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Closing Keynote

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Morality, Colour, Bodies: Epistemological and Interpretive Questions of Purity

Introduction

Responses to the idea of purity in this special edition are wonderfully diverse and contribute towards a welcome discussion of the topic. In offering a range of perspectives on different themes, they avoid a canonical statement about purity, but offer lines of enquiry. They amply demonstrate purity and impurity as an issue of contemporary relevance: for the politics of nation states, in cosmetic and reproductive technologies, projects of the state, of the body, of finance and media, in ambiguous and contested cyberspace, popular culture and beyond. Activities in all of these areas are shaped by implicit understandings and practices that relate to purity, variously expelling, carving, distributing and representing human and material processes in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ways.

The contributions to this special issue do not only trace historical and present-day forms of purity discourse, but challenge some of its superficial and

hegemonic presentations in exploring different forms of social practice. Attending to the practice of historical inquiry in her contribution, Susan Currell draws attention to what she terms the ‘confusions and delusions of the discourses of purity’ and their oppressive and violent deployment. Currell attends to the significant role these discourses have played in both twentieth-century American social and eugenic policies, a finding which is in line with research addressing other countries (e.g. Mottier, 2008). As well as presenting insightful observations on this topic, she also offers meta-reflections for those interested to theorise purity within history. Her premise, fully evidenced by her own scholarship addressing documentary photographs, is that there is no untainted record of facts or events, waiting to be uncovered in a neutral way by the researcher: ‘History of course, is not “pure”: but we need to face the inadequacy of the historical method that reconstructs the past using only fragments obtained from documents created by those whose voices are already privileged over their subjects (academics, politicians, artists for example). How do we refute those dominant narratives without privileging our own?’.

Currell’s question, of how to respond to the complicity of historical method and its asymptotic distance of the evidence from the truth has been a question asked countless times. It was, in fact, Marx and Engels who first framed this question as a distinction between ‘pure history’ and ‘impure history’, in the *German Ideology* ([1864] 1976, p.164). Currell not only offers a distinctive answer to this question, but also gives an elegant demonstration of how it might work in practice: ‘One way that we might proceed is to question and prod the gaps – explore the binaries and unity of opposites such as white and trash – expose the imperfections and impurities of historical evidence’. Currell is suggesting that we can best acknowledge the impurity of historical, or for that matter sociological, evidence by prodding the gaps in existing narratives. Topics come to our attention because they are already situated in some way as intelligible, if perhaps opaque or contradictory. Exposing the terms of that intelligibility as a method acknowledges that we begin from an already partly constituted horizon, but suggests that we can advance through questioning the terms of this intelligibility.

Sociological, anthropological and ethnographic literature dealing with the theory of visual images (Henare et al., 2006; Belton, 2011) draws attention to the sites of the production, image and audience for images, and how our

bodies experience images. Considering Currell's discussion of photographic images, and the encouragement to 'prod the gaps', exposure in this context can be taken to mean the control of light hitting a photographic film, between the time the shutter is released and the time it is closed again, in order to produce visible detail. Perfect light or perfect absence of light are incapable of producing textures on a photographic film, and as such cannot support intelligible meanings. Instead, it is the imperfections of available light—between pristine light and pristine darkness—which produce this texture (Nancy 1991). Exposure is an operation performed upon this finitude, shaping it in order to achieve visually intelligible shapes, tones and contrasts. It is by crafting this finitude by selection and exposure control that the potential for meaning is achieved. Similarly, other aspects of photography such as composition expose the contingent nature of purity; visual elements have meaning in relation to other elements, images themselves are presented in particular sequences and utilise narrative conventions, and imperfections in images themselves testify to authenticity. Through such crafting, different ways become possible of turning the singular event—available to us only in imperfect light—into an account, of turning the openness of ourselves as researchers into the production of something marked, limited and new.

In her analysis of the use of documentary photography to support eugenic discourse, Currell observes that 'the photo portrays an absence, makes present that which it tries to hide and hides what it is truly showing'. Eugenic purity and impurity in human beings is not visible, and as such leans upon other forms of signification in order to appear as a certain basis for public policy (and for individual sexual choices). A photograph of a dilapidated house, with dirty occupants, can make visible eugenic impurity, even whilst in order to be plausible it must hide the production of this visibility out of an image which could readily have quite alternate meanings. Currell refers to 'the dialectics of purity' in this context, highlighting that close attention to purity and impurity discourses in their situated operation will allow the researcher to see the forces which both allow these discourses to subsist and persuade, and which can reveal the contradictions and constructions upon which they necessarily rest.

The discussion of purity itself is something that benefits from an exposure of the terms of its intelligibility. As contributors to this special edition show in

different ways, purity itself is a less stable concept than may first appear. This insight, however, is not always reflected in dominant theory on the topic. Contributions to this special edition are therefore placed in dialogue with a metanarrative regarding the role of purity in Western history, presented by the influential Harvard sociologist Barrington Moore Jr.. In effect, discussion of Moore's narrative on purity is a way to expose it differently, allowing the reader to consider Moore's claims about the defining role of purity as he sees it in the Hebrew Bible. In turn, we hope that the special issue's contributions will be exposed differently in light of work to refine and redefine Moore's overarching thesis. As Udo Simon (2012, pp.31, 34) has argued, contemporary research is not well-served by what he calls the 'remarkable' disparity between the limited theory developed to date on the topic of purity and impurity, and the pressing fact that 'purity rhetorics are still part of the daily life of the individual and in public discourses' in both industrialised and post-industrialised societies.

Moral Purity and Persecution

Among existing theory on the topic of purity and impurity, one major account is that of the Harvard sociologist Barrington Moore, Jr. (2000). In *Moral Purity and Persecution in History*, Moore proposes that the Hebrew Bible, 'the moral template of Western civilisation', assigned a monopoly of grace and virtue to its adherents, making relations with any other human beings 'fierce and cruel' (2000, p.x, 3). He suggests that monotheistic religion will necessarily and inevitably produce discourses of moral purity, which demand the elimination of impurity, since they equate diversity with evil in their conception of a single God. Citing Leviticus 5:2, which states that a person touching the carcass of an unclean animal is both 'unclean and guilty', Moore proposes that this framework fully aligned impurity with guilt, producing an ideology of 'moral purity', 'a monotheistic invention that has been with us for centuries' (2000, p.12).

From this historical foundation in Biblical monotheism, moral purity and impurity have 'become the basis for political and religious action in Western and Central Europe', contributing to intolerance and extremism through the absolutist world-view that they mandate (2000, p.x). Using comparative

historical methods, Moore addresses the cultural specificity of this notion of purity and impurity. Other societies use these ideas, he states, but do they form exclusivist ideologies of moral purity? Examining Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, prior to substantial Western impact, Moore concludes that whilst purity and impurity discourses are present, they do not operate as characterisations of moral perfection or abjection: ‘missing or very weakly developed in China are the two basic themes in the Western theory and practice of moral purity. First is the otherworldly sanction for “our” moral purity, be it God, revolutionary faith, or the mythic Aryan race... Second is a strongly developed notion of pollution that makes the impure and the unbelievers into a mysterious dehumanised threat that must, if at all possible, be rooted out for the sake of preserving “our” moral purity’ (2000, p.128).

