



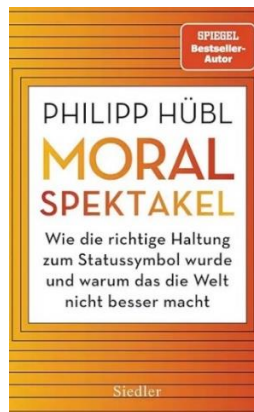
## Moral spectacle:

### How the right attitude became a status symbol and why that doesn't make the world a better place

Reading time: 9 minutes

Rarely has a book been more topical and fascinating for me than the new book by philosopher Philipp Hübl: *Moralspektakel*. An ideal book for the festive season and a great gift. Hübl delivers tangible philosophy. He draws on current science, cites a large number of studies and summarises the findings in an eloquent and easy-to-understand way. Here is an excerpt from his many insights - and I hope that this will whet your appetite for the stimulating reading pleasure of this beautiful book.

The moral spectacle is best illustrated with figures: We have all noticed that new terms are appearing in the social debate and that they are taking up ever more space. It's about prejudice and discrimination such as #racism, #transphobia, #Islamophobia and social justice such as #privilege, #patriarchy and #inclusion. #Race and #Gender have the highest frequency. Between 2013 and 2019, the term #racial privilege and #white rose sharply in the two most prestigious daily newspapers in the USA. In the New York Times by 1,200 per cent, in the Washington Post by 1,500 per cent. This has nothing to do with current deteriorating circumstances, as studies show that researchers have been measuring less and less racial prejudice for decades (!)



#### What happened here?

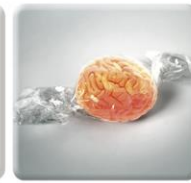
Hübel defines "moral spectacles" as moral discussions that have no effect on society, but are often about status and group affiliation.

He argues that moral accusations are used strategically to fight status battles and that digital media has made this easier and more tempting. If we present ourselves to our neighbours as particularly social and moral, they can easily judge us by our actions. And, if necessary, quickly cut us down to size. Our digital 'neighbours' on social media can't do that. The word rules here. The attitude. The outrage.

#### Moral values and status game

People have a tendency to present themselves better with moral values in order to improve their status.

This can lead to a form of "virtue-signalling", where people use their moral convictions as a diversionary tactic to pursue their own interests.



## Moral vocabulary and language policy

This new moral vocabulary emerged almost exclusively from English terms, such as "intersectionality", "victim blaming", "microaggression"

These terms are often used to ostensibly promote inclusive language, but they appear exclusive and create a new moral elite that differentiates itself from the less educated through its vocabulary. I already discussed this phenomenon in BrainCandy No. 79 on 'Luxury Beliefs'.

Gendering in language appears to be a progressiveness marker rather than an effective means of achieving equality.

The basic idea of language policy is that changing words can also change people's attitudes, but most experiments show that this is not so easy and political and moral attitudes change very slowly.

Studies have shown that restricting language and introducing rules to protect minorities has not made people feel freer but has made everyone afraid to say the wrong thing.

### Example of diversity and diversity-washing in business

The idea of diversity trainers and courses is that they should help to prevent discrimination and create a more diverse working environment, but often these measures are only used as "diversity-washing" to project a positive image. How could diversity be effectively achieved? Through mentoring programmes. They are really effective. But they have a contemporary disadvantage. Because mentors are often the 'old white men'.

Social contagion and familiarisation with certain images and situations can help people become more tolerant, but this is a slow process that cannot be achieved by simple measures such as changing the language.



Equality  
Diversity  
Inclusion

Source: istockphoto.com / CAPToro

Companies are trying to demonstrate their progressiveness through diversity and LGBTQ indices, leading to a kind of "moral spectacle". But the wind seems to be changing. The first big companies in America, such as Ford, Deere, Toyota, Walmart have just cancelled their DEI initiatives.

Fun facts: Studies show that in countries with better gender equality, the career choices of men and women are more divergent.

Women with left-wing values are less likely to engage in dialogue with those who think differently.

### Moral cultures and victim culture

Sociologists Campbell and Manning identified three major moral cultures: the culture of honour, the culture of dignity and the culture of sacrifice. The victim culture is characterised by a high sensitivity to offence and a tendency to appeal to authority, which often leads to a "moral spectacle".

