

Topic #4: Tomonobu Imamichi

Tomonobu Imamichi, by examining the complexities of the topic of ethical tolerance, differentiates between benign indifference and withdrawal and withholding from wrath rooted in disagreement with the characteristics, habits and acts of another, and, in doing so, he takes apart the concept of tolerance-as-a-virtue in modern society, analysing the progress of human thought and virtuosity under the effects of modernisation.

It is impossible to divorce the view that Tomonobu takes from the standpoint of a virtue-based analysis of ethics, as he doesn't progress into concerning himself with what is good and what is bad, but only what is virtuous, and thus – the changing of that which was once benign into what is now virtuous represents no paradigm shift, for it is only a reframing of what ethics (or, in the specific case of this quote, virtue ethics) should focus on. Tomonobu tells us that:

- 1) **Neutrality** of thought is not the same as ethically virtuous tolerance
- 2) The objective shift of tolerance from temperate patience (both in the sense of the Christian Virtue, and a general ethical virtue) to permission of different activities is a modification of virtue **under the influence of our technological society**
- 3) Administrative neutrality and detachment of the personal from the professional is an obligatory act that underlines professional ethics without which there would be no manageable public professional interaction

Of these points, I take the first two of being of the utmost importance, and I believe that it is necessary to examine the shift of tolerance in light of technology so as not to disregard anything significantly impactful upon our lives. I agree with Tomonobu in that the modification of the definition of the virtue of tolerance is a visible shift of virtues in modernity. It is reasonable to approach the discussion of Tomonobu's statement (as well as the discussion of the relevancy of his statement unto our lives) from multiple points of view, which I believe are best differentiated as such:

- 1) We must first examine what it means to differentiate administrative, professional neutrality from neutrality of acting in a patient and virtuously tolerant context.
- 2) Then, the weight and significance of the shift of one virtue in regards to other virtues, and in the context of the entire framework of virtue ethics and ethical morality, must be taken apart.
- 3) Finally, the significance of neutrality and tolerance themselves in a technological society must be investigated.

In this essay, I will regard morality of good and evil, of virtue, and of righteousness as equally valid, if concurrent, analyses. The standpoints overviewed are both theistic and atheistic, and no assumptions or claims about the actual existence of a deity, or deities, are implied or made.

It might be prudent to start the examination of Tomonobu's concept of neutrality by examining the contexts he talks of, and the ecosystem in which his thought best thrives. The primary concept he introduces in this quote that is detached from most virtue ethics is the idea of a **technological society**, the one in which we are implied to live. By inferring the meaning of the word (as it frequently resides in the domain of public speaking), we can see that its surface meaning is that of a modern industrial, or post-industrial, society, where

capitalism has had its hold on the mechanisms of progress for quite a few years. Beyond this, the concept of a technological society is truly inseparable from its root in capitalism in that the pursuit of progress in a technical sense has been geared towards attaining more efficiency in the methods of production, and in attaining efficiency in the utilisation of economic leverage and power – one of the main faces of capital.

The shift in focus from an individual to a faceless amalgamation in the shape of a legal entity in a professional context is, ultimately, the product of capitalism (for it makes the most sense to organise many individuals, and utilise their working potential ultimately for repetitive production of a good, or the invention of a better tool for production) that ends with partially erasing individualism as a virus that would infect and destroy the capitalistic mechanism from within.

Due to the nature of man as a free-acting and arbitrary entity of flesh and blood, this process of depersonalisation can't ever be carried out to completion without actually doing away with the genetic diversity that defines that which makes man man: even if all racial identity is erased, and total and unsurpassable linguistic, cultural and educational equality is completely achieved, differences in personalities and physical condition will, invariably, exist (either inherently, or developed over time), which will, given enough time, regardless of whatever management or training is imposed, always lead to the situation where two sufficiently different individuals interact and feel tension arise from the interaction.

This is where professional neutrality (or, colloquially, the *don't-ask-don't-tell* mentality) comes to assist. It has, without doubt, its methodological roots in the Tolerant Virtue prescribed by Aristotle, but its end-goal is not virtuous in and of itself: professional neutrality is a tool of capitalism that acts as its internal self-regulator, and, as an enforced policy, it is a guideline for company resource cooperation that works exclusively for the bettering of capital acquisition. Taken at face-value, we cannot investigate the *appearance* of professional neutrality with hopes of it bearing fruit, but deeper inquisition into the topic leads us to the conclusion that, while beneficial for the well-being of the individual (in that it fully enables a mechanism of conflict prevention in a context that is nearly totally inescapable), it doesn't have any virtuous action at its core.

