

CALL FOR PAPERS

*Noisy, Smelly, Unsightly*  
*The Ethics of Regulating Sensory Offence*

SPECIAL ISSUE EDITED BY BOUKE DE VRIES

There are certain behaviours that engender negative emotions *without being* harmful, or at least seriously harmful. The main problem with these behaviours (if there is one) is that they elicit such emotions, which might include, but are not limited to, disgust, shock, indignation, annoyance, and anger. It is this group that we usually refer to as ‘offensive behaviours’.

Following Joel Feinberg’s canonical work on this topic, normative theorists have considered whether states should regulate a range of behaviours that are experienced as offensive by at least some groups, including blasphemy, nudism, swearing, and cultural appropriation.<sup>1</sup> However, an important category has remained understudied, one that is often seen as the most primitive form of offence: Offence to the senses.

This symposium seeks to fill this lacuna by investigating what legal and political responses to sensory offence are appropriate, if any. Addressing this issue is pertinent, as the proliferation and toughening of criminal, civil, and administrative restrictions on unwanted noises, smells, and sights suggests that we are becoming increasingly intolerant of behaviours that offend one or several of our senses. While some might welcome this development on grounds that it improves the quality of the environment and particularly benefit those sensitive to sensory offence, such as those with sensory processing disorders, it also raises worries about the constraints that are imposed on people’s freedom and the disproportional impact this may have on certain groups, such as youngsters and minority cultures with different aesthetic tastes or higher tolerance of sound.

This symposium invites normative papers on the regulation of sensory offence. Possible questions include, but are not limited to:

- Should the state regulate offence caused by sound, sight, smell, taste, and/or touch? If so, when and how?
- What, if any, is the normative significance of people’s different sensibilities to sensory offence and understandings of what such offence consists of?
- Should the state train or nudge people to become more tolerant of behaviours that offend their senses and/or take measures to reduce the incidence, intensity, and duration of such feelings? If so, when and how?
- Does sensory offence call for different legal and political responses than other types of offence?

**Contributions should be limited to 5000 words and be sent to [bouke.devries@umu.se](mailto:bouke.devries@umu.se) by June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019.**

***Raisons Politiques* is a peer-reviewed journal of political theory publishing in French and English.**

**More information: <https://www.cairn-int.info/journal-raisons-politiques.htm>**

<sup>1</sup> Joel FEINBERG, *The Moral Limits of the Criminal Law: Volume 2: Offense to Others*, Moral Limits of the Criminal Law (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); J. W. MONTGOMERY, “Can Blasphemy Law Be Justified,” *Law & Justice - The Christian Law Review* 145 (2000): 6; Bouke DE VRIES, “The Right to Be Publicly Naked: A Defence of Nudism,” *Res Publica*, September 18, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-018-09406-z>; David SHOEMAKER, “Dirty Words’ and the Offense Principle,” *Law and Philosophy* 19, no. 5 (2004): 545–584; James O. YOUNG and Conrad G. BRUNK, *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation* (John Wiley & Sons, 2012).