Tolerance will no doubt be defined in many ways during the course of this conference. For my purposes, we should think of it as a willingness to allow, without endorsing, the ways or objectives or values of others, and to be willing to interact with them without seeking to change their ways and values, while following different ways and holding different values ourselves. I intend this characterization to be evaluatively neutral, leaving open the questions I want to address - whether and when tolerance is owed by one group or person to others.

And initially it may seem that whether tolerance might be owed is problematic - that tolerance may seem either too weak or too strong a disposition in our dealings with others, whether at the individual or the group level. Although I shall argue that this is not the case, that the appropriate distance between persons expressed by tolerance is in fact widespread, I shall begin by sketching the contrary case. Among friends, it will first be insisted, tolerance is too grudging an attitude. The ways and values of our friends are not alien to us. If the true friend is, as Aristotle says, another self, his values are our own. His concerns we make our own. To be sure, friendship takes more and less intimate forms, but even at its least intimate true friendship requires a positive degree of acceptance of each other’s ways that far exceeds the weak demands of tolerance.

Consider now a community, characterized by shared values and objectives. Although the members of a community may be too many to be all friends, what they share again makes tolerance too weak an attitude for them to express in their interactions. For their shared concerns make them partners in their activities. Although lacking the personal, emotional interdependence of friends, they think of themselves as “we”, and this identification takes them far beyond the confines of mere tolerance in the way in which they relate one to another. Both friendship and community are then inappropriate contexts for the manifestation of tolerance.
What of the relationships of persons outside the bounds of friendship and community? If tolerance is too weak within those bounds, it may seem too strong beyond them. Where shared ways and objectives are absent, we may see interaction as usually unwelcome to at least one of the parties. If one party is able to further its aims, we may suppose that this will usually be at the expense of the other. In such contexts tolerance may seem irrelevant or pointless. Tolerance is irrelevant, it may be argued, to those whose superior might enables them to ignore the ways and values of weaker parties. And it is pointless to those whose weakness leaves them unable seriously to affect the ways and values of the stronger.

Throughout much of human history, relations between different groups and cultures, espousing different ways and values, have tended to hostility. The step from the other to the enemy has been a short one. And tolerance of the enemy has not been seen as a virtue, but has been accepted, if at all, only from prudent necessity. The ways of others, of strangers, have called not for understanding but for condemnation, not for acceptance but for rejection. And this attitude, in which tolerance is not seen as the stranger’s due, and indeed in which the disposition to tolerate is far from a virtue, is still with us. It informs the stance of terrorists of every kind, but extends far beyond them. And I shall not argue that the intolerant are always wrong. If the disposition to tolerate is a virtue, it is not a virtue manifest in every interaction among strangers. In explaining when toleration is called for, I shall also be explaining when toleration is not called for - when indeed it would be wrong to tolerate the other, unless prudence leaves us no reasonable alternative.

The key to what I shall call the modern case for tolerance, among individuals and among cultures, is the scope of mutually beneficial, or positive-sum, interactions among persons. It may be natural to think of this scope narrowly - to suppose that mutually beneficial interactions require friendship or community. For both or all parties to an interaction to benefit, it may be thought, the parties must be friends (or kin), or joined in the pursuit of common objectives or the expression of common values. If, for example, we value freedom for all men and women, then we can cooperation beneficially together to achieve this objective or realize this value. But if each values freedom only for himself or herself, then we lack the common basis needed for such cooperation.
Were mutual benefit to depend on friendship or community, then the disposition to tolerance would be, if not more a vice than a virtue, then at best good-natured folly. It would be too strong a link to those with whom our interactions were unprofitable. We might find ourselves unable to avoid interacting with such persons, and we might find ourselves compelled to tolerate their alien objectives and values for want of the power to overcome or eliminate them, but we would have no reason to think that they were entitled to that toleration.