For the purposes of this essay, I shift the focus of the idea of 'neutrality of thought' to the idea of 'neutrality of thought **and action**', seeing as I believe in the inseparability of thought from action, as it is necessary for thought to form so a conscious being (such as a human) could act at all – this stands at the very root of the idea of action: if there were no underlying thought, be it rational or impulsive, to a thought, then it would be nothing more than a natural occurrence, which is in and of itself at best bestial.

Thus, the question is asked: is a deed virtuous if it complies with virtuous deeds and ethical mores, without being done for the sake of virtue, and without any further bettering of the character of man truly at its heart? If the product of a deed has as its *side-effect* the bettering of man, and not as its primary concern, then it is ultimately not truly a means of virtuous improvement (or it is, only in the case that virtue is something we could use as a mantelpiece to boast with – a truly preposterous proposition no virtualist would agree with). If the deed is virtuous, the thought that bore and birthed it would be virtuous as well: the virtuosity stems from the thought, not the act following the thought.

To best answer the question, it is important to regard the implications of either answer, and then alone decide which to choose. Playing the devil's advocate, I shall first examine the effects of an evaluation that results in truth: if the deed is indeed virtuous if it is not in violation of virtue, and is indeed virtuous if it does produce progress and self-improvement without genuine regard for the its own virtue in and of itself, then that would straightforwardly mean that virtue is all that which might lead to other virtues if it isn't in violation of an ethical norm, then virtues are innumerable, limitless, and ultimately arbitrarily anything that isn't directly against virtue; the definition truly falls apart at that point, since it would imply that even benign acts, such as usage of restrooms (to take an example most banal and absurd), are virtues, and that anything which would enable the progress of another virtue – even acts such as vainglorious murder of animals for the advancement of technological and scientific knowledge – would also be a virtue. Thus, this position is untenable.

The alternative is much more pleasant: if an act is not virtuous, and a characteristic not a virtue, if as its side-effect it has the production of another virtuous characteristic, there is little argumentative absurdity to be had, and non-genuine progress towards a virtue is not virtuous at all. This is ultimately where we see the difference between ethical virtue in tolerance as patience towards others *for our own virtuosity's sake*, and tolerance as a capitalist regulation that functions by way of true neutrality. While professional workplace neutrality is mandatory for the maintenance of virtuous tolerance (and, ultimately, also its product), it is not virtuous by itself.

Examining the nature of virtues, and especially the virtue of tolerance, in a deeper historical context, we can see that its prominence as a philosophical standpoint hasn't been steadily and undeniably stirred by any school of thought since time immemorial. Temperance and tolerance have always been linked inextricably one with another, ranging from Siddhartha Gautama's position that tolerance arises from temperance regarding our emotional and 'bestial' nature (in that true tolerance is being unstirred by that which assaults us readily on an emotional basis), to Christian dogma which preaches of tolerance as arising from abstinence from wrath, envy, pride and gluttony. It is important to note that the tolerance preached by many isn't that of indifference towards violence (even when they preach *against* violence): in many contemporary schools of thought, Buddhist and Christian alike, it is considered fully just to act violently against someone whose actions threaten the integrity (both corporeal and spiritual) of another. In this, Tomonobu sees a decay of the virtue of tolerance as it morphs from a patience and non-disagreeability with someone's characteristics and actions geared towards themselves, to a form of silent passivity (where silence is a tacit sign of permission) of another's actions also aimed potentially not at himself.

This is (in a way) a troubling sign of ethics morphing under the pressure of the society that cultivates them, and is a strong point for ethical relativism: if ethics can be moulded by their host society, we cannot with any certainty argue that ethics that we are capable of observing and quantifying are in any way universal or absolute (this has strong implications for ethical theory, either implying it is fully relative, or that the absolutely, objectively true deeper principles of ethics are ungraspable and beyond human intellect; this very likely *isn't* the case for meta-ethics, which should then be able to describe the shape, though not the innards, of the ethical principles they concern themselves with).

