

DE GRUYTER
MOUTON

Patrick Lee Plaisance (Ed.)

COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA ETHICS

HANDBOOKS OF
COMMUNICATION SCIENCE

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Handbooks of Communication Science



Edited by
Peter J. Schulz and Paul Cobley

Volume 26

Communication and Media Ethics



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MOUTON

Università
della
Svizzera
italiana

Faculty of
Communication
Sciences

The publication of this series has been partly funded by the Università della Svizzera italiana – University of Lugano.

ISBN 978-3-11-046373-6

e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-046603-4

e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-046380-4

ISSN 2199-6288

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Lee Plaisance, Patrick, editor.

Title: Communication and media ethics / edited by Patrick Lee Plaisance.

Description: 1 Edition. | Boston/Berlin : De Gruyter Mouton, 2018. | Series: Handbooks of communication science [HoCS] ; 26 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018018146 (print) | LCCN 2018019612 (ebook) | ISBN 9783110466034 (electronic Portable Document Format (pdf) | ISBN 9783110463736 (hardback) | ISBN 9783110463804 (e-book epub) | ISBN 9783110466034 (e-book pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Mass media--Moral and ethical aspects. | Communication--Moral and ethical aspects. | Journalistic ethics. | BISAC: LANGUAGE ARTS & DISCIPLINES / Communication Studies.

Classification: LCC P94 (ebook) | LCC P94 .C566 2018 (print) | DDC 175--dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018018146>

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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Cover image: Oliver Rossi/Photographer's Choice RF/Gettyimages

Typesetting: Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

www.degruyter.com

Preface to *Handbooks of Communication Science* series

This volume is part of the series *Handbooks of Communication Science*, published from 2012 onwards by de Gruyter Mouton. When our generation of scholars was in their undergraduate years, and one happened to be studying communication, a series like this one was hard to imagine. There was, in fact, such a dearth of basic and reference literature that trying to make one's way in communication studies as our generation did would be unimaginable to today's undergraduates in the field. In truth, there was simply nothing much to turn to when you needed to cast a first glance at the key objects in the field of communication. The situation in the United States was slightly different; nevertheless, it is only within the last generation that the basic literature has really proliferated there.

What one did when looking for an overview or just a quick reference was to turn to social science books in general, or to the handbooks or textbooks from the neighbouring disciplines such as psychology, sociology, political science, linguistics, and probably other fields. That situation has changed dramatically. There are more textbooks available on some subjects than even the most industrious undergraduate can read. The representative key multi-volume *International Encyclopedia of Communication* has now been available for some years. Overviews of subfields of communication exist in abundance. There is no longer a dearth for the curious undergraduate, who might nevertheless overlook the abundance of printed material and Google whatever he or she wants to know, to find a suitable Wikipedia entry within seconds.

'Overview literature' in an academic discipline serves to draw a balance. There has been a demand and a necessity to draw that balance in the field of communication and it is an indicator of the maturing of the discipline. Our project of a multi-volume series of *Handbooks of Communication Science* is a part of this coming-of-age movement of the field. It is certainly one of the largest endeavours of its kind within communication sciences, with almost two dozen volumes already planned. But it is also unique in its combination of several things.

The series is a major publishing venture which aims to offer a portrait of the current state of the art in the study of communication. But it seeks to do more than just assemble our knowledge of communication structures and processes; it seeks to *integrate* this knowledge. It does so by offering comprehensive articles in all the volumes instead of small entries in the style of an encyclopedia. An extensive index in each *Handbook* in the series, serves the encyclopedic task of find relevant specific pieces of information. There are already several handbooks in sub-disciplines of communication sciences such as political communication, methodology, organisational communication – but none so far has tried to comprehensively cover the discipline as a whole.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-201>

For all that it is maturing, communication as a discipline is still young and one of its benefits is that it derives its theories and methods from a great variety of work in other, and often older, disciplines. One consequence of this is that there is a variety of approaches and traditions in the field. For the *Handbooks* in this series, this has created two necessities: commitment to a pluralism of approaches, and a commitment to honour the scholarly traditions of current work and its intellectual roots in the knowledge in earlier times.

There is really no single object of communication sciences. However, if one were to posit one possible object it might be the human communicative act – often conceived as “someone communicates something to someone else.” This is the departure point for much study of communication and, in consonance with such study, it is also the departure point for this series of *Handbooks*. As such, the series does not attempt to adopt the untenable position of understanding communication sciences as the study of everything that can be conceived as communicating. Rather, while acknowledging that the study of communication must be multifaceted or fragmented, it also recognizes two very general approaches to communication which can be distinguished as: a) the semiotic or linguistic approach associated particularly with the humanities and developed especially where the Romance languages have been dominant and b) a quantitative approach associated with the hard and the social sciences and developed, especially, within an Anglo-German tradition. Although the relationship between these two approaches and between theory and research has not always been straightforward, the series does not privilege one above the other. In being committed to a plurality of approaches it assumes that different camps have something to tell each other. In this way, the *Handbooks* aspire to be relevant for all approaches to communication. The specific designation “communication science” for the *Handbooks* should be taken to indicate this commitment to plurality; like “the study of communication”, it merely designates the disciplined, methodologically informed, institutionalized study of (human) communication.

On an operational level, the series aims at meeting the needs of undergraduates, postgraduates, academics and researchers across the area of communication studies. Integrating knowledge of communication structures and processes, it is dedicated to cultural and epistemological diversity, covering work originating from around the globe and applying very different scholarly approaches. To this end, the series is divided into 6 sections: “Theories and Models of Communication”, “Messages, Codes and Channels”, “Mode of Address, Communicative Situations and Contexts”, “Methodologies”, “Application areas” and “Futures”. As readers will see, the first four sections are fixed; yet it is in the nature of our field that the “Application areas” will expand. It is inevitable that the futures for the field promise to be intriguing with their proximity to the key concerns of human existence on this planet (and even beyond), with the continuing prospect in communication sciences that that future is increasingly susceptible of prediction.

Note: administration on this series has been funded by the Università della Svizzera italiana – University of Lugano. Thanks go to the president of the university, Professor Piero Martinoli, as well as to the administration director, Albino Zraggen.

Peter J. Schulz, Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano
Paul Cobley, Middlesex University, London

To Atisaya, as always,
and to my daughter, Simone

Acknowledgements

As with all such endeavors, this edited volume may have a single name on the cover but is in fact the product of extensive efforts by a large group of scholars. First and foremost, this volume was made possible by the leadership of the Handbooks of Communication Science series editors, Peter J. Schulz and Paul Coble. Their support of the vision for this volume was unflagging and greatly appreciated. Throughout the process, I have been indebted to the thoughtful stewardship of Barbara Karlson at De Gruyter Mouton, who showed graciousness and forbearance throughout as I worked with all the contributors to keep the project on track (and as she kept me on track during my transition to Penn State).

