

3. *“In a technological age public professional interaction requires neutrality of thought for effective collaboration and political coexistence. As an administrative attitude neutrality differs from tolerance which is an ethical virtue; but neutrality in the professional sphere is implied and included within the ethical virtue of tolerance. Note that this objective modification of the virtue of tolerance, from patience in regard to other persons’ defective acts to permission of different types of activity, is an objective modification of virtue in our technological society”.*

Tomonobu Imamichi, “The Concept of an Eco-ethics and the Development of Moral Thought” (1989)

In his quote from “The Concept of an Eco-ethics and the Development of Moral Thought” philosopher Tomonobu Imamichi discusses the distinction between tolerance and neutrality as an administrative attitude, claiming that neutrality is, in fact, an objective modification of the said virtue of tolerance. In this essay I’m going to go through the concepts of tolerance, administrative neutrality and neutrality in the professional sphere as used in the quote, express my own interpretations of them and then conclude the text by expressing whether Imamichi is right or not.

To begin my essay, I would like for us to imagine we’re in a business lounge with three women, Anna, Jeanne and Juliet, who all share a passion for philosophy but who also come from rather different backgrounds. Anna is a Christian woman who acts according to the Bible, respecting other religions and cultures but firmly believing that hers is the right one. Jeanne, on the other hand, is rather passionate about human rights and liberalism and therefore supports tolerance of other cultures and religions, claiming that we can’t tell which ethical set of rules is the best one. Juliet is a Muslim woman, whom Anna likes wholeheartedly but whose religion and traditions she can’t really grasp. Now, as we are in the business lounge, Juliet excuses herself to pray as she does five times each day. Anna shakes her head as she gets herself another cup of coffee, sighs, and tells Jeanne that she doesn’t understand how Juliet finds praying worthwhile after having been doing it for all her life. This causes Jeanne to frown, and she tells Juliet to start being more tolerant about other people’s cultures. Anna is bemused, for she thought that her statement was perfectly neutral and by no means discriminating. As she tries to come up with an answer to Jeanne, she starts to wonder what the difference between neutrality and tolerance actually is.

We shall look back in history before discussing the concepts of “neutrality” and “tolerance” further, and allow us to dwell in the concept of “virtue” for a short while. Ancient philosophers such as Socrates, Platon and Aristotle were all supporters of virtue ethics, a theory in the sphere of normative ethics that insists that people should thrive to develop different kind of qualities, such as rationality, generality and courage. It is important to notice that the word “ethics” wasn’t used in the same way as it is used in contemporary philosophy: the goal of ethics was to find the way to live your life to the fullest, to achieve happiness, not to set universal moral rules or find ways to solve ethical problems. Thus, such qualities – often called “virtues” - were considered necessary if one desired to achieve *eudaimonia* (often translated as “true happiness”). Tolerance was one of the virtues in Ancient Greece, which is quite reasonable if we look back in history, since Ancient Greece was, despite its rather discriminating policy towards immigrants and other minorities, a cosmopolitan society with people from all over the Mediterranean.

Back in the business lounge Anna is wondering what Jeanne actually meant when she told her to be tolerant. As we stated earlier, tolerance is considered a virtue in Western countries, and it has become more and more important as ideologies such as liberalism gained popularity among Enlightenment philosophers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Tolerance is often associated with normative relativism, an ethical statement that claims that we should tolerate all cultures and their ethical norms. Jeanne seems to support normative relativism, since her way of telling Anna to tolerate Juliet’s culture is definitely a normative statement: she’s saying that Anna *should* be tolerant towards Islam and its traditions, which clearly implies that being tolerant is ethically right whereas there’s something wrong in being intolerant towards other cultures. Normative relativism can also be adapted into subjectivism, the supporters of which argue that we shouldn’t only tolerate cultural norms but also personal norms and ways of seeing the world. Given this, Anna shouldn’t only tolerate the way Juliet prays five times a day and doesn’t eat certain dishes, but also the way her other colleagues act even if there were no cultural explanations for their actions. Normative relativism and subjectivism have gained popularity in today’s multicultural world, but I think that this theory is problematic and even paradoxical, which I’ll explain further later on in this essay.