If the concept of an ethical virtue can be reformed and reforged as so, it is not only sufficient to regard the virtue as morphable, but also the entire field that finds it a virtue: when we have noticed that that which we once found to be non-virtuous (as examined under the examination of point §1) has become virtuous, we can safely claim that the whole field of ethics, when defined by virtues, has changed in nature. This brings us exactly to the point that Tomonobu makes: this change of one virtue implies a change in virtue itself, since it takes a redefinition of virtue for something that is not virtuous to truly become virtuous. In such a case, it might be the safest to speak of **capitalist virtues**, as opposed to **ethical virtues**, if only to preserve the sacrosanctity of the idea of virtues as indicators of ethics. Examining virtues from a more chronological standpoint, it is safe to say that inclusion of indifference, or withdrawal, with the appearance of temperate tolerance into the order of virtues is a direct product of the strengthening of the capitalist system, which, by exponentially acquiring incessant complexity, needed a way to keep the gears turning efficiently: if capitalism (and, by extension, capital itself) gets to dictate virtuousness, then it makes no sense to view this new form of virtue as anything but a product of the system of regulations needed to maintain capitalism: we can, from there, begin to even discuss corporate ethics and the significance and definition of corporate professionalism, though this would only be a subset of all ethics applicable to all spheres of human life. Segmenting fields of ethics like this, and examining each of them on its own without reference to other spheres of ethics, holds a large risk of fracturing ethical studies into multiple, incompatible specialisations of ethical conduct which do not apply well one to another and carry the possibility of undermining ethics as a general, categorical field. Reasoning that the definition of the virtue of tolerance is malleable opens the gate to a discussion on Kant's conceptualisation of a cosmic law-giver, though this is a moot question I shall not investigate further.

Having the possibility of examining the nature of the study of corporate ethics, and the nature of the ethics that define corporate interaction in and of itself, one may see that even such a field is strictly paradoxical even when hermetically closed and examined from within: corporate ethics do not carry repercussions for any vain or gluttonous violation of any of its regulations — this violation is even rewarded, and the system maintains its internal cohesion on a larger scale by way of violations of ethical regulations is supposedly imposes upon itself. Instead of mores and codes of conduct which it would adhere to legalistically, a corporate ecology is instead governed by Alan Turing's principles of game theory, and by a very specialised and extended Prisoner's Dilemma: it is ultimately a fundamental question of whether to break a code of conduct for the sake of profit while risking continuous and assured betrayal from any other party one (or one's legal entity) interacts with. In such a system, then, a prudence in violating codes of conduct, possibly threatening the livelihood of many others, for personal or locally collective gain, seems to be an unspoken virtue. Thus, it seems improper to discuss generic virtue ethics from the standpoint of corporate ethics — yet, Tomunobu seems to find that corporate ethic norms and ideas are starting to penetrate our society at the same rate that the corporate machine grows in both the economic and cultural spheres of our society. It would then be possible to claim that it is exactly that spirit of corporate, capitalistic advancement, that is replacing ethical virtues and regulations with terms from its own ecologically regulating ethics, and thus also threatening the wellbeing of independent, generic ethics. As we have seen that ethics are relative and malleable, we might one day (when societal authority has been

replaced fully by corporative ecological self-sustenance) indeed make a statement that all ethics are *presently* corporate ethics.

Having encroached upon the topic beforehand, it seems prudent to sum up the very meaning of what tolerance and professional neutrality mean in a technological context. While tolerance as a concept is not necessary to modern corporatism (nor has it ever been, as we can see from the dealings of the East India Trading Company, as a temporally near example, or that of Venetian merchants in the middle ages, as a more distant one), the very idea of tolerance is what was necessary for corporate ecologies to take and examine, tear apart, and reassemble using only the most satisfying of its bits, giving something which happened to coincide with indifference regarding the personal choices and characteristics of others.