As such, ‘For the Western world, and only the Western world, we can discern a line of historical causation that begins with the monotheism of the ancient Hebrews; runs through the heresies of early Christianity, the slaughters of the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Reformation; turns secular in the French Revolution, and culminates in... Nazism’ (2000, p.26). Moore’s narrative does not imply that this cultural heritage is limited to Western societies today. With imperialism and globalisation, moral purity discourses have spread widely. Thus Moore notes that whereas purity and impurity in India used to organise caste hierarchies in which the most polluted did the dirtiest and most strenuous work, in recent years these discourses have increasingly been used within movements for whom there is no possible place for pollution.

Moore’s argument is strident. It draws attention to three valuable facets of purity and impurity discourses. First, he draws a distinction between ritual purity and moral purity, proposing that they operate quite differently. He suggests that only moral purity is an absolutist discourse, distinguishing in black-and-white terms the meaning and worth of human beings. Second, Moore situates moral purity discourses in history. This differs from the work of Mary Douglas (1966, pp.43-4), for example, for whom purity and impurity attends any breach of the social or categorical boundaries of a society, and for whom ‘the difference between pollution behaviour in one part of the world and another is only a matter of detail’. By contrast, Moore suggests that moral purity and impurity discourses are culturally contingent. Moore’s account can

explain, for example, why Hang Lin's fascinating contribution to this special issue, discussing Confucianism, does not explicitly mention purity and impurity: Moore states that whilst concepts of ritual and aesthetic purity exist in Confucianism, this 'contrasts sharply with the divine sanction found in the three monotheistic religions of the West and Near East. It is one important reason for the near absence of a militant moral purity in classical Confucianism' (2000, p.123). Third, however, Moore makes an important point when he suggests that the heritage of Western societies in the construction of moral purity and impurity may have purchase, *mutatis mutandis*, in organising non-Western discourses to the degree that they selectively incorporate and reconstitute Western discourses of moral purity.

However, Moore's account also has significant flaws. In its totalising narrative, it too often neglects the plurality of influences on the use of purity and impurity discourses, and too often forces their appearance and form in contexts where they are not invoked (Birnbaum, 2003). This point can be illustrated with the case of Biblical monotheism. In support of his metanarrative, Moore considers Leviticus 10:10, in which God instructs Aaron on behalf of the Israelites that they 'must distinguish [*ulahavdil*] between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean'. This text appears to run quite counter to Moore's account, since it implies that purity and impurity cannot be reduced to a mere characterisation of good and bad, and that the two oppositions not only have been but should be distinguished from one another. Moore counters such a reading by proposing that there is ultimately no difference between good/evil and pure/impure in the text, since 'impurity remains the decisive threat, and certainly a moral one, because it is a threat to holiness' (2000, p.14). Moore's interpretation, however, not only runs counter to the ostensive meaning of the verse—*Ulahavdil* is an injunction to separate; the term for separation used is the one which elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible designates an ontological or categorical distinction (e.g. Genesis 1:4-7 between darkness and light, heavens and earth). Moore's account also runs counter to the tide of specialist scholarly literature on purity and impurity in the Hebrew Bible, further suggesting that the binary account of purity he draws from scripture also requires re-examination.

There are, scholars have argued, two currents of purity and impurity classification in the Hebrew Bible. One current situates impurity as bad; the

other wishes to avoid contact between impurity and the Temple, as the site at which imminent existence meets transcendence, but otherwise treats impurity as an inevitable part of human existence and without moral valence. Klawans (2000, p.23) specifically draws out that whilst some forms of impurity are perceived as avoidable, evil and more or less indelible, there are sources of impurity considered in the Hebrew Bible which are '(1) more or less unavoidable. (2) It is not sinful to contract these impurities. And (3) these impurities convey an impermanent contagion'. A key distinction is that where impurity is perceived as avoidable and evil it is not perceived by the biblical text as contagious; whereas where purity is perceived as unavoidable and not in itself sinful, it has the problem of causing contagion through touch. Linking these two different schemas of purity and impurity, there is a concern, expressed in Leviticus 15:31, that both kinds of impurity run some risk of contaminating the Temple. In any case, however, already from the Hebrew Bible itself purity and impurity discourses can be observed which do not obey the eliminationist schema which Moore theorises originated in the Hebrew Bible and subsequently dominated Western culture. A current of purity and impurity discourse in the Bible sees impurity as an integral part of human life, and not as bad in itself:

Consideration of the plain meaning of the scriptural verses relating to impurity contravenes the notion that impurity is always regarded as a forbidden state *ab initio*. After all, bodily impurities, including corpse contamination, are an inescapable component of daily life. Scripture recommends no apotropaic precautions for approaching impurity, neither for childbirth nor for burial, for example; nor does it condemn voluntarily contracted impurity, as through marital relations. Indeed, the few verses warning against impurity, or stating a punishment for its incurrance, are primarily directed at preventing contact between impurity and consecrated persons, objects, or places. (Noam, 2008, p.471)

Yet the plurality of purity discourse in the Hebrew Bible can be countered by Moore with the claim that only one form matters. Here again we can identify the consequences of a binary account of moral purity: he argues that 'the long, long route from the ancient Hebrews to Stalinism was a river of social causation' and 'despite all the twisting and turning of historical debris, the river has a clear identity and an obvious ending point in twentieth-century totalitarian movements' (2000, p.26). In short, historical diversity is

epiphenomenal. In this way, Moore falls subject to just the purifying manoeuvre he is intent to diagnose: he clears away what appears to him to be mere historical dross or debris, to see the 'clear identity' of purity and impurity as a pure river of ideas beneath phenomena, experiences, texts and events. In one of many examples, Moore notes awkwardly that popular Calvinism made no use of purity and impurity discourses that he could discover; nonetheless he asserts that 'an implicit distinction between pure and impure remained basic to the whole Calvinist position' (2000, p.48), and that as such 'the entire Catholic ritual, with its belief in the real presence of Christ in the Mass, the veneration of relics, the cult of the Virgin, etc. formed a poisonous pollution of the true faith, to be rooted out by any possible means' (2000, p.55).

In Moore's hands purity and impurity waver between a discourse actually used by organisations and societies, and an interpretive framework which can be used to analyse events where no explicit discursive appeal to purity and impurity is made. This wavering, indeed, appears to be the condition of his strongest claims that moral purity and impurity are of foundational importance across Western societies, in producing 'moral approval for cruelty' (2000, p.57). Moore himself worries that 'in an inquiry such as the present one, the investigator nearly always finds what he is looking for, a discovery that by itself may be worthless', and urges further work to 'learn not only what notions of purity-impurity were current but also to acquire some sense of their importance in current thinking and political action' (2000, p.76). Drawing upon and integrating the contributions to this special issue, this article will engage in such work, aiming to achieve a different and deeper theory of purity discourses than that presented by Moore. In his text, Moore highlights the themes of truth, morality and embodiment as crucial for Western purity discourses, but he offers no analysis of why purity and impurity are tied to these themes. Our analysis will attend to each in turn on the way to an improved account of how purity and impurity discourses, as Moore rightly states, often play a role in black-and-white worldviews.