The work of the 28 scholars featured here truly reflect the “state of the art” in theorizing in communication and media ethics. Their dedication and efforts transformed my aspirations for this project into a reality: to showcase, in an accessible way, the best thinking from the two related fields. With all the important scholarship being published, this volume fills a notable void: it is the first of its kind not only to offer voices of authority from both fields, but to do so with an internationalist lens. This should be a particular point of pride for all involved in this project, which marks an important milestone in the continuing maturation of the fields.

I also want to express my gratitude for the love and support from my daughter, Simone, my son, Carter, and as always, Atisaya.

State College, Pennsylvania, June 2018

Patrick Lee Plaisance

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-202>

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Patrick Lee Plaisance

1 Defining the Field

Abstract: This chapter describes the parameters of scholarship in communication and media ethics and provides a brief primer on the three predominant branches of ethics theory: virtue, deontology, and consequentialism. Communication ethics and media ethics each address distinct concerns; the former has focused on rhetoric, theories of interpersonal communication, and dynamics of discourse, while the latter has focused on philosophical and psychological approaches to studying media workers and their content. We see how each branch of ethics theory has shaped media and communication research in a discussion of specific types of ethical controversies, such as conflict of interest, questions of harm, privacy, and use of graphic images.

Keywords: ethics theory, virtue ethics, deontology, consequentialism

Communication is by its very nature relational, regardless of its various forms – mass, mediated, digital, interpersonal. It is contact, conveyance, appraisal, dissemination, exchange. That is, communication is an inherently morality-related endeavor. As communicators of all stripes, we function as moral agents by continuously negotiating notions of respect, fairness, harm and autonomy. The enterprise of ethics is the deliberation of conflicting values and competing interests as we talk to each other, broadcast to the masses, and write or stream to selected audiences. So, communicating ethically is to communicate with thought and care, ever mindful of the relational web through which we move and of our potential effects, positive and negative, on others.

But of course it is not so simple. The postmodernist nature of truth, the utility of misdirection and disengagement, the dynamic of power and the value of secrets all shape our communicative motivations. As they should. We have long recognized the reality of multiple truths. Saving face and the artful demurring of harsh honesty are essential social lubricants worldwide. Disparate systems of hierarchy, authority and responsibility necessarily shape our dialogue and our information exchange. And as Thomas Nagel has pointed out, our commitment to honesty notwithstanding, if we were unable to withhold information, to deflect queries, to shield parts of our lives from public scrutiny, we would surely embark on the road to madness, or at least dysfunction. All of which is why the ethics of communication remains such a vital and vexing topic. While we understand the perils of relativistic thinking for the most part, we also can easily see the *situational* nature of most ethical claims in communication, how our judgments are contingent on a host of factors that vary in their perceived importance and relevance.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-001>

This volume illustrates the breadth of scholarship in communication and media ethics and attempts to capture the latest theorizing that brings ethics frameworks to bear on the many types of communication in our daily lives – interpersonal exchange, journalism, media marketing, entertainment content, and much more. Drawing on classic and contemporary works in moral philosophy, theorists regularly examine perceptions and manifestations of harm, of autonomous agency, of moral and professional obligations, of social justice, and of virtue, just to name a few. Sophisticated ethics-based theorizing on these and other topics is arguably more critical in communication and media research than ever. Media business and organizational models long relied upon are being challenged by unprecedented economic and social shifts, resulting in bold and often ethically questionable experiments in the search for viability. Media technology is transforming our notions of privacy, community engagement – even the nature of self-identity and how we interact. And in an increasingly networked communication system that is global in nature, theorists are struggling to articulate what a universalized ethical framework for media practices might look like – and whether such a framework is even possible. As this volume indicates, the field of communication and media ethics scholarship covers communication in its broadest sense and draws on increasingly sophisticated qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Its theorizing is descriptive, normative, explicative and hermeneutic in nature. And it is increasingly interdisciplinary, drawing as it does from rhetoric, moral philosophy, psychology, sociology, and various other of the social sciences.

Some would argue that when we speak of “communication ethics,” we are actually speaking of two distinct fields. One is composed of “communication” scholars, grounded in rhetoric, linguistics and theories of interpersonal and organizational communication, who tend to examine the dynamics of discourse and elements of the communicative act. The other is composed of “media” scholars, often hailing from social science frameworks, who are drawn to the sociological and psychological dynamics of media workers and media organizations, as well as to empirical questions involving the effects of media content. The two have generally developed into distinct scholarly communities with their own research venues and organizations (though a trend in some parts of the world has seen them merge into unified academic departments and colleges). Their common denominator, of course, is the harnessing of the philosophy of ethics onto questions of communication and media practices. And we are increasingly seeing a blurring of bright distinctions between the two groups. This volume simultaneously recognizes the distinct thrust of each camp while emphasizing the philosophical kinship of the two.

A few words about the nature of ethics itself. The philosophy of ethics provides important tools that help us clarify the nature of key concepts and to think about situational factors in constructive ways. Contrary to our everyday use of the word ethical, the philosophy of ethics has less to do with the nature of goodness than with the process of deliberating our way through dilemmas that don't offer a single “right” solution. Black-and-white cases in which there is a clear single solution or course of

action rarely poses a true question of ethics; instead, ethics is focused on the difficult gray areas that force us to articulate why a decision might be the most defensible one. We do so in various ways by drawing on ethics theory: by pointing out why one consideration is more “virtuous” than another, by thinking about our duties and obligations in certain social roles, by weighing the potential harms and other consequences of a decision. Each of these approaches rely on different branches of ethical theory – virtue ethics, deontology or duty ethics, and consequentialism, respectively. Each branch has a rich literature and emphasizes a distinct approach to understanding moral values, obligations and potential harms. Virtue ethics, rooted primarily in the work of Aristotle, argues that ethical deliberation centers neither on external moral law nor outcomes, but on the question of what constitutes good character. Classical and contemporary virtue theorists are concerned with how we understand what we refer to as the virtues and their links to Aristotle’s emphasis on human flourishing. Deontology, or the philosophy of duty, is rooted in Enlightenment rationalism and emphasizes what Immanuel Kant referred to as the moral obligations we are all obliged to recognize and embody as moral agents in the world. Consequentialism is the umbrella term used to refer to the range of utilitarian-based theories that argue for the link between morality and our actions. Our actions, argued John Stuart Mill and others, are best judged on the extent to which they produce beneficent outcomes. More recently, some theorists have advocated an entirely different approach by articulating how the notion of “care” serves as a normative guide in ethics, often coming from a feminist perspective. The cultivation and maintenance of relationships, rather than abstract notions such as duty or justice, should form the basis for ethical deliberation.