But fortunately mutual benefit is not confined to interactions based on shared affections or objectives. Mutual benefit need not be shared benefit or common benefit. The ideal that John Rawls promulgated in his characterization of society as “a cooperative venture for mutual advantage” does not invoke any idea of shared or common advantage. Rather it builds on the idea that persons without common objectives can interact in ways that further the different objectives of each.

One of the most striking and valuable advances that we can attribute primarily to modern economic thought is the recognition that under appropriate circumstances, if each person effectively pursues his or her own advantage, then the result will be beneficial to all, where each defines benefit in his or her own terms. This is the rationale of the competitive market. And where circumstances are not appropriate for the market, game theory shows us both the problems and the prospects for structuring interaction so that although each is constrained from the direct pursuit of his own advantage, the outcome optimally benefits everyone. This is not the place to pursue these ideas, but they provide the underlying framework for viewing interaction among persons lacking shared values in a positive light. Persons without common objectives can interact in ways that further the different objectives of each.

So a “cooperative venture for mutual advantage” does not require agreement on what constitutes advantage. Each may hold, within certain limits that I shall refer to shortly, whatever objectives, whatever values she chooses. She need not herself value the objectives or goods of her fellows, nor need they value hers. All she need do is accept the legitimacy of their valuations for themselves. And this brings tolerance into our account.
We have now identified the appropriate locus for tolerance. If we are to interact in a mutually beneficial way with those to whom we lack ties of affection or shared values, then we must accept their concerns, their outlooks and interests, their objectives and values, not as our own, but as appropriate for them to advance in their dealings with us. And this is precisely what tolerance requires. We need not like what they like or want what they want, but we must accept their likings and wantings as legitimate for them. And reciprocally, we expect from them the same recognition of the legitimacy of our own concerns, the same disposition to tolerate our objectives and values. No stronger endorsement of each other is required or called for, but this weak endorsement is essential if we are to perceive our interactions as genuinely cooperative.

Common objectives and shared objectives are bonds that help create a shared identity, a sense, one might say, of “us”. But at the same time they help create a sense of difference from those with other objectives and values, a sense of “them” as opposed to “us”. And this sense of difference, of otherness, may stand in the way of tolerance. A community of mutual, rather than common advantage may not generate a strong sense of identity among its members, but equally it does not generate a sense of otherness. For a community of mutual advantage is not exclusive in scope. It admits anyone who is able and willing to contribute to an exchange of benefits. It harnesses differences among persons so that they contribute to mutual advantage. And it thereby invites a willingness to respect those differences.

A community of mutual advantage can thus transcend cultural boundaries. Deep differences in objectives and values remain compatible with mutually beneficial interaction. Mutual benefit is not automatically forthcoming, of course; skill and care are required to devise ways in which it can be secured. And differing objectives may give rise to conflict, as when each of two cultures seeks to shape the entire world in its image. But my concern here is to indicate a possibility, not to examine in detail how it may or may not be realized. I shall however return to the problem of conflicting objectives as my enquiry proceeds.

The thesis that I am propounding is that persons owe one another tolerance of their values and objectives given the possibility of mutually advantageous interaction. In a world in which global interdependence is increasingly the norm, this possibility for mutual
advantage becomes more and more widespread. If groups are largely independent of each other, then the each has little need to respond to the different values and objectives of the others. There is no rationale for tolerance, but little occasion for active intolerance. But of course, as I have already noted, when such groups do come in to contact, the ones that enjoy technological superiority are likely to ride roughshod over the others, and justify their exercise of domination by appealing to the superiority of their own way of life. The idea of a “cooperative venture for mutual advantage” has yet to enter into their thinking. For them, tolerance has no rationale. But for us it does. As we become more and more aware of the possibilities for mutually beneficial interaction, we become more and more subject to the norm of tolerance.

