

*Moral Disgust*¹

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ABSTRACT. Disgust is often believed to have no special moral relevance. However, there are situations where disgust and similar feelings like revulsion, repugnance, or abhorrence function as the expression of a very strong moral disapproval that cannot fully be captured by argument. I call this kind of disgust moral disgust. Although it is always in principle possible to justify our moral disgust by explaining what it is in a given situation or action that disgusts us, the feeling of disgust often comes first and either draws our attention to the fact that there is something (terribly) wrong in the first place, or makes us aware that the *kind* of wrongness we are dealing with surpasses what can be accounted for by established moral theory. In both cases moral disgust serves an important purpose for an adequate moral evaluation of diverse situations and the actions from which they result.

KEYWORDS. Disgust, yuck factor, moral feelings, biotechnology, beyond suffering, sentimentalism

INTRODUCTION

Shortly after Saddam Hussein had been arrested, the French lawyer Jacques Vergès, who has a reputation for defending all sorts of terrorists and dictators (one of whom was Milosevic), announced that, if he were invited, he would gladly defend Saddam Hussein, too. When a journalist asked him if he did not, at least, know the feeling of disgust, indicating that disgust would be a sufficient reason not to defend the likes of Saddam, Vergès answered that this question could, with equal justification, have been put to the defence lawyers in the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials (Moenninger 2003).

I do not want to discuss here whether volunteering to defend dictators such as Saddam Hussein or war criminals such as Hermann Goering is in any way immoral for successful lawyers. After all, even mass murderers have the right to be well defended. What I am interested in is rather how a feeling like disgust can be thought to be morally relevant at all. For, what the journalist implied with his question was that Vergès *ought* to be disgusted, that disgust was the *proper* reaction to the idea of defending Saddam, and that, if he *did* feel disgust as he should, he would abstain from defending the Iraqi dictator. So obviously, disgust is thought to be, at least in certain situations, a *moral* feeling, that is, a feeling that ought to be endorsed and accepted as a guide for action.

In the course of this paper, I shall examine this assumption and discuss the problems connected with it. My starting point will be Mary Midgley's claim that strong feelings, including disgust, are essential to all real moral commitment and indispensable for realizing that certain actions are morally wrong in the first place, and John Harris' counter-claim that feelings, to count as moral, must be capable of being justified in moral terms or else be rejected as mere prejudice (1). I shall argue against Harris that feelings can qualify as moral even when such a justification is lacking and, moreover, that arguments meant to justify a particular moral feeling are themselves in need of justification which can only be provided by widely shared moral feelings. Thus the seemingly unproblematic distinction between legitimate moral feelings and mere prejudices breaks down (2). I shall then analyze the feeling of disgust and, following Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley (1999), distinguish between core disgust, animal-nature disgust, and moral disgust. The latter will be interpreted as that kind of disgust which is directed towards actions that threaten the image we have of ourselves as human beings, that is, our idea of what it means to be human (3). I will continue with a discussion of Leon Kass' controversial proclamation of a "wisdom of repugnance." Once again, the problem of justification is addressed and, this time, rejected. I will argue that the impossibility of solving the justification problem leaves no choice but to take

moral disgust seriously for a start and then, instead of asking for its justifiability, to see whether and when it is consistent with the interrelated beliefs and feelings that define our humanity (4). In the following sections, I shall analyze paradigmatic occasions for moral disgust: wanton cruelty (5), slavery and meat-eating (6), defiling the dead (7), and finally the (still fictional) creation of living organisms that are incapable of feeling by means of genetic engineering (8 and 9). My aim is to show that in none of these cases can moral theory adequately explain the widely shared feeling that something is deeply wrong, and that despite this, we should not reject those feelings as morally irrelevant. On the contrary, we should take heed of them and act accordingly unless we have good *moral* reasons not to (10).

1. DISGUST: RAW MATERIAL FOR MORAL SCRUPLES OR MERE PREJUDICE?

There is a lot in the world that disgusts us: maggots in food, cockroaches in the cupboard, slugs, faeces, especially those of other people, certain skin diseases, intestines, the way some people behave, how they eat, or laugh, or display their sexuality, physical and mental distortions, old age, poverty, and many other things, situations, actions, and events. Some people are easily disgusted, some people less easily, but we all know the feeling. Disgust, however, like the related and, in terms of its actual usage, hardly distinguishable notions of repugnance, revulsion, and abhorrence,² is not commonly thought to have much *moral* relevance, except as something that occasionally ought to be overcome for the sake of morality. If we want to do the right thing, we cannot always give in to our feelings of disgust. On most, if not all, occasions it rather seems to be required that we ignore those feelings, to avoid distorting our moral judgement. Thus, writes Martha Nussbaum, “the really civilized nation must make a strenuous effort to counter the power of disgust, as a barrier to the full equality and mutual respect of all citizens” (Nussbaum 2004, 117).

Nonetheless, the rhetoric of disgust is often used when people object very strongly to a certain kind of action or particular deed. In such cases, disgust can be the very expression of a serious moral commitment, a fact of which William Miller, in his excellent study *The Anatomy of Disgust*, justly reminds us:

Disgust is more than just the motivator of good taste; it marks out moral matters for which we can have no compromise. Disgust signals our being appalled, signals the fact that we are paying more than lip-service; its presence lets us know we are truly in the grip of the norm whose violation we are witnessing or imagining. To articulate one's disgust is to do more than state a preference or simply reveal a sensation in our bodies (Miller 1997, 194).

Accordingly, one can argue that the ability to respond with disgust and revulsion to certain deeds is essential to all real moral commitment.

Among philosophers, Mary Midgley has frequently made this point. According to Midgley, we cannot even “really think injustice is bad if it does not at some point sicken us” (Midgley 2003, 107).

Whenever we seriously judge something to be wrong, strong feeling necessarily accompanies the judgment. Someone who does not have such feelings – someone who has merely a theoretical interest in morals, who doesn't feel any indignation or disgust and outrage about things like slavery and torture – has missed the point of morals altogether (Midgley 2000, 9).

Although, Midgley concedes, disgust may often be a mere physical reaction which often has “no meaning” and is, in itself, “not significant,” it nonetheless provides the raw material for moral scruples and, eventually, moral principles which would not exist without it. Disgust at, for instance, bloodshed

often does have a meaning. It has played a great part in the development of more humane behaviour, because it can alert people's imagination to what they are doing, and wake their sympathies for the victims. The same thing happens with unthinking revulsions to unfairness, meanness, ingratitude, envy and the like (Midgley 1984, 43).³

According to Midgley, there is often a “message” in our emotions that we need to spell out. Emotions like disgust sometimes are trying to tell us something and it is our job to find out what (Midgley 2000, 9).