1 Virtue ethics

Virtue ethics was originally articulated in the works of Socrates and Plato, and later was refined by Aristotle. Rather than being concerned with how we know “goodness,” Aristotle’s writings are focused on identifying and articulating the *highest* good, which he says has specific characteristics: it is innately valuable; that is, we desire it for its own sake and not for what it allows us to accomplish, and all other goods are desirable because they help us attain this highest good. Aristotle argues that highest good is the state of “living well,” translated from the Greek word *eudaimonia*. Thus, virtue ethics frames moral questions in this way: What would someone with a proper understanding of honorable behavior do in a given situation, and how might one cultivate a character that predisposes one to embrace virtuous behavior as a lifestyle? The cultivation of individual character to become models of virtue, rather than the rightness or wrongness of specific actions, is the focus of virtue ethics. Pursuit of virtue is part of what constitutes a “good” human life. Many contemporary virtue ethicists have expanded and refined Aristotle’s ideas, arguing that virtue theory compellingly corresponds to

lived life rather than to some notion of an idealized rational being. Rosalind Hursthouse, for example, wrote, “[b]uilt into the theory is the claim that part of the virtuous person’s practical wisdom is her knowledge, her correct appreciation, of what is truly good, and, indeed, of what is truly pleasant, truly advantageous, truly worthwhile, truly important, truly serious (and, correspondingly, of what is truly bad, unpleasant, or painful, disadvantageous, worthless, unimportant, and trivial)” (2012, p. 73). Rather than getting tangled up in philosophical debates over our motives and duties, virtue ethicists who have followed Aristotle urge us instead to focus on the rules and behaviors that contribute to our “flourishing.” They use this term in a broad sense to accommodate the diversity of society and our wide range of interests. By flourishing, most philosophers mean that we all need to enjoy the fruits of our labor, to reap the benefits of collaboration and community engagement, and to have the means and resources to enable us to strive toward and reach our individual potential. So, for us to flourish, we would need, among other things, a social system that is just and that maximizes liberties, that encourages engagement, cooperation and generosity. “Men and women need to be industrious and tenacious of purpose not only so as to be able to house, clothe, and feed themselves,” philosopher Philippa Foot argued, “but also to pursue human needs having to do with love and friendship. They need the ability to form family ties, friendships, and special relations with neighbors. They also need codes of conduct. And how could they have all these things without virtues such as loyalty, fairness, kindness, and in certain circumstances obedience?” (2001, p. 44–45).

2 Duty ethics

Duty ethics is concerned with setting out what we ought to do if we take our status of moral agents seriously. Also known as deontology (from the Greek word *deon*, meaning duty), duty ethics argues that there are moral obligations that we are all bound by, and that these obligations must motivate our behavior. Since these obligations, or moral “duties,” define what action is right, our moral judgments cannot rest solely on the consequences of those acts. Some choices, deontologists argue, simply cannot be justified by their effects: no matter how much they might result in some “benefit,” some choices are simply morally wrong because they fail to reflect our duty to behave in a certain way. While bringing about some benefit, or good, through one’s actions is obviously desirable, our success at doing so cannot be the basis of our moral judgments, because that would imply that any sort of underhanded or evil “means” can be justified by a good outcome. Rather, the “right” must come first: knowing our moral duties to properly treat others, to avoid harm, to respect certain values, is the surest guide to making the best decisions. It is our intended ends and our intended means that define our moral selves. Immanuel Kant’s duty-based moral system is the classic example of a deontological approach: an act cannot be judged as right

or wrong based on its consequences, but only on whether the person performing the act understood her obligations as a moral agent. Performing a certain act may have negative consequences for some people, but such results are not what makes that a bad or immoral act; its “rightness” exists independently of any resulting outcome.

As much as duty-ethics philosophers emphasize the role of our motivation in making moral judgments, they also are concerned with the *rights* of individuals whose fates are determined by what we do. As moral agents, we all have the right, they say, not to be used only as a means for bringing about good consequences without our consent. People cannot use our bodies, our labor or our abilities without our say-so. Yet our intents and our rights are not always compatible, and thus duty-ethicists continue to debate about the exact nature of our moral duties. However, the wide range of plausible solutions is subordinate to our paramount obligation to respect everyone’s capacity for reason. Kant argues that this is what makes us special as beings, and with the proper use of that reason, we can fully discern ways in which we are morally obligated to respect and honor that reasoning capacity – in every case, for everyone. Thus, the fundamental principle of our moral duties, he says, is the “categorical imperative”: We are to “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” It is an *imperative* in that it commands us to do something – Kant does not order that we perform specific actions to be “moral”; instead, he commands us to exercise our *wills* in a particular way. And it is *categorical* – that is, it applies to all of us unconditionally, simply because we possess rational wills, without reference to any of our personal goals or interests. For Kant, this categorical imperative calls on all of us to think more deeply about doing or not doing something. Philosopher Robert Johnson summarizes how the categorical imperative calls on us to consider the morality of an action:

First, formulate a maxim that enshrines your reason for acting as you propose. Second, recast that maxim as a universal law of nature governing all rational agents, and so as holding that all must, by natural law, act as you yourself propose to act in these circumstances. Third, consider whether your maxim is even conceivable in a world governed by this law of nature. If it is, then, fourth, ask yourself whether you would, or could, rationally *will* to act on your maxim in such a world. If you could, then your action is morally permissible (2016).

Kant’s formula helps us think more deeply about our behavior, but modern philosophers have noted that a little flexibility here can go a long way in balancing duties with consequences in our daily lives. By saying we all must act only if the action can be defended as a universal standard of action for everyone does not mean duty ethicists think we all must act in lock-step, with no consideration for the unique differences in our lives. For many, context matters. So in many cases, the moral obligations we have can be “agent-relative” – that is, they may apply just to us because of our relation to the individuals impacted by our actions. For example, one person may feel obligated to act a certain way with family members to avoid moral failure, but that feeling of duty may not apply in the company of strangers.

3 Consequentialist ethics

We certainly have obligations to act morally and to uphold certain duties, but we also need to think about, and defend, the consequences of actions to the extent possible. As its name suggests, consequentialist ethics argues for shifting the moral weight in decision making from character and intent to how much “good” our decisions might produce. Whether an act is morally justified depends only on the results of that act. The most common phrase associated with consequentialist ethics is “providing the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people.” And the most common form of this framework is *utilitarianism* – an act is judged based on how much “utility,” or good outcome, it provides. The early proponents of utilitarianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries argued for a *hedonistic* definition of utility: physical pleasure is the only intrinsic good, and maximizing it was the sole basis for judging acts. Later, others refined and expanded what constituted the good beyond mere physical pleasure, to include broader, higher-order goods such as freedom, knowledge, skill in the arts, etc. John Stuart Mill articulated this type of utilitarianism in the 1860s. Yet contemporary philosophers continue to debate just what sorts of consequentialist principles can be useful in ethical dilemmas. Not all pleasures are considered valuable in the same ways for everyone, so which pleasures should carry moral weight? Can we really perceive all possible pleasures and act with sufficient foresight to promote them? How can we rank different kinds of pleasures against each other?