Moore is quite disparaging about 'purity': in his work, 'impurity receives far more attention than its opposite. It is also rather more interesting' (2000, p. ix). The neglect of purity, in favour of analysis of impurity, has been a common feature of studies of the topic to date (e.g. Caillois [1950], 1959; Kristeva [1980], 1982). Our own view is that purity, reconsidered, offers rich

potential for study. To remain with a scriptural imaginary, to wrestle with the angel of purity is complex and uncomfortable but ultimately stages an encounter which is not empty. Pursuit of fresh ways of understanding and applying ideas of 'Purity' stem from the title of the *Excursions Journal*/University of Sussex conference from which the contributions to the special issue originated. Contributors have interrogated this theme in topics as diverse as the propaganda of eugenics, putrefaction and death, colour, popular culture and the morality of banking. In agreement with these contributors, our own position is that future exploration of the subject of purity, including its constructive, relational and ethical dimensions, offers rich grounds for thought. Whereas Moore (2000, p.3) perceives purity as defined by what it is not 'namely, impurity or pollution', we will attend to the specific meanings associated with purity. Our analysis will begin by reconsidering whether purity and impurity discourses have the 'clear identity' that Moore wishes to ascribe to them, looking at variation in their epistemological status through attention to themes raised by the contributions to the special issue.

Purity and truth

In her contribution to the special issue, Rebecca Downes suggests that 'purity suggests flawlessness; it is an ideal and an abstraction, opposed to the real, the actual, the physical'. This is an elegant formulation, with much value as a characterisation of the way that purity and impurity have figured death and corpses. In addition to considering purity as a contrast of ideal and material, we consider the possibilities for purity as situated, with both material and ideal features. To do this, we borrow from the world of physical sciences and take the case of the metal element zinc. Rather than absolute flawless presence or absolute flawless absence—either of which would kill us (through zinc toxicity or zinc deficiency)—the human body requires trace amounts of zinc for the operation of many of the key proteins and enzymes required for manufacturing new cells.

Zinc (Zn) is pure whereas zinc oxide (ZnO) and zinc blende (ZnS), its common compounds, are impure. Like Currell's eugenic purity, pure zinc never occurs without human support and intervention. We are forced to challenge our ideas about purity. If purity refers to an ideal and an abstraction,

this does not mean that it is *mere* ideal and abstraction. There is surely value in being able to assign a different epistemological status to eugenics and material science discourses. Since the seventeenth century, various methods have been used to smelt—extract—zinc from its oxide without it immediately escaping as vapour (Craddock, 1998). Scientific discourse situates such an extraction as an act which achieves pure zinc, deploying the assumption that metallic zinc is an ‘element’, an immutable essence defined by the number of protons in the nucleus of the atom (its distinctive atomic number) and expressed in any instantiation of zinc to the extent that it is free from mixture. We will never see, hear, or touch zinc in its form as an element any more than we can eugenic purity. It is always partly constructed by the material and discursive conditions of scientific practice (such as its price). Yet the distinctive atomic number of the element zinc gives it a more credible claim to being the basis for the assessment of actually occurring zinc compounds in terms of their purity and impurity (Duschinsky & Lampitt, 2012).

As this example shows, Moore (2000) and other theorists such as Kristeva ([1980], 1982), make a methodological misstep in their presumption that purity is simply the absence of impurity. This is true of purity in the Hebrew Bible (Klawans, 2000), but not of Platonism. The Athenian tells Clinias in Plato’s *Laws* (4.716) that ‘the wicked man is *akathartos* [unclean] in his *psuché* [life, soul, being], whereas the good man is clean [*katharos* – opposite of *akathartos*]; and from him that is defiled no good man, nor god, can ever rightly receive gifts’. For Plato, deviation from our essential truth is marked as steps away from true reality, as the common domain of men and gods. This means, as Foucault observes, that for Plato both worldliness and untruth ‘should be understood on the double register of an impurity to be dispelled and a disease to be cured. Purification and cure are mixed together’ ([1983] 2012, p.361). Foucault emphasises that the association between purity and truth, to be found in Plato and in other Greek discourses, ‘was to be decisive in the history of Western knowledge’ ([1971] 2013, p.228). Yet he insists, in contrast to Moore, that this does not mean that purity and impurity will always be salient in Western discourses. For example, he draws a contrast between Stoic ethics in which ‘the question of purity was nearly nonexistent or, rather, marginal’ and ‘the Neoplatonic schools’. The importance of purity to the latter

meant that the question of purity ‘became more and more important through their influence’ ([1984b] 1997, p.274).

The influence of Platonism on Western purity and impurity discourses complicates Moore’s narrative. He knows this. In a discussion of Buddhism’s lack of a discourse of moral purity, Moore observes that ‘in Buddhist cosmology all things are composite and transient. They have no eternal self. The personality is in a constant state of flux... This set of ideas amounts to a complete denial of Platonism. To take this anti-Platonism seriously, to deny the possibility of pure essences, and yet construct a doctrine claiming a purity relevant to this world would be impossible’ (2000, p.114). The implication is that Western purity discourses are as much shaped by an account of phenomena as underpinned by essences, lacking mixture or transience, as by Biblical purity discourses. This would suggest a rather different theory of purity and impurity in Western cultures to that offered by Moore, in which the two basic themes of such discourses are an otherworldly sanction and an alignment of impurity with evil. Instead, purity and impurity would also, and perhaps predominantly we would argue, be shaped by an assessment of phenomena in terms of their correspondence or distance with their essence in terms of their degree of mixture and/or transience. Purity would not be empty of content, but would have properties of its own.

Indeed, cognitive scientists have found evidence that there are specific neurophysiological reactions to the presence of purity which are distinct from those associated with the presence or absence of impurity. For example, smells that signify purity to a participant are more likely to encourage cooperative behaviour and trust than merely the absence of negative smells (Liljenquist et al., 2010). When people have typed a virtuous e-mail, they are less likely to want to use hand sanitizer than the general population, ‘suggesting that people may avoid rinsing away residues of virtue’ as a moral substance distinct from the absence of contamination (Lee & Schwartz, 2010, p.1425). As Schnall (2011, p.265) puts it, such findings mean purity is ‘more than the simple absence of contamination’, and that ‘clean, proper and tidy are more than the absence of dirty, disgusting and wrong’.

We propose that hegemonic constructions, characteristic of the cultural heritage of Western societies but not limited to them in contemporary globalised society, allocate purity two distinct qualities: it corresponds with its

essence, and it is qualitatively homogenous (devoid of heterogeneous, foreign or inferior elements). A further property of pure things is that their degree of homogeneity or mixture is *therefore* a measure of their correspondence with their essential truth (Duschinsky & Lampitt 2012; Duschinsky & Brown 2013). Purity discourses, in short, compare people and things to their essence *in terms of* their degree of mixture. And as even Plato himself acknowledged, seemingly despite himself, there is a great deal of social and psychological contingency in what phenomena get assigned an essence (termed an 'Idea' in Plato), and how the purity of the correspondence between phenomenon and essence gets judged:

Parmenides: such things as hair, mud, dirt, or anything else which is vile and paltry; would you suppose that each of these has an Idea distinct from the actual objects with which we come into contact, or not?