Why is this so? Why are participants, actual or potential, in mutually beneficial interaction owed tolerance by their fellows? Why does the fact that tolerance is a condition of mutual advantage give rise to an obligation to tolerance? The answer to this question goes to the heart of our understanding of morality. I have long advocated a contractarian perspective, in which moral requirements are defended by showing that were persons in a position to determine jointly the conditions, institutions, and practices governing their interaction - their social framework - they would rationally agree to adhere to these requirements, provided their fellows would similarly agree. I then argue that fair mutual advantage elicits rational agreement - that persons would rationally agree to those practices and conditions that are required if persons are to expect social interaction to yield each the same proportion of expected possible benefit as his or her fellows. Now just as truthfulness, promise-keeping, straightforward dealing, and other familiar moral practices pass this test of rational agreement, so does tolerance. If we are to interact for our fair mutual benefit, then we must accept the ways and values of each as a basis for determining that benefit. We must not try to impose our own ways and values on others, and of course we must not allow others to impose their ways and values on us. Recognizing the role of tolerance in realizing mutual benefit, we would, insofar as we are rational, agree to be bound by its demands. Tolerance then is a contractarian virtue, owed by each participant in a cooperative venture for mutual advantage to his or her fellows.
Tolerance is a cool virtue. Because it addresses our behaviour towards those who do not engage our emotions, and because it is tied to our concern with a benefit that includes our own, it is a virtue whose merit appears most clearly in reflection. Some may not find this a recommendation, thinking of virtuous dispositions as both more emotionally charged and more selfless. But we might here remember Hume, who calls justice a “cautious, jealous virtue”, and find a parallel with tolerance. For the tolerant person neither tolerates indiscriminately, but is cautious in the scope of her toleration, nor tolerates without regard to the presence of a reciprocal disposition to tolerate in the other, guarding jealously, we might say, her own values and objectives in her interactions with others.

Although I am not defending a Kantian account of tolerance, it is worth noting that in accepting the ends and values of others as their legitimate concerns, and in not seeking to impose her own values on them, she shows the respect that is at the core of treating others as ends in themselves. But whereas Kantians see this as required by the very idea of rational agency, so that tolerance is owed others as rational beings, the contractarian limits the demand for accepting others ends as their proper concerns to the context of mutual advantage. Accepting the ways of others is demanded, not by others being rational agents, but by others being participants, actually or potentially, in a cooperative venture for mutual advantage. Now this immediately raises questions about the place of tolerance in the real world, where interaction, between both individuals and groups, is frequently non-cooperative, benefitting some but not others, or only marginally cooperative, benefitting some to a much greater extent than others.

But questions of tolerance need not arise in many of these interactions. Failure to achieve mutual advantage need not be linked to differences in ways and values. You and I may both be concerned with personal, material gain, and this may lead to competition between us in which each seeks to profit at the expense of the other. No question of tolerance arises here; we accept each other’s concerns as legitimate. What is of concern to our enquiry is then a quite special context of interaction, when cooperation is hindered or made impossible by the opposed objectives and values of the parties.

I have defended the relevance and value of tolerance in interactions in which persons lack positive emotional ties and do not share objectives. Tolerance ensures that each person
respects the autonomy of his fellows, their freedom to determine their own objectives and
to decide their own values. But as I have already noted, there are certain limits on the
objectives and values that each may hold. If some seek a society in which all conform to
the same faith, while others seek instead a society in which each chooses her own faith, if
any, then cooperation in the area of religion may seem impossible. Any outcome that
advances the concerns of one group hinders the concerns of the other. In this conflict,
tolerance may seem irrelevant.

Let us return to the contractarian perspective and ask what each of the two parties - those
supporting a single faith and those embracing free choice - would find it reasonable to
agree to as conditions of interaction. And here a paradox might seem to present itself. The
advocates of a single faith would want to be free to advocate and work for their position.
But the only agreement they could expect to achieve that would leave them free would be
one that embraced free choice. On the other hand, the defenders of free choice would want
to ban those who would seek to impose one faith. But they could not achieve this by
agreement. The most they could hope for would be an agreement that would leave all
parties free to advocate their own position. But then tolerance would be part of any
reasonable agreement between advocates of a single faith and defenders of free choice.