Caring culture, a variant of victim culture, focuses on expressions of compassion and care for minorities, often without knowing or having a mandate from actual victim groups. The most obvious case for me is the 'Queers for Palestine' campaign. Palestinian culture is unfriendly to queer lifestyles. To put it mildly.

Another example of this "moral spectacle" is the American discussion about the term "Latinx", which is propagated by woke circles in the USA as a gender-neutral form for citizens of Latin



American origin. Only 3% of Hispanics use it, while 75% have never heard of it.

### Examples of moral spectacles

A politician was criticised for saying that he had played "Indiana Jones" as a child and later had to apologise because he had used the "wrong term". Although he was known to have his heart in the right place.



Source: istockphoto.com / knape

The liberal party FDP staged the "the end of the coalition government as moral spectacle. And was itself the victim of a moral spectacle: Because there was a huge media storm of indignation over the word 'D-Day' in their strategic musings. In other words, over a somewhat unfortunate word in an internal document. At the same time, it became known that Health Minister Lauterbach had not accepted the recommendations of the Robert Koch Institute to lower the risk level of Covid in 2022, but had continued his uniquely restrictive policy throughout Europe. Or that Economics Minister Habeck has demonstrably lied about the decommissioning of nuclear power plants in 2022 and has probably currently wasted 620 million taxpayers' money on subsidising the battery manufacturer Northvolt. One word becomes a huge media moral spectacle. Genuine restrictions on personal and entrepreneurial freedoms by the health minister and economic

damage caused by high electricity prices and huge real tax losses remain side notes in the media. This is pure moral spectacle.

### Sensitivity reader and voice control example

Author Sören Sieg has written a book describing his experiences in Africa, but the publisher has asked him to have the manuscript reviewed by a "sensitivity reader" to avoid potential offence.

The "Sensitivity Reader" advised the author to change certain passages so as not to convey prejudice, but the author argued that this would not accurately reflect the real situation.

The assumption that one person from a group can speak for all others is absurd, as there are almost always major differences within a group.

### Complexity of moral issues and reputation management

Moral issues are often difficult questions to weigh up, depending on many factors and requiring careful consideration. In the public debate, outposts with clear and simple messages are often heard, while differentiated opinions receive less attention.

Studies have shown that people who want to have a differentiated and calm discussion often withdraw, while extreme positions and robust formulations attract more attention.

The internet potentiates this moral situation by enabling people to disseminate their opinions and gain attention, even if they are not nuanced or balanced. The lure of gaining moral recognition is great, and some people are very good at using this to gain attention.

### Substitute actions as a result of moral impatience

Moral impatience arises when you know what society should be like but realise that it is not.



This impatience leads to people looking for small adjustments to change things instead of solving the big, difficult problem.

An example of such substitute actions is the change of language, which is intended to serve as a substitute for the more difficult task of changing society.

Climate activists are an example of simple solutions that bring no progress in the matter apart from attention and a high level of annoyance. And they are an example of social licensing: through moral activities, you build up a kind of social credit that entitles you to use these criticised means of transport yourself. For holidays and participation in international events, like frequent flyer Luisa Neubauer of Fridays for Future.



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### Conclusion

The better educated are particularly susceptible to moralising and moral spectacles. As a BrainCandy reader, you are very likely to be tempted on a regular basis. What can we do?

Hübl recommends cultivating moral modesty and realising that you are not always right.

Hübl says that it is important to think critically and not simply follow the group or your gut feeling, but instead to do your own research and consider what you are saying. And thus resist the temptation to behave outraged.

Especially in the creative class, i.e. among academics and in the media, there is an urge for self-expression through moral outrage in order to show that one has the right morals.

I myself believe that wokeness and moralising have passed their peak. Especially in Germany and the EU, but also in America, more and more people are beginning to realise that we have to solve real problems through effective action and that we no longer have the luxury of throwing ourselves into the self-righteous battle of words as keyboard cowboys. And I also advise brands to be very careful when addressing the issue of morality in brand positioning. The hoped-for inclusive effect is not a certain result; on the contrary, it can lead to uncertainty or even rejection and thus damage the brand's sales opportunities.

I will end with a quote from Oscar Wilde:

**Morality is the attitude you take towards people you don't like**



## Book recommendation

By Ralph Ohnemus, Uwe H. Lebok, Florian Klaus:

### Context marketing

The key to consumer behaviour to [order](#).



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