Even Mill, one of the foremost architects of utilitarianism, eventually came to the realization that a direct pursuit of happiness as an end in itself only can lead to disappointment. The only truly happy people, he wrote late in life, are those “who have their minds fixed on some other object than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but itself an ideal end.” The ways in which we perceive pleasures as valuable, and what we count as a maximization of those pleasures worth promoting, could result in quite different variations of utilitarianism. In consequentialist ethics, what appears to be a straightforward idea – maximize benefits, or pleasure, for the greatest number of people – can quickly become very complicated. Still, the general approach of utility has arguably become the foundation of the Western democratic legislative system.

Consequentialists argue that our aim should be promoting things that benefit society as a whole, rather than focusing on aggregate goods that may benefit individuals. This would help account for cases when “pain” is perceived as somehow valuable. “For example,” one contemporary philosopher argued, “even if punishment of a criminal causes pain, a consequentialist can hold that a world with both the crime and the punishment is better than a world with the crime but not the punishment, perhaps because the former contains more justice” (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2015, p. 8). So, instead of having to determine whether a single act would produce specific benefit or pleasure, this “holistic” utilitarianism compares “the whole world (or total set of consequences) that results from an action with the whole world that

results from not doing that action,” he argues. “If the former is better, then the action is morally right.” This is the difference between using utility as a “standard” with which to judge the rightness of an act, and using it as a “decision procedure.” The latter is virtually impossible, since we are not omniscient and cannot possibly anticipate every outcome of our actions. So most consequentialists argue for the former, as Sinnott-Armstrong explains: “Just as the laws of physics govern golf ball flight, but golfers need not calculate physical forces while planning shots; so overall utility can determine which decisions are morally right, even if agents need not calculate utilities while making decisions” (p. 10). We cannot be held accountable for simply failing to foresee all the possible consequences of our actions, but utilitarians argue that we are accountable for our *intended* consequences and for failing to observe likely, or *foreseeable*, outcomes. consequentialist thinkers advocate for an alternative known as *rule utilitarianism*; that is, we should judge actions not on specific anticipated outcomes, but on how likely they are to uphold other agreed-upon principles or rules. Under this approach, an act is morally wrong if it violates a rule whose acceptance has better consequences than what would likely be the outcome without the rule.

4 Applying ethics theory to communication

Earlier, scholarship in communication and media ethics was described as being diverse in its methods, frameworks and theoretical approaches. Much of it has been essayistic and qualitative in nature, though an increasing proportion harnesses social scientific and quantitative methodologies. Considerable media ethics theorizing in the last two decades has been preoccupied with engaging and critiquing the libertarian framework that the late media scholar John Merrill promoted as the best “fit” to guide responsible media practice. This framework has met significant criticism over the years. Too often, scholars have said, this framework was promoted in ways that were simplistic (Christians et al., 1993, p. 40–41), theoretically incoherent (Plaisance, 2005, p. 297), and narrowly focused on a particular strain of big-institution journalism that has been on the wane since at least 2003. Several compelling, and arguably more useful, frameworks have since emerged. One is the “contractualist” approach of Stephen Ward, who rejects absolutist thinking about key principles such as objectivity and instead recasts the nature of ethical deliberation as a process of “intersubjective agreement obtained from rational, public deliberation, in light of common purposes, values, and facts.” (2005, p. 7) Another is the “philosophical anthropology” approach by Clifford Christians, who has argued that “protonorms” such as sacredness of life can be identified as foundational concepts for universal human solidarity. This approach is tied closely to the communitarian ethics that Christians and his colleagues have long advocated as a critical antidote to the problematic Western paradigm of individualism that has obscured a more holistic conception of the self (1993, 2012). A third approach is represented by the work of Sandra Borden (2007),

who articulates an application of virtue ethics to journalism work by bringing to bear the concept of morally informed and professional “practice” by Alasdair MacIntyre. In his landmark work, *After Virtue*, MacIntyre made the important observation that Homeric and Aristotelian accounts of virtue always assume the fact that features of our social and moral lives are widely accepted as important and as necessary conditions for the enactment of virtuous behavior. Such behaviors, or practices, serve the public in some way and are how “virtues are exhibited” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 187).

Much scholarship has been concerned with practical applications of the three formalist frameworks – deontology, virtue, consequentialism – described above, though more recently a “mixed formalism” has emerged to reflect work of contemporary moral philosophers. Theory-building has occurred by using several different approaches. Arguably, the most prevalent have been descriptive, normative, explicative and hermeneutic approaches. What follows are some examples of each that have preoccupied scholars. While these descriptions are by no means meant to be comprehensive, they do suggest the kinds of research questions that have defined the fields.

4.1 Descriptive scholarship

Researchers have sought to document the nature of ethical thinking among media professionals. What ethical standards or principles are featured or prevalent among industry codes or practices? How are ethical principles manifested in the work of journalists, public relations professionals and other media workers? What are the ethical implications of the patterns of rhetoric found in online communities? These are the kinds of questions found in descriptive work in the field. Much of this scholarship uses quasi-ethnographic and interview methods to document and describe practices, beliefs and behaviors. For example, scholars have examined the culture of media organizations for clues about its ethical “climate.” They also have interviewed members of online audiences to report on the various ethical values that seem to shape norms and interaction. Quantitative methods also are used to gather ethics-related frequencies and other statistical data. Researchers have assessed moral development scores, for example, and uncovered patterns of moral responses of audience members shown different types of media content. Examples of the broad range of ethics-oriented descriptive research include studies documenting the ethical culture of media organizations (Schauster, 2015), and efforts to document the differences in how audiences respond to photographs versus video content (Meader et al., 2015).

4.2 Normative scholarship

Beyond scholarship that seeks to document the state of norms, practices and effects, other work argues what those norms and practices *should* be when principles or

standards are properly applied. Whereas early media ethics scholarship tended to argue for “best practices,” the field has dramatically grown in sophistication by reaching deeper into moral philosophy and providing rich context for arguments about why communication should be informed in various ways. What should be the nature of dialogue in public relations work involving competing stakeholder interests? How should the notion of social responsibility be manifested in media-based marketing? Discursive ethics continues to be an example of a widely used normative framework; drawing on the work of Jürgen Habermas and others, communication ethics scholars have articulated the necessary conditions for productive and respectful exchange. Regarding media, scholars have argued for specific regulatory and anti-corruption policies to encourage better democratic-minded content. Most all of such normative scholarship is essayistic in nature. Examples include drawing on Habermas’ theory to help organizations communicate ethical issues more effectively (Meisenbach, 2006), and drawing on the virtue ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre to clarify the public service of professional journalism work (Borden, 2007).

