere (1998), "Having been tolerant enough implies a 'threshold' of tolerance whereby the circumstances, unfortunately, would make it no longer possible to continue to live up to one's tolerant identity but rather requires a justified intolerant reaction." The third paradox mentioned by Königs, (2022) suggests that in order for tolerance to persist, it cannot be absolute, and intolerant behavior cannot be avoided. However, as in the third paradox, according to him, there is no way to determine the limits of tolerance, which would mean that any way of drawing the limits would itself be an arbitrary act of intolerance. Based on this problem, I propose the concept of productive intolerance. Through this concept, intolerant actions can be justified based on their consequences. As it becomes evident, the concept of productive intolerance is rooted in the moral theory of utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism, a consequentialist ethical theory, has undergone significant development since its inception. Two prominent figures in the development of utilitarian thought are Jeremy

Bentham and John Stuart Mill. While both Bentham and Mill advocated for utilitarian principles, they had distinct interpretations and approaches. This article aims to explore the main differences between Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism and John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism, focusing on Mill's key points, the practical implications of his utilitarianism, and the criticisms it has faced. Jeremy Bentham, a pioneering utilitarian philosopher, formulated his utilitarianism based on the principle of maximizing overall happiness or pleasure. His version of utilitarianism, known as act utilitarianism, emphasizes the calculation of happiness for each individual action. Bentham proposed a quantitative approach, where the pleasure or happiness derived from an action is measured by its intensity, duration, certainty, proximity, and extent (Bentham, 1907). On the other hand, John Stuart Mill, influenced by Bentham's utilitarianism, developed his own interpretation, often referred to as rule utilitarianism. Mill introduced qualitative distinctions, asserting that higher intellectual pleasures carry greater moral significance than lower sensual pleasures. He argued that the well-being of individuals and society can be maximized by following general rules that promote overall happiness and minimize suffering (Mill, 1863).

The main point of Mill's utilitarianism is his emphasis on the "Greatest Happiness Principle" According to Mill, actions should be evaluated based on their tendency to promote the greatest overall happiness for the greatest number of people. He argued that moral decisions should consider not only the quantity but also the quality of happiness, giving priority to higher intellectual and moral pleasures (Mill, 1863). For Mill, there are no inherently good or evil actions (Mill, 1863, p. 31). In order for an action to be justified, it must bring about utility (happiness). The happiness referred to by Mill is the realization of pleasure and the absence of pain. However, it should be noted that this principle cannot be applied in every circumstance. There are several prerequisites that must be met for the utility of an action to be justified. First, an action must involve public interest, not personal interest (Mill, 1863, p. 16). It should be noted that motives cannot be taken into account, but rather the outcome of an action. Second, many critics attack utilitarianism for reducing the meaning of happiness to something too materialistic. Therefore, unlike Bentham, Mill also takes into account the quality of pleasure by distinguishing intellectual pleasure above practical pleasure. For Mill, such a distinction is a form of recognizing human reason. Third, an action must set aside any status. According to Mill, an action should not be judged as right or wrong based on the person performing the action (Mill, 1863, p. 24).

Meanwhile, an important aspect to be considered is Mill's stance on justice. According to Mill, justice is reciprocal. Mill emphasizes the importance of respecting the fulfillment of others' rights and applies the principle of "no harm." For Mill, in cases of justice, individuals who feel their rights have been violated have the right to seek retribution. Mill believes in the concept of punishment for anyone who commits a crime, with the condition that punishment is justified if it contributes to the overall happiness of the majority. Based on the above, all forms of both tolerant and intolerant actions must be justified as efforts to protect the fulfillment of rights. This is because fulfilling rights promotes pleasure and reduces pain. Taking intolerant actions against those who threaten public rights can be seen as a form of punishment. However, the punishment must be proportional, and its application should have utility for the public good, then, it could be justified as productive intolerance.

b. Banning Front Pembela Islam (FPI) As an Act of Productive Intolerance

The Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) is a religious organization that officially emerged on August 17, 1998. The organization was founded by a group of ulama (religious scholars) and Muslim activists, with one of its prominent figures being Muhammad Rizieq Shihab. Over time, FPI sympathizers have spread across various regions of Indonesia (Jamhari, 2004, p. 132). The purpose of establishing this organization is to promote amar ma'ruf nahi munkar, which means enjoining good and forbidding evil. FPI is divided into two structures: FPI sympathizers and FPI militia. FPI sympathizers engage in religious social activities such as religious lectures, social services, and education. On the other hand, FPI militia is responsible for various actions, such as pressuring entertainment venues through sweeping operations and demonstrations (Ng, 2006, p. 90). In essence, FPI is an organization that has been involved in assisting the community. Its involvement is evident in various disaster response efforts. However, the style or method of proselytization adopted by FPI has received criticism due to the frequent use of violence. FPI often conducts "sweeping" activities, cleansing places of entertainment that they consider to be dens of sin. They are known to carry various sharp weapons during these actions (*Aksi-Aksi Sweeping FPI yang Resahkan Warga*, 2020).