Clearly, this account of the moral relevance of disgust and similar feelings faces a serious problem: if the feeling of disgust is not significant in itself, often has no “meaning,” and carries no moral message, how then can we ever distinguish those cases where it does from those where it does not? And if the feeling as such does not give us any clue, would it not be better to ignore it altogether and focus instead on those features of the situation which provide us with the relevant moral information that we require to determine what we ought to do? If we cannot rely on our feelings of disgust as a guide to morals, if we cannot judge that an action is morally wrong simply on the grounds that we are disgusted by it, then it is hard to see why we should consider it morally relevant at all.

This kind of difficulty seems to face all sentimentalist accounts of moral judgement. When Mary Warnock (1987) argued that a sense of outrage might possibly suffice to deem certain practices morally wrong – like embryo experimentation, shovelling the dead into the ground without ceremony, or the supply of surrogate mothers by commercial agencies – John Harris (1998) criticized Warnock for assuming, without giving any evidence at all, that a sense of outrage is always a sense of *moral* outrage. People may be shocked by practices such as the above mentioned, but that doesn’t mean that they are morally justified in being shocked. Perhaps they are only prejudiced:

The crucial problem, entirely ignored by Warnock, is that not all feelings are moral feelings and not all outrage is moral outrage. So that while we ought to respect the moral beliefs and feelings of others even where we do not share them, we have no reason to respect their prejudices or brute preferences or aversions (Harris 1998, 56).

Since we have no obligation to take account of people’s mere prejudices, we obviously need a criterion to distinguish prejudice from a genuine moral feeling that might then give rise to a valid moral principle. Harris

believes that this criterion can only be the ability to provide a “justification in moral terms” for having that particular feeling and, moreover, expecting others to share it or at least act in accordance with it. “Moral terms,” for Harris, are “terms which would refer to the way in which violating the principle causes harm to persons or otherwise adversely affects persons or their interests or violates their rights or causes injustice” (Harris 1998, 59).

In the next section of this paper, I will counter this kind of objection by showing that it begs the question and faces the same difficulty that the sentimentalist view is supposed to fall a victim to. I will then, in the following sections, proceed and elaborate Midgley’s claim that disgust is an important and in fact indispensable, though not infallible, epistemic guide to certain morally questionable actions and practices. More objections will be raised along the way, and hopefully met.

2. MORAL FEELINGS AND THEIR JUSTIFICATION IN MORAL TERMS

When does a feeling qualify as a *moral* feeling? And can something like disgust ever be a moral feeling at all? When Harris uses the term ‘moral feeling,’ he means a feeling that can be justified in what he thinks are moral terms. If, and only if, a feeling can be justified in that way, is it thought to be warranted, acceptable as a guide to action, and rational.⁴ Hence, to decide whether a feeling is moral or not, we have to look beyond its intrinsic qualities and submit it to the test of moral justifiability. If we then find that the feeling does not pass the test, we can discard it as irrational and not worthy of serious moral consideration. However, this way of defining the term ‘moral feeling’ has the effect of blurring the distinction between feelings that have a normative content and those that do not. If I, for instance, happen to feel a strong aversion to meat-eating, this aversion can, in theory, take either of two distinct forms. First, I may hate the taste and look of meat, find the idea of eating dead animals extremely

unappealing, resent people who eat meat in my presence, and may even wish that people would generally give up this distasteful habit, *without* ever thinking that it is *wrong* to eat meat or that people *ought* not to engage in a practice that requires the killing of animals. If, on the other hand, my aversion to meat-eating is cognitively related to its presumed wrongness, then my aversion has a normative content and to that extent is a moral feeling, whereas in the former case it is not. Note that to feel that a practice, i.e., killing animals for food, is wrong and ought not to be done, we don't have to be able to give a coherent account of *why* it is wrong. Before we even attempt to justify our feelings, they can be divided into moral and non-moral feelings depending on whether or not they have, or are related to, a normative content. We can thus define a moral feeling as a feeling part of whose cognitive content is the wrongness of a certain kind of action or practice. Thus understood, Mary Warnock was quite right to regard widespread hostile feelings towards human embryo research as *moral* feelings.

This, of course, does not settle the question whether those feelings should be endorsed and taken as a guide for action. By accepting a feeling as a moral feeling, we do not commit ourselves to accepting it as the expression of a *legitimate* moral concern. Instead, we are just recognizing that that feeling has a moral content, whether this is, in a particular case, justified or not. If you, for instance, feel indignation because you believe a wrong has been done, your feeling of indignation should qualify as moral even if you are incapable of convincing others that what you consider wrong actually *is* wrong. If you feel contempt for a particular person because you believe that she behaves in a way she ought not to behave, your contempt is a moral feeling even if others do not see anything contemptible in her behaviour (see Mason 2003). Likewise, if you feel disgusted by a certain practice and your disgust is such that you believe that practice to be wrong (instead of being merely unpleasant to behold), then your feeling of disgust is a moral feeling and the disgust you feel a moral disgust.

If this proposal for using the term ‘moral feeling’ is plausible, then disgust can be a moral feeling when the object of disgust is felt to be something that ought not to be or happen.⁵ Harris, however, could concede this as a matter of terminology and still insist that any feeling, whether or not it is thought of as moral, that cannot be *justified* in moral terms, is a mere prejudice and not to be taken seriously. In other words, he could argue that not every moral feeling is a *legitimate* moral feeling. For instance, hostile feelings towards human embryo research are, in Harris’ view, not legitimate because they cannot be justified in what he believes are moral terms. To be justified in moral terms, an action or practise must harm persons, adversely affect their interests, violate their rights, or cause injustice. Since embryos are, per definition, not persons, any unconditional opposition to embryo research is not justifiable in moral terms. Therefore, when people feel outraged about embryo research and protest against it, they have no good reason to do so, that is, no morally legitimate reason.

