

# Proactive Tolerance

## A Deeper Understanding of Proactivity

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The social climate in Germany has become rougher, more polarized and more hysterical. Calls for cohesion from societal authorities have become more pleading and the search for togetherness in diversity is becoming more and more urgent. Many see the solution in the magic word of tolerance.<sup>1</sup> But how can this word be filled? With the concept of proactive tolerance, which grew out of a socio-ethical project in western Ukraine,<sup>2</sup> a basic and concrete concept of tolerance was presented, which is fed by an attitude of appreciation. This term enables a perspective on how peaceful coexistence can be sustainably promoted in a plural society like ours, which is why it is worth the effort to deepen the understanding of this term.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to provide the concept of proactive tolerance with a substructure that facilitates the understanding of its peculiarity. This text approaches the meaning based on the actual usage of the term proactivity in other sciences in order to emphasize the particularity of proactive tolerance in contrast to passive and active tolerance. After this outer encirclement of the term, its inner center should be explored. Two digressions serve this purpose: an exemplary one on the person of Gandhi and a philosophical-sociological one on the current discussion about the theory of resonance. Since the concept of proactive tolerance was developed in particular against the background of different religions and world views, the religious communities as actors who can promote proactive tolerance are the last thing to look at, in other words the practice and implementation of proactive tolerance should be examined.

“Anyone who determines the development of an event and brings about a situation through differentiated advance planning and target-oriented action” acts proactively when one lends his ear to the definition of the *Du-*

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1 The former president of the Federal Republic of Germany Joachim Gauck has released recently a book with the title “tolerance” (Gauck 2019).

2 Vogt/Husmann 2019.

den.<sup>3</sup> The first images that the informed reader can see, as soon as the term proactivity is mentioned, come from various areas: but above all from the disciplines of management and planning. To name just a few examples: In the area of reputation management, managers are required to proactively meet criticism of the company. The proactive strategist of a company is not reactive and waits for a request from management, but looks for ways to reduce costs and increase profits. And proactive management figures in a company are dealing with tomorrow's challenges already today. All of these examples revolve around people as proactive actors.<sup>4</sup>

But that is not the only possible variant. The word “proactive” is also associated with computer or social systems in economics and business informatics: Algorithms have the ability to proactively shape the design of environments in a city with a view to future challenges in order to provide an intelligent solution for living together in the city.<sup>5</sup> But economic and social systems must also prove to be proactive and agile if they want to be resilient, i.e. resilient in the face of harsh processes of change and (unforeseen) adversities.

Another usage of the term can be found in psychology. There, the term of proactivity is also used differently than it is used in the area of management. In psychology the use of the term is mainly focused on the rationality of the individual action of a person. In addition to the importance of proactivity for resilience<sup>6</sup>, which is also highlighted by psychologists, one speaks for example of proactive aggression in children.<sup>7</sup> When children slam doors with all their might, clamor, and stomp because they want the chocolate they have been denied, they are using aggression to achieve a specific goal. Of course, it doesn't have to stop at the banal and tangible example of chocolate, much more often it is less haptic goals such as attention and recognition.

The concept of proactive tolerance has not yet appeared in the debate. However, it is particularly suitable for working out nuances of the dazzling container term tolerance, which cannot be described exhaustively by the concepts of passive and active tolerance. The concept of proactive tolerance is similar to the examples above because it is similar to them with its preventive and forward-looking character. Tolerance is a concept

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3 Duden (2019): Art. proaktiv (translation R.H.), 2019, <https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/proaktiv> (last access: 12–21–2019).

4 E.g. Ternès/Runge 2015; Krumeich 2018.

5 Cf. Andrushevich et al. 2015.

6 Cf. Maiwald 2017.

7 Cf. Görtz-Dorten 2019: 251–261.

of conflict and tolerant behavior clearly emerges as a necessity in conflict. But tolerance is also relevant in the forecourt where conflicts arise and can prevent the outbreak of violent conflicts there. The effective means of proactive tolerance is dialogue, in which the actors get to know and understand each other. Information is exchanged that can be helpful in resolving future conflicts. Looking at the previous examples, a parallel becomes obvious: Even the proactive reputation manager or strategist is always on the lookout for information that will potentially be relevant in the future. In addition, the peculiarity of proactive tolerance is that it takes into account both the individual dimension, as it has been highlighted by the examples of the manager or the egoistic child, and the societal dimension (systemic dimension) and thus integrates these dimensions (individual and systemic).

