

Did Our Virtue Get Caught in the (World Wide) Web?

Today the world is commonly referred to as a “global village” or a big, loud and creative community. One can work in an international corporation such as Google, sit in her office in Tel Aviv and discuss the latest problem in the new translation tool with a colleague from England and another one from the United States. As Imamichi states, this method of work and management requires “neutrality of thought”. An engineer from Israel must evaluate his friend from China based only on his professional skills, whatever his opinion and the Chinese government is. Imamichi separates this neutrality, which he defines as an “administrative attitude” from tolerance, which is an ethical attitude. However, he also states the administrative attitude is included within the ethical virtue of tolerance. Imamichi connects this modification in the virtue of tolerance with a general modification of virtue in our days, which are so technology-oriented and based.

I would like to state three points of disagreements between Imamichi and myself. First, Imamichi’s point of view and the difference he states between neutrality and tolerance might suggest that we should evaluate the two differently as well. While I agree that there is a separation between an act and its cause, I do not think that we should consider the reason of the act when evaluating the deed or the result of it. Respecting your allies from foreign countries in order to work better together might not point at any thought or belief in the virtue and the need of tolerance, but whether one is a tolerant person or just a good neutral colleague does not make a change in the final result of her acts. She treats her co-workers well either way, and we shall evaluate her deeds the same whether they are a result of an order or of an independent, liberal mind.

Also, as the common say states, “fake it till you make it” – an act based on the “wrong” reason, or on some kind of norm, might eventually bring to a continuously of the act based on the “right” reason. In the stated case, a neutral behavior toward a foreign work mate because of the need to cooperate well together might eventually result in better understanding of the need in tolerance. While the actual behavior toward the colleague might not change as a result of this new enlightenment, the reason it is based on will. This is another reason to ignore the difference between an administrative attitude and an ethical one.

Imamichi applies his argument to a professional sphere neutrality and its connection to tolerance, but it is also relevant in many different cases. This brings me to another flaw, in my opinion, in Imamichi’s separation between the administrative and ethical field: in many cases neutrality is indeed an ethical virtue by itself, and an order can result in ethical consequences, as well displayed by the concept of “net neutrality”. “Net neutrality” is the idea that every piece of information in the internet is, regardless of its content, equal to the other in its accessibility to the public and its right to exist in the web. This means, for example, that internet providers are not allowed to slow down the loading

speed of websites that do not pay them, or block sites that include critical news about the access-providing company. One may claim against the example of net neutrality that it does represent a technical, administrative attitude toward the internet and how we use it – it determines what a network provider can or cannot do, not how the users should treat the information online. This is only partially true, as it relates only to one aspect of this idea. The results of net neutrality are much wider than rules applying to companies: this neutrality is, in many ways, the very heart of the internet. It is what makes the internet a republic without government, when everyone can express their opinions and be heard by others that are interested in them. We are all equal in the internet, and our success in the World Wide Web depends on creativity and popularity. In this case, neutrality is not a tool used to bring to a specific, expected and needed result (such as effective corporation in the global corporation example), but a principle that affects the way the whole internet “society” acts and creates new content.

In relation to the argument I made on how should we judge actions, this is also a good example to a case in which certain acts can be the result of two points of view: many of the internet users are not aware of the principle of net neutrality, yet act to defend its consequences in the name of freedom of speech, for example. In my opinion, this shows us not only why the separation between neutrality and tolerance is not relevant, but also where such a separation can be wrong and lead to false assumption. This understanding is even more important in “our technological society”, as Imamichi puts it, where new information is created, managed and discussed every day, and business meetings take place around the world almost every moment. Technology is the engine behind the globalization that brought us all to deal with the professional interaction problems Imamichi discusses. It gives us great power, and we must know how to use it carefully and effectively not only as individuals but also as countries, companies and families. A part of this responsible use is to know how to communicate well with each other using the freedom it allows us, what brings up the topic of discussion.