Let us move on to discuss the concept of “neutrality”. Anna has finally managed to open her mouth to give Jeanne a rather bitter answer to her previous command, telling her that her comment on Juliet’s praying was perfectly neutral. The difference between neutrality and tolerance is crucial here: I think that, following the guidelines of Imamichi’s quote, neutrality

is more of an attitude, not a virtue per se. As I stated earlier, tolerance is a virtue that, in one way or another, involves actions. In Ancient Greece the only way to live a happy and virtuous life was to practise these virtues consistently, and therefore Anna would have to practise tolerance every day in order to become tolerant and thus at least partially virtuous. Neutrality, on the other hand, doesn't seem to involve actions in the sense that being tolerant does: one can be perfectly neutral and indifferent about someone practising a religion the values and traditions of which they don't support, but still consider the said religion as something "wrong". However, in his quote philosopher Imamichi makes a clear distinction between administrative and professional neutrality, and he claims that toleration is actually "implied and included in within the ethical virtue of tolerance". This distinction will be discussed more thoroughly later on in this essay, for right now we will be concentrating on the argument between Anna and Jeanne.

By the time Juliet is done with her prayers and gets back to the business lounge Anna and Jeanne are already at the edge of a heated argument. Anna decides to challenge Jeanne by asking her whether she thinks that there are universal and fundamental moral laws or not. Jeanne is taken aback by the question and hesitantly answers that she thinks that there is no specific "ethical sphere". Jeanne's answer can be supported by a philosophical theory called Ockham's razor, which insists that the simplest explanation is the best, meaning that things such as unnecessary substances and spheres should be excluded from philosophical theories. Ockham's razor has often been used to attack metaphysical theories that involve more than one substance, such as Rene Descartes' Cartesian dualism, and it can be also adapted into ethical discussion. Given this, Jeanne might for example argue that Anna's ideas of God and Heaven should be excluded from the conversation completely. Judging by her answer Jeanne also seems to support meta-ethical antirealism, which normative relativism often holds as an unsaid assumption. This meta-ethical theory states that there are no fundamental ethical norms per se and has been supported by various other theories, such as David Hume's emotivism. If we look back to Ancient Greece once more we might notice that, in some sense, meta-ethical antirealism and meta-ethical relativism were first introduced by Protagoras, who famously stated that "man is the measure of all things". This quote by Protagoras can be interpreted as a statement for truths being relative and dependent on the subject.

I think, however, that meta-ethical antirealism and normative relativism are a dangerous combination as far as philosophy is concerned, and eventually lead to problems. Anna notices

this too, and triumphantly states that if Jeanne really thinks there are no fundamental moral laws, she shouldn't go around spreading the idea of tolerance either. The combination of these two theories is definitely paradoxical, and Anna's statement leaves Jeanne speechless for a while. Now, let's try to combine normative relativism with meta-ethical realism, which states that certain ethical rules are, in fact, universal and fundamental, and can be derived from for example the Bible or even certain evolutionary qualities that all humans share. This philosophical combination seems to claim that even though there are ethical norms that are good and, on the contrary, ethical norms that are bad, we still ought to tolerate the norms that are bad, for toleration would most likely to be an ethical norm that is considered good. However, there is one quite obvious objection to this, for it seems like we should actually also tolerate intolerance if we were to follow this ethical theory. This is actually a problem visible in various modern societies, which have minorities that might discriminate certain members of their community. In a situation like this the government must decide whether to tolerate the intolerant behaviour of the members of the said minority or take action and try to change the practices of the minority. It can also be argued that normative relativism doesn't take into consideration the fact that somebody must decide which traditions actually belong to certain cultures, for there will always be people that don't approve of some traditions of their own culture. If it's for the majority of the community to decide which traditions are a crucial part of their culture, minorities might be discriminated once again. One can also criticise normative relativism by using philosopher David Hume's thought experiment called "Hume's guillotine". The famous quote, "no ought from is", insists that the world doesn't have values per se, meaning that even though we can make the descriptive statement of different cultures valuing different things and having norms that differ from each other, we cannot say that this is a good thing or a bad thing.