4.3 Explicative scholarship

Much communication and media ethics scholarship seeks to explicate, or unpack and refine a specific concept. This work examines conventional use or understanding of a term and suggests critique or refinement of how it operates in ethical communication. This work has much in common with normative scholarship in that it, too, is predominantly argument-based. How should the nature of accountability be understood as a dynamic of interaction in media messaging? In what ways is the concept of autonomous agency being augmented and undermined by patterns of social media use? How should the concept of harm properly inform journalists’ respectful treatment of the subjects of graphic images? Concept explication is particularly useful in media ethics to illustrate the role of key philosophical terms that are deeply embedded, yet not often fully considered, in media practices. Such work often uncovers multiple dimensions or meanings of a concept in ways that are useful both to clarify theoretical claims and to refine the operationalization of variables for future research. Examples include an analysis that raises questions about the moral limitations of dialogic norms of public relations (Browning, 2015), an explication of the idea of journalistic paternalism (Thomas, 2016).

4.4 Hermeneutic scholarship

By bringing strands of all these approaches together, researchers can provide accounts for why communication processes and media systems work the way they do and what might be done to encourage more ethically informed practices and dynamics. Here,

hermeneutic scholarship often goes hand in hand with normative work: By providing explanations for phenomenon and by drawing on research that identifies the best integration of moral concepts and media practice, the hermeneutic approach can point the way toward optimal policies and practices that prioritize ethical claims and values. What are the organizational dynamics of media-based companies – journalistic, advocacy-driven, etc. – that shape individuals’ abilities to do virtuous work? What are the cognitive processes involved in audience responses to types of content that are in turn linked to their moral reactions? As these questions suggest, hermeneutic work is often synthetic in nature, drawing on empirical research for continued theory-building. Examples of this include Luciano Floridi’s scholarship defining the emergence of the “infosphere” that arguably defines human interaction (2014), and work that traces the influence of different kinds of norms in journalistic culture (Lee et al., 2016).

5 Ethical implications of media practice

Recurring tensions inherent in the communicative act, mediated or otherwise, mean that several specific types of questions and controversies regularly surface in communication and media ethics. Yet it should be clear that ethics provide no clear-cut solution to cases of the same type; indeed, ethicists often argue for very different resolutions or optimal decisions among similar cases, depending on context and factors that may have more or less importance in different situations. It nonetheless is valuable to note several broad types of ethics questions posed by communication and media practices:

5.1 Conflict of interest

In journalism and public relations, corporate and political conflicts of interest commonly raise questions of autonomy and adherence to ideals of public service. Conflict of interest can also occur at the individual level, where the interests or values of a single journalist, for example, might tempt him or her to compromise his or her news judgments. Most journalistic policies require news workers to treat potential *appearances* of conflict of interest as just as much a threat to credibility as *actual* conflicts, and, in cases of the latter, to take explicit steps to acknowledge the conflict and to either minimize or eliminate it. In most cases, journalists are expected to recuse themselves from activities that might pose a journalistic conflict. This includes policies that prohibit reporters covering politics from featuring political bumper stickers on their private vehicles. Public relations organizations regularly avoid taking on clients that might compete in the same industry, and the notion of being transparent in all media relations work is critical to legitimacy and trust-building. The same is increasingly true in media marketing: independent bloggers, for example, are now often required

by government regulation to disclose when products or services are promoted due to financial compensation.

5.2 Minimizing harm

While the concept of what is “harmful” in media may seem self-explanatory, ethics scholars are increasingly concentrating on the nature of harm, its many dimensions, and how it can actually manifest itself in communication. Harm clearly is linked to the Kantian notions of respect and human dignity; scholars subsequently have been interested in when behavior may substantively “set back” someone’s interest. For example, bullying rhetoric and tactics that undermine dialogue are serious concerns in interpersonal discourse ethics. And harm, of course, may take several forms in media content. Journalists are regularly called upon to justify their decisions that arguably cause harm to individuals or groups. Photojournalists in war zones and those covering sites of humanitarian tragedy have been challenged, for example, for their decisions to maintain their role as dispassionate witnesses to scenes of human suffering, and scholars have explored when such depictions undermine human dignity. Scholars also have increasingly attended to the negative social effects of Web-based corporate marketing, asking questions such as how might the consumerist focus on Internet marketing undermine virtues of citizenship and community.

5.3 Balancing privacy interests

Everyone requires a degree of privacy for self-development and to enable individuals to manage their multiple social roles. But with the very definition of privacy in a digital society in a state of flux, it has increasingly become among the most confusing concepts in communication and media ethics. It is clearly of critical importance in journalism, where writers, editors and producers constantly confront the dilemma of the extent to which respect for individual privacy should determine news coverage. But social media and other digital information sites that don’t adhere to journalistic standards of privacy often are expected to do so. Scholars also have explored ethical implications of the policy debates over privacy for media marketing and datamining practices – an indication that the notion of privacy is critical for sectors beyond journalism.

5.4 Informational and content effects

Media content that may have negative effects on society frequently raise ethics questions. For example, journalists have embraced media guidelines for responsible coverage of suicide as a social-health issue rather than as spectacle. The way an issue in the news is

“framed” by story narratives, using factors such as sourcing, point of view, emphasis and description, can leave audiences with a particular understanding of that issue. Framing of hot-button topics such as gun violence, gender roles or obesity can serve to emphasize or favor one perspective over another and thus raise ethical questions. How interest groups and corporations attempt to “define the dialogue” also has been the focus of ethics scholarship. The concept of “greenwashing” by companies is one such example.

5.5 Reliance on stereotypes

Relying on or perpetuating gender, racial or ethnic stereotypes in all forms of communication raises myriad ethical issues for scholars. In journalism, stereotypes are a form of framing, expediency, narrative brevity and the press of deadlines often discourage thoughtful considerations of the descriptions used for story subjects, be they local celebrities or police suspects. Research has suggested a consistent gender bias in news descriptions of physicality, emphasizing clothing items for women but not men, for example. Also, consistent focus on race often leave skewed perceptions of crime patterns in the mind of the public. Of course, stereotypes have long been relied upon in marketing and promotional content to target specific audiences, but recent scholarship has explored the negative social implications of doing so. Narrow portrayals of female beauty in advertising has come under increasingly scrutiny for its apparent negative effects on young girls and women.

5.6 Information bias

What methods are justifiable in the collection of information valuable to the public? Classic what-ends-justify-the-means questions regularly confront journalists and have been a popular subject of media ethics scholars. While absolutist policies are rare, many news organizations refuse to pay for news or interviews, though tabloid outlets commonly do so. The concern is that sources with a financial incentive may be tempted to embellish, alter, or even fabricate facts and events, thereby undermining the journalistic enterprise. In many developing countries, money is regularly passed to individual journalists to curry favor and secure positive treatment. With celebrity periodicals, where exposure has created its own competitive market among a finite pool of public figures, payment for attention has become more removed from objective newsworthiness standards. The use of deceptive tactics, such as hidden cameras, also raises ethical questions. As mentioned earlier, the concept of transparency in information has preoccupied scholars examining the communication practices of corporations and interest groups that may have an interest in obscuring the source of their advocacy.

