Topic 3.

Introduction

In this essay, the notion of tolerance is explored based on Tomonobu Imachimi's theses on the evolution of tolerance in modern society. Although Tomonobu Imachimi highlights the different considerations of tolerance before and after the transition to the technological society, I attempt to show that the primitive content of the notion does not change; thus, I figure out what generally tolerance consists of by means of conceptual analysis of the term. This analysis leads to the formation of a definition of tolerance which includes all of its aspects mentioned in the quotations. Furthermore, this definition serves as a basis to prove the statement that neutrality of thought is a necessary condition of tolerance. Having shown this, the value of tolerance in modern society is justified in terms of different theories of normative Ethics; that is, the reasons why tolerance ought to be considered a moral virtue and more specifically, a vital part of social coexistence and political life. Finally, based on the definition of tolerance I propose, the means by which tolerance can be cultivated in modern communities is clarified.

1.   Tolerance is the voluntary acceptance of alterity.

According to Tomonobu Imachimi, the very essence of tolerance -which is assumed by the philosopher to be a moral virtue- has been modified due to the changes which occurred as a result of the historical event of the transition to technological society. More specifically, Imachimi argues that the terms in which tolerance is defined have changed, since during the Enlightment era, when the use of the word became increasingly common among philosophers and political thinkers, tolerance was thought to be a form of patience towards the acts of other people, but today, it accounts for the "permission of different types of activity". However, there is a basic problem which stems from this assumption: although tolerance is thought to be an ethical virtue, the fact that is has undergone a modification suggests that virtues have no fixed ethical values. This conclusion is problematic because it leads to implications of trivial relativism, which are unacceptable within normative Ethics.

Therefore, before putting tolerance into moral terms, it is of profound importance that the notion be defined in a logically consistent way, in order for its content not to be affected by the historical and social background in which it is used. In that sense, it is a fallacy to assert that the definition of a term changes because individuals understand it differently. In other words, the essence of tolerance must be taken to be fixed; the only thing which changes is its understanding by individuals, who emphasize different aspects of the same definition.

Hence, a definition of tolerance must be reached in strictly logical terms, so as to include all these different aspects. In classical logic, the method of constructing an intensional definition (that is defining a term by listing all of its necessary and sufficient conditions) is the Aristotelian format of *genus* and *differentia*: the genus is the portion of the definition which consists of another definition; in other words, it is the conceptual "family" which the term to be defined belongs to; the differentia is an essential property of that term which sets is aside from all other elements of the same genus. For, example, when definition knowledge as

justified true belief, the genus of the definition is the set of all true beliefs and the differentia is that such a belief is justified.

In our case, the genus and the differentia of tolerance have to be determined to reach a complete definition. It is reasonable that the genus of tolerance be considered to be acceptance of alterity. Since it cannot be denied that tolerance is a type of behaviour which has value only when it is expressed towards others and not the self, then acceptance of alterity is an appropriate genus for tolerance. A possible objection to this would be that the way in which alterity is used in the expression is not well-defined, but this is not the case here: alterity is considered in its most general sense, that is, everything the self faces as different: people of other nationality, religion, external characteristics, character and so on.

But not all the cases of such an acceptance suggest tolerance. Consider, for instance, a dictator who establishes a law that everybody should accept other people's religious beliefs. It is highly likely that everybody would do so, but this would not mean tolerance; rather, it would be an oppression of people's right not to accept an idea. This leads to the determination of the differentia which is to complete our definition. This unique property of tolerance is that it is voluntary, that is, a product of a free and autonomous will. Hence, the definition I propose is the following:

Tolerance is the voluntary acceptance of alterity

This is a complete and successful definition, since it implies no logical contradictions by mixing up logical and ethical terms. Moreover, it includes both approaches to tolerance mentioned by Imamichi because any form of patience to other people's acts as well as permission pf different types of activity are both implied by the above definition.

2. Neutrality of thought is a necessary condition of tolerance

On the basis of the above definition, Tomonobu Imamichi's opinion that neutrality of thought is included in tolerance can be justified and be no more a mere assertion. Acceptance of alterity implies becoming conscious of what alterity consists of. This means that the subject which tolerates attempts to go beyond the limits of itself and try to understand the other. This can be achieved in many ways, since human interaction can take place in many different levels, but the most reasonable among them is that of rational thought.

Thinking as independently from emotional and non-logical misconceptions as possible eventually leads people closer to the ideal of a holistic point of view, a mental state in which alterity will no more be a criterion of acceptance or no acceptance. This viewpoint of perceiving the world as whole and constantly attempting to figure out the connecting relations between the self and the other are highly valued in Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics,* where Spinoza argues that rational thought is a central notion in building up a morally valuable behaviour. More specifically, Spinoza refers to the subjects perceiving the world *sub specie aeternitatis, "*under the aspect of eternity", which is the absolute ideal of going beyond the limits of the self by eliminating all the subjective elements which set us apart from the other. By allowing our rational thought to surpass time, the greatest obstacle in eliminating any deceptive differences, we reach the ideal of a free and valuable moral behaviour. Since

rational thought is the best way to achieve such an objectivity, it becomes clear that it is a vital part of building up a character based on moral virtues.