Certainly not, said Socrates; visible things like these are such as they appear to us, and I am afraid that there would be an absurdity in assuming any Idea of them, although I sometimes get disturbed, and begin to think that there is nothing without an Idea; but then again, when I have taken up this position, I run away, because I am afraid that I may fall into a bottomless pit of nonsense, and perish; and so I return to the Ideas of which I was just now speaking [the good, the true, etc.], and occupy myself with them. (Plato, *Parmenides* 130c)

Having taken the example of zinc as a starting point, nationalist purity discourses offer a useful further case for consideration, since we are less inclined to accept the essence imputed as the ground of national identity than the element as the ground of zinc metal—although both in part are constructions. Discourses of nationhood, in the influential form which emerged in early modern Western Europe, are heavily indebted to the symbolic resources made available by the Hebrew Bible (Curruthers, 2012). Yet the boundaries of the nation are not organised along Biblical lines, and as such neither are racial purity and impurity discourses. Rather, it is the influence of the Greek concept of essences which has more significant a role to play here. A full member of the nation is conceptualised as pure in nationalist discourses, in contrast to immigrants and in sharp contrast to 'mixed-race' or 'retarded' couples or children (Stubblefield, 2007). In making this judgement, nationalist discourses depend upon the assumption that the nation is a trans-historical essence, instantiated by each true member of the national population

within the national territory to the extent that they are devoid of ethnic mixture or perceived inferiority.

In his superb contribution to the special issue, Björn Sonnenberg-Schrank states that purity is ‘difficult and delicate... to determine... especially sexual and spiritual purity—the purity of the human's body and mind—because their boundaries are so fluid and subjective, other than e.g. the purity of chemical substances, which is determinable, objective, and a neutral fact. Purity is almost always a “fake idea,” a construction with a clear political agenda, one that constitutes an inside-outside or pure-impure dichotomy and thereby becomes a function of (social) Othering’. This is a powerful theorisation of the topic. However, the two examples drawn above, zinc and the nation, allow us to finesse Sonnenberg-Schrank’s claim. Whilst generally correct, it is too stark to say that purity is ‘almost always a ‘fake idea’—or with Currell that it is a ‘delusion’, implying that it is mere cultural construction through a contrast with the objective and neutral fact of chemical substances. The discourses which situate zinc and the nation as pure both impute an essence as the ground of existence, and this imputation is by degrees but always a process which involves social construction and political agendas. Consider, for example, Primo Levi’s ([1975] 1984) essay on zinc in his book *The Periodic Table*, in which he observes the way in which, in Fascist Italy, discourses on chemical elements could imbricate with Nazi ideas of racial purity, each impacting the meaning of the other.

Conversely, however, the nation is not merely a ‘fake idea’; this risks an idealist fallacy. Nationalist discourses of the nation are not unmoored to any sensuous or measurable reality, but are grounded in a variety of socially-policed and contingently-organised practices. It is these practices which serve as the ‘hardware’ for the ‘software’ of nationalist constructions of a racial identity as the ever-threatened expression of an essence, threatened by admixture. Among the most significant such practices is category-based endogamy—only reproducing with individuals of the same category as oneself. This involves, for example, the geographical and biopolitical (self-)regulation of young women, constructed as a key site for the biological and cultural reproduction of the next generation of the nation (Duschinsky 2013a). As Janice Pariat suggests in the introduction to her beautiful creative contribution to the special issue, ‘the designation “dkhar” implies the drawing of borders of

purity in terms of bloodline and lineage'. Another significant piece of the 'hardware' of nationalist purity discourses is the effort to organise and administer geographical territories as if they had natural and inevitable boundaries. Attention to nationalist discourse in the context of the discursive practices which serve as its hardware shows that there is no general alignment between nationalism, inside/outside, and pure/impure: 'From the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us and whose crime it is not to be. The dividing line is not between inside and outside but rather is internal to simultaneous signifying chains and successive subjective choices' (Deleuze & Guattari [1980] 1987, p.197).

The availability and form of purity and impurity discourses is shaped by the scaffolding available for making claims about the truth. In particular, a key form of scaffolding is the materiality of sensuous objects. Sonnenberg-Schrank follows Sartre ([1943] 1993) in highlighting the instinctive human response of disgust towards viscous things, on the basis that they disturb our cherished classificatory boundaries and this 'ambiguity... equals impurity'. He suggests that 'the teenager is situated in a transitional in-between-neither-nor space, between the formerly innocent (or pure) child and its opposing, yet developmentally inevitable counterpart, the potentially polluted adult, between dependence and independence, between undeveloped and fully developed sexuality. In the developmental process of a human, the teenager as in-between stage corresponds to the viscous'. Sonnenberg-Schrank is right to see value in Sartre's reflections. They are partially correct: viscosity and/or ambiguity make a disgust response more likely. However, there is only a general association rather than any robust tie between viscous or ambiguous (or viscous and ambiguous) phenomena and a perception of impurity, as anthropologists and cognitive scientists have shown (Tambiah, 1969; Valeri, 2000; Stevenson et al., 2010; Zhong & House, 2013). It is notable that it is female teenage sexuality more than male, as Sonnenberg-Schrank observes, which is subject to purity/impurity codings: 'loss of male virginity is treated more lightly, in satire and comedy, as boyish fun, half awkward, half competitive-aggressive. The loss of female virginity is rather addressed in serious, grave terms... the definition of purity as virginity is clearly gendered and treats adolescent female sexuality as problematic.' As such, being in-

between is not a sufficient explanation for impurity. Though it is a potentially useful regularity, it assigns too much causal power to classificatory boundaries (O'Brien, 2006; Duschinsky, 2013b).

Attention to the scaffolding for the erection of an essence against which people or things can be judged pure or impure helps us advance beyond realist or idealist approaches to purity and impurity. These classifications are never merely objective, or merely fake, but are always constructions produced out of signifying chains and successive subjective choices within situated practice. Currell identifies this in her paper, in considering the way in which documentary photography was deployed as a scaffold for the 'invisible' role of eugenic purity in shaping human bodies and cultures: 'social-documentary photographs accompanying eugenic texts often showed residences as isolated, dirty, or in a state of collapse—not to show that occupants needed help or housing but as a way of confirming the feeble-mindedness that justified eugenicists' demand for segregation and sterilization. Taken out of context, however, it would be impossible to discern eugenic intent in these, even where we know it certainly exists'. Support for eugenic purity discourses was supplied in the course of national policy and discursive practice by photographs, signifying chains, which in themselves offer little or no obvious scaffolding. In other cases, the scaffolding of purity and impurity discourses may, in itself, lend itself to such use, without ever determining it. One such case is the purity of colour.