My second disagreement with Imamichi regards the claim that neutrality in the professional sphere is “implied and included within the ethical virtue of tolerance”. Even regardless of the use of the separation between the administrative and ethical, which I am against, I do not think that work ethics or norm is certainly connected to the way workers act outside of work. Tolerance is, as Imamichi presents it, a bigger topic that includes inside it neutrality at work. Therefore, when treating tolerance as an ethical virtue, it might include also the way we treat our neighbors, friends and even strangers we meet for the first time. Being neutral at work does not mean that when having a drink with a colleague, an argument about the recent news will excel in tolerance. Also, when accepting Imamichi’s position about the difference between neutrality and tolerance, we may say that the two are not always parallel, which makes it hard to include one within the other. As a response, it is possible to say that when one has a tolerance point of view, neutral acts are for sure a result of it, and I fully agree with this claim. However, I claim that the opposite is not always true – and the opposite is the exact logic claim that Imamichi uses. We must also notice that if neutrality is not an ethical attitude, it seems difficult to

include it within an ethical one. This is because it seems to be treated as a tool used to allow and support a certain ethical point of view, but not as an ethical position by itself. We might say, in different words, that the use of professional neutrality is not always connected with tolerance. Sometimes it is indeed just a tool to maximize profits and benefits from global work process, without any deep thought behind it, as this is often out of big corporation's business or interest.

The third point of my disagreement with Imamichi regards the next step he takes in his argument, claiming that "...this objective modification of the virtue of tolerance [...] is an objective modification of virtue in our technological days." While I agree that the virtue of tolerance is deeply connected with our evaluation and judgment of good and bad in general, I do not agree that tolerance and changes in the way we capture the idea of it will certainly represent or bring to a modification of the virtue itself. This is well presented again in the internet: even though net neutrality is a great part of the internet ethics, its use does not result in general tolerance in the internet. My reasons to disagree here are similar to those I presented when discussing the including of neutrality as a tool within tolerance as an ethical attitude. In this case, even though we deal with two ethical ideas, the virtue of tolerance and virtue as a term, I still think it is difficult to combine them. For example, tolerance is, among other things, in my opinion, respecting acts of the opposite side that one would not do himself, in the name of the freedom of action. These actions might not pass one's personal judgment and ideas of good and bad, but she must accept the fact that somebody else thought that they are worthy. I do not think it is safe to say that her concept of virtue has changed in this case, because it is not about her – it is about the virtue of those who chose to act in a specific way, which is different from hers anyway.

In relation to this part of his argument, another claim against Imamichi is that tolerance is not parallel or equal to objectivity or the complete lack of critic against opposite opinions and the acts they end up creating. There is a place for respectful critic and discussion within the borders of tolerance, as I think tolerance is about accepting the ideas that other opinions exist, not the opinions themselves. In many ways, tolerance might be seen as a tool used to achieve a different, bigger goal, such as a democratic society: it is the basis for key elements in a democratic regime, for example citizen's freedom to affect government's acts and to be heard by the public. It also has a great connection with journalism ethics, for example, but along other values such as objectivity. Going back one step in the argument, the same can be said about professional neutrality: a professional, free of prejudices point of view is indeed a big part of it, but it also leaves a place for a professional discussion and to making decisions as a group, taking other opinions in account. Aside from that, one is still allowed to have a bad impression of someone based on his professional skill or personal behavior.

In conclusion, I agree with Imamichi in one main point: technology does have a big influence on the way we communicate, act, work and express our opinion. There is a reason to the fact that

corporations often seems to act in similarity to big countries, and like every physical country, also cybernetic and electronic countries needs to have rules in order to operate correctly and effectively while also being peaceful and safe to all of their “citizens” – workers in this case. I mainly disagree with the general conclusions that Imamichi makes, based on professional neutrality, regarding concepts such as tolerance and virtue that also apply to the way we act outside of work. I believe that Facebook, Google and Twitter and the culture they helped creating did changed the way we act upon each other, specifically online. Examples of that can be seen all the time, from President Trump’s massive use of Twitter to the Arabian Spring that was organized using social networks. However, the connection between the so-called “cyber-space” and the reality is still unclear, and we are just starting to figure out the full, both positive and terrifying, consequences of the situations in which the two meet.