In the end, on June 21, 2019, the FPI organization was officially disbanded by the government. The reasons for its dissolution are not entirely clear. Based on various statements,

it can be determined that there are at least three reasons for the dissolution of this organization. First, FPI is considered to be involved in various unlawful activities, such as property destruction, violence, hate speech, and involvement in terrorist organizations. Second, FPI is seen as not recognizing the ideology of Pancasila (the official state ideology of Indonesia) and promoting the idea of an Islamic state, which is deemed contradictory to the state ideology ("Tak kunjung terdaftar di Kemendagri, FPI diminta cantumkan ikrar setia NKRI di AD/ART," n.d.).

The various acts of violence carried out by FPI can be seen as damaging to tolerance. As discussed earlier, tolerance is reciprocal, and intolerant behavior should be met with intolerance. However, the question arises, "How can acting intolerantly preserve tolerance?" In the context of FPI's dissolution, to break free from such a paradox, we need to exercise productive intolerance, which is intolerance limited by ethical considerations. In his work titled "On Liberty," Mill believes that every individual has jurisdiction over themselves to act freely as long as it does not harm others. The state, as the holder of authority, can punish individuals for actions that harm others (Mill, 1859, p. 103). Since FPI has been involved in actions that harm the rights of others, the state is obligated to impose punishment. In this first scenario, the government's decision to disband FPI is relatively easier to accept. This is because the actions carried out by FPI members are considered to cause harm and must be stopped through punishment. However, as stated above, any punishment should be proportional and provide utility to the public. Therefore, the question that needs to be raised is whether the dissolution of FPI is a proportional punishment and, if so, what utility the public gains from it.

Meanwhile, in the scenario of dissolving FPI based on their rejection of the Pancasila ideology, a closer examination is necessary. This is because, for Mill, unlike actions that can be regulated, freedom of opinion and criticism are absolute (Mill, 1859, p. 103). Based on this, the dissolution of FPI due to its rejection of the Pancasila ideology can be seen as an attack on freedom of expression. Furthermore, FPI's rejection of the Pancasila ideology does not directly impact the public's happiness or alleviate public suffering. In this context, to justify the dissolution of FPI based on ideological grounds, the government must prove that FPI's rejection of the Pancasila ideology threatens the well-being and fulfillment of public rights.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper delved into the concept of classical tolerance and its paradoxes, emphasizing the endurance and acceptance of differing perspectives. The classical tolerance paradoxes, including moral tolerance, self-destruction, drawing the limits, and the tolerant racist, were discussed. It was noted that tolerance requires reciprocity and that there is a need to establish the boundaries of tolerance. To address the limitations of classical tolerance, the concept of productive intolerance was proposed. Productive intolerance justifies intolerant actions based on their consequences, drawing upon the ethical theory of utilitarianism. Utilitarianism, with its emphasis on maximizing overall happiness and the "Greatest Happiness Principle," evaluates actions based on their tendency to promote the greatest overall happiness for the greatest number of people. John Stuart Mill's rule utilitarianism, which considers both the quantity and quality of happiness, was explored.

The paper concluded that productive intolerance, rooted in utilitarianism, provides a framework for justifying intolerant actions when they protect the fulfillment of rights and contribute to the overall happiness of society. However, it emphasized the importance of proportionality and respecting the rights of individuals. The concept of productive intolerance opens up new perspectives in understanding and analyzing repressive actions by the Indonesian government towards radical Islamic groups. In summary, this paper contributes to the discourse on tolerance, intolerance, and their implications in the Indonesian context. By applying utilitarian principles to the concept of productive intolerance, it offers insights into the ethical justifications for intolerant actions and their consequences. Further research and analysis are needed to fully understand the complexities of productive intolerance and its implications for democracy, religious freedom, and social cohesion in Indonesia and beyond.