Colour and the material imagination

The reasons why whiteness and purity evoke one another, and the limits of this association, have been debated by scholars. Some researchers have treated a link between purity and whiteness as a cultural universal, others have presumed this link to be specific to Western culture, and yet others have treated the two terms as simply synonymous (Sibley, 1995; Sherman & Clore, 2009; Berthold, 2010). A step beyond this debate is to consider closely the materiality of whiteness. As we have shown elsewhere, the qualities of whiteness as we perceive it facilitate a close association with purity, though they certainly do not determine any necessary link: 'the uniformity of whiteness can be used to signify qualitative homogeneity, its emptiness can be

mobilised to signify a transparent correspondence between phenomena or forms of subjectivity and their originary state, and the immediate visibility of any mark suggests a fragile vulnerability which makes any deviation already of great magnitude' (Duschinsky & Brown, 2013). Yet these material qualities can have multiple, perhaps even contradictory, meanings. Our sense of what whiteness means is shaped by the history of its utilisations within discourse, though this is scaffolded by its particular qualities. This conclusion can help make sense of Turner's (1967) survey which found that whiteness has different meanings across world cultures, but that there is a family resemblance between its different meanings. Whiteness is suited to the evocation of purity, but it cannot achieve this by itself: it requires that the link is made within situated practices—necessarily and inevitably shaped, like all practice, by degrees by relations of power.

Moore suggests that monotheistic history has been the cause of Western purity discourses and that the concept 'purity' is itself empty of content. Certainly, as Currell observes, 'purity' as a quality cannot be touched, even if things designated as pure can be. Yet, in his book *Water and Dreams*, Bachelard ([1942] 1983, p.141) has insightfully highlighted that 'the psychology of purification is dependent on material imagination and not on an external experience'. Purity is not empty of content because it is not immediately present in external experience and therefore stands dependent upon our 'material imagination'. Comparing the way purity is linked to whiteness within different traditions influential for Western culture can help show that the family resemblances linking whiteness to purity, identified by Turner, depend upon the 'material imagination' of purity as an image of homogeneity and of an originary state.

Isaiah 1:16-18 describes the turn to obedience to God's will as an act which will 'wash yourselves [*rahatzu*]; cleanse yourselves [*hitzaku* — from the root *zakah*]'. Purification is evoked through images of colour transformation: 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool'. The process of purification is likened by Isaiah to the dyeing of wool or the disturbance of snow, but in reverse. The original position and quality is reclaimed through this action, the physical impossibility of achieving this raising the question of a miraculous partnership between human obedience or repentance and God's forgiveness.

The material imagination of the association between purity and whiteness through the image of a homogenous, originary state is emphasised also in verse 13 of Psalm 73 in which the penitent tells God that he or she has ‘kept my heart pure [*tzikiti* – to have kept *zakah*] and have washed my hands in innocence’. Yet, in light of the verse from Isaiah, the material image fights against the penitent’s assertion. Is it possible, physically, to make something scarlet such that it appears like snow, or something dyed so that it appears like natural wool? This concern, at once theological and necessarily material, causes Proverbs 20:9 precisely to wonder: ‘Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin"?’ Job (15:14) insists that any such transformation must involve a miraculous element: ‘What are mortals, that they could be pure [*zakeh*]?’ By contrast, perhaps, Psalm 119:9 seems to suggest that it is possible to become pure through human actions, albeit always as a vanishing horizon: ‘How can a young man keep pure [*yezakeh*] in his behaviour? By guarding it in accordance with your word’.

The material imagination of whiteness as a moral purification in Isaiah emphasises the role of God in achieving a true and moral state. By contrast, the material imagination of whiteness as purity in Plato’s *Philebus* is mobilised to describe the unmixed orientation of the human towards essences (Ideas) rather than the variety of worldly things as the way to achieve the true and moral state of human life. This contingent construction of purity has contributed to a now-hegemonic cultural formation: in her contribution to the special issue, Downes emphasises the significance of ‘the notion of an essential self, a thinking self elevated from a decaying body’ for Western conceptualisations of death. An early, and important, form of such discourse can be found in Plato. In a chapter of the otherwise unpublished Volume 4 of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault observes that, within a tradition emerging with Platonism and later amplified by Christianity, purification is not merely the removal of contaminants but the approach to correspondence with the essence of the world: ‘there occurs a sort of double action, a withdrawal that also reveals’ ([1984a] 1999, p.196).

In Plato’s *Philebus* (52d), Socrates starts by asking ‘What kind of thing is most closely related to truth?... let us adopt that point of view towards all the classes which we call pure. First let us select one of them and examine it’:

Protarchus: Which shall we select?

Socrates: Let us first, if agreeable to you, consider whiteness.

Protarchus: By all means.

Socrates: How can we have purity in whiteness, and what purity? Is it the greatest and most widespread, or the most unmixed, that in which there is no trace of any other colour?

Protarchus: Clearly it is the most unadulterated.

Socrates: Right. Shall we not, then, Protarchus, declare that this, and not the most numerous or the greatest, is both the truest and the most beautiful of all whitenesses?

Protarchus: Quite right.

Socrates: Then we shall be perfectly right in saying that a little pure white is whiter and more beautiful and truer than a great deal of mixed white.

Protarchus: Perfectly right.

Socrates: Well then, we shall have no need of many such examples in our discussion of pleasure; we see well enough from this one that any pleasure, however small or infrequent, if uncontaminated with pain, is pleasanter and more beautiful than a great or often repeated pleasure without purity.

Protarchus: Most certainly; and the example is sufficient.

Protarchus, then, is convinced that just as whiteness is truer than mixed white, so a pleasure which is pure is superior to one which is mixed. Though we leave the discussants in their dialogue—a quick exposure—the conclusion Socrates will extract is that philosophy, as knowledge of essences, is the pleasure which is pure and which must therefore guide our action. Yet other conclusions can be drawn using the same logic. Plutarch, the first-century Platonist, addresses the same concerns in two existent sections of his *Moralia*: *De E apud Delphos* (which directly cites Plato's *Philebus*) and *Quaestiones Romanae*. In the former section, Plutarch draws out that the content of purity is qualitative homogeneity. This is why, he suggests, we start to talk about purity and impurity when what is at stake is the extent to which a particular thing corresponds solely and singularly with its essence: 'Unity is simple and pure. For it is by the admixture of one thing with another that contamination arises, even as Homer somewhere says that some ivory which is being dyed red is being "contaminated," and dyers speak of colours that are mixed as being "spoiled"; and they call the mixing "spoiling". Therefore it is characteristic of the imperishable and pure to be one and uncombined' (*De E apud Delphos* 20, translation Babbitt, 1936).

Applying this reflection to whiteness, Plutarch observes that ‘only white, therefore, is pure [*eilikrinei*, separate, absolute], unmixed [*amiges*, pertaining either to material substances or breeding], and uncontaminated [*amiantos*] by dye, nor can it be imitated; wherefore it is most appropriate for the dead at burial. For he who is dead has become something simple, unmixed, and pure, once he has been released from the body, which is indeed to be compared with a stain made by dyeing. In Argos, as Socrates says, persons in mourning wear white garments washed in water’ (*Quaestiones Romanae* 26-7, translation Babbitt, 1936). Plutarch’s account here is important and unsettling in both how proximate and how distant it is from the purity and impurity discourses we use two thousand years later. We, too, still perceive purity as a simple state, in which there is no mixture or inferiority. We, too, retain the Platonic thread in tending to view the body as a whole as antithetical to purity—in contrast to the Hebrew Bible in which only particular body substances and corpses are considered impure. Yet we would not wear white garments when in mourning as a reflection of the purity of the departed’s imperishable soul, now released from the stain of their body. Instead, as Downes rightly observes in her contribution to the special issue, we have seen a ‘medicalisation of death, which took death out of the home and into the hospital. Rather than being a natural part of life, death became something against which one should fight, at all costs. This was the advent of the invisible death, a cultural repression that remained largely unchallenged until the latter half of the twentieth century’.