However, it is far from obvious that only those actions that adversely affect *persons* are properly thought to be morally wrong. It can certainly not be inferred from the meaning of the term ‘moral.’ The fact is that most of us would agree that harming persons is morally wrong and we do agree because most of us have come to feel that way about persons. But there is no conceptual link between ‘harming persons’ and ‘being morally wrong’ such that those and only those actions that harm persons can meaningfully be said to be morally wrong. Philosophers, especially those of a utilitarian persuasion, often talk as if it were quite obvious what is morally relevant and what is not.⁶ But in fact the only way to find out about what is morally relevant is to look at what people actually *feel* is morally relevant. To argue, as Harris does, that certain feelings are not moral feelings, i.e., morally legitimate feelings, because they cannot be accounted for in terms of those principles which he thinks are alone legitimate is like pulling a rabbit from a hat in which it was hidden right from the start, that is, a clear case of begging the question. One could also call it a prejudice in the disguise of an argument. The difficulty of distinguish-

ing between mere prejudice and morally legitimate concerns is not less of a problem for the rationalist than it is for the sentimentalist. While the sentimentalist needs to explain why a certain feeling such as moral disgust is supposed to be sometimes morally relevant and sometimes not (unless they want to claim that it is *always* morally relevant), the rationalist needs to explain why his or her account of what is morally relevant is more adequate than alternative accounts. This, however, can only be done by reference to widely shared moral intuitions, i.e., to the way people actually feel about it. Those intuitions in fact provide the only possible justification for *any* theory of what is morally relevant. Accordingly, if those intuitions are ignored because the moral terms one favours do not account for them, these terms lack justification even more than a moral feeling that is not supported by a widely accepted moral theory. For a moral feeling that is shared by the vast majority of people living at a certain time in a certain society is not in need of further theoretical justification whereas a moral theory that is not backed by the moral feelings that are prevalent at a certain time and place will not appear plausible and, as a consequence, its prescriptions not justified.

This claim gains support through psychological research that strongly suggests the epistemological priority of moral intuitions and feelings. Interviews conducted with both conservatives and liberals about sexual morality showed that both groups alike tended to base their respective judgements on their affections rather than perceptions of harmfulness (Haidt and Hersch 1993). Moreover, they were often at a loss to give supporting reasons for their judgements, yet in spite of that did not question them (Haidt 2001, 817). This indicates that the reasoning process does not precede the moral judgement. In fact, it seems that we only start reasoning about our moral intuitions when the need arises to convince others of the superiority of our view. As Jonathan Haidt, who some years ago developed a very convincing social intuitionist model of moral judgement, puts it: “Moral reasoning is usually an *ex post facto* process used to influence the intuitions (and hence judgements) of other people.” (Haidt 2001,

814) Thus, when we engage in moral reasoning, there is nothing impartial about it. Instead, by referring to those moral theories that are culturally available and generally considered to be acceptable, we construct a post hoc justification for those moral intuitions we already started with. We do not, for instance, judge abortion to be morally wrong because we think that life starts at conception. Rather, we have the “gut feeling” that abortion is bad, and then, if challenged, justify our feeling by arguing that life starts at conception (Haidt 2001, 817). Hence, if we do not succeed in convincing the other party that we are right and they are wrong, this is not because our arguments are not good enough but rather because we make the false assumption that our own moral intuitions as well as those of our opponents are based on more or less rational arguments. Haidt calls this twofold assumption the “wag-the-dog illusion” and the “wag-the-other-dog’s-tail illusion,” respectively, the dog being our intuitive moral judgment and its tail the accompanying moral reasoning. Moral arguments are then “like shadow-boxing matches: Each contestant lands heavy blows to the opponent’s shadow, then wonders why she doesn’t fall down” (Haidt 2001, 822).

If this account is correct, then Harris’ objection to Warnock fails because there is no obvious way of distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate moral feelings other than by presupposing a criterion for legitimacy that derives its plausibility from the very feelings it is meant to legitimize. Again, this is not to say that it is pointless to demand some reflection on why we feel as we do. Generally speaking, we want to make sense of our feelings. But there is more than one way to do that and we should not dismiss certain emotions as morally irrelevant simply on the grounds that we cannot account for them in terms of accustomed moral theories. We always have to consider the entire situation in which a feeling is expressed and judge it on its individual merits. Sensitivity, as Mary Midgley puts it, “requires rationality to complete it, and vice versa. There is no siding onto which emotions can be shunted so as not to impinge on thought” (Midgley 1984, 43).

3. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF DISGUST

In the last section I argued that whether a feeling is moral or not does not depend on the availability of a justification for it that is generally considered to be rational. If that is correct, then disgust can be a moral feeling even if such a justification is lacking. However, whether it is a feeling we can ever make sense of and should endorse in respect to certain actions and practices has not been decided yet. Before tackling this question, though, we need to say a bit more about what kind of feeling disgust is. What are its defining features?

Disgust is generally considered to be a basic emotion that is distinctively human and can be found in all human cultures. Following Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley (1999), disgust is characterised by the experience of nausea, the fear of contamination, a tendency to distance oneself from the object or situation that elicits disgust, and, last but not least, a sense of offence “related to a sense of deviance or imperfection: something is not as it should be.” Disgust differs from distaste, which is a reaction to unpleasant sensory qualities, whereas disgust is a reaction to the presumed *nature* and *origin* of an object. We don’t necessarily object to the *taste* of maggots in our food: it is sufficient to believe there to be maggots (which are associated with rotting corpses and generally the decay of animal matter). Originally, feelings of disgust were centred on food selection and served to protect the body from harmful substances. During the process of human civilization, however, disgust has gradually come to cover more and other grounds, eventually serving to protect not only the body but also the *soul* from harm. Although the way disgust is experienced and expressed has not changed, the objects and events that trigger it have. There are at least three other domains of life into which the original core disgust has expanded. The first domain covers everything that reminds us of our own animal nature such as body odours, sex, “body envelope violations,” and death. All this needs to be hidden if we want to preserve our idea of ourselves as being something special that is not, or at least not to

the same extent, subject to natural processes as animals are. In so far as disgust effectively motivates us to hide our animal nature from each other, it has, *pace* Nussbaum, a civilizing effect. “Disgust is thus the emotion of civilization, and of socialization. It is part of affirming our unique humanity.” Rozin and his colleagues call this kind of disgust “animal-nature disgust.” A further expansion of the core disgust is “interpersonal disgust,” which is the disgust that many people feel when getting into a too intimate social contact with someone whom they don’t know or don’t want to have intimate contact with.