Although there are many similarities between the general understanding of proactivity and the specific meaning of proactive tolerance, decisive differences remain: Proactive tolerance is not remotely pragmatic and calculating, as the examples from management suggest. It is not about obtaining an advantage and therefore only seeking as much dialogue as it makes economic sense, considering the cost of dialogue in relation to the gain in peace in society. It would be also a functionalistic misunderstanding if one wanted to explain the proactivity of tolerance, as proactivity is understood in proactive aggression, because proactive tolerance is more than just a behavior practiced solely for the purpose of another goal (social peace). On the contrary, proactive tolerance is not so branchy, but is essentially based on an appreciation of the other person and the plurality in society. Insofar as tolerance always has a personal touch, because it refers to an attitude towards other people, it is never purely rational and pragmatic or simply reduced to an ethical minimum, and thus proactive tolerance differs significantly from active and passive tolerance. These differences need to be worked out more clearly in order to understand more precisely the specifics of proactive tolerance.

### *Proactive tolerance as distinct from passive and active tolerance*

Using an analogy, the differences can be shown particularly easily. If there is a fire in a building, a fire truck races to the source of the danger and tries to bring the source of the fire under control. The fire brigade reacts to an already existing fire outbreak. On the other hand, a mother puts sun cream on her children in summer before visiting the lake to protect them from the dangerous UV radiation to which they may be exposed if they cannot

find a place in the shade. In contrast to fire fighting, putting on lotion is a preventive action, because the danger from UV radiation does not yet exist and may or may not occur.

Just as fire fighting and sun protection differ, so too are active and proactive tolerance. While active tolerance affects an existing conflict and tries to contain it by setting rules, the task of proactive tolerance is to act in advance, regardless of when and whether a conflict arises. Because even taking action in advance can noticeably minimize the risk of a (violent) conflict.

Just as sun cream multiplies the natural protection of the skin, so too can proactive tolerance strengthen mechanisms and attitudes in society that make it possible not to let conflicts escalate at all. The decisive factor for this is the attitude of appreciation as a characteristic of proactive tolerance, because it enables dialogue, getting to know each other, and the will to communicate, but also interest and openness for the other. If such a process takes place in advance, then alienation, fear, and escalation can be soothed or avoided in advance.

It is just as clear, however, that a proactive tolerance is less controlled and less precise, but rather has a broad effect for all eventualities. It is the same and no different with fire and sun protection: While fire fighting is precisely geared towards the cause of the fire, the use of sun protection is much more indeterminate; you don't even know whether the sun is still shining or if there are clouds and a thunderstorm is approaching. The sun cream has its effect, the only question is whether the danger against which it is supposed to work will arise or not. And yet the use of a preventive measure is reasonable and sensible. In terms of the ability to steer, one can also speak of proactive tolerance and active tolerance that active tolerance is calculative, whereas proactive tolerance is generous appreciation.

### *Proactive tolerance as exemplified by Gandhi*

The uniqueness of proactive tolerance can finally be grasped with the example of Mahatma Gandhi. The Indian freedom fighter and devout Hindu shaped the paradigm of nonviolent resistance like no one. His aim was to conduct a resistance<sup>8</sup> with means that correspond to the end, which has

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8 Cf. Weingardt 2007: 223–227. The terms “Ahimsa” as “renunciation of violent acts and of threatening with violence” and “Satyagraha” as “power of truth” or “power of love” are the decisive terms.

already become a commonplace in the vernacular: The end never justifies the means. Gandhi was not concerned with just keeping a clean slate or keeping the potential for violence and thus the dangers for his supporters and the Indian population low. No, the bottom line for him was that violence is simply not a suitable means. Violence is not compatible with love, the love of truth. Gandhi loved the truth and, in his opinion, a love of truth demanded the renunciation of violence. There is a basic conviction in this that is much deeper than that you cannot beat anyone to a wedding and that forced marriages are hardly successful. Love is the respect for something that one does not want to control, because any control would rob it of its independence.

Gandhi was also aware of a second point: Truth invites love.<sup>9</sup> Because she is attractive, you can't turn a blind eye to her. He believed in the power of symbolic acts that open everyone's eyes – for truth and for justice. It is precisely against this background that the famous Salt March is understood. Against the arbitrary and oppressive prohibition of unauthorized salt extraction, the group went together with Gandhi to the waterside in order to extract the precious salt out of the sea. Nobody uses violence, nobody is quick-tempered. But the action has a subtle attraction; it is the persuasiveness of what really moves people.

After all, in the interests of proactive tolerance, Gandhi had friendly exchanges with the British colonial rulers even before the symbolic deeds and tried to be appreciative. During his time in South Africa and India, he saw the role of sport, especially the football game, in how different social groups can be connected and borders (including racial segregation) can be overcome.<sup>10</sup> It was the first steps of getting to know each other and of appreciation that made understanding, non-violence and also communication with the powerful acts of drawing possible.