Attending to Plutarch as a moment within the genealogy of hegemonic purity discourses helps disturb our assumptions about the naturalness of our purity discourses, in both its proximity and its distance. Contemporary scientific discourse, two thousand years later, would assign to the element zinc the qualities of being imperishable and uncontaminated, even though particular zinc metal must be smelted for it to ever be solely an instantiation of this element. Likewise, the nation is allocated the same properties when judgements are made using purity and impurity, in twentieth and twenty-first century nationalisms, about who is allocated the tacit privileges of whiteness. In each case, a material imagination deploys purity in order to address the truth of existence. This truth does not need to have a moral meaning; but it is well adapted for moral discourse which presumes upon absolutes, built into ontology. Benjamin ([1921] 1996, p.265) gestures towards this when he states

that ‘the fantastic play of colour is the home of memory without yearning, and it can be free of yearning because it is unalloyed’.

Tara Ward’s beautiful paper on the work of Robert and Sonia Delaunay helps deepen our understanding of this relationship between colour and purity, alluded to by Benjamin. She notes that both were influenced by Chevreul, a nineteenth-century colour theorist who had shown that hues opposite one another on the colour wheel make each look purer to the human eye when shown together. Whilst the Delaunays’ writings on purity have been generally read as instantiations of an eliminationist rhetoric of ‘pure art’, Ward shows that this was far from the case. In fact, their artworks demonstrate that pure meanings, aspiring to address intense and absolute experiences of the modern world, can be created ‘not by segregation but proximity, not by distillation but careful mixing’. Ward concludes that, ‘in short, for the Delaunays, pure painting was not a retreat from the world, but a way of making its dichotomies and conflicts more visible’. Once again, therefore, we can stave off an argument here that purity is a mere construction, and no more than a matter of the eye of the beholder—since Chevreul’s discovery was precisely that most human eyes are disposed to respond to exposure to simultaneous contrasts in a way that increases the perception of purity. The Delaunays made use of this discovery in order to address the disjuncture of identities, ideological struggles, power structures, and practical congestion of modern, urban Paris in their artworks. Ward’s work agrees with the perspective elaborated so far, since she shows the role of materiality in even abstract reflections on society or religion framed in terms of purity. However, Ward’s reflections go one stage further in suggesting that purity-perception is a necessarily embodied experience.

Embodied cognition

Why is the body so central to hegemonic purity discourses? Moore suggests that this is a product of monotheistic morality. However, we have seen that, in contrast to the Platonic degradation of the body, the Hebrew Bible is selective in assigning impurity codings to particular bodily substances and activities—and not others. Furthermore, we have seen that the materiality of purity inclines discourses and practices in certain directions, though it does not

determine them. We wish to present two necessarily-interleaved reasons for the centrality of the body to so much purity discourse. First, the body is very important in how humans perceive generally. In its material articulations of time and space, ‘the body is the architectonics of sense’ (Nancy [2006] 2008, p.25), and thus may serve as both support for and an instrument of purity-impurity discourses. These discourses can be anchored in and strategically deploy the vividness of certain lived experiences: of intact or broken skin; the status of objects as touched or untouched; the spatial sense of elements of an environment as elevated or grounded, integral or dispersed, still or moving in relation to one another. It is impossible to evacuate the body from our perceptions of purity and impurity. Ward has shown this conclusively in her study of the Delaunays’ artistic practice.

Research in cognitive science supports this conclusion. Schnall et al. (2008), for example, found that making moral judgements in the context of a bad smell or a dirty room increases the severity of these judgements; information about bodily states was, without their conscious awareness, being used by participants to inform their moral reasoning because of the proximity between embodied feelings of disgust and judgements about moral purity. Eskine et al. (2011) found that disgusting tastes were more likely to stimulate severe moral judgements than sweet tastes or water, and that this effect was particularly pronounced for those who held conservative as opposed to liberal political views. Inbar et al. (2012) replicated this association between conservatism and disgust sensitivity with participants from 121 different countries.

Yet if embodied revulsion can be confused with moral judgement, the same is true in reverse. Ritter and Preston (2011) found that American Christian conservatives showed increased disgust in judging an unpleasant drink after writing out a passage from the Qur'an or from Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, but not a control text or from the New Testament. The effect was removed if participants were allowed to wash their hands after copying out the passage and before rating the unpleasant drink. This latter finding suggestively shows the imbrications of cognition with culture in the judgement of purity and impurity. One is not base, the other superstructure; they both recursively influence each other. Even our very sense of taste is shaped by our political views and religious convictions, via the enmeshing of purity discourses with

one another at the level of culture and cognition: if we are used to activating purity and impurity to judge others according to our beliefs, these themes will be more salient and available when our bodies experience an unpleasant or disgusting sensation.

Thus a second, imbricated factor for the centrality of the body to hegemonic discourses of purity and impurity can be proposed to be the body as biopolitical object within culture. The body is a key site of social struggle in a variety of fields organised through appeal to essence. Discourses on the body address the biological, economic, semiotic, and social potentialities of human beings, and can therefore be used to make or contest claims about the natural or proper stratification or (self-)regulation of particular forms of subjectivity (Guattari, [1992] 1995). For instance, discussing the scientific field, Haraway (1991, p.204) has observed that ‘the immune system is a map drawn to guide recognition and misrecognition of self and other’, rather than simply a means of policing a set of pre-existing body boundaries. Scientific study of ‘the immune system’ has increasingly revealed the contingency of what are generally taken to be natural boundaries, such as inner/outer, mine/yours, pure/impure. Antigens, for instance, can potentially be classed within either of these poles. Yet, at the same time, metaphors associated with the immune system are deployed in social and political discourses to situate the ‘inside’ as homogenous and originary compared to an outside, producing a narrative that frames a pure self in danger from or the victim of an impure invader (Ansell Pearson, 1997; Esposito, [2004] 2008; Hughes, 2005). Purity/impurity discourses can be mobilised to facilitate the devaluation, exploitation, sequestration, regulation or excision of those phenomena or subjects who diverge from what is, in part precisely through this discursive labour, thereby taken to be no more than the expression of an essential ideal.