Finally and for the purpose of this paper most importantly, there is a disgust that comes about as a reaction to certain socio-moral violations. Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley find this a “puzzling category” because obviously not all socio-moral violations are considered to be disgusting and many of those that are “appear to be disgusting because they involve aspects of core or animal-nature disgust (e.g., the sexual molestation of children, or brutal murders that involve mutilation or other body envelope violations).” Some, however, appear to be disgusting on other grounds, for instance when people are disgusted by instances of hypocrisy, racism, betrayal, or disloyalty. Why can these elicit disgust whereas other socio-moral violations cannot or at least usually do not? Why, for instance, do we not normally consider someone who commits a bank robbery disgusting? Rozin and his colleagues give the following interesting explanation:

A bank-robber has a normal (human) desire for money; he uses unacceptable means to get money, and for his crime he must ‘pay back’ society in some way. However, people who reveal themselves to have deep characterological flaws that make them unfit for participation in society are rejected and ostracized by the socio-moral disgust of their peers. Thus, racism (for liberals) or lack of loyalty (for conservatives) makes a person revolting and perhaps contaminating in a way that a bank-robber is not.

This explanation, whether it is convincing or not, provides a link between animal-nature disgust and moral disgust. The link, which is overlooked by

Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, is the idea we have of ourselves as humans. That the bank-robber is said to have a “normal (human) desire” for money means that we can understand him, that, although we cannot tolerate his behaviour, he is still one of us. He can still be accepted as human without forcing us to negate or compromise our “unique humanity.” Actions that disgust us threaten the image we have of ourselves, the way we define ourselves. In the case of animal-nature disgust it is usually sufficient to hide our animal nature from each other to stop or prevent the disgust reaction. Moral disgust, however, is more demanding than that. When we are morally disgusted by an action or practice we do not demand that it be performed secretly. Instead, we demand that it not be performed at all to protect our “soul” from contamination, that is, to let no harm come to our idea of what it means to be human.

4. LEON KASS AND THE WISDOM OF REPUGNANCE

Some years ago, Leon Kass, the neo-conservative philosopher and presidential bioethics advisor for George W. Bush, remarked that a society “that always rationalizes away the abominable” is “a society that has forgotten how to shudder.” (Kass and Wilson 1998, 87) One need not sympathize with the Bush government, or identify with conservatism as a worldview, to acknowledge the truth in Kass’ remark. Kass claims that the revulsion or repugnance we occasionally feel in the face of certain actions or conditions often is the “emotional expression of deep wisdom, beyond reason’s power fully to articulate it” (Kass and Wilson 1999, 18). We “intuit and feel, immediately and without argument, the violation of things that we rightfully hold dear” (Kass and Wilson 1999, 19). We may, of course, wonder how we can be sure that the things whose violation we immediately intuit are things we *rightfully* hold dear. Could we not be wrong in holding them dear? What justifies our trusting such intuitions? It seems that the mere intuition, or feeling, that something is terribly

wrong, or abominable, is not enough to establish its wrongness. To achieve this, other, more rational grounds seem to be required. Simply to declare that we don't need those rational grounds to judge some practice, for instance human cloning, morally wrong because all it needs to condemn the practice is our instinctual disgust, sounds, as Nicholas Agar (2004, 153) puts it, "like cheating. Placing the conservative's conclusion about biotechnology beyond reason's reach goes against the grain for those who are used to rationally justifying their moral conclusions."⁷ Agar rejects Kass' "yuck" argument because he believes that if "we lack a rationally persuasive reason to find their existence (i.e., the existence of cloned or genetically engineered human beings) wrongful, we should not translate queasiness into moral condemnations" (Agar 2004, 58). However, as I have argued above, to what extent we find arguments in support of certain moral intuitions plausible and hence rational depends on whether those arguments are themselves supported by our intuitions. It is hard to see how any argument that is completely disjoined from our moral intuitions can be said to be more convincing, plausible, or rational than any other. Most of us share the intuition that suffering is bad and that we ought not to make anything suffer if we can avoid it. That is why arguments to the effect that certain actions are to be avoided because they cause (needless) suffering, carry a considerable immediate plausibility. If suffering did not strike us as bad, we wouldn't understand the argument. For the same reason, a moral theory that focuses on suffering and its avoidance gives the impression of providing rational grounds to our intuitions. But the apparent objectivity thus achieved is simply an illusion.

Yet if there are, strictly speaking, no rational grounds for our moral judgements, then it seems that all we can say is that there are some things we (or some of us) "hold dear" and others we don't. We can then never decide whether we are *right* in holding them dear. This is usually supposed to be a problem that needs solving. Yet I am not sure that it is. Perhaps there is no non-circular way of distinguishing clearly and once and for all between legitimate and illegitimate moral feelings, and between rightfully

and not rightfully holding something dear. If that is the case, then clearly the practical question of how to deal with those widespread sentiment-based moral concerns that cannot be accounted for by established moral theories becomes more difficult to answer. A straightforward rejection is no longer an option. Instead, we are compelled to take those concerns seriously for a start and then see how well they fit to everything else that is important to us as human beings or as members of a certain civilization or society: to other concerns we have, other things we hold dear, other moral feelings, and to the image we have of ourselves. Thus the relevant question is not: Are those concerns rational and therefore legitimate?; but rather: Do they make sense to us in the light of the complex of interrelated beliefs and feelings that define our specific way of living in, and looking at, the world?

Now, there are practices that many people most strongly object to without being able to justify their objection or its intensity plausibly in terms of established moral theories, and that nonetheless are generally assumed to be morally wrong. Objections in these cases are mostly based on the revulsion felt. What is felt is what I would call a kind of moral disgust. Kass names some of those practices and poses the question whether anyone can “really give an argument fully adequate to the horror which is father-daughter incest (even with consent), or having sex with animals, or mutilating a corpse, or eating human flesh, or raping or murdering another human being? Would anybody’s failure to give full rational justification for his revulsion at those practices make that revulsion ethically suspect?” (Kass and Wilson 1999, 18).

I think that Kass has a very good point here. He is not saying that one cannot argue at all that having sex with animals, mutilating a corpse, etc., is morally wrong. In fact, there may be plenty of good arguments, even though none of them may be compelling in their own right. But none of these arguments, claims Kass, is *fully adequate* to the *horror* of the action in question. We may give arguments why a certain action is morally wrong (and some of these arguments will be more plausible than others),

but there are some actions that are not merely morally wrong, like, say, theft or the breaking of a promise, but rather *more* than just morally wrong. It is as if calling it morally wrong were simply insufficient to cover the kind of wrongness that we encounter here. It is not just wrong, but rather a “horror,” an “abomination.”