Following the reasoning of Spinoza, and assuming that an ideal moral behaviour consists of a combination of morally right types of behaviour (they may be also called virtues), it has been shown that neutrality of thought is a necessary condition of the type of behaviour determined as tolerance. Tolerance seems, thus, to be a result of a procedure of rational thought, which is aims at trying to be objective and not affected by any emotional states which may prevent one from that type of behaviour.

Yet, this raises a major objection to such rationalist approaches in ethics, originally expressed by David Hume. By pointing out that "Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions", Hume intended to show that rationality cannot be considered to be completely independent from any other domains of human nature, mainly emotions and somatic needs. So, such a vision of a totally rational self is not realistic. A response to that objection would be that when dealing with ethics, ideals are set for a morally acceptable behaviour, even if it is known that these ideals will never be fully accomplished. Alternately, one could respond that how thing are is different than how things ought to be. In that sense, it can be assumed that tolerance as a result of a rational procedure will never be completely achievable; but it can serve as a guideline of leading a morally valuable life.

3. Further moral justifications of tolerance

The rationalist approach in justifying tolerance can be considered the connecting wire between the logical and the moral analysis of the notion. So, after having defined tolerance and pointing out the characteristics of one of its basic necessary conditions, neutrality of thought, further moral justification could be provided about whether or not tolerance should be considered a moral virtue, as Imamichi states. By considering the two greatest Western ethical theories, Kantianism and Utilitarianism, I attempt to show that tolerance is of great value in both and therefore, accepting either of them implies an adoption of tolerance as a vital part of moral code.

Firstly, Kantian Ethics has as an axiom that what underlies morality is human autonomy, as expressed through rationality. It can be easily understood why this is the case by defining tolerance as a voluntary acceptance of alterity. Since morality in Kantian terms is thought to be an expression of autonomy, then it follows that whatever respects autonomy is morally acceptable. But since tolerance is a way of preserving and protecting alterity by accepting it, it can be argued that it is a form of protect the autonomy of other human beings. Moreover, the fact that tolerance is a voluntary act suggests that it is a product of an autonomous will, which satisfies Immanuel Kant's criterion of freedom for the ethicality of action. Therefore, tolerance is in accordance with Kantian Ethics, and a rejection of it would imply a contradiction with Kant's moral actions.

Trying to reconcile tolerance with Utilitarianism is a more difficult task because of the wide variation of utilitarian doctrines. Since tolerance is explored as a general concept in this essay and not as an individual case, I consider the case of Rule Utilitarianism, according to which an action is morally acceptable if and only if it agrees with a general principle which produces

the greatest amount of happiness in the long run. Again, the fact that tolerance preserves alterity means that it respects the freedom of each individual; so, even if it makes one unhappy to respect the alterity, he/she ought to do so, because this would produce the best possible balance of happiness over unhappiness in the long run.

4. Practical application of Tolerance in modern society

After the theoretical clarification and justification of the notion of tolerance, we can proceed to the practical aspect of it, and mainly answer the question of how it is possible to achieve tolerance in a technological society, as Imamichi suggests. It seems reasonable to use the theoretical devices produced before so as to clarify the means through which society can be oriented to cultivating tolerance.

Let us consider again the definition of the concept: Tolerance is a voluntary acceptance of alterity. By trying to analyse this synthetic definition it can become clear how it is applicable to real life situations. Firstly, consider the differentia: voluntary. Voluntary is intended to mean freely done, so it is explicitly connected to freedom. Therefore, I suggest that two things are vital in satisfying the condition of voluntariness. The first one is about ensuring and protecting the rights and the liberties of citizens within modern states. A citizen can feel closer to the ideal of tolerance if and only if he/she feels free to do so. In other words, a conscious behaviour according to the principle of toleration requires political freedom; only under this circumstance it is possible to establish tolerance as not only a moral but also a political virtue.

The second domain related to the correlation between tolerance and freedom is education. It is not accidental that the world "virtue" has been used when referring to tolerance. The ethical term "virtue" introduced by Aristotle, is about those characteristics of a moral character which can be acquired only through practice and eventually lead to a good character. Therefore, it is substantial that people learn how to exercise their freedom responsibly from a young age so as to acquire the maturity of leading a life based on the principle of tolerance.

When referring to the genus of the definition, "acceptance of alterity" it is obvious that in order to accept alterity we have to experience it first. This implies that tolerance toward the other can only be achieved through coexisting with the other and interacting with it. Hence, experiencing alterity at a social level can function positively towards the direction of a morally acceptable behaviour based on tolerance. Especially in the modern world, where multicultural societies grow very fast it is needed that people come closer and dismiss any principles of isolation and individualism, which do contradict with our age of globalization.

Conclusion

I have discussed the theoretical aspects of the notion of toleration as addressed by Tomonobu Imamichi and proceeded into specifying the ethical value of tolerance from different points of view. This exploration suggests that tolerance gains even more and more importance in the modern world. This fact can also be explained by the rapid extension of the limits of the moral community. Globalization has lead us to revise many of our ethical perspectives, in order to include more people in our moral considerations. However, the fact that our

perspectives change constantly should not be taken to mean that morality changes, too. Moral statements have the same content, it is just vital that we clarify them and rephrase them clearly, so as to adjust them to the conditions of modern life. Tolerance has to be recognized as a necessary part of this process of adjustment.