Agamben ([1995] 1998) has argued that among the most important questions addressed to the body in the language of purity and impurity is ‘who counts as a full human being, and warrants protections as such?’ (Duschinsky, 2012). He highlights the significance of the work of Walter Benjamin, who suggests that Western society ascribes a certain, tacit ‘purity’ to a person as the foundation for their physical inviolability and their entry into the social community of human beings:

Honour is, as Hegel [*Philosophy of Fine Art*, [1837] 1975, 327] defined it, 'the extreme embodiment of violability'. 'For the personal subsistency for which honour contends does not assert itself as intrepitude on behalf of a communal weal, and the repute of thoroughness in relation to it and integrity in private life. On the contrary it contends simply for the recognition and formal inviolability of the subject'. This abstract inviolability is, however, no more than the strictest inviolability of the physical self, the purity of flesh and blood in which even the most secondary demands of the honour code are grounded. For this reason dishonour is caused by the shame of a relative no less than by an offence against one's own person... it is only the shield designed to protect man's physical vulnerability. The man without honour is an outlaw. (Benjamin [1925] 1998: pp.86-7)

Benjamin, commenting on Hegel, is suggesting that all humans find themselves in a state of physical vulnerability to one another and to their environment. A tacit, unmarked purity is allocated to each full member of the human community, which warrants them protections within an honour code. That these protections are rooted ultimately in the body of the person, and that the boundedness of the body is erected as the first and foundational right, is revealed by the fact that the actions of others who are associated with one's own body, such as relatives, have the capacity to bring down the barrier of protections of the body offered by honour. Turning Benjamin's reflection to a consideration of gender can bring this point further into focus, and continues to highlight the significance of embodiment. Annaliese Beth Piraino, in her contribution to the special issue, suggests that 'rape, honor killings, and chastity expectations demonstrate the need for men to "purify" male dominated societies of women that "drive men" to sexual compulsion'. These practices, she suggests, are 'manifestations of patriarchal fears pertaining to the loss of power'. We would wish to add to this that representations of purity/impurity particularly serve to instantiate, develop or transform divisions between the true, acceptable human and the sub-human. These divisions can, in turn, be mobilised to anchor further purity/impurity discourses through the production of stock discursive figures, like the 'cripple' or the 'whore'. Such figures may be deployed as a 'narrative prosthesis' (Mitchell & Snyder 2000, 2006), a discursive element that through its supposed deficiency imputes a propriety and sufficiency to full human life.

The global Slut Walks of 2012 protested the association between women, sexual availability, and impurity. Whilst this case offers an example of a movement committed against ideals of sexual purity, more fundamentally

this case helps interrogate the assumption that we always aspire to purity by highlighting the question of why this protest was necessary to contest judgements about women, and not about men. It is not generally the dominant in society, Bourdieu ([1979] 1984) has observed, who are marked as pure or who aspired to be pure. Political and economic elites, if things are going well for them, are more likely not to have a purity/impurity coding; it is figures in the cultural and religious field—‘dominated among the dominant’ for Bourdieu—who have and aspire to further purity; and it is the dominated in society who are coded impure.

Bourdieu observes the same figuration in the organisation of gender power. The construction of the feminine as either pure or impure legitimates masculine possession, protection and control of women to ensure that impurity does not enter; masculinity is situated as relatively pure—and this relative purity serves as a tacit norm against which the purity or impurity of women is compared ([1998a] 2001, pp.20, 51). Femininity is flagged for assessment in terms of purity and impurity, whereas masculinity is not marked in this way: ‘Whereas men in contemporary society are often treated as retaining a relative and unmarked purity and a status of inviolability no matter their heterosexual experiences or practices, the marked social construction of their embodiment subjects women to a marked differentiation between pure-good-proper-clean and impure-bad-wild-dirty’ (Duschinsky, 2013a, p.359).

For Bourdieu, individuals are variously categorised as relatively pure, or relatively impure, depending on the degree and forms of capital they possess. Given the right institutional frame, these possessions can serve as ‘symbolic capital’, placing the person who possesses it as a relatively true and elevated human being. A distinction must therefore be drawn between marked and unmarked purity. Unmarked purity characterises dominant subject-positions not only in their relative privilege in society, but also in their privilege not to stand out (Berlant, 1997; Chidester, 2008). Máire MacNeill’s penetrating analysis of changing duelling discourses in her contribution to the special issue, for example, shows the transition of duelling from an activity without a purity/impurity coding into a marked activity ‘at worst on a par with drinking and whoring’ since it did not show the ‘expected level of purity of thought’ sufficient for the unmarked purity of a gentleman. However, this was a matter of degree, and at no point did the duellist become subject to continual

surveillance for signs of purity or impurity, in the manner of Sonnenberg-Schrank's female teenagers.

The economics of purity

As Mackenzie (2004, p.x) has observed, we live in 'an age scarred by the actions of regimes in pursuit of purity'. Yet 'purity is an ideal that secures many of our most deeply felt attachments to our sense of self, our relations with others and the ebb and flow of cultural life'. We would add to Mackenzie that in our age, also, certain sorts of purity discourses dominate, with disturbing results, while others remain unexplored and under-utilised. One area of special importance of purity and impurity discourses in contemporary society, in the context of the power exercised by global capital, is the use of these themes in framing the meaning of money.

Two of the founding figures of sociology present a potent account of the potential impurity of money, which aligns well with the analysis presented above. Simmel ([1907] 1989, p.364-7) and Weber ([1922] 1968, p.636) propose that money and labour have been historically constructed as corrosive of a particular essence imputed to human beings. Economic processes are oriented by the transferability and quantifiability of commodities rather than the dignity and specificity which may be ascribed to human beings. The ideas of these classical theorists can be further specified by the suggestion that this impurity is associated with relations such as desire, toil, debt and contract, which place the subject *in commerce* with forces or elements that have been constructed as standing outside the various competing and overlapping constructions of human essence imputed by the discourses of particular actors in society.

It can be observed that as the 'toxic debts' built up by the financial services industries have been taken on by the State, the relationship between private and public sectors has undergone huge shifts. In the context of state austerity, a market uncontaminated by welfare protections is held up as both the ideal and the inevitable future. This discourse treats the dehumanising tendencies and callous consequences of capital as inevitable, the lesser of two evils compared to the distortions to human freedom of state intervention. This discourse has its roots in the way that the social and economic problems of the

1970s were framed by the Chicago School economists as caused by the lack of 'pure' competition, in accordance with the 'natural order' of the market. To achieve correspondence with this true market form, not only a scaling back of the welfare state but tough penal measures against 'disorderly' groups (most notably, the working class and ethnic minorities) were recommended, in order to ensure that citizens act as the consumers they are taken to be already by nature (Foucault, [1979] 2008; Harcourt, 2010).

In Francesco Di Bernardo's contribution to the special issue, he explores contemporary fictional discourses and interviews with bankers which, in the wake of the credit crunch, depict the financial services industry as a Faustian pact in which bankers agree to give up morality for the sake of profit: 'the deal and the consequent loss of soul are here metaphors for the transformation of society determined by the application of the neoliberal free-market rules'. Bankers are, then, impure because their 'commerce' is animated by a degree or form of greed which wrecks the moral organisation which 'naturally' characterise a human being. In return for this pact with greed, he suggests, the elite of society are able to afford and justify residence in purified gated communities, since profit appears to be the result of individual hard work rather than of exploitation and selfishness at others' expense. As Steller and Willer (2013, p.5) found in their experiments, 'increasing an individual's moral self-image buffers against the potentially damaging effects of taking immorally earned money, reducing any inhibitions associated with accepting this money'.