Viewing indifference like this, we can see that, while a crucial part and the very minimum boundary for proper, genuine tolerance to breach and thrive over, it is a complete detachment of emotions — and it is done for the purposes of attaining capital. From this it seems to follow that tolerance is then an emotional virtue: it implies not acting against the autonomy and integrity of another, through restraint, by overcoming the emotional reaction rooted in disagreement. This, interestingly for me, implies that the tolerance Buddhism preaches is only a pathway to attaining Nibbana, which, in itself, is indifference towards the corporeal, and the only pathway to enlightenment which has no emotional connections to the material world. As Buddhist tolerance is, by Buddhism, regarded as a virtue, and it is not done for the purposes of attaining material gain or corporeal pleasure (for this would then imply strictly that it isn't a virtuous state of being), we must say that either Buddhism isn't virtuous, or that virtue isn't strictly a temperance to emotional reaction, but rather an attainment of the lack of emotional reaction where there previously must have been one. Personal ethics must thus not be confused with the ethics of a system at large (Tomonobu uses the term 'eco-ethics', which I find wholly appropriate), though the virtue of an individual must (as I have investigated) be determined by the context in which we reside (generally taken to be the society in which we live).

Regarding this further, I have concluded that indifferent neutrality, as the lower bound of tolerance, isn't necessarily tolerance itself: it would be unjust to regard tolerance as indifference, as indifference to violations of the laws of man is paramount to treason of those laws just the same. Indifference becoming tolerance becomes an enabling factor letting lawbreakers violate the legal principles their social contract binds them to: if a violator of a social contract (as defined by Locke between individuals) is allowed to break the implicit terms of the contract as he wills, fearing no repercussions, it enables him to, from an ethical standpoint based in non-virtuous morality, do evil unto the world. Those who tolerate the violation of law and the procreation of evil, then, do evil themselves: this is why tolerance fails to be regarded as a virtue even in the context of being judged as good or evil. Of the Eight Deadly Sins in Christianity, indifference in the face of evil is, rightly, a slothful sin, and in Zoroastrian doctrine, letting evil happen is on the same cosmic magnitude as doing evil yourself: through this we can see that indifference fails to parse as virtuous even in a theistic concept, as enabling the doing of evil allows the enemy of good to grow in strength. Thus, a contemporary general ethical system has no place for indifference under the guise of tolerance, no matter which standpoint we take. In this I tie in Kant, with whom I agree on

the point that an act is righteous only if it is done only if it is known to be right, and only because it is right on its own.

The last question that has remained unexamined, but has surfaced during my investigation of Tomonobu's thought, is whether Greg Kavka's toxin puzzle can be analogically repurposed to investigate whether it is virtuous to intend to be tolerant when all it results in is indifference in action. To answer this, we need to keep in mind that virtuous tolerance is an overcoming of a negative emotional response to another's characteristics or acts done unto himself, whereas toleration-like indifference is merely not acting in disagreement with norms of the society around us; this comes back to the prior statement that all thoughts that give virtuous deeds must themselves be virtuous. The question can then be rephrased as such: is it virtuous to be indifferent, wanting to be both tolerant and overcoming of your prejudices and negative emotional responses? Further: is it necessary for the virtue of tolerance that the person improves his-or-herself, or is merely genuinely wishing to do so, but not doing so, virtue enough? I will chance to say that, while nice, it is not truly a virtue to wish to do, or not do, something, while acting contradictorily, and this is a key point of any ethical or legal system: wishing not to have done something abolishes nobody of any guilt whatsoever, and if it were not to be so, there would be little grounds upon which one could base the foundations of any modern, large-scale legal system.

In **conclusion**, I find few points of disagreement with Tomonobu: while I could disagree with him on the necessity of administrative neutrality for the well-being of tolerance, I can see the merits in his analysis; other than that, I would, taking all the points examined into consideration, completely agree with the premise of his statement and the implications of further development that stem logically from the statement itself and the definitions of the terms it uses. It is clear that neutrality is not virtuous, because it isn't done for the sake of virtue itself: if it acts as a capitalist restraint and management tool, it is not an act of virtue for the sake of itself, but an act of indifference for the sake of procurement of material goods, the hoarding of which most definitely goes against the philosophical grounds upon which the virtue of temperance is based. A shift in morality from a focus on general human virtues whose end-goal is the benefit of the individual, or martyrdom for the salvation of group, to a focus on corporative morality that relies on the well-behavedness (not well-being) of its cogs presents a noticeable and troubling development that is the product of the progress of encroachment of technological capitalocracy on all spheres of humanity.