Let us get back to the business lounge, where Juliet has been standing at the door for a while now, listening to her friends' argument. She decides to take part in the conversation, and asks – directing her question to Anna – why she thinks that neutrality is any better than tolerance. Anna takes a sip of her coffee – which has got cold ages ago – and reminds Juliet of the problems of tolerance, those that we have gone through in this essay. The command to be tolerant is a normative statement that leads to problems from various meta-ethical standpoints, whereas being neutral is more of an attitude that doesn't seemingly hold any meta-ethical assumptions. Juliet sits down next to Jeanne and asks Anna if she's familiar with the concept of "blind justice". As Anna shakes her head, Jeanne begins to explain the concept

as she gets herself a cup of tea. Blind justice is often defined as justice that doesn't take cultural and individual differences into consideration, which leads to a society blind to factors that make people different from each other, such as culture, special needs and socio-economical back round. Given this, the rights of a blind justice –thriven society are mostly negative, which means that everybody has the same opportunities – at least in principle. Juliet insists that true tolerance includes actively supporting certain minorities by for example guaranteeing that cultural minorities can express their ideology by using certain kinds of clothes and that people with special needs will get economical support in order to able to live their life to the fullest. Neutrality, on the other hand, is a principle a blind society would most likely support, for it doesn't involve any action-taking per se; it only condemns actively discriminating certain culture. Juliet stirs her tea to allow the spoonful of sugar to melt and asks Anna if she would like to live in a blind society in which Christians were a minority. In such society Christians wouldn't get state-funded churches and probably not even Bibles in languages that they're fluent in. Anna takes a sip of her cold coffee once again, frowning, and shakes her head.

Jeanne is now smiling triumphantly, but Juliet is nowhere near done. The attitude she just explained by using the example of blind justice resembles an attitude that is called "administrative neutrality" in Imamichi's quote, whereas neutrality in the professional sphere is whole another concept. As stated in the citation, neutrality in the professional sphere is actually implied and included in tolerance. Given this, my interpretation of the quote is that neutrality of this kind also requires action taking: one must decide to be neutral and practise neutrality to reach that goal, just like the Ancient virtue ethics –supporters we discussed earlier, whereas administrative neutrality is most likely due to ignorant and lazy politicians that don't bother getting involved in the lives of their countries' minorities. Neutrality in the professional sphere does, however, differ from tolerance in the sense that whereas tolerance is a virtue valued especially in the West, neutrality is more of an objective attitude. Some pluralists have even claimed that human rights –the main values of which include tolerance - are too Western and don't take cultural differences into consideration. Given this, neutrality is definitely an objective term in comparison with tolerance, which is undeniably based on liberal, Western values that date back to the French Revolution and Enlightenment and Jeanne, being a supporter of multiculturalism, definitely doesn't want to force Western culture on anyone. Juliet concluded her speech by saying that neutrality is included in tolerance, but tolerance is something more than neutrality: it's a normative statement, and therefore leads to certain

problems, whereas neutrality in the professional sphere allows us to question certain values rather than blindly accepting everything, even intolerance.

To conclude my essay I would like to say that I think that in his quote philosopher Tomonobu Imamichi makes an important distinction between administrative neutrality and neutrality in the professional sphere. I agree with the way he includes neutrality in tolerance but also points out that tolerance is something more and therefore not always the best option in modern world. As Juliet finished her speech about the difference between toleration and neutrality in the professional sphere and took a sip of her green tea, Jeanne and Anna both stared at her in awe, realising that their argument had been practically pointless. The three women continued their business meeting in peace for a few more hours, being careful with touching the subject of tolerance – and Anna didn't comment on the way Juliet didn't go out for drinks afterwards.