

Topic: 3. Tomonobu Imamichi

### **From tolerance to neutrality: A tacit schism**

Before starting this essay, it must be stated that tolerance can be broadly defined this way: the pure acceptance of the Other *as* an Other, the ever-openness of human beings to other human beings, with no special conditions put forward, with no discriminations whatsoever. I am aware this is a rather ideal and obsolete conception of this particular term.

Tomonobu Imamichi, in the given quote, is posing the following dichotomy, of which terminology the author of this essay will make use of for the rest of this argumentation: the modern, humanistic virtue of `tolerance`, and the highly pragmatic, formal concept of `neutrality`. There is a certain relationship of co-dependence that Imamichi is trying to establish between these two concepts, and it should be noted that his view is clearly defined by the context of what he calls `the technological age` (therefore another historical breach, but with some subtle implications that we will come back to). For making this co-dependence visible, there is yet another opposition that should be emphasized: the `administrative attitude`, or, as we should infer, the one part trying to preserve the humanitarian, democratic foundations of our civilization, for which tolerance is an ethical virtue *par excellence*, and the `professional sphere`, for which the coldness of neutrality is implicitly intrinsic to tolerance, through a so-called `objective modification`.

The aim of this essay is trying to show how this apparently pragmatic view is, in fact, inhumane, authoritarian, ethically dubious, while still being an absolutely justified politics, for the fact that it (might) suggest the entrance in a new age of thought and also a drift from the usual moral thought of Humanism to a, if not technocentric society, at least a profession-centered one.

We shall, first of all, give a short description of the context which this essay refers to, `the technological age`, and its relationship to another form of contemporary (or post-contemporary) historical delimitation: that is Foucault's anti-humanism, the so-proclaimed `death of man`, which, at a first glance, might seem dubious in its correspondence to Imamichi's view. It must, however, be noted that this parallel is only to show how Foucault's methodology is betraying itself in its explicit attempt to provide a foundation for the post-humanist world, and how Imamichi's social and moral description of our current capitalist society can be seen as a more solid basis for a post-, extra-humanistic historical phase.

Second of all, we shall talk about Derrida's interpretation of hospitality, connecting it with the concept of tolerance, more exactly its specific form of neutrality, and find links between Derrida's view and Imamichi's. We shall find that they are similar concepts, and we could declare that not only is Imamichi's view suppressing, but it is assumedly so, and that is a point of interest for the last chapter of our argumentation.

Thirdly, given the fact that Imamichi's world escapes all form of humanism while still preserving its values, and given the fact that its pragmatism is simultaneously suppressing and sincere, while not expressing it clearly, the author of this essay will express his opinions and speculations on this *moral drift*.

## 1. Foucault demolishing himself. `Our technological society`

Imamichi's situating himself in a differentiated, special period of time can be seen as another historicist attempt to speculate over the future of our society, trying to emphasize over certain break, a declared schism. It is, however, not the case, and the quote is lucidly claiming this: it is a explicitly present and pragmatic view, it is not making any historical suppositions, and this made the author of this essay to feel suspicious about the true nature of this statement. To emphasize this, I have decided to make a comparative chapter between an explicit anti-humanist view (Foucault's) and what I believe to be an implicit, *real* anti-humanist perspective (Imamichi's).

Foucault's plan of writing an a-historical history, a genealogical description (a map) of different aspects of our present society can be seen as one of the most important and risky project in the 20<sup>th</sup> century's human sciences, for the mere fact that its target was to provide a basis for a post-modernity that escapes all orthodox methodologies and concepts. His plan was of delimitating certain attitudes, theories of knowledge, institutions, discourses that, added up, in a particular period of time, could make up for what he calls an *episteme* – not a *saeculum* or a mere generalization, nor a description of the mentality of the people living in that particular age (that being pure anthropology, pure history of culture, the type of study Foucault tried to distinguish himself from), but the description of the way ideas connected themselves and emerged from within the cultural and institutional framework of the time, independently of individuals, but about the people at the same tune. A discovery he made through this `cultural behaviorism` could be the fact that the concept of Man, which is deeply intertwined with the modern Western *episteme*, is a recent invention, having appear merely a few centuries ago, during the Enlightenment, and finding its terminal phase in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of structuralism and post-structuralism in Europe. This has interesting implications. First of all, we are assisting the death of Man as a central figure of the logos – even more, the logos is talking to himself, given the fact that the 20<sup>th</sup> century's philosophy, be it Analytic or Continental, was deeply obsessed with language. Secondly, this death of Man implies the birth of a new era – `post-modernity`, `post-humanity`, the avalanche of `posts` that defined the last decades of the last century.