Of course, we may disagree with what Kass classifies as such a horror. We may, for instance, wonder whether human cloning is really a horror and an abomination in the sense that our revulsion of it, if we happen to feel it, is sufficient grounds for its condemnation. But we must, I think, admit that there are some things that really *are* a horror, which simply should not happen, or be allowed to happen, which can never be justified, no matter whether we can rationally explain *why* they should not happen.

5. CRUELTY

Consider the case where a child is tortured and then killed just for the ‘fun’ of it, and then imagine the moral philosopher who undertakes to explain why it is morally wrong to do such a thing. She might say that children are capable of suffering, or that being tortured and killed is clearly against their interests, and that it is *prima facie* wrong to violate somebody’s interests or hurting them and making them suffer. Or she might argue that a human being should never be treated merely as a means, but always as an end in itself as well. She could claim that torturing and killing a child could never be a universal law and that hence it must be wrong. Or she could say that it is definitely a breach of the social contract. But the fact is: each of these explanations seems hopelessly inadequate. Neither is there any need for such an explanation - because we simply *know* or at least cannot *seriously doubt* it is wrong - nor does it help us in any way to understand the kind of wrongness we immediately perceive. Of course, there are many actions whose wrongness *can* be clarified by systematic explanations for why they are wrong. When we ask ourselves why, for

instance, theft is (always) wrong, or lying, or adultery, we may find a utilitarian, Kantian, or contractualist account quite helpful and illuminating (as long, that is, as we can relate to the underlying moral intuitions). However, there are other actions whose very nature defies all our attempts to rationalize our objection to them. They are not merely wrong for such and such reasons. Rather, they are horrible, “too big for words.” They make us speechless. When it comes to positively cruel, “inhuman” actions, simple moral disapproval is not the proper reaction. Adorno must have had something like this in mind when he, in his *Negative Dialectics*, remarked that Hitler forced a new categorical imperative on us which to discursively justify would be heinous (“*ein Frevel*”): the imperative not to let Auschwitz (or something similar to it) happen again. For this imperative is nothing but the “practically applied abhorrence of the unbearable physical pain which the individuals had to suffer” (Adorno 1966, 358).⁸

Slavenka Drakulic reported in a December 13, 1992, *New York Times* article an incident that happened during the war in Bosnia: Serbian soldiers raped a woman while her baby lay beside her. When they were finished with her and she asked for permission to breast-feed her baby, one of the soldiers took a knife, cut the baby’s head off and threw it into the arms of its screaming mother. This is not just morally wrong: it is positively evil, and we acknowledge this evil by our revulsion. I do not think that it is specifically the dismemberment of the infant’s body that triggers our revulsion in this case. Animal-nature disgust may be part of it but is not at the centre. Rather, we revolt against the sheer wanton cruelty, the apparent complete lack of compassion, the blatant lack of concern and the ease with which a human body and the accompanying life are destroyed. The cruelty is such that we do no longer recognize the murderer as a human being. At the same time, knowing that he is one, we recognize him as the mirror image of ourselves. It makes us sick to realize that someone who is capable of doing such a thing belongs to our own kind. This is much worse than just having to realize that we too are, after all, animals. It is not our animal nature that reveals itself in this instance.

Although our animal nature might be something of which we don't like to be reminded, it is not normally something that positively horrifies us. Yet when we are confronted with humans that are capable of committing crimes such as the one described above, humanity itself becomes a horror, something we cannot any longer identify with, but have to all the same. The immediate object of our revulsion, however, is the extreme cruelty displayed. "Why is it," asks Judith Shklar in *Ordinary Vices*, "that wanton pain inflicted upon helpless beings, especially children and animals, is so revolting?" (Shklar 1984, 24). Shklar does not give an answer to her question, but she certainly does treat the revolting character of cruelty towards the helpless as a fact. They are, for Shklar, indeed a "horror," an "abomination" (Shklar 1984, 24, 30), and that is something which definitely cannot be appropriately said about morally wrong actions such as lying or theft (except perhaps in certain situations where, for instance, the helpless are robbed of their only means of survival). We may well say that lying or stealing (or bank-robbery) is morally wrong whatever the circumstances, but we would hardly call those actions a horror, or an abomination. There is nothing revolting in them. Actions that are considered to be abominable belong to an entirely different moral category.

It might be objected that abhorrence is not the same as disgust, that disgust is not what we experience when we come across a case like the one mentioned. However, it is at least very similar to disgust in terms of the bodily reactions connected with it. It is certainly more than just indignation. It literally can make one sick to think that a thing like that actually happened. When I told Drakulic's story to a group of students during a seminar one of them actually ran out to the bathroom and threw up. The fact that this can be the result of merely hearing the incident related indicates that it is the action *itself* (and not, say, the visual appearance of it) which revolts us. Seeing cockroaches in the cupboard, or being in the presence of them, might make us sick with disgust, but it is rather unlikely that *thinking* of their mere existence will have the same effect on us. This is not because disgust always depends on some kind of sensory

presence, but rather because we do not feel any *moral* disgust towards cockroaches. Moral disgust is the kind of disgust we feel towards abominable *acts* like the one mentioned above.

6. SLAVERY AND MEAT EATING

It may seem that in the case of wanton cruelty our revulsion, disgust, or horror – or whatever we choose to call it – can, to a certain extent, be rationally justified. Although our moral theories may not be suitable to adequately explain the *disgust* that, for instance, the slaughtering of defenceless human beings triggers in us, they at least can explain plausibly enough why it is morally *wrong*. The theory thus seems to give us an independent means to test whether our disgust is justified or not. In other words, we need not rely on the feeling of disgust to convince us that the actions we are disgusted by are wrong. At first glance this is very helpful since, after all, it is possible that some actions which *I* find abhorrent are not considered abhorrent by *you*, and vice versa, and that some actions on whose repulsiveness we all agree *today* will sometime in the *future* be felt to be quite alright, or did feel alright sometime in the *past*. Just consider “the changes in the attitude to the institution of slavery, now generally regarded as morally abhorrent; consider even possible future changes in the attitude to meat-eating, which some wish to see generally regarded as no less morally abhorrent.” (Strawson 1985, 47)

Let us follow for a moment Strawson’s suggestion and first consider slavery. We have learned, or so it seems, that slavery is morally wrong. We are able to justify our abhorrence of it by powerful and indeed very convincing arguments. Hence, we are rather puzzled that such a great thinker as Aristotle did not see what we so clearly see today and that he could really believe that slavery was a natural (and therefore quite appropriate) institution. Slavery is so obviously, in the words of Leon Kass, “a violation of things we rightfully hold dear.” But, again, how do we know that

we *rightfully* hold the liberty of each and every human being dear? One is tempted to think that it is because we see things more clearly now, because we have reflected more thoroughly on the matter. That is why we feel disgusted now. But the truth is that we are not disgusted because arguments have convinced us that slavery is wrong but rather do we find those arguments so convincing because we find the idea of slavery so repulsive. The disgust we feel today may have been shaped by arguments but those arguments would never have convinced anybody if they hadn't been supported by strong feelings pointing in the same direction. Aristotle, after all, had a theory of his own which *he* found quite convincing and which in his own eyes justified his *not* feeling disgusted by slavery. So why exactly do we no longer find Aristotle's arguments convincing? Is it because they are unsound? Or is it because our emotional attitude towards slavery has changed? It seems to me that the latter is much more likely.