But can this easy argument be right? No. For the supposed agreement is one neither party
would be prepared to honour. The reason is simple - the supposed agreement fails to
determine interaction for mutual advantage. Both the defenders of a single faith and the
advocates of pluralism would prefer not to interact with the other party, whose very
existence is, for its opponents, a deplorable contingency. If the presence of the other party
is an unwelcome one, then interaction between the parties can not provide mutual
advantage.

So what should be said about tolerance in the situation of religious conflict that I have
envisaged, and that seems to be manifested in the real world? In my view, tolerance on the
part of either party is not always a moral requirement. Neither need have good reason to
accept the ways and values of the other as something owed that other. It may of course be
prudent for one or both of the parties not to seek to prevent the activities and repress the
expression of the views of the other, perhaps for fear of retaliation or costly conflict.
Tolerance of the other may prove a pragmatic necessity. But this does not make it a virtue for persons or cultures with directly opposed objectives.

But these considerations understate the case for tolerance of opposed and even hostile views. As is well known, views, and particularly extreme views, may thrive under repression. If they are permitted to express themselves, then they may find it harder to demonize their opponents, and to maintain the siege mentality that adds to their appeal. Persons may change or moderate their views, so that over time enemies become potential partners in cooperation. Hobbes, while licensing us to use “all the helps and advantages of war” nevertheless commanded us to “seek peace”. Treating opponents as if they were potential partners is a form of peace-seeking not to be underestimated, though of course not to be followed blindly. This extended case for tolerance does not represent it as owed. Used to try to convert opposition into cooperation, tolerance looks to future hope rather than present desert. But this does not deny it all moral significance. Tolerance of opponents who could become cooperators may be a prudent policy, but it is more than that - it is an attempt to establish a relationship governed by moral norms.

And this brings out the key moral significance of tolerance. On a contractarian view, the key relationships among persons or groups that are necessary for a “cooperative venture for mutual advantage” are central to morality. Tolerance expresses the respect persons can have for each other without sharing particular objectives and values. Without a tolerant readiness to accept - although not sharing - the objectives and values of others, many of the conflicts that plague today’s world must seem intractable. In Northern Ireland power sharing is supposed to exist between groups who suspect each other, not unreasonably, as seeking dominance rather than genuine cooperation. Many Protestants and Catholics do not see the other as engaged in a bona fide effort to work together to the benefit of members of both religious communities. Neither group finds it easy to view the objectives of the other - Irish unity for the Catholics, the British connection for the Protestants - as legitimate, and neither may seem prepared genuinely to work for an all-embracing Northern Irish community. Five years after the Good Friday agreements to end the struggle between Catholics and Protestants, intolerance remains the order of the day, as the recent elections in Northern Ireland made amply clear.
In mentioning Northern Ireland - or in mentioning the Israeli-Palestinian situation which equally displays mutual intolerance - I am not claiming that the lack of tolerance is straightforwardly unjustifiable. Neither party to either conflict may judge that it owes tolerance to the other, given the reasonable suspicions each has of its opponent. But I am calling into question the unwillingness that each party - again in both conflicts - seems to have both to defuse these suspicions and to make clear its readiness to move towards reciprocal tolerance. This is not the occasion, and I am not a qualified person, to embark on an analysis of either the Irish or the Palestinian conflict. But each should find some of the objectives and concerns of its opponent to be understandable and even reasonable for the opponent to hold - and this offers a basis for exploring the possibility of tolerance and cooperation. But to go beyond this observation is no part of my expertise.