Foucault's (alongside with other philosophers') situation in this `post-era` was definitely prior to the entrance in this specific era. I.e., it is announcing its arrival, its emergence, but only by situating themselves in the very paradigm they were trying to break. Derrida was very clear about Foucault's self-betrayal in their very popular polemics about *The History of Madness*. Foucault was trying to write a history of Madness, of the big Other of the Western society, the one who lacks in rationality and cannot be explained from within the Cogito. Derrida, in *Cogito and The History of Madness*, is explicit about the fact that the speaking of Madness from a rational point of view is not only impossible, but repressive for the very Other that Foucault was trying to re-appropriate. Foucault was examining the Other from inside the city walls: Madness was tamed and rationalized, programmed, objectified, used against itself. Taking this argument even further, it has two main implications for our essay:

1. For the particular theme of this chapter, i.e., the possibility of post/extra-humanism: Foucault's constant attempt to delimitate a new historical era from a retrograde, humanist one falls short of plan, because this abstract situation in post-history still makes use of the old concepts of Man and History, and therefore it is just opposition, not departure. The grounds are not `shaking`, as Foucault would have put it, and the discourse talking about itself is just a mere figure of speech, since it is just the discourse (the Power) analyzing an external perception of itself, which could be, and most probably is, following Foucault's methods to their ends, just a chimera.

2. For the general theme of this essay, i.e., the possibility of tolerance: The very basic definition of tolerance, that is, the acceptance of the Other, is impossible, for the very fact that any appropriation (be it cultural, racial, religious or other) of the Other is still another form of keeping it at distance, of repressing it, of speaking of it from within one's culture, pretending to having understood the difference, when in fact this could not be fully, perfectly possible, and it should be accepted as thus.

Returning to the implication (1.1), while leaving the second one for later, we can see how any attempt of anti-humanism is self-demolishing, for the mere fact that it makes use of the same concepts it is trying to break from. Therefore, anti-humanism is just another form of humanism. If there exists a form of anti-humanism, it must not be explicit. And this brings us back to Imamichi's quote, since the concept of tolerance is connected to the concept of humanism.

As we have stated, this essay is to show how this brutally pragmatic view has dubious implications which are not dubiously expressed. One of them would be the fact that the 'post-humanist' age contemporary philosophers are so obsessed about is no longer called that way and it is no longer defined by anthropocentrism – the departure is already clarified, we are living in a 'technological' age, and Man, while still the possessor of this spectacular technological development, is clearly the object of a subtle change, for the mere fact that he is now living in a 'professional sphere', he is an agent on the platform. He no longer possess a Soul in the classical sense. He suffered an 'objective modification': man has been objectified, has lost its innermost humanity.

Our aim is certainly not critical of this position, but only to show that: a) what was thought to be a break from the enslavement of the old dogmas was made in the very spirit of those dogmas, and our example is principally Foucault, but we could extend that to other philosophers as well (Lyotard, Bachelard, Badiou, Zizek and, even if it is self-assumed in his case, Derrida), and b) the talk about tolerance from the point of view expressed by Imamichi, in that particular quote, is purely empty, for it does exceed its paradigm without even being aware of it, and is using apparently 'living' concepts in a formal, perverse way. There is also a c) that says: the fact that the concept of tolerance is empty of meaning is of no interest here, ethics became absolutely formal, and that is a fundamental description of what the technological age is aiming for.