Now consider meat-eating. Unlike slavery, which all philosophers (and most non-philosophers) today agree is wrong, meat-eating is still a controversial moral issue. At present, there are those who are (morally) disgusted by it and those who are not, and both are able to find plenty of arguments for their respective positions. So how should we decide which side is right? If we had one single moral theory shared by both the defenders and the opponents of meat-eating, we could in principle solve the matter. But as it is, there are theories supportive of meat-eating and theories supportive of vegetarianism, and which theory one finds convincing does not seem to be independent of what one is in favour of, or emotionally opposed to. However, at least there is, for each position, a well-conceived and widely accepted theory to which one can refer. One does not have to confine oneself to being simply disgusted but can account for *why* one is disgusted and why everyone else *ought* to be disgusted too. That is, whether we find meat-eating repulsive, or not, in both cases we can make good sense of our respective feelings, i.e., our repugnance, or the absence of it. But does it not follow from this that there is nothing *objectively* disgusting, nothing that truly *deserves* our disgust?

7. DEFILING THE DEAD AND THE “OBJECTIVELY” DISGUSTING

Justin d’Arms and Daniel Jacobson (2000) have argued that emotions, in contrast to, e.g., moods or feelings, involve evaluative presentations. Taken in this sense, what I have described as moral disgust is not a feeling but an emotion because it does present certain aspects of the world (i.e., certain actions and practices) in a particular way, namely as genuinely (morally) disgusting. According to d’Arms and Jacobson, an emotional response can be said to be “fitting” if it accurately presents its object as having certain evaluative properties. Hence, if disgust is an emotion (as d’Arms and Jacobson think it is), then it can be accurate and justified if the object it presents as disgusting really *is* disgusting. Accordingly, feeling moral disgust towards a certain action or practice would be appropriate (fitting) if and only if it were really morally disgusting. But when is an object *really* disgusting? Christopher Knapp (2003, 255) has rightly pointed out that disgustingness is a relative property: “It makes no more sense to say that something is disgusting *per se* than it does to say that something is illegal *per se*.” Things are always disgusting for someone, so if we are not disgusted by something, so long as we take it for what it is it cannot be disgusting, and if we are mistaken about its nature it can only be judged disgusting if we *would* be disgusted were we to know what it was. It follows that the notion of fittingness does not apply. Either feelings of disgust always fit their objects or they never do. This does not necessarily prevent us from distinguishing between objects or actions that deserve our disgust and those that do not. It is just that we cannot make this distinction on the basis of objectively disgusting properties, for there is no such thing as objectively disgusting properties. If an action deserves our disgust, it must deserve it on other grounds than those. For Knapp, these other grounds are “moral reasons.” However, he fails to clarify what reasons count as moral and how we should ever know them to be moral without recurring to the moral feelings people actually have. Just as disgustingness is relative to the disgust actually felt, moral wrongness is

relative to the *perception* of something as morally wrong. But we can only perceive something as morally wrong by *feeling* some sort of moral disapproval of it, and moral disgust is a very strong sort of such disapproval. Thus we can no more say that something is *objectively* morally wrong than we can say that it is objectively disgusting.

However, there are situations in which it is virtually impossible to acknowledge the non-objectivity of our moral judgements. Struggling with the problem of relativity, Jeffrey Stout (1988, 160) claims: “When the Nazis made lampshades out of the skins of their human victims, that was truly abominable.” That is to say, that it does not merely *appear* abominable *to us*. Rather, we would be *wrong* to regard such an action as not abominable, because “there are certain ways in which human beings (and their remains) shouldn’t be treated.” Again, I take the word ‘abominable’ here to be synonymous to the morally disgusting. To call something an abomination is an expression of one’s moral disgust. While the usual moral theories explain fairly easily why human beings should not be killed and mutilated, Stout’s example is quite interesting in so far as it is much harder to see why their *remains* should not be treated any way it suits us. Why, after all, should we not make lampshades out of the dead? Why not make use of them as long and as much as we can? They surely don’t mind, and what good is there in letting them rot? Granted that it was wrong to kill them, once this is done, it seems that no harm can result from putting their remains to practical use.

If someone should think that the harm in this case was done to the person who once lived and whose skin is being used in a way she certainly *would* have minded, we can imagine that the person in question in fact did *not* mind what would happen to her body after her death – which surely is possible. Even then, I think, we cannot help feeling that Stout is right: It actually *is* an abomination to treat the dead as if they were a mere commodity to be used at our convenience, no matter whether they *themselves* would have minded. Strangely enough, it may even seem more horrible to treat them that way than to kill them in the first place, even though we

have difficulty stating clearly the exact nature of the harm that is being inflicted here on the dead. But we are convinced that there *is* harm done, and we do not abandon our conviction when philosophers, putting too much trust in their pet theory, try to persuade us that our reaction is quite irrational and we should not pay any attention to it. No argument will convince us that making lampshades out of the skins of murdered people is not abominable. But of course, no one seriously doubts that we should honour the dead and that in defiling them we somehow defile ourselves, i.e., the living. The practice of honouring the dead is something we, to use Kass' words, "hold dear," and we don't care whether we do it rightfully or not. If we gave up treating our dead with respect we would change the meaning of humanity in a way that few people would consider an improvement. This may not exactly be rational but it is an essential part of our self-understanding as human beings.

There are, however, other occasions for moral disgust that appear to be equally irrational but lack the sanctioning of a long established public opinion. One of those is the repugnance many people feel towards genetic manipulation of living organisms in general, and the creation of transgenic chimeras in particular. This is the last occasion for moral disgust which I want to discuss in this paper.

