



Ethics and Practice: Living Together in Troubled Times

Sofia Bonicalzi¹

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Issue after issue, throughout its almost three decades of history, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* has earned a prominent place as an inclusive forum for discussing problems at the crossroads of moral philosophy, public ethics, and politics. This issue is no exception, bringing together a number of contributions that address questions at the forefront of contemporary ethical and political debate and confirming the journal's role as a venue for rigorous yet lively discussion across different traditions and areas of inquiry. The themes covered in this issue include the ethics of cancel culture, the notion of distrust, the threat of self-harm by resisters, longtermism, and several pressing questions in the ethics of technology and in animal ethics. While the range of topics is broad, many, if not all, of the contributions in this issue illustrate how vital ethical debates inevitably arise whenever individuals or groups sharing an environment or resources develop diverging interests, needs, and goals. As in previous issues, our readers will find a carefully calibrated balance of deeply theoretical and genuinely practical discussions, grounded in the awareness that neither aspect can be adequately addressed in isolation from the other.

Some of the articles in this issue shine a spotlight on central ethical questions of our time, addressing surprising gaps in the literature on crucial area of public debate and calling for an expansion of the philosophical lens. Alfred Archer and Georgie Mills' *The Ethics of Cancelling* is a case in point. While cancelling and cancel culture have attracted a good deal of public attention in recent years, with intellectuals fervently taking sides, the issue has largely escaped the attention of professional moral philosophy. Seeking both to remedy this neglect and to move beyond current views of cancelling as a form of social punishment, Archer and Mills address the central question of the conditions under which cancelling may be considered permissible. To answer this question, they offer a wide-ranging account of the nature and aims of cancelling, presenting it as a multi-faceted moral practice – from reputation correction to holding representatives to account – that requires specific and nuanced ethical justifications.

A much more established topic, though one still in need of a satisfying and comprehensive account of its nature and aims, is interpersonal distrust. In *Distrust, Inc.: Interpersonal and Corporate Distrust, Ordinary and Deep*, Thomas Szanto does not shy away from this

✉ Sofia Bonicalzi
sofia.bonicalzi@gmail.com

¹ Roma Tre University, Rome, Italy

task, but goes straight to the heart of the problem. The article argues that distrust is a meta-stance of trust whose function is to modulate the agent's future-oriented reactive attitudes and to prepare for the harm that might otherwise be experienced in the event of betrayal. In addition to ordinary forms of distrust directed toward individuals and groups, special attention is devoted to forms of *deep distrust*, which have specific epistemic and political aims and may be experienced toward group agents engaged in practices of *dehumanisation* – a central notion in the contemporary social sciences, denoting the disregard or denial of the human properties and traits of the distruster.

Three other contributions in this issue also directly address normatively relevant frictions between agents with conflicting needs or goals. In *Extortions, Threats To Self-Harm, and Resistance*, Ten-Herng Lai considers the situation of resisters who threaten self-harm in order to impose demands on others. The central research question is whether the target of such a threat may bear any responsibility for the harm the resister inflicts on herself. The case resembles that of self-threatening extortion, with the important difference that, in the latter case, targets can more easily escape responsibility, since it is standardly assumed that agents who are capable of caring for themselves bear first-person responsibility for their well-being and are not entitled to shift that burden onto others. This normative consideration may, however, apply differently in the case of resisters, insofar as they may not be in a position to care adequately for their well-being. This, in turn, may ground responsibility on the part of the target for refusing to meet the resister's demand.

The next contribution, *The Ethics of Kingmaking*, by Alexis Morin-Martel and Gabriel Monette, provides a vivid illustration of how ethical questions are ubiquitous and emerge in every realm of existence, including board gaming. Here the conflict unfolds between rival participants competing for the crown whereby the king is, quite obviously, the game winner. When a player is not in the position of winning anymore, she may nonetheless attempt to alter the winner, thus engaging in the practice of kingmaking. To the extent that it infringes basic norms of fairness in board-gaming, kingmaking is usually considered unethical. Conversely, Morin-Martel and Monette argue in favour of gaming rules allowing a moderate acceptance of kingmaking whenever such practice does not imply disrespect for the targeted co-player but is rather motivated by game-related strategies, such as deterrence or storytelling.

In Valerie Soon's *What We Owe the Future Is not Ours Alone To Give*, the conflict becomes intergenerational. As the title itself suggests, in deliberate echo of William MacAskill's influential work on affective altruism and longtermism, the article directly addresses the question of how resources should be allocated between those living in the present and those in the distant future. Is it legitimate, or even obligatory, to allocate resources to the far future when doing so will almost inevitably impose costs on present or near-future generations? In response, Soon develops what she calls the principle of "Resource-Use Justification", according to which any reallocation of resources must be normatively justified in terms that those in the present who would bear its costs could regard as acceptable from their own moral standpoint.

