Introduction

France was the focal point of the world's press for a couple of days. The youth of the suburbs were happy with such massive attention. Finally some account of them had been taken. The government reacted circumspectly, after the reaction to the remarks of Interior Minister Sarkozy. It feared enflaming passions, but at the same time it gave the resolute impression of restoring order. Meanwhile, the French suburbs no longer hit the front pages. The curfew seems to have worked. The press pays no attention to chronic problems. News is not news if it remains static. The next wave of violence is awaited.

The problem in the French suburbs is complex. It rests upon social neglect, latent racism, and the inability of many youths to get themselves free of the vicious circle in which their sub-group sits imprisoned. It is also remarkable that only young males are to be seen in the street scene. Many questions are being asked about the role of the parents. Indeed, scores of arrested youths were younger than 13. In the discussions concerning the riots, one of the keywords that continually re-emerges is 'respect.' The youths blame society for having spat them out and for excluding them from its official life, however much they try to participate. When they apply for jobs and their faces are seen and their names recognized as Muslim, the interview is usually over before it even began. It is an ever-recurring refrain: the community respects them insufficiently and offers them no future. Thus, they feel completely isolated and see no other exit than arson. On the other hand, most citizens find that the manner in which the youths have brought attention to their problems and worked out their frustrations is in no way justified because of the violence and material damage that resulted. Security and property rights are sacred in a liberal rule of law, and every citizen must exhibit respect for public order and public institutions.

The problems that have come to the fore in the French suburbs draw our attention to a chronic problem that has so far eluded a solution with-

in the liberal rule of law. Characteristically, the liberal moral understanding neutralizes discussions concerning the good life and privatizes moral and religious choices. The State is expected to limit itself to the care of public matters and to provisions that guarantee a minimal material well-being and a maximal freedom. That which makes a life worthwhile is not the object of political discussion. People are more and more approached as clients and consumers who can direct their own lives on the basis of their own preferences. Every discussion concerning what a person must do so as to lead a worthwhile life is cut short because were an answer given, a basis would be created from which one could disapprove of, oppose, or even eliminate fellow citizens. The fear that inspires the modern liberal vision is that each absolute certainty, each positive vision of what justifies a life, is dangerous. It can incite discord and, *in extremis*, lead to bloody conflict. Unfortunately enough, there is no lack in examples of 'explosive' conflicts that have emerged on the basis of strongly religious, nationalistic, or chauvinistic convictions. However, with the riots in France, it becomes clear that despite the attempt to privatize all religious and moral justifications and to honour the republican vision of the State, and despite the influence of the conviction that every individual is capable of determining what makes a life worthwhile, contempt has not been removed from the world. This evident plea for equality notwithstanding, the unrelenting struggle for recognition continued to spread underground. Although it seems that distinctions among moral values are no longer tenable because of the view that the criteria determining the dignity of one's own existence are a matter of personal autonomy, nevertheless, there are those who feel rejected or despised, and there are those who feel that they can identify with official society in a positive manner because they are successful in the meritocratic rat race that determines who is respected in society.

What a liberal society seems to be in need of is a larger plurality of collective spheres wherein individuals can engage themselves. A liberal democratic state needs far more spaces wherein people as individuals can

make a valuable difference. In a consolidated society that wipes away or standardizes every difference, and which provides few or no possibilities to give a 'special' meaning to the individual life because of such monotony, opportunities are too limited and very many people will feel seriously despised. Only through cultivating the conviction of being important or good for something can individuals identify positively with their society. Provisionally, the only people who succeed in this are those who, through their education and social networks, have the opportunities to make their lives into something. The actual spheres wherein a person can earn respect are too biased and too impersonal. For this reason, a liberal society must invest in the creation of new spheres or in the strengthening of classic spheres that can contribute to a positive interpretation of a person's freedom. We need not fear that this type of politics will lead to conflict as long as these projects are founded upon actual interpersonal contact and are aimed at a large diversity of skills and interests. When people from the suburbs are given the possibility to move in different spheres without having to fear that they will be rejected or humiliated, the chance is great that the frustration that today seems to pile up in the suburbs can be converted into a positive engagement with, and respect for, the rule of law. Undoubtedly, future issues of *Ethical Perspectives* will come back to this fundamental social question. It certainly is connected with the research that we coordinate in the European Centre for Ethics.

This issue of *Ethical Perspectives* engages in other discussions that, nonetheless, remain dominated by this issue of respect. Against Elizabeth Anderson, Alexander Brown argues that both luck egalitarianism and democratic equality work toward the goal of justice as equality. Brown's nuanced view refuses to reject luck egalitarianism as heartless, but instead broadens it into a pluralistic egalitarianism that allows respect for those whose misfortune is not the result of bad luck alone but also of uninsured risk. Richard Cornwall takes the issue of respect as an international issue – the respect for noncombatant immunity. In his article on how Michael Walzer's strong concept of national autonomy problematises the relation

of *jus ad bellum* to that of *jus in bello*, Cornwall offers a weak version of autonomy designed to free noncombatants from total responsibility for the belligerent acts of their leaders, and thus leaves open the possibility for humanitarian interventions in their favour. Herman De Dijn approaches one of the most intimate instances of respect: the doctor-patient relationship. Noting that many types of medical communication have had a deleterious effect on dignity, De Dijn appeals for a more modest form of communication: conversation. His treatment of conversation underscores that the doctor-patient relationship is not technological but social in nature. Finally, Nicholas Capaldi offers his vision of the role of the business ethicist. His plea for respect is not aimed at persons, but for historical processes. Arguing against a priori understandings of human economic behaviour, Capaldi puts forth a case for business ethics based on a type of philosophical humanism that respects the givenness of situations.

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