8. CHICKIENOBS

Margaret Atwood, in her latest novel *Oryx and Crake*, describes a scene where the narrator, Jimmy, is guided through the floors and laboratories of an elite college specializing in biotechnology. One room is occupied by strange objects:

What they were looking at was a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing. 'What the hell is it?' said Jimmy. 'Those are chickens,' said Crake.

‘Chicken parts. Just the breasts, on this one. (...)’ ‘But there aren’t any heads,’ said Jimmy. (...) ‘That’s the head in the middle,’ said the woman. ‘There’s a mouth-opening at the top, they dump the nutrients in there. No eyes or beak or anything, they don’t need those.’ ‘This is horrible,’ said Jimmy. The thing was a nightmare. (...) ‘No need for added growth hormones,’ said the woman, ‘the high growth rate’s built in. You get chicken breasts in two weeks – that’s a three-week improvement on the most efficient low-light, high-density chicken farming operation so far devised. And the animal-welfare freaks won’t be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain’ (Atwood 2003, 202-3).

No doubt, Jimmy is disgusted by what he sees in the laboratory, although he will soon get used to eating ChickieNobs, as those creatures are called. But this is not because later they do no longer strike him as a horror but rather because he has managed to dispel all thoughts about *what* he is eating. Strangely enough, the fact pointed out by the lab assistant, that “this thing feels no pain” so the “animal-welfare freaks” have no reason to protest, does not, in Jimmy’s eyes, make it any better. On the contrary, it somehow increases the horror of it. But if there is no pain involved so that animal welfare concerns simply do not apply, what can be wrong with it?⁹ If nobody is harmed and no other argument for why it is wrong to do such a thing can be given, all opposition ought to be classified as evidently irrational and unjustified. If the disgust felt by Jimmy is a moral disgust, then surely it is inappropriate here. At least this is what many bioethicists urge us to believe. One of them, again, is John Harris.

Discussing the issue of transgenic plants and animals, Harris argues that the uneasiness some people feel about the creation of chimeras (i.e., organisms that carry DNA sequences of at least two different species), even if they should *look* like monsters, is to be dismissed as morally irrelevant: “As for making us uneasy, well, we have no sacred right to tranquillity of mind, although many people think that they do” (Harris 1998, 179). The even stronger opposition to the creation of animal-human chimeras is, according to Harris, equally unjustified:

It is a sort of instinctive recoiling from the very idea of contamination with animal products. Like other taboos which employ the ideas of defilement and uncleanness it is either felt or not. It deserves about as much respect as objections to miscegenation. In the absence of an argument or of the ability to point to some specific harm that might be involved in crossing species boundaries, we should regard the objections *per se* to such practices as on a par with objections to interracial marriage and dismiss them as mere and gratuitous prejudice (Harris 1998, 181).¹⁰

If we adopt Harris' position we must, it seems, conclude that Jimmy's instinctive recoiling from the ChickieNobs deserves no respect either. It is merely a prejudice, in no way different from the rejection of what is called by those who reject it, "miscegenation." The same objection is raised by Martha Nussbaum against Leon Kass' disgust-based argument against human cloning: Kass "offers us no way of distinguishing the disgust that lay behind antimiscegenation laws from the disgust that he endorses as a good legal criterion in the case of cloning" (Nussbaum 2004, 148). However, there actually is an important difference between those cases: between the opposition to human cloning, embryo research, the creation of animal-animal or human-animal chimeras on the one hand and the opposition to sexual relations between persons of the same sex or of different skin colour on the other.

The difference is that there are, in fact, good *moral* arguments against the enforcement of sexual and racial prejudices. A good moral argument is one that is supported by strong moral feelings that are widely shared. Fortunately, in our society, we have come to respect both the equality of all persons in terms of their basic rights and the right of individuals to sexual self-determination. We have come to think that all people have a right to their private life and to do with it whatever they like as long as they don't harm anyone. Some may not like the idea but even they can, if they make the effort, understand that there are more important values to be preserved here. Today, the idea of sexual oppression disgusts many people far more than the idea of homosexual relations (Kahan 1999). Personal

autonomy is something we have learned to “hold dear,” which is crucial to our self-understanding as members of a basically liberal society. This fact provides us with an excellent moral reason not to give in to our feelings of disgust (or those of others), even if we are not willing to dismiss them as completely morally irrelevant. In the Atwood case, on the other hand, which admittedly is an extreme case, there is no good moral reason to overcome or at least ignore our feelings of disgust. A being is created that is hardly more than a living, or rather growing, piece of meat. This might serve economic interests but certainly no moral interests. It might be objected, however, that if something serves economic interests then it has some utility: it benefits people, and if it does then surely it serves moral interests as well. After all, it is *good* for someone. Yet, although this moralization of the economic is a popular misconception, it is still a misconception. Utility is not a moral concept (see Maclean 1993, especially chapter 8). The whole point of morality is to set limits to the pursuit of utility. Otherwise we could just as well accept Jonathan Swift’s modest proposal of preventing the Irish children from being a burden to their country and their parents. Yet even if utility as such is not morally relevant, since in itself it provides no moral reason for something not to be done, it is hard to see why we should not be allowed to follow utility if no harm results from it.

9. THE NOTION OF HARM

This is the starting point of Harris’ argument, which draws heavily on the notion of harm. If “no specific harm” can be pointed out, he claims, any objection raised is to be dismissed as mere prejudice. I am inclined to concede to Harris the intuitive plausibility of this demand. If someone is disgusted by a certain kind of action (or its results) and she, in consequence, objects to this action being performed, we must suppose that she regards it as harmful, for if she thought that the action (or the state resulting from

it) was *not* harmful in any way, it would be hard to understand the moral relevance of her disgust. There would be no reason (even for herself) to classify her disgust as a *moral* disgust. Furthermore, if she expects *us* to share her view and to act accordingly, we can reasonably expect *her* to account for her (implicit) claim that harm is being done. If we do not share her feelings of disgust, we need at least to know why we should be disgusted. However, although moral disgust may require the notion of harm being done, it is not always easy to “point out” exactly in what the alleged harm consists. The word “harm” is, as Joel Feinberg rightly remarked, “both vague and ambiguous” (Feinberg 1984, 31). It is fairly clear, though, that there are states and actions commonly regarded as harmful which do not involve any subjective experience of being harmed. A person can reasonably be said to be harmed by being raped in an unconscious state. She can be said to be harmed by being painlessly killed in her sleep. She might even be harmed by events happening *after* her death, or before her birth (Feinberg 1988, 65-104). There is also the puzzling case where a person is being conceived (and then given birth to) even though it is known in advance that she will be seriously handicapped in such a way that her life does not seem worth living. Thinking about this case might help us to understand how the creation of living organisms such as Atwood’s ChickieNobs can indeed be something that, for the sake of those organisms, ought not to be done. It is a way of “making sense” of our disgust, a way of spelling out the message inherent to it.