I have been exploring links between tolerance and mutual advantage. The prospect of mutual advantage invites tolerance; the attainment of mutual advantage requires tolerance. The other side of this equation is that the lack of mutual advantage affords no case for tolerance, although as I have been suggesting, there are complications here when mutual advantage is seen as a possibility but not, or not yet, an actuality. But I now want to turn to a very different context, one in which arguments for and against tolerance come into conflict. The problem that I want to examine in relation to tolerance is that of liberal imperialism. The connection may not be immediately obvious so let me set out the nature of the problem and tie it to our enquiry into tolerance and mutual advantage.

Let me begin with a disclaimer. In discussing liberal imperialism, I am not primarily concerned with empirical questions about its place in the real world. I shall indeed refer to real situations as plausible exemplifications of my claims, but nothing in my argument turns on the correctness of these alleged examples. I am concerned primarily with a doctrine which has its advocates, and which some would see as one of the strands in the exercise of power by leading Western nations, in particular perhaps Britain, France, and currently the United States, in relation to parts of the world that have exhibited ways and values very different from those espoused, if not always followed, in the West. In particular my remarks should not be seen as either supportive or condemnatory of the American intervention in Iraq, although combined with factual premises that fall beyond
my expertise some judgment might follow. What I want to say is intended to be relevant to real world situations, but as in itself insufficient to ground an assessment of those situations.

The imperial ideal is perhaps most succinctly expressed by the French, the “mission civilisatrice”. To the French, this meant turning “natives” into Frenchmen. To the British, who did not believe it possible to turn anyone into an Englishman, it meant readying supposedly backward or primitive peoples for Westminster-type self-government. For Americans it may mean creating new groups of never-satiated consumers. Whatever it means, the imperial power sees itself as entitled to reshape other peoples, with their aberrant ways and values, into participants in a society modelled on its own.

But my concern is not with imperialism in general, but specifically with liberal imperialism. The underlying idea is that other societies fail to guarantee fundamental human rights to some or all of their members. They may be undemocratic, denying persons the right to participate in choosing their governors. They may be racist or ethnicist, subordinating one group of persons - sometimes but by no means always a minority - to another. Blacks in apartheid South Africa, Muslims in Serb-ruled Kosovo, Shiites and Kurds in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, all come readily to mind. Or they may be sexist, practicing female circumcision, requiring women to be veiled, and banning their public presence unless accompanied by a husband, father or brother.

The liberal imperialist advocates intervention in behalf of democracy, or racial and ethnic equality, or sexual equality. The form of intervention he proposes will of course depend on particular circumstances; he need not advocate armed force as the best or the usual approach. In some situations, indeed, he may recognize that his intervention would be futile or counter-productive. But these are practical considerations. His principle is clear.

In his advocacy of intervention, however limited and qualified it may be, he shows himself unwilling to tolerate the social ways and values that lead to violations of what he understands as human rights. The liberal imperialist need not adopt the traditional attitude of cultural superiority that is clearly expressed in the phrase “mission civilisatrice”. He may well find this attitude condescending. Cultural superiority is not his concern. Rather
his emphasis is on the moral failing of the society in which he proposes to intervene; its refusal to show equal respect for its members, to treat them as autonomous individuals, to work for their fair mutual benefit.

But the liberal imperialist’s lack of tolerance does not reflect the belief that the values and objectives which he rejects are incompatible with interaction between his society and the other that would be mutually advantageous. The values of the Wahabi sect of Islam that dominates Saudi Arabia is in many respects as opposed to liberal values and objectives as can readily be imagined. But this difference need not prevent and has not prevented the United States and Saudi Arabia cooperating for the mutual advantage of the two societies. So there may be a conflict between the doctrine of liberal imperialism and the realities of mutual advantage. Liberal imperialism would justify an intolerant attitude toward a country with the practices and values embraced by the Wahabi; mutual advantage might support tolerance.