The next three papers address related yet distinct issues in animal ethics and veganism. Insofar as each challenges accepted views in its own way, they are likely to stimulate further debate on these topics. The first paper in this group is Bernardo Aguilera's *How Bad Can the Lives of Persons and Animals Go? On the Alleged Asymmetrical Effect of Cognitive Capacities on the Potentials for Welfare of Persons and Animals*. Aguilera directly disputes what he calls the "Welfare Asymmetry Thesis", according to which there is an asymmetry between

the maximum potential for positive and negative welfare of cognitively sophisticated beings (for example, humans) and less sophisticated beings (for example, most non-human animals): while humans have a higher potential for positive welfare, human and non-human animals are on a par when it comes to negative welfare. In response, Aguilera offers arguments in support of a symmetric view of welfare, one that may justify more favourable treatment of humans compared to non-human animals while, somewhat more surprisingly, rejecting the claim that human lives matter more than animal lives.

The next paper is Konstantin Eckl's *Weighing Up Animal Dignity – Due Caution about Going Beyond Welfare*, which likewise addresses the issue of animal welfare. Here, however, the comparison is not between the positive and negative welfare of human and non-human animals, but rather between welfare and other values, most notably animal dignity, that figure in discussions of animal rights. As the title suggests, Eckl urges caution in attempts to move beyond welfare, especially in order to avoid wronging animals. A principle of moral caution, he argues, should prevent us from appealing to animals' *sui generis* dignity – as distinct from less contested and more evidence-based forms of dignity – when assessing conflicts among the values regarding how we treat them.

Considerations about animal rights and suffering continue in Joshua Jarvis-Campbell's *Is Veganism Not Good Enough? Industrial Plant Agriculture and Unnecessary Harm*, where the discussion broadens to include the ethics of industrial plant agriculture. Jarvis-Campbell asks whether we ought to reject industrial plant agriculture, and not merely industrial animal agriculture, insofar as industrial practices may also cause unnecessary harm to animals. Although the harm caused by industrial plant agriculture is significant, Jarvis-Campbell argues that it is likely necessary and that, therefore, while some individuals may still be required to abstain from purchasing produced goods, the practice in general should not be regarded as morally problematic.

The final two papers are situated within the burgeoning field of the philosophy of technology, and address the moral significance of technology-driven societal changes. The first, Jeroen Hopster's *Conceptual Mediation in Technomoral Change: Reply to Danaher and Sætra*, opens a dialogue with Danaher and Sætra's *Mechanisms of Techno-Moral Change: A Taxonomy and Overview* (2023), previously published in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* (26(5)). In that article, Danaher and Sætra offered a detailed discussion of the various ways in which technology can affect significant aspects of our moral life. Hopster's paper provides an ideal continuation of this effort by focusing specifically on the way in which concepts – with case studies drawn from “brain death” or “reproductive autonomy” – can play a second-order mediating role in conveying the first-order mediations of technological change discussed by Danaher and Sætra.

The second paper, Étienne Brown's *Democracy Needs Reach: Political Equality, Online Speech and Algorithmic Recommendation*, also engages directly with earlier work, in this case by Niko Kolodny, in order to examine the ways in which new technologies may affect the capacity to influence political outcomes. A central problem for democracy in our algorithm-driven societies is that the opportunity for political influence – a pillar of democratic life – is not equally distributed. Largely uncontrollable systems of algorithmic recommendation tend to channel disproportionate attention to a minority of speakers. To address this issue of fairness, Brown proposes some practical correctives, which are best understood as part of a broader and desirable structural reform aimed at realigning the digital sphere with democratic principles.

The issue is also rich in book reviews, featuring four contributions that critically engage with recently published books. Tom Parr's *Empowering Workers in an Age of Automation*, reviewed by Sanat Sogani, amplifies political concerns connected with the rise of technology and automation, along with the related risks of job loss and environmental harm. Sogani shows how Parr's book aims to provide a guide to navigate the landscape of possible normative responses to such existential threats. Marcel Jahn reviews Fabienne Peter's *The Grounds of Political Legitimacy* (2023), in which "crisis" – ranging from pandemics to widespread inequalities that urgently require complex and future-oriented decision-making – emerges as a keyword of contemporary politics. The book examines the legitimacy of the controversial view that, in situations where some possess epistemic superiority over others, those with epistemic authority may legitimately make binding decisions.

Although we may well live in difficult, technologically dominated, and politically troubled, times, James Lenman's *The Possibility of Moral Community* (2024), reviewed in Valerie Tiberius's essay, argues – from an expressivist perspective combined with a constructivist moral epistemology and a compatibilist view of free will – for the possibility of a moral community inhabited by rational people with a shared sensibility. While Lenman's book stays away from metaphysics in order to focus on metaethics, questions of causation and free action return in Carolina Sartorio's *Causalism* (2023), reviewed by Mattias Gunnemyr. While raising doubts about Sartorio's neutrality regarding causation and about her limited engagement with ahistorical accounts, Gunnemyr praises the clarity with which Sartorio succeeds in presenting a unitary account of action and free action grounded in the agent's actual causal history.

Across a wide variety of topics, the contributions included in this issue are marked by their methodological rigor and conceptual clarity, combining the capacity to address specific, and even highly specialised, topics with an inclusive and constructive structure and tone. In doing so, they challenge the *status quo* while remaining relevant, accessible, and informative for our diverse readership, exemplifying the values for which *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* stands.

Declaration

Competing interests Nothing to declare.

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