Di Bernardo's conclusions also resonate with a study by Yang et al. (2012, p.488), which found that 'the effects of dirty money were not a simple combination of dirt and money but rather differed starkly from the presentation of either dirt or money without the other'. The researchers observed that when people associated money with purity, they were more likely to be generous, but when they associated money with impurity, they were more likely to be selfish: 'clean money evokes positive attitudes about fair, reciprocal exchange, whereas dirty money evokes notions of exploitation and greed' (2012, p.484). Yet whereas 'dirty money' elicits a desire to keep funds to oneself, making themes of 'dirt' salient before an economic-moral choice made participants more likely to be generous. The implication drawn by the researchers is that where people see money as inevitably impure, they are more likely to give in to greed. By contrast, when their own experiential sense

of dirtiness is at stake, ‘exposure to dirt alone seems to have elicited a contrary desire for symbolic cleanliness, as reflected in high moral standards’ (2012, p.487). If both the purity or impurity of a person’s sense of self, and the purity or impurity of the money that they accrue, influence how generous or callous their behaviour will be, then this emphasises the value in further work on this topic. For example, in neoliberal capitalist economies, money signifies moral purity or impurity in powerful ways through debt and shame, wealth and freedom. Debates about the morality of welfare are riddled with eliminationist purity and impurity rhetoric. It can operate as a moral or ethical metric, where practices reflect on individuals—so in contemporary politics, ‘hard working families’ are rewarded and ‘scroungers’ are punished. A consideration of money, morality and judgement underlines their powerful association with purity. Such relations further demonstrate the contemporary relevance of this subject and its powerful effects on contemporary life, highlighted by the contributions to the special issue.

Concluding comments

As contributors have shown, practices associated with topics such as money, sexuality, artistic expression and propaganda operate within a binary economy of purity, where artificial distinctions obscure the *enactment* of purity. It is at these sites, where purity is enacted, that the distorting effects of inequality and discrimination can be seen and portrayals of individuals as dirty whores or scroungers (and so on) can be challenged. Articles in this special issue sensitise us to ways in which ideas of purity relate to privileged telling of history and how imperfections in the intelligibility of historical discourse may lead to new understandings. Through consideration of colour, they help us to define purity in terms of difference and proximity and they push us to explore ways of going beyond gendered and classed paradigms of purity. They also challenge sanitised presentations of individual ‘purity’ (in this case, the hard working elite) by connecting with the operation of economic systems and actors. They reveal instances, each one, of the politics of purity.

Identifying ‘Purity’ as something that engages, that is mixed, that is proximal to difference has ethical implications since where relations and power are concerned, there are concerns of ethics. We argue that the only

alternative to homogeneous states (of ideas, of institutions, of communities of people) is the recognition of difference, and the working out of relations within that difference, as ethical practice. We have seen that even the Hebrew Bible, characterised by Moore as the monolithic source of moral purity discourses, contains a plurality of purity discourses, with different means, objects and implications. One is eliminationist, concerned to avoid impurity in the Temple; the other treats impurity as a means of organising subject positions and relationships, in which all humans are impure sometimes and there is no necessary moral valence attached to this status. Moore (2000, p.26) argues that in its purity and impurity discourses, 'Christianity... took over ancient Hebrew vindictive intolerance, amplified it, and institutionalised it'. Yet if we have seen that a plurality of purity discourses operate in the Hebrew Bible, it might turn out also that St Paul, in dialogue with this tradition, can provide a 'signpost' towards an alternative ideal of purity practice. As Foucault suggests, moral and ethical systems encoded in documents from the past, with potentially quite different beliefs and commitments to our own, 'cannot exactly be reactivated but at least constitute, or help to constitute, a certain point of view which can be very useful' ([1984b] 1997, p.261).

Paul's letter to Romans was written to a church divided between an original majority of Jewish converts to Christianity and a growing number of gentile converts (Nanos, 1999). Purity and impurity discourse has become invested as a symbolic crunch-point by a community struggling with issues of homogeneity and difference. Paul's injunction to the members of the Rome church is that 'Let us not therefore judge one another any more': 'I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself; but if anyone regards something as unclean [*koinos*], then for that person it is unclean [*koinos*]' (Romans 14:13-14). Paul's statement is not, as it has sometimes been read, a simple and total repudiation of the tradition of purity and impurity set out in the Hebrew Bible, and the imposition of a radical constructivist perspective in which purity has no meaning or moral valence besides in the eye of the beholder. A first piece of evidence for this proposition lies in Paul's choice of object: *koinos*. Note that Peter, in events of Acts 10, states that he 'has never eaten anything which Jewish laws have declared *koinos* or *akathartos*' (Acts 10:14): these terms are distinct from one

another, and have a technical meaning in the ritual-legal thought of the time (Wahlen, 2005; Rudolph, 2011).

Koinos means the quality of uncertain cleanness or being without particular status as pure or impure (also signifying mutual or common as in ‘common tongue’). This contrasts to *akathartos* which means unclean or tainted, for instance as used in Matthew 10:1 and elsewhere to describe the ‘unclean spirits’ banished by Jesus; in Mark 1:40, Jesus explicitly tells a leper he has made ‘clean’ to then follow the ritual procedure of biblical purity laws following a recovery. Further and stronger evidence is that Verse 20 goes on to immediately invalidate a reading of the verses as simple repudiation or radical constructivism by stating that ‘everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats’. If purity were simply in the eye of the beholder, then stumbling would either be impossible or causing it would not be wrong.

Paul is, rather, articulating two principles—one old and one new. One is that nothing has any intrinsic property besides goodness (already proposed in the Hebrew Bible in Psalm 24:1, which he cites in 1 Corinthians). As such, ‘food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse’ (1 Cor 8:7). Paul’s principle here is drawn from Mark 7.18-20, in which Jesus says, ‘whatever enters man from without, it cannot defile him’ but ‘that which comes out of man can defile him’, using this as a parable (note the ‘who has ears to hear’ formula in verse 16, signifying a metaphor) to emphasise the role of thoughts and motivations in shaping ethical practice (Boyarin, 2013). Romans 14:20 articulates this first conclusion with the principle that it is wrong to cause someone else to break their commitment to an application of purity and impurity discourse regarding diet, even if this application is flawed. At the basis of this principle, offering a deft theological and pastoral intervention for the divided Roman Church, is an acute sociological intuition or observation. Reading verses 14 and 20 together suggests that Paul’s point is that communities have different purity and impurity discourses available to them in the course of their situated practices, and that in the face of this diversity the deployment of these discourses cannot be certain or absolute such that one human can legislate for another. What is at stake, for Paul, would not then be a repudiation of purity and impurity entirely, but a selection among purity discourses in the Hebrew Bible and then

a further elaboration and innovation. As such, the text is making an argument against the eliminationist and for the potential value in elaborating upon the alternate discourse of purity and impurity from the Biblical text. In this latter discourse, as we have seen, purity and impurity characterise all humans sometimes and no human being absolutely. Taking this approach as a signpost for contemporary ethics, including secular ethical practice, purity and impurity might not then represent gated communities or patriarchal judgements on women's bodies, but moments within the rhythm of our being situated with, related to and constituted by the other.

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