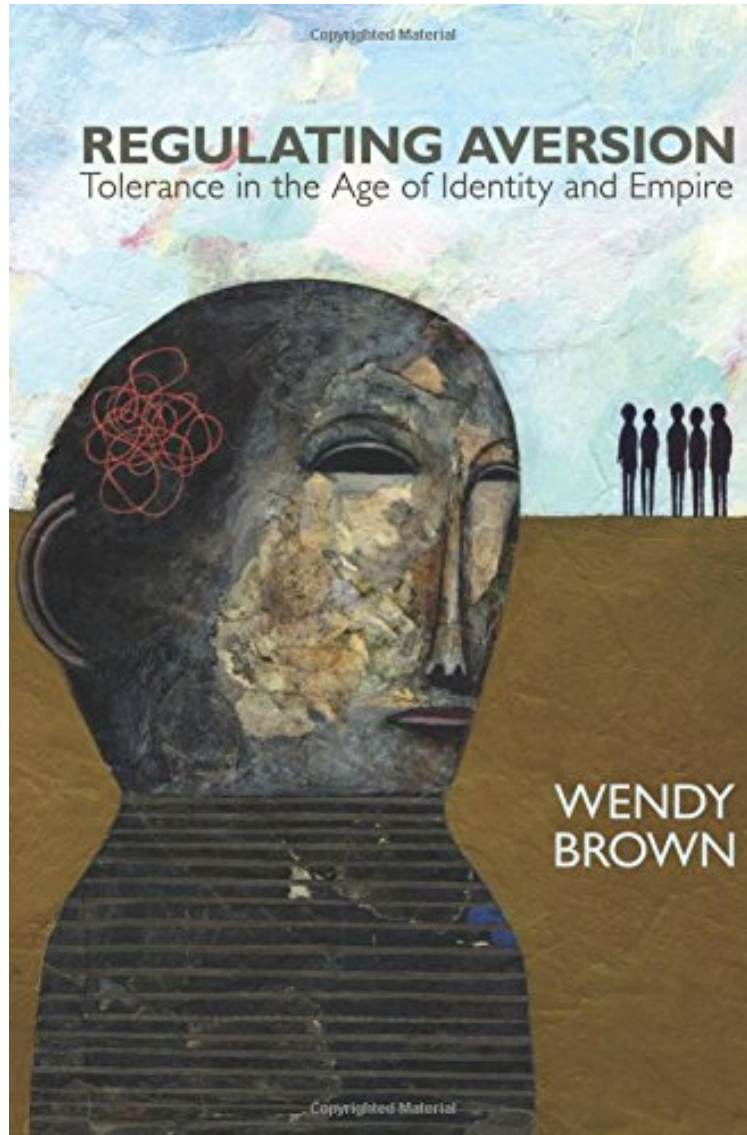


[Ebook free] Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire

## Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire

Wendy Brown

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**Wendy Brown : Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire:

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Excellent readingBy J. RigglemanA great series of discussions about a subject that is little understood and often misrepresented. I hope this book is being in introductory classes to start students on a lifelong query.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Trenchant CritiqueBy Graham

