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INTERVIEW WITH NORIMASA MORITA

On July 14th, we, students of the second year of Global Governance, had the honor to interview some distinguished guest speaker during the symposium held in Villa Mondragone. After the end of the first panel, we spent some time conversing and asking questions to Norimasa Morita, professor of literature at Waseda University. The first question we raised was linked to the theme of interdisciplinarity. Before directly questioning the guest, we made a little premise. In the world, as the one we are living in right now where the technocratic and scientific approach of knowledge is prioritized, we believe that in order to solve the complex global challenges of today humanistic studies too are needed so as to lead to creative, new and flexible ideas. For this reason, we were curious to ask prof. Morita which kind of contribution and what role does he address to literature and humanistic studies in this era of dominant scientific approaches.

He answered to us by saying that it is really difficult to prove how exactly humanities, literature and arts are contributing in this period of innovation. It is unquestionable that in more ancient times the existence of polymaths, as for example Leonardo Da Vinci, was more spread, while today scholars are becoming more and more specialized. On one side specialization has brought to great advancements but on the other side it has generated different ways of thinking for each discipline that represents a limit, a disadvantage. It is fundamental, according to prof. Morita, that people push themselves to go beyond their own perspective and focus on the idea of providing answers to the greatest variety of questions.

We then asked Prof. Morita what was his opinion about the spread of stereotyped notions that, in our opinion, is leading to a still society that lacks imagination and critical thinking. He answered us with the following words: "Before modern medicine, people believed that there had to be some kind of evil that caused illness, therefore they mainly imagined. With the development of modern medicine, (also the Darwin theory of evolution contributed a lot to this change) people started thinking that God was behind all that. If we think about the great imagination behind the Bible, would our society now be able to imagine as well as then? Would we be able to create imaginative interpretations over the universe? This is just a great power of imagination that we do not have anymore because we have already answers provided by science. Nowadays with the changes in technology, we have innovation, not imagination. I think, however, that it is more than necessary to be able to imagine the negative impacts of technology. We should ask ourselves, what kind of impacts those advanced technologies are bringing? This is the main thing imagination could do right now. While before imagination was more used to think about a positive evolution of society, now it is a negative one that does not provide for an evolution of society in a positive sense. But still it is the only tool that can prevent the future bad actions from taking place".

After this interesting discussion, we moved on towards a more personal sphere. Looking at Prof. Morita's curriculum, we noticed that he had studied English literature and we were wondering if there was a specific reason behind that choice, since, we considered the Japanese literature very different from the British one. Morita told us that he likes books and therefore he loves literature. But why choosing the English one? He said: "I could read well in English by the time I studied in university and I specialized in an English subject. You needed a special effort to study English because you have to conquer the language. By the time I had to choose my specialization I really liked English literature and moreover, not many people were specialized in that major. I specialized in the early modern literature (16th century), the time of Shakespeare. Therefore it was not only English but older English that in order to be enjoyed needed even more time and effort." Prof. Morita, has been holding lectures on film studies because of its specialty in film theory and cultural theory. Therefore we believed it was important to make a final question about his strong passion for

movies, so we asked him: “How do you think movies can be a tool for influencing culture theory?” He said: “there could be a violent film and a film talking about violence and there is a huge difference between the two kinds. The answer is not in films that give you certain solutions but in the ones that make you think. This is the thing that I like most about movies, their power to be carriers of great messages”.

At the end of the conversation, both of us were very satisfied and glad to have met this great professor. The interview with Norimasa Morita had been very inspiring and it raised a lot of interesting points for discussions. It was really an honor and a pleasure to have the opportunity to meet and talk with this important professor, confronting with him about important topics of our daily life.

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