5.7 Graphic images

The publication of photos that depict gore, violence and suffering regularly raise ethical questions for news journalists. Such questions become particularly heated during times of war or conflict, and when patriotic sentiments may bring added pressure to bear on journalists to depict the “right” story and avoid using images that audiences might perceive to be demoralizing. Scholars have grappled with claims that graphic images can be offensive, harmful or unnecessary, weighing philosophical arguments that suggest avoiding such images risks sanitizing or propagandizing the news. As with other communication ethics issues, the controversies over the publication of graphic images reflect diametric approaches within ethics itself: A utilitarian concern focused on minimizing harmful *consequences* of a decision versus a *deontological* ethos that calls for depicting the news with courage and relying on audiences to make their own decisions about the value of such images.

In the future, ethics scholarship in media and communication will no doubt continue to examine the latest manifestations of all these issues, and many more not listed. As the last section of this volume suggests, the field of communication ethics is clearly moving in some clearly identifiable ways as it grows into its fifth decade. More inferential, interdisciplinary research drawing on psychology theories is one. Theory-building that capitalizes on the philosophy of technology is another. But the field will doubtless grow in unanticipated ways as well, as young scholars with different training and new questions join in ethics inquiry. As a relatively young discipline, communication ethics such limitless potential paths ensures the vibrancy of its scholarship for generations to come.

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Lee Wilkins

2 A History of Media Ethics: From Application to Theory and Back Again

Abstract: This chapter focuses on practical issues that lead to ideas worth considering across disciplines. By discussing the evolution of four concepts, truth-telling, privacy, the impact of technology and moral development, it outlines the historic development of these ideas in the field of media ethics. Its central assertion is that media ethics has had something to contribute to philosophy and political philosophy as well as to working professionals. This contribution centers as much as it does in philosophy and political philosophy as it does in the more accepted domain of applied ethics.

Keywords: history, standards, truth, privacy, ethical decision making, technology, journalism

Most histories focus on ideas, people or events. Disciplinary histories tend to connect people with specific ideas and to link those to the events that influenced them (Christians 2008). This brief history has a different purpose. At the outset, it assumes a dual connection: the first to the profession of journalism as it has been practiced for the past 500 years or so, but with emphasis on the past 300 years in the United States. The second connection is to the field of philosophy and political philosophy – to the contributions that thinking about professional practice can make to central questions that have arisen in those fields. To link the professional to the philosophical, this paper employs feminist epistemology (Koehn 1998): it assumes that practice has theoretical relevance and that theory, in turn, will influence practice. In the words of Nell Noddings, it assumes that “moral decisions are, after all, made in real situations,” (Noddings 1984, p. 3). Thus, the paper will focus on practical issues that lead to ideas worth considering across disciplines. Its central assertion is that media ethics has had something to contribute to philosophy and political philosophy as well as to working journalists, public relations practitioners, advertising professionals and those new roles that are emerging as the world grapples with the meaning of the web.

1 It begins with the work itself

In her foundational volume, Hazel Dicken-Garcia noted, “No literature deals to a significant degree with the history of journalism ethics,” (Dicken-Garcia 1989, p. 4). Dicken-Garcia’s work became a touchstone for historical inquiry, but it was seminal because it also included an examination of media criticism in the nineteenth century.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-002>

Dicken-Garcia's historical approach assumed a democratic conversation between "the press" of the day and the citizenry that read it and influenced its evolution, beginning with the partisan press in the early portion of the century to the penny press and finally to the emergence of a mass press in the late 1800s. As Dicken-Garcia suggests, the original ethical questions emerged from the work itself.

A too-brief summary of this early professional discussion outlines the following ethical issues that centered initially on democratic roles and included the following: the tension between impartiality and partisanship (characteristic of the years between 1780 through 1830); then the watchdog function and the public's right to know, fairness, taste, trivialization, and an examination of how much, if at all, journalists should insert themselves in their stories (the years between 1830 and 1850), and then specific journalistic "conduct" (the years 1850 through 1899) focused around the issues of free press/fair trial and invasion of privacy. During this latter era, there was a definitional reconceptualization of news, from the contents of a political broadsheet to reports that would have an appeal to a mass audience. Schudson (1981) has argued that this definitional shift was propelled by the economics of the news business at the end of the eighteenth century, one that was foreshadowed by James Gordon Bennett, son of the founder of the *New York Herald*, and who emphasized the money making elements of journalism (Emery, Emery & Roberts 1999).

But impetus for these developments emerged from the two decades before the American Civil War, in which newspapers and individual journalists played significant political roles, often centering around the morality of slavery, and hence accuracy, truthfulness and the need for unbiased media accounts. Probably the most celebrated of these is Horace Greeley, founding editor of the *New York Tribune*, whose pro-abolitionist stance ultimately led him to support the emerging Republican Party (Chadwell 2006). Other newspaper editors were equally vehement in their support of political causes, but central to these discussions was the link between political stance and morality as that word was understood at that time. In 1878, when Joseph Pulitzer established the *Post-Dispatch* in St. Louis, he noted, "The Post-Dispatch will serve no party but the people, it will be no organ of Republicanism but the organ of truth, it will follow no causes but its conclusions These are the ideals of a true, genuine real Democracy," (Bent 1939) . During this era and for the first time, the character of individual journalists became the focus of some discussion.

Within the profession, the answers to these questions were tied to journalistic standards, standards that were linked with the process of getting, reporting and editing the news. A secondary discussion focused on the often patchy assertions about the impact of the press on the larger society. The connection to philosophy is, at best, a dotted line. "As cultural shifts occur in a given society, standards change. Whereas standards, then, are connected with everyday practical procedures, moral principles are constructs, ideals, that are equally incumbent on all professions (all human activity, even); but like members of most professions, journalists are not routinely compelled to wax philosophical – that is, to think about or be involved with philosophical

precepts on a constant basis,” (Dicken-Garcia, 238). Media criticism during this latter era focused on questions about societal-level media effects – “theory and function” as Dicken-Garcia notes (182).