But the doctrines espoused by the Wahabi sect itself are supportive neither of tolerance nor of mutual advantage. A society that excludes women from its public spaces can not plausibly be represented as affording benefits to men and women alike, even if some of the women in the society, having no first hand familiarity with other views, themselves espouse Wahabi doctrine. There is then a significant connection between liberal imperialism and the demand for mutual advantage. The social practices and values which the liberal imperialist refuses to tolerate are ones that fail the test of mutual advantage, when it is applied not to the relation between two societies, one liberal and one not, but within the non- or anti-liberal society whose practices the imperialist rejects, and into which the he proposes to intervene. The justification for liberal imperialism does not therefore ignore the test of mutual advantage that I have been employing throughout, but applies it in a different context.

In discussing liberal imperialism and mutual advantage, I have used the vocabulary of rights and freedoms which liberals use, along with the vocabulary of advantage and benefit. Liberal imperialists charge other societies with violating fundamental rights of their members; I have interpreted the violation as a denial of fair mutual benefit. In a fuller account, I would try to show how these vocabularies of rights and benefits are linked in a
contractarian framework. But here I can only point to the need to establish a connection which in this enquiry I simply assume.

Let me return now to the liberal imperialist. He is often charged with occupying a morally ambiguous position and our account enables us to see why this is so, without calling his good faith into question. For he refuses to extend the tolerance owing to other societies, not because, or at least not necessarily because, of the way in which they seek to interact with his own society, but because of aspects of their internal structure. It is easy to condemn this as interference. But on the other hand, he refuses to extend tolerance not because, or again not necessarily because, of differences between other societies and his own, but because the particular differences are plausibly judged to constitute deep wrongs, denying the autonomy and respect due all persons.

The liberal imperialist seeks to occupy a universal standpoint, one that all persons can see to be relevant to their interactions. He may readily admit that the ways and values of one society may shock or even offend the members of another society, without in any way justifying them in refusing to tolerate those ways and values. He is not appealing to such reactions which need have no moral force. Equally he is not appealing to principles accepted simply as part of a faith. His appeal is straightforwardly and exclusively to standards of autonomy and benefit that all can understand. What remains controversial in his account is his insistence on the extent of their practical relevance. What remains controversial is whether a liberal society may demand of other societies that they too respect autonomy and fair mutual benefit for their members.

How should we evaluate liberal imperialism? In my view, the problems it creates are not at the level of theory or principle, but at that of practice or application. How to guarantee the good faith of the supposed liberal imperialist? But this is not a question that falls within my philosophical inquiry. All I can do at this point is to raise a warning flag. However attractive we may find the ideal of bringing autonomy and fair mutual benefit to all of the peoples of the world, we need to heed the terrible costs that have resulted from attempts to implement other ideals.
But whether or not we reject liberal imperialism as a policy, we may acknowledge its role in delimiting the scope of tolerance as a moral requirement. We may agree that those who espouse ways and values that the liberal imperialist denounces have no *de jure* claim on our tolerance, even if prudence leads us to tolerate them. The ideal of society as a cooperative venture for mutual advantage thus plays two roles in determining the contexts in which tolerance is a virtue, owed to those whom we tolerate. Tolerance is owed those persons and groups who are willing to interact with us on terms that yield fair mutual advantage, as long as, in the case of groups and cultures, the members interact among themselves in ways that afford them mutual respect and fair mutual advantage. Tolerance is not owed to those persons and groups who are not prepared to interact with us on terms affording fair mutual advantage, although we may extend tolerance to them an effort to bring about a change in their ways. And it is not owed to those who interact among themselves in ways that exclude some of them from autonomy and fair mutual advantage.

Tolerance is then a virtue significantly limited in the scope of its application. We must agree with John Locke that some are not at all to be tolerated, even if we reject his identification of those not to be tolerated are those who deny the existence of a deity. Locke thought that only belief in a deity made moral relationships including tolerance possible. I have claimed that the prospect of mutual benefit makes moral relationships possible and so provides a demand for tolerance. We should prize the conditions that make tolerance a moral demand, but we should not pretend to find them everywhere.