Feinberg, discussing the case, argues that since the only possible alternative would have been non-existence and since it seems false to say that somebody would have been better off if she had never existed (since a non-existent person cannot be “better off”), or that she is worse off now than she would otherwise have been, we perhaps cannot exactly say that this person has been *harmed* by her being conceived and given birth to. However, we have good reasons to suppose that the state this person is made to live in is a *harmful* state and that she was *wronged* by being condemned to existence:

We can conclude tentatively that there are some inherited handicaps that are so severe that they doom a child's most basic future interests to defeat. A child born with such handicaps is in a condition that we would not hesitate to call 'harmed' if it were not for the fact that it is not, like standard harms, a worsening of some prior condition, being itself the *initial* condition of the person who is born. Whether or not we can call him harmed (...), there is good reason to claim that he has been *wronged* to be brought into existence in such a state (Feinberg 1984, 99).

Although Feinberg seemingly bases his argument on the "child's most basic future interests" he cannot really mean the interests the child actually will have. If the child is, for instance, severely mentally retarded (one of Feinberg's examples) his interests, whatever they will be, will be the interests of a severely mentally retarded child, and it cannot be presupposed that *those* interests will be thwarted by his condition. What is being thwarted here are rather the interests he *would* have had if he had not been born mentally retarded. But the main point is that, as Feinberg remarks: "Any rational being would prefer not to exist than to exist in his state" (Feinberg 1988, 102).

We can go a step further now and suppose that the mental retardation is so severe that the infant does not feel anything at all. In this case, he would not have any actual interests whatsoever. Even so we would, I think, not be unreasonable or in conflict with the usual understanding of the word "harm" if we insisted that such a child would have been wronged too, and that the state it is in because of somebody's action is a harmful one. We would certainly not regard such a life as worth living. The same holds here as in the former case: Any rational being would prefer not to exist than to exist in this state. This is reason enough to claim that deliberately creating such a being would be morally wrong. If we could genetically engineer brainless, entirely unconscious human beings to use them as organ donors, we can be sure that most people would object strongly to it. In fact, many would agree that the very idea is revolting and the thing proposed an abomination. Again, we cannot help thinking that it would be a "violation of things we rightfully hold dear."

We can return to the Atwood case now. The two cases are sufficiently similar to justify an adoption of the argument given above. Although the ChickieNobs could not have existed other than they are and their interests have, strictly speaking, not been thwarted, it is plausible to assume that they have been wronged by being brought into existence in such a state. The life they have (if it is a life) is certainly not worth living, and any rational being would prefer not to exist than to exist in this state. That is why creating such beings cannot be dismissed as morally unproblematic.

10. CONCLUSION

Moral disgust is the kind of disgust we experience when witnessing an action or event that immediately, and without further reflection, strikes us as terribly wrong, that is, as something that simply ought not to happen, no matter what the circumstances. Of course, it is always a good precept to reflect on the grounds of one's disgust and to try to integrate it into the system of interconnected beliefs that make up our moral world. Argument is, as Mary Midgley (2003, 151) points out, "always in order." But argument will not always help us to understand the firmness and strength of our intuitive conviction that what we are dealing with is a matter of great importance. And we will not always be able to state clearly and convincingly the reasons for our reaction and the resulting moral concerns. Even so, "opponents of the yuck factor must concede that, sometimes, we know that an action is wrong merely on the basis of our reaction to it, even if we cannot satisfactorily justify that reaction" (Streiffer 2003). Harm, for sure, can be pointed out, but to acknowledge the harm *as* harm we need more than theory: we need the feeling of disgust or some similar reaction to make us sensitive to it. To dismiss as morally irrelevant widespread feelings of disgust towards what, in virtue of technological advances, we are able to do with living beings, is itself in need of justifi-

cation. In the absence of any good *moral* reasons *not* to trust our intuitions, we should take them seriously and act accordingly.

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NOTES

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² It has been observed that in many languages the term "disgusting" is used in the same way and with apparently the same meaning as terms such as "horrible" or "outrageous." Cf. Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 1999.

³ Of course, disgust at bloodshed does not necessarily lead to more humane behaviour. Often, it only leads to more refined (and, incidentally, more efficient) ways of killing. When the Nazis realized that many soldiers had serious difficulties to cope with the increasingly frequent mass shootings, they invented the gas chambers to circumvent feelings of disgust and thus to facilitate the act of killing. See Hilberg 1961, 208-219.

⁴ Cf. Gibbard 1990, 7: "A rational feeling is an apt feeling, a warranted feeling, a way it makes sense to feel about something."

⁵ Cf. Blackburn 1998, 13: "there is no doubt about the central ethical role of disgust, anger, and contempt." Gibbard (1990, 295) lists as moral feelings for one's own actions besides guilt and anger: "shame, fear, disgust, embarrassment, and humiliation."

⁶ Cf. Maclean 1993, 5: "bioethicists wish to present the moral conclusions for which they argue as the verdict of philosophy itself upon the issues they discuss." 15: "Utilitarians select one of the forms that moral thinking actually does take – the form of which they approve – and label it the only rational form; thus conferring upon it a title to which it has no legitimate claim."

⁷ Similarly Nussbaum 2004, 153: “To appeal to disgust seems to be just to say ‘I don’t like that,’ and to stamp one’s foot vehemently.”

⁸ “*Hitler hat den Menschen im Stande ihrer Unfreiheit einen neuen kategorischen Imperativ aufgezwungen: ihr Denken und Handeln so einzurichten, dass Ausschwitz sich nicht wiederhole, nichts Ähnliches geschehe. Dieser Imperativ ist so widerspenstig gegen seine Begründung wie einst die Gegebenheit des Kantischen. Ihn diskursiv zu behandeln, wäre Frevel: an ihm lässt leibhaftig das Moment des Hinzutretenden am Sittlichen sich fühlen. Leibhaft, weil es der praktisch gewordene Abscheu vor dem unerträglichen physischen Schmerz ist, dem die Individuen ausgesetzt sind, auch nachdem Individualität, als geistige Reflexionsform, zu verschwinden sich anschickt.*”

⁹ A similar case is discussed by Bovenkerk, Brom, and van den Bergh 2002.

¹⁰ The same point was made by Glover 1984, 40-41.