But the philosophical underpinnings of these nascent debates began about about 200 years earlier in the periodic press of the seventeenth century (Ward 2004), where journalism was equated with the work of public intellectuals such as J.S. Mill and Samuel Johnson, who published political tracts in the periodicals of the day. This same public intellectual approach was reflected in the United States with the publication of *The Federalist Papers* (1788) during the founding of the republic and in Walter Lippmann’s work in the early part of the twentieth Century (Steel 1999). However, this public intellectual approach was supplemented and then supplanted by the concept of reporting, which Ward links to Great Britain in 1771 and 1775 when journalists were first allowed to view debates in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, respectively. In Ward’s analysis, the concept of objective journalism was tied to the Enlightenment, and objectivity was considered a moral imperative. Thus, as Ward views it, objectivity was not a response to the economics of funding a journalism that was rapidly becoming a mass press, the central and highly influential thesis of Shudson’s 1981 book, but of philosophical understandings that had been working themselves out in the way that journalism was practiced for at least 200 years. James Carey applied these same insights to the last years of the nineteenth century when he noted that for journalists to claim a professional mantle, they needed to align themselves with the objectivity and prestige of science, thus positioning news routines that promoted objective reporting as rightly outside the spheres of political influence but firmly within an Enlightenment world view (Carey 1997, p. 335) – an approach that provided a basis for understanding journalistic standards and ethics for much of the twentieth century. Not coincidentally, it also marks the time when journalism itself began to claim the mantle of a profession as opposed to a craft (May 1986).

The drive to professionalization led to two important developments that had a profound impact on the growth and intellectual direction of the mass media ethics. The first, as May (1986) notes, is the movement toward the inclusion of journalism in university curricula. Although there is some good-natured jockeying about which institution was first, various partisan accounts agree that the first journalism class at the university level was offered at Iowa State University but that the first university-level degree program emerged in 1908 at the University of Missouri (Winfield 2008), which established an independent School of Journalism that included, as part of its curriculum, the publication of a daily newspaper governed by an independent publication board. Founding Dean Walter Williams linked journalism ethics to religious, specifically Christian, principles, including stating that the Bible was the most important text for journalists (Ibold and Wilkins 2008). Just four years later, in 1912, the second university-level program was established, this time at Columbia University in New York and under the auspices of Joseph Pulitzer. This movement of journalism curricula into the university foreshadowed the extensive development of academic

work on media ethics (Borden 2007). As Hulteng noted, “In every journalism curriculum there is at least some attention – and usually a good deal – given to the concept of journalistic ethics – and the application of that concept,” (Hulteng, 1976, p. 233). The central elements of that work will be reviewed later in this essay.

The second result of the movement to professionalize journalism was an increasingly level of self-examination and internal critique led by the profession itself. That critique is not without some irony, for it began during the era of Yellow Journalism, the most notorious era for journalistic excesses of almost all sorts in the twentieth century. “For cultural materialists, journalism codes of ethics may be seen as cultural practices existing within ongoing social processes,” (Brennen and Wilkins 2004). Upton Sinclair’s indictment of journalism in *The Brass Check* (1920) was followed three years later by the American Society of Newspaper Editors and its code of ethics published in 1923. The Canons of Journalism (the ASNE code) foregrounds public welfare and press freedom. This initial code was followed about 10 years later by the publication of the ethics code of the American Newspaper Guild, which focused almost exclusively on the behavior of individual journalists rather than news organizations. As a result of the twin forces of journalism as a field moving into the academy and the continuing, if somewhat skewed internal critique arising from within the profession itself, Henry Luce’s (editor of *Time* magazine) funding of a scholarly inquiry into the role of the media after World War II makes historical sense. The result, the Hutchins Commission’s “Report on a Free and Responsible Press” (1947), was at once meant to be a practical document and a philosophical one that attached the practice to, if not ethical philosophy, then the political philosophy most closely associated with democratic functioning as it was understood in the mid-twentieth century. It is not an overstatement to say that the Hutchins’ Commission recommendations have provided the basis for commentary and thinking about journalism and then media ethics ever since (Christians *et al.*, 2009).

The Hutchins Commission codified the emerging connection between professional practice and philosophical theory. As journalists became increasingly trained at universities and in the American liberal arts tradition, those who trained them – the professoriate – had more time to explore and in many instances expand the concepts of standards and codes to theory-based work. That connection moved media ethics into the realm of political philosophy and ethical theory. However, professional practice continued to exert indirect but significant intellectual power. Institutional structures and the increasing dependence on technology as both a tool of and a shaper of media content posed questions that demanded theory-based answers – some of that theory emerging from philosophy. Finally, what Dicken-Garcia characterized as the theory and function of the press in the late nineteenth century, beginning with the *War of the Worlds* study in 1939 and continuing with increasing vigor to the present day, foreshadowed the contemporary examination of media effects on an individual, institutional and societal level (Lowery and DeFleur 1995). This body of work, which is largely driven by the academy with some notable exceptions (for example, the continuing discussion of the impact of violent media content on individual behavior)

raised important normative questions about the role of and the responsibility of the media – not just in news content but in persuasion and entertainment.

The breadth of the intellectual inquiry here is far too vast to summarize in a single chapter. However, certain central questions dominate this discussion. They are: how journalists should define and operationalize the concept of truth; the evolving concept of privacy and its relationship to community, political philosophy and notions of autonomy; the impact of technology on professional practice and the construct of harm; and influences on individual professional ethical choice. This list is meant to be evocative rather than exhaustive. It is intended to suggest the areas where media ethics can make the most potent contribution to philosophical theory and how those answers may be integrated into contemporary professional practice. It is to the historic development of understandings of these issues that this essay now turns.

2 The contribution to philosophical theory: Truth as instrumental

Beginning in the early twentieth century, discussion of truth, of the role of truth in democratic functioning, and how truth is understood as well as how it does and does not undergird how journalism is evaluated by the public, became the central philosophical question that dominated teaching and theorizing in media ethics (Black, Steel & Barney 1999; Bivins 2003; Day 2005; Plaisance, 2009; Patterson & Wilkins, 2014). Philosophically, definitions of truth are appropriately examined through a Hegelian lens, beginning with the thesis of the oral tradition and arriving at the synthesis of pragmatism by way of the anti-thesis of the Enlightenment. What media ethics has added to the philosophical frame is a series of deep insights about how, when truth becomes the linchpin of ethical reasoning, other concepts as well as the linchpin itself evolve. This thinking about truth connected logically to the ethical theorizing of W. D. Ross, whose articulation of the nature of competing duties became prominent in thinking about how truth must be balanced against concepts such as privacy (Meyers 2003). Pragmatism is among the theoretical foundations for contemporary discussion of the nature of visual truth, particularly the theoretical work of Mitchell in *Picture Theory* (1995) and the practical application of those same concepts by Julieanne Newton in *Visual Truth* (2001). Truth as a way of doing work, an issue that was seldom broached in philosophical theory, became the subject of applied ethics, for example in the work of Sissela Bok (1983) as well as in research on how journalists think about this complex concept (Lee 2003.; Ettema and Glasser 1998; Lambeth 1986).