Gandhi's method of non-violence is thus exemplary for what is to be understood by proactive tolerance and what can also be characterized in the words of Pinchas Lapide as “love of deenemification”<sup>11</sup>. The love of deenemification is about rethinking the supposed opponent by being caring about the other. As Gandhi showed his appreciation for the British

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9 “If you want to find the truth as God, the only way is love, that means renunciation of force.”, a quote that is commonly attributed to Mahatma Gandhi (translation R.H.).

10 Cf. FIFA Weekly (2010): Mahatma Gandhi – Fussball-Legende, 10–22–2010, <https://de.fifa.com/news/mahatma-gandhi-fussball-legende-1322011> (last access: 2–19–2020).

11 Lapide 2010: 298 (translation R.H.).

while playing football, he was able to break through established friend-foe schemes and created an opportunity for getting to know each other. In this way, proactive tolerance with the attitude of appreciation should break through fossilized conflict patterns, create new interest and understanding, so that tolerant action can bear fruit in a society.

### *Proactive tolerance and response*

The exemplary excursus on Gandhi has illustrated the characteristic mode of action of proactive tolerance in an individual case. Behind this, however, are structural relationships that can be discovered in every human-environment-relationship and make the mechanism of action of proactive tolerance understandable.

In the current debate about human-world-relationships, Hartmut Rosa's contribution stands out. He links the question of subject and environment with the question of a successful life. The happy life is an interaction of subject and world. It is decisive to what extent the subject succeeds in appropriating the world. Rosa characterizes the successful relationship as a resonance: people and the world "touch" each other and emotions and expectations are awakened in people so that they can look at the world with interest and work in the world to bring about a visible change: "Resonance is a form of world relationship formed through affection and emotion, intrinsic interest and the expectation of self-efficacy, in which subject and world touch and transform each other at the same time."<sup>12</sup>

Rosa specified three aspects of the response in order to prevent misunderstandings. On the one hand, a resonance relationship requires independence (of subject and world) and thus that the world contains something fundamentally inaccessible, so that the relationship to the world is not a mere echo of the subject's own ideas and desires, but remains diverse in itself. In addition, subject and world must – to a certain extent – be a self-contained system that can be affected by an input but develops its own voice. It is easy to draw a parallel to Niklas Luhmann's system theory, in which systems always process information according to their own rules and translate it into their coded language.<sup>13</sup> After all, resonance is not an emotional state that is defined by the emotional content that is transmitted. Rather, the content is indifferent and resonance happens

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12 Rosa 2016: 298 (translation R.H.).

13 Cf. for the term autopoietic systems: Luhmann 1984.

independently from the content of sensation, as the mere interaction of subject and world enables self-perception and thus resonance. This is why tragedies can trigger resonance despite their sad content.

In contrast, alienation is the counterpart of resonance, but not its negative. It is true that the failure of the world-subject-relationship triggers alienation. Alienation is therefore the “form of the world relationship in which subject and world are indifferent or hostile (repulsive) and therefore internally disconnected. Therefore, alienation can also be defined as a relationship that is lacking connectivity (Rahel Jaeggi).”<sup>14</sup> But there is no resonance when the alienation is erased. Nor can alienation be thought of as an absence of resonance. Rather, they are mutually dependent and the mix of rejection and attraction enables differentiation, depending on which prevails. Only the complete absence of resistance would prevent resonance. An illusory idyll, in which everything is beautifully colored in harmony, does not allow anyone to be touched. Rather, resonance stands under the sign of a hope: How dissonances in a piece draw the listener's attention and he hopes that the melody will resolve itself in a cadenza at the end. The same applies to conversations in which people do not show their personal opinion, in which they always speak to the other person: Isn't that just a mere echo of your own talk? It is not an authentic encounter that contains value, arouses interest. And the genuinely committed conversation partner will see his words as flat metal and his efforts as in vain. Rather, resonance occurs when an honest discussion develops in which arguments and points of view are exchanged, regardless of whether a common solution is found in the end. Then the exchange of thoughts is no longer meaningless.<sup>15</sup>

Experiences of repulsion require a feeling of resonance. But there is also a second. We need a fundamental trust in the response, namely that the above conversation partner has something meaningful to say. Only if we grant this advance of trust we can really come to a deeper understanding. Here Hartmut Rosa refers to the leap of faith that one has to grant a text so that its meaning becomes accessible.<sup>16</sup> In this respect, a dialectical movement can be identified.<sup>17</sup> It begins with a trust in resonance, but the experience of repulsion is also necessary in order to differentiate between nostrification (appropriation) and a transformation of the world,

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14 Rosa 2016: 316 (translation R.H.).

15 Cf. Rosa 2016: 321.

16 Cf. Rosa 2016: 324.

17 Cf. Rosa 2016: 325.

because only the latter leaves the world in its ultimate unavailability. The contradiction is thus the spin that turns the spiral of the subject-world relationship further.