BrackenBrown's book on Tolerance seems to be aging well in our era of unstable politics. As the other reviews point out, the goal of her project is to probe the political discourse of Tolerance and criticize it. A preemptive note: given the blistering strength of her critique it's easy to get the impression that Brown is rejecting Tolerance tout court, but this is emphatically not the case. Her focus is on Tolerance as a political discourse, that is, as a force that structures our political ideals and practices. Accordingly, she uses this book exorcise some of the demons she sees lurking in that discourse, but she leaves open a hopeful future where we can get by with a more virtuous version of the ideal. She also leaves unscathed the practice of tolerance in our personal lives – something she takes as an unqualified good. Brown is not intelligibly 'against tolerance' as some have put it. What she is against, however, is a version of Tolerance which has a stultifying, depoliticizing effect on our public sphere, a Tolerance which supplants other justice projects like Equality, a Tolerance which provides cover for an expansionist State, and a Tolerance which underwrites an imperial civilizational discourse of us-and-them. Each of these accounts is fascinating in turn and I will outline just some features of the case for depoliticization. This version of Tolerance branches off from Locke's Treatise for Religious Toleration wherein he argued that doctrinal differences in Christianity were a matter of personal conscience and not public dispute (and religious war). This classical liberal argument achieved peace (to the extent it did) by privatizing what was once public and turning it into a matter of belief. This pattern recurs. The Enlightenment liberal state makes claims to both secularism and universality, and it faces a thorny challenge in groups who recognize authority in other places – like culture and religion. The liberal state can't demand that some groups relinquish their most cherished beliefs as a condition of participation and still take itself seriously as liberal. Enter: tolerance. According to Brown, the state trades in a discourse of tolerance at this point because it assures the state's authority by tacitly bargaining to admit these 'other' groups on the condition that they privatize their assertive claims as matters of mere belief. This way the state can maintain an air of liberalism while also inoculating groups it sees as a threat. It's a hegemony donning robes of neutrality. This leads to a progressive secularization of politics and relativization of belief that tends toward a State which claims for itself only a culturally neutral proceduralism – one that is emptied of substantive moral claims which risk seeming parochial. Whether or not we think that such a state is possible in a pure form (Brown surely does not), the story comports nicely with the state of many contemporary liberal democracies. Paeans to Tolerance as a supreme political value are recited at exactly this moment when citizens feel like their public lives are empty and bloodless. In the story Brown tells, this liberal zenith (nadir?) is dissatisfying to the point of fuelling reactionary movements and pre-modern counter discourses (while not within the purview of her book, resurgent nativism seems like just one case that is a propos). Thus, tolerant liberalism creates new enemies against which it can assert itself. To recap the story: liberalism's pretension to universalism can only be maintained in the face of conflict over substantive values by invoking a discourse of tolerance and reducing competing values to matters of private belief. This relativization advances liberalism's hegemony at the cost of any meaningful values by which people live. The ostensibly neutral and legalistic residue is so morally unfulfilling that it sparks reactionary and illiberal movements founded on the palpitating values of your choice (race, culture, religion, or some potpourri thereof). Liberalism can then assert itself against these movements by repurposing a discourse of tolerance as license for self-defence against these intolerant barbarians. In short: liberalism is responsible for producing its enemies, and efforts to silence them only exacerbate conflict. All told, tolerant liberalism is purportedly exposed as a project which both obscures and exacerbates conflict, and which justifies its own imperialism. While there's much of interest here, I want to add one squabble: In this story Brown implies that a tolerant, liberal, and secular state cannot ultimately inspire moral allegiance. I would agree that this is an exceedingly difficult issue; the value of liberal democratic institutions cannot be reduced to a moral criterion (then we're just invoking morals ex nihilo) and it should not be reduced to a culture without great caution (as demonstrated by culturally imperial aggressors who claim the benevolence of democratization). This does not mean, however, that it is impossible to find justifications of liberal democracy which are motivating and inspiring enough to defend it against the reactionaries. One possible approach here would be the culturalist approach of John Dewey who thought that democracy, in addition to being a set of political institutions, was a way of life. "Democracy", for him, "starts at home" and manifests in a set of practices in all areas of our lives – public and private. To my mind, this kind of Deweyan project deserves serious consideration; we should want a democracy which is both liberal and morally inspiring. But a potential constructive project like this which hews close to cultural forces would have to be carried out in conjunction with critical projects like Brown's which sensitize us to the hazards of hegemony and empire. As an exploration of these potential sins and as an exorcism of them, I cannot recommend her book enough. Graham Bracken 58 of 59 people found the following review helpful. A powerful critique of tolerance By kritikBrown delivers a compelling critique of tolerance. In a complex, yet accessible way, she argues that tolerance functions as an instrument of power by regulating group differences and by selectively and differentially integrating "others" into the civic space. Conferring and withholding tolerance can both function as differential modes of exclusion and regulation of difference. The problem with tolerance is that it dissimulates its political role: tolerance relies on a power differential between those who tolerate and those who are tolerated. Yet this power relation is masked because "tolerance talk" individualizes racial, cultural, and sexual difference. It treats difference as something that should be confronted by civility and behavior: if only we all behaved responsibly and tolerated others, we could

all happily live together. Unsatisfactory in this view - as Brown argues convincingly - is that it substitutes a vocabulary of civility for political problems and confrontations and thus sidelines demands for freedom, equality and justice. It individualizes social and political questions, as it substitutes the individual object of tolerance for the group (and simultaneously reifies difference and otherness by construing the subject as the product of a collective identity). Brown traces the transformation of tolerance from its early modern inception (where it meant tolerating other beliefs) to its current instantiation, where it means tolerating (sexual, cultural, racial) difference. The central question of her book is how what she calls "tolerance talk" has become the beacon of multicultural justice and civic peace. Reminding readers that only a generation ago, tolerance was reviled as a thinly veiled form of racism - yet today it has emerged as the emblem of the good society.

