

MORAL IMPULSE AND CRITICAL CITIZENSHIP

This issue of *Ethical Perspectives* is strongly illuminated by two themes: moral impulse and critical citizenship. Of course, these themes are related – without a critical faculty, the moral impulse is not possible, and impulse, conversely, can be seen as leading toward critique. This is no vicious circle, nor mere tautology – rather, they are both moments of the truly autonomous individual, where the autonomy of the individual is not seen as isolation, but rather as an individual responsibility to and within a society. Hence, a moral impulse fuelled by the individual critic is not enough; criticism must be framed within critical citizenship. Since our schizophrenic age fears for desensitization, a fear best expressed in our age's various flavours of political correctness, while it actively or at least tacitly posits this very desensitization in its canonization of a purely formal 'freedom to,' a canonization best exhibited in the extreme examples of reality television, these intertwined themes are of extreme importance, and thus deserve close explication and discussion.

I will let the pieces below provide this discussion, but permit me at least to set the table. As Michael Hauskeller so clearly argues in these pages, moral disgust is the moral impulse towards formal ethics, in the sense that it is the initial and immediate moral reaction that normatively colours our comportment with the outside world. I may know or think I know that something is wrong, or right, without giving this impulse a reason. This is not the ethical certitude of Bradley, but it is close in that both Bradley and Hauskeller would argue that the initial feeling need not be explained away, but rather deserves due respect. Moral disgust can clearly be misplaced, and clearly it can fail to withstand ethical scrutiny, but as impulse, it shakes us out of mere consciousness and moves us toward some sort of normativity. In this sense, it is always morally relevant.

Lisa Bortolotti joins this discussion by arguing that no moral justification exists for reserving rights to humans. The moral impulse must be

widened. At first, her approach comes across as opting for the typical agenda of preference-satisfaction utilitarianism: she wishes to extend the realm of rights in the name of safeguarding the power of reason and autonomy (defined through preferences) of individuals, who, she argues, are not always human. But then she offers something atypical in this debate: the very safeguarding of the power of reason and autonomy also applies to those who are often seen as marginal humans and thus excluded from in other strands of preference utilitarianism.

Co-authors T. Brian Mooney and Samantha Minett apply the question of moral disgust to the question of life-science art, a new form of expression that merges biotechnology with the aesthetic. Like most forms of art that have emerged in recent generations, life-science art sees its task in the questioning of assumptions, which, of course, is a break from past ideas of aesthetics. Mooney and Minett turn their attention to this nascent field and ask: are there good grounds to translate our putative moral disgust at the fanciful and aesthetic use of biotechnology, such as pigs with wings and glowing rabbits? Turning first to utilitarianism and then to Thomastic virtue ethics, they argue clearly: yes, there are.

Christian Arnsperger then kicks off our second related theme by posing a simple but profound question: why do English speakers refer to anti-globalism, whereas French speakers refer to *alter-mondalism* (i.e., belief in a different world)? This French viewpoint would seem to call for critical global citizens who do not shirk from the increasing interconnectivity of our world, but who also do not take its current form as the inevitable development of immutable laws. Instead, such critical citizenry is called to see the current capitalist framework as an ideology, and as such, as liable to change, a change that citizens themselves can effect.

Moving from theory to practice, Andrew Fiala rounds off this issue by giving us an example of critical citizenry, which he sees in just war pacifism. He argues that citizens must not capitulate to political or military authority in judging the justness of war, either regarding *ad bellum* judgements, or *in bello* actions. Moreover, seemingly just *ad bellum*

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decisions also deserve close scrutiny, largely because once the fog of war descends, *in bello* actions quickly eclipse justice. For this reason, he argues, a critical citizen should anticipate war crimes and thus be strongly reluctant to authorize war – an authorization that, in democratic societies, ultimately lies in the hands of the citizens themselves through the electoral process.

Thus, this number quite clearly furthers the mission of *Ethical Perspectives*, which is to promote the international dialogue between fundamental and applied ethics. Providing articles written on three separate continents and addressing three of the most characteristic aspects of our age (art as confrontation, globalization, and the seemingly permanent war against terror) on top of a background well painted by their companion theoretical pieces, our authors once again invite you to take stock of where our world finds itself today. And then, to take action.

John Hymers