From these general remarks on Rosa's concept of resonance, the main effects of proactive tolerance can be highlighted. Proactive tolerance aims to create relationships between people and groups who are strangers to one another. Therefore, the principles can be easily translated here. Proactive tolerance is about respecting the independence and resistance of the other. It is not about equalization or an idyll of harmony. Many behaviors and views remain permanently alien to us. Only an honest discussion that highlights common aspects and differences can only enable the interlocutors to experience that they are taken seriously, that their opinions and arguments are heard. This experience of self-efficacy and interest is the basis for trust to emerge and grow in a society. Why is this so important? Mistrust prevents or makes it difficult to reach an agreement on political issues, which, however, definitely require a quick and pragmatic solution. The seeds of mistrust bear the seeds of fear of strangers, incomprehension, demarcation behavior and, in the end, intolerance and excesses of violence. So proactive tolerance is *cum grano salis* enabling a resonant relationship between different people in a society.

### *The special role of religions in proactive tolerance*

Proactive tolerance is a special form of tolerant behavior. For the effective implementation of proactive tolerance, religions play a special role, as it has already been generally emphasized elsewhere with regard to tolerance as a whole.<sup>18</sup> Following current debates on the role of religion in conflicts in the field of political science and conflict research, four aspects will be singled out that illustrate the extent to which religions make a solitary contribution to proactive tolerance.

It has been widely discussed that religions can be used as a means of exacerbating conflict. Religions can be modified as ideologies for attacks and terrorism. You can unleash special motivational powers and thus increase the willingness to fight. In addition, when conflicts unleash globally and are no longer just conflicts between two states, but a conflict between

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18 Cf. Vogt/Husmann 2019.



different blocks or world orders, religions can mark a phase boundary between the blocks as an identity marker.<sup>19</sup>

Recently, however, religions have also been perceived as conflict mediators that, as honest brokers, can mediate authentically in conflicts due to their political independence.<sup>20</sup> Religions also have the opportunity to understand the religious dimension of conflicts. Through the usual way of life and belief, they can fall back on a fund of ways of acting that are not understood as political statements. This way you create a new channel. The atmospheric significance of religion through its rituals can also be understood as reassuring. In addition, religious representatives often have a higher level of credibility, at least in political matters, because they are assigned a special ethical and moral qualification that makes them appear independent from political interests. Moreover, there is a special emotional ability that can also express the deeper dimension of conflicts (sacrifice, responsibility, justice) in words. Furthermore, church actors are not regarded as being sent by political interests and also not as appeasement in the sense of humanism, which can make it easier for those involved in the conflict to start a dialogue.

Religions are also particularly suitable actors in proactive tolerance because they are open to ethical and concrete thinking. While in active tolerance, moral-abstract rules are formulated that can be constructed on the basis of reciprocity and generality. Proactive tolerance needs to be about sharing ethical beliefs. Christianity is particularly capable of this. It brings with it clear material-ethical ideas, but it is compatible and open to both formal-moral argumentation and other material-ethical concepts: "Against this background, ethics compatible with pluralism does not aim at leveling validity claims. It differs from the indifferent coexistence in renouncing the search for the better alternatives. Rather, it is based on an appreciation of cultural, social, scientific and moral diversity, because this is perceived as an opportunity to get to know different options for interpretation and action and to decide on the better one."<sup>21</sup> With this attitude, Christianity can be a good dialogue partner: "Moral pluralism is more than the juxtaposition or opposition of ethical convictions that are incompatible. It can also refer to complementary perspectives that complement each other and give rise to in-depth communication"<sup>22</sup>.

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19 Cf. Weingardt 2007: 414f.

20 Cf. Weingardt 2007: 392–403.

21 Korff/Vogt 2016: 629 (translation R.H.).

22 Korff/Vogt 2016: 629 (translation R.H.).

Finally, religions emerge as particularly suitable because they contain narratives and ethical ideas that can motivate proactive-tolerant behavior.<sup>23</sup> Only those who can arouse and maintain interest in others can promote proactive tolerance. Religions have clearly demonstrated the ability to do this through their readiness for interreligious dialogue.

In addition, religions have a special competence to tolerate ambiguity in view of the fact that the world is ambiguous.<sup>24</sup> Religions educate their members in multiperspectivism. One can interpret the phenomenon from within the world, one can interpret it religiously. This competence is necessary to deal with the diversity of different cultures.

Religions make a particularly valuable contribution to the implementation of proactive tolerance. But the concept of proactive tolerance is universal and human. Proactive tolerance is an attitude of appreciation and openness, which develops a fulfilling subject-environment relationship, which ensures peaceful coexistence, and which lets decent and joyful human relationships grow.

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23 Cf. Vogt/Husmann 2019; MacIntyre 1984: 215–219.

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