## **2. Derrida & Hospitality versus Imamichi & Neutrality**

Derrida's view on hospitality is one of the aporias the Algerian philosopher talked about the most in his works. His aim is to classically deconstruct the familiar concept of hospitality, which is similar, if not synonymous, with the concept of tolerance as expressed by Imamichi. What Derrida finds dubious about this humane attitude is the fact that it is still a form of repression, of keeping a distance, of suppressing. This can be related to (1.2), to some degree, and the explanation is the following one:

If one agrees to be hospitable (tolerant) of another person, and agrees that this person can come freely to one's personal place, and has the permission to 'feel like she's at home' in one's personal space, there still exists, in a subtle way, a form of suppression, for the reason that, *a priori* to the act of toleration itself, there exists a level of permission, of *allowing*, which implies there exists an indefinite hierarchy. In this indefinite hierarchy, the one who is allowing another's activity in his proximity, in his 'personal world', is still the sovereign, and it is known by the both sides. Therefore there still is a delimitation between Me and the Other, which makes the concept of pure

hospitality, of pure tolerance, impossible, for it would be, *sui generis*, violence against the Other. Derrida's whole social and political philosophy was an attempt to make this violence visible and clear; it is a project against violence in its subtlest forms.

Going back to Imamichi, we can observe that the author is talking about, beside the classical concept of toleration, with its obviously hospitality implications, the concept of neutrality, the aim of which is clearly defined as being 'effective collaboration' and 'political coexistence'. It is also a result of the appearance of the 'professional sphere', in opposition with the retrograde 'administrative' sphere, and a mutation in the moral thought of 'our technological society'. Imamichian neutrality is fully expressed, fully assumed Derridian hospitality: it is 'this objective modification of the virtue of tolerance, from patience in regard to other person's defective acts to *permission* [my italics] of different types of activity'.

Neutrality is interesting to us because it shows yet another change in view between poststructuralism and today's technological, professional pragmatism – what was considered to be an ethical abomination has now become a contract, what was considered to be a revolutionary paradox is now a complete triviality. And that brings us to the third chapter of our argumentation.

### 3. Friendly professionalism

While the 'administrative' sphere is still mentioned by Imamichi, it is clear that it is not the point of interest in the given quote. It might be used as an auxiliary term for the 'dying' humanist age, although I highly doubt this is the implication, and I highly doubt that Imamichi's description is a form of revolutionary break from the tradition of Enlightenment. I would say it is really showing how the history of Enlightenment has become something completely different, or even more: that it has barely lived up to his name before being 'objectively modified'. We can begin to describe this system of the professional sphere, see its elements and the relationships between them:

- 1) This 'technological society' is a departure from any subject-centered attitude. Moreover, the subject has now a professional interface, she is purely virtual. She is an individual, with her hopes, dreams, loves, anxieties, talents, differences, but those are purely virtual. They are *pseudo-subjects*.
- 2) The attitude between the pseudo-subjects is one of neutrality. That is one of both acceptance and being accepted. This is friendly professionalism, and it implies that: 1) you communicate, 2) you work together, 3) you sometimes express feelings to each other, 4) once you are together, you are *not* private, you are your *persona*.
- 3) The relationship between the professionalism sphere is similar to those enumerated in (3.2). It is purely formal, and it cannot be otherwise.

### 4. Conclusion

What is tolerance then? It seems that this drift is not an a-moralist one, as some philosophers from the Nietzschean tradition would have expected the future to look like. The idea of tolerance still starts numerous discussions. The thesis of this essay is to show that the Imamichian perspective, while being widely accepted in our day-to-day activity, and seen as being founded on common sense and efficiency, has wider implications that what would be expected. It is anti-humanist while still preserving the individual's role in the society (the Imamichian society is therefore atomic, not holistic – mundane, not spiritual). It has aspects that would make it seem

hypocritical, immoral and totalitarian, but it is nonetheless reasonable and pacifist. Tolerance, while a dubious concept from the start, has been transformed into *neutrality*, while the professional sphere became the principal platform of our society. His use of familiar concepts like 'technological age', 'tolerance', 'objective modification' are actually hiding a shift in today's society's development. It is particularly moral, and it is, from our perspective, '*beyond good and evil*', but not in the sense that philosophers from the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would have expected to be: it is a drift in nuance, a form of depersonalization that can be compared to Foucault's project, but now completely matured and brutally pragmatic. Tolerance has no meaning in this system of thought, and its slow replacement by neutrality would exclude its being a complete, pure form of tolerance. Therefore, in conclusion, Imamichi is conceptualizing an empty, but functional society, and this lack shall be its primal essence, and I refuse to say whether this is morally accepted or not, since this classification is of no use here.