Tolerance is generally regarded as an unqualified achievement of the modern West. Emerging in early modern Europe to defuse violent religious conflict and reduce persecution, tolerance today is hailed as a key to decreasing conflict across a wide range of other dividing lines-- cultural, racial, ethnic, and sexual. But, as political theorist Wendy Brown argues in *Regulating Aversion*, tolerance also has dark and troubling undercurrents. Dislike, disapproval, and regulation lurk at the heart of tolerance. To tolerate is not to affirm but to conditionally allow what is unwanted or deviant. And, although presented as an alternative to violence, tolerance can play a part in justifying violence-- dramatically so in the war in Iraq and the War on Terror. Wielded, especially since 9/11, as a way of distinguishing a civilized West from a barbaric Islam, tolerance is paradoxically underwriting Western imperialism. Brown's analysis of the history and contemporary life of tolerance reveals it in a startlingly unfamiliar guise. Heavy with norms and consolidating the dominance of the powerful, tolerance sustains the abjection of the tolerated and equates the intolerant with the barbaric. Examining the operation of tolerance in contexts as different as the War on Terror, campaigns for gay rights, and the Los Angeles Museum of Tolerance, Brown traces the operation of tolerance in contemporary struggles over identity, citizenship, and civilization.

"The triumph of toleration as the central liberal value, and the attendant inability of liberals to see the dark side of their favorite virtue, is the subject of Wendy Brown's insightful and illuminating new book. . . . I find the analysis trenchant and the critique persuasive."--Stanley Fish, *Chronicle of Higher Education*"This is a remarkable book . . . made attractive by its passion, the lucidity of its negative critique, and its intelligence."--John Hall, *Social Forces*"Wendy Brown has produced a richly textured and timely analysis of some of the darker elements lurking beneath the tolerance discourse of western liberalism."--Vincent Geoghegan, *American of Politics*"[This is a] bold, erudite, and timely study."--Ely Aharonson, *Criminal Law and Philosophy*"*Regulating Aversion* is a forceful and, in many places, convincing attempt to account for the contemporary relevance and meanings of tolerance within liberalism in the West, and in the United States in particular."--Emily Grabham, *Feminist Legal Studies*"The strength of Brown's book is her trenchant deconstructions of the universalizing pretenses of tolerance specifically and liberal discourse more generally. Brown's intervention successfully jars tolerance loose from the hallowed transhistorical ground on which it usually rests."--C. Michael Hurst, *Cultural Critique*From the Back Cover"This is a brilliant book. Wendy Brown has made the reader understand 'tolerance' in a new and more provocative way. Alerting us to its genealogy, she demonstrates the ambiguity of any politics that seeks to found itself on this much-touted liberal virtue. *Regulating Aversion* is a remarkable--and remarkably rigorous--contribution to the considerable literature on tolerance and the limits of the tolerable. Anyone wanting to think seriously about multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and democratic pluralism in our time must read it."--Talal Asad, CUNY Graduate Center"Wendy Brown's *Regulating Aversion* is clear, rigorous, and unusually bold in an academic atmosphere that is now far from sympathetic to its kind of radical critique. Brown has done a wonderful job of orchestrating her argument, and it has been articulated with wit. The book is a worthy successor to her best and most politically astute contributions. This is an important work."--Paul Gilroy, London School of Economics"In this fascinating and provocative book, Brown brings into sharp analytical focus a perplexing phenomenon: in political discourse since the late twentieth century, both the objects and content of tolerance have shifted. The sweep of Brown's analysis is impressive: she deftly weaves together critiques of contemporary politics with thoughtful explorations of the history of liberal thought on tolerance."--Melissa Williams, University of Toronto

About the Author Wendy Brown is professor of political science at the University of California, Berkeley, where she is also a member of the Critical Theory Faculty. Her books include *Edgework: Essays on Knowledge and Politics*, *Politics Out of History*, and *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (all Princeton).