5. References

- Aksi-Aksi Sweeping FPI yang Resahkan Warga.* (2020, December 30). Republika Online. <https://republika.co.id/share/qm5g85320>.
- Allen, I., & Allen, S. (2016). God Terms and Activity Systems: A Definition of Religion for Political Science. *Political Research Quarterly*, 69(3), 557–570. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912916654014>.

- Bentham, J. (1907). *An Introduction to Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Oxford Clarendon Press.
- Blommaert, J., & Verschueren, J. (1998). *Debating diversity: Analysing the discourse of tolerance*. Routledge.
- Brown, W. (2006). *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Princeton University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7st91>.
- Carson, D. A. (2013). *The Intolerance of Tolerance*. Eerdmans.
- Cohen, A. J. (2004). What Toleration Is. *Ethics*, 115(1), 68–95. <https://doi.org/10.1086/421982>
- Forst, R. (2013). *Toleration in Conflict: Past and Present*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gibson, J. L. (2006). Enigmas of Intolerance: Fifty Years after Stouffer's Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties. *Perspectives on Politics*, 4(01). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S153759270606004X>.
- Hamdi, A. Z., & Wahid, M. (Eds.). (2017). Refleksi Teoritis (Teorisasi): Populisme dan Kekerasan Etno-Religius: Menimbang Ulang Konsep Godly Nationalism dalam Isu Perlindungan terhadap Kelompok Minoritas Agama di Indonesia. In *Ruang untuk yang kecil dan berbeda: Pemerintahan inklusif dan perlindungan minoritas* (Cetakan I). Gading.
- Jamhari, J. J. (2004). *Gerakan Salafi Radikal di Indonesia*. RajaGrafindo Persada.
- King, P. (1997). *Toleration*. Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Toleration/King-King/p/book/9780714644141>.
- Königs, P. (2022). Paradoxes of Toleration. In M. Sarđoč (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Toleration* (pp. 93–108). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42121-2_13
- Lee, F. L. F. (2014). "Tolerated One Way but Not the Other": Levels and Determinants of Social and Political Tolerance in Hong Kong. *Social Indicators Research*, 118(2), 711–727.
- Liddle, R. W. (2014, August 20). Tantangan Nasionalisme Bertuhan. *Kompas*.
- Maharani, T. (2020, February 3). Jemaah Ahmadiyah Lapor Kasus Intimidasi, Komnas HAM Negara Lemah Melindungi Hak Warga. *Kompas.Com*. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/03/02/17155651/jemaah-ahmadiyah-lapor-kasus-intimidasi-komnas-ham-negara-lemah-melindungi?page=all>.
- Media, K. C. (2020, December 30). 6 Alasan Pemerintah Bubarkan dan Larang Kegiatan FPI. *KOMPAS.com*. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/12/30/14545951/6-alasan-pemerintah-bubarkan-dan-larang-kegiatan-fpi>.
- Menchik, J. (2016). *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316344446>.
- Mill, J. S. (1859). *On Liberty*.
- Mill, J. S. (1863). *Utilitarianism*. Batoche Books Kitchener.
- Ng, A.-Z. (2006). *Gerakan Islam Simbolik: Politik Kepentingan FPI*. LKiS.
- Popper, K. R. (2011). *The open society and its enemies* (1. Auflage). Routledge.
- Rizkita, M., & Hidayat, A. (2023). *Love for All Hatred for None: Ajaran Teologis dan Respon Ahmadi terhadap Perusakan Masjid Miftahul Huda di Media Sosial*. 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.19105/nuansa.v20i1.7378>.
- Sandel, M. J. (1994). Political Liberalism by John Rawls Reviewed by Michael J. Sandel. *The Harvard Law Review Association*.
- Tak kunjung terdaftar di Kemendagri, FPI diminta cantumkan ikrar setia NKRI di AD/ART. (n.d.). *BBC News Indonesia*. Retrieved June 2, 2023, from <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-50602035>.

- Tim CNN Indonesia. (2021, April 9). Kronologi sebelum Perusakan Masjid Ahmadiyah di Sintang. *CNN Indonesia*. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20210904110136-20-689644/kronologi-sebelum-perusakan-masjid-ahmadiyah-di-sintang>.
- Verkuyten, M., & Yogeeswaran, K. (2017). The Social Psychology of Intergroup Toleration: A Roadmap for Theory and Research. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 21(1), 72–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868316640974>.
- Vogt, W. P. (1997). *Tolerance & education: Learning to live with diversity and difference*. Sage Publications.
- Walzer, M. (1999). *On toleration*. Yale University Press.