The application of truth as a cornerstone of democratic functioning also had a particularly American resonance. Discussion of the First Amendment to the U.S. constitution, beginning with the Federalist Papers, provided a direct application of the political philosophy of the Enlightenment to speech and participation in democratic

institutions that allowed scholars to imbue their research with philosophical theory, particularly utilitarianism and the duty-based theory of Kant. If truth is a foundational construct for thinking about the profession, the work of two scholars stands out as linking philosophical theory clearly and specifically to a discussion of truth. John Merrill, in his book, *The Imperative of Freedom* (1974), is the first scholar to connect philosophical theory to journalism ethics. His work begins with Kant and Kant's deeply reasoned emphasis on truth as it is connected to duty. Clifford Christians throughout his career emphasized the central role of theory in understanding media ethics (Christians, Rotzoll and Facker 1987 and all subsequent editions). Christians' contributions span the intellectual gamut through his co-authored text (Christians, Fackler, and Ferre 2012), which emphasizes the applications of virtue ethics, utilitarianism, deontology, communitarianism, and religious ethics to questions of practical ethical decision making by journalists and strategic communication professionals in historically significant cases. This theory-centered approach begins but does not end with truth-telling.

Christians' work, however, problematized the professional emphasis on truth-telling in a way that Merrill's work did not. Christians specifically focuses on the questions of truth as a construct of culture, and of the making of political culture and the wider culture that is often termed "community" or a network of social relations. Philosophers infrequently consider how the truth will be interpreted by those who "receive" it, a question that Christian's work asks scholars and practitioners to consider. What media ethics has to contribute to philosophical thinking is the notion of truth as iterative and context-dependent within community. Truth is balanced with other goals – for Christians, most specifically justice (1986). These nuances reflect the additional insights of craft; they contradict some articulations of post-modernism that suggest that there is no such thing as truth or some contemporary political theory that suggest "moderns" are living in a post-truth or post-fact era. "The media of mass communication, therefore, are profoundly important not only because they potentially allow for wide forms of social participation, but that the functioning of the media regularly reminds us of our mutual interdependency. The most powerful arguments remain the lack of opportunities for participation in discursively shaping societies institutions, and the failure to meet common social needs through an egalitarian distribution of resources." (Stevenson, 1999, p. 27). Most fundamentally, they suggest that truth is not exclusively an end in itself but that it can be a means to an end, specifically the creation of a society rooted in justice and equality – a radical interpretation of democracy.

3 Privacy: The intersection of philosophy, law, and technology

Philosophy has long been concerned with autonomy and dignity, two of the core components of human privacy. Philosophical discussion of autonomy focus in general on

the ability to govern oneself; philosophy has tended to view autonomy as an internal quality. What political philosophy adds to the theory is the notion that autonomy can be both constrained and corrupted from without – by institutions – as well as from within. Thomas Hobbes, in his discussion of the social contract (1651), provided a rationale for the necessary constraints on individual autonomy imposed by the state that would allow people to live in community. But Hobbes also noted that the state can also corrupt individual autonomy beyond repair; when the state required the death of the citizen, the individual was allowed to dissolve the social contract. Thus, autonomy is a defense against a too-powerful state.

What media ethics adds to this evolution is that autonomy is founded in information – a notion that is implied in most philosophical discussions (it is difficult to think about understanding the self without some form of interior monologue) but seldom overtly stated. Information can thus be external to the self, it can have an impact on self-understanding and the decision making that is the foundation of autonomy, and it can influence the community's understanding of the individual. Losing control of information about the self, and the context in which it is understood, thus introduces the notion of harm, a harm that hinges on the externality of information, not just self-awareness and clear thinking. Unlike traditional philosophical theory, media ethics connects information about the self to other, internalized, processes. There is an intimacy of connection between self awareness and information about the self understood within a community that is foundational to the concept of privacy as it is understood in media ethics.

Because information fuels the core of the concept, thinking about privacy has evolved from an initial focus on thrusting individuals into an unwelcome and potentially devastating spotlight to a more systematic examination of what is and is not possible with the aid of technology. This intellectual evolution has prompted scholars to develop four different types of potential harms when privacy is invaded (Nissenbaum 2008): informational harm (such as identity theft), informational inequality, (such as governments and corporations amassing large amounts of data about individuals without their knowledge or consent), informational injustice (for example, transferring data from your financial records to the local newspaper without appropriate contextual information) and encroachment on moral autonomy, “the capacity to shape our own moral biographies, to reflect on our moral careers, to evaluate and identify with our own moral choices, without the critical gaze and interference of others” including pressures to conform to social norms (van den Hoof, 2007, p. 439). Three of these harms implicate powerful institutions employing technology, something that philosophy with its focus on individual autonomy and accountability, historically has addressed only incompletely but to which political philosophy has added the important dimensions of community and the tensions between the individual and the state. Nissenbaum's enumeration of the ways that privacy can be compromised suggests that distributive justice may be an appropriate philosophical lens through which to examine privacy, particularly privacy in a community also permeated by technology.

For example, if the poor have fewer resources to maintain privacy, how should journalists and strategic communication professionals take their relative powerlessness into account? This is not a hypothetical question: in 2017 Congress approved and President Donald J. Trump signed a bill allowing organizations such as Google, Amazon and telecommunications corporations to sell individual browsing histories to third parties, potentially for profit.

When it considers privacy, media ethics as a field has also challenged some of the assertions of philosophy: first that philosophy and law should be considered separate domains. In the American context, thinking about privacy is a conversation between craft and the legal evaluation of those actions (Alderman and Kennedy 1996). The second challenge focuses on the nature of accountability itself. In philosophy, because privacy is profoundly connected with the act of becoming and remaining human, individuals are accountable for harm (Bok 1983). But since organizations support individual actions, media ethics also questions whether individual accountability can be bounded by external forces. The first of these forces is organizational dynamics – whether large organizations can promote certain sorts of behavior and discourage others. News organizations form a culture (or climate) that can provide a kind of solidarity and a tangible internal support network that establishes formal and informal behavior standards. Finally, organizations, through their leaders, emphasize certain values that subtly pervade the organization and its employees. The values of individuals acting within organizations are negotiated; they serve a larger organizational end, which may or may not be in alignment with individual understanding of values, standards and goals. But organizational ethical culture can enhance or degrade individual ethical choice in both inconsequential and fundamental ways. In fact, case studies (Adams and Balfour, 2004) suggest that this impact can supersede individual, logical decision making. The literature supporting the contention that organizations can and do influence ethical responses by individuals contradicts some widely accepted philosophical understandings, namely that “morality and moral choice” are housed exclusively in individual human beings (May 1987).

This return to considering the impact of group-originated standards – something that Dicken-Garcia notes as the start of a discussion about professional ethics in a previous century – raises a question for contemporary philosophers: Under what circumstances is individual accountability bounded and what is the impact on individual actors in the larger system? Political philosophy historically has provided some answers to this question, but only in terms of the relationship between the individual and the state. These answers have usually focused on large consequence questions, for example Hobbes’ assertion that only when the state demands the death of the citizen can the social contract be broken. Media ethics adds informal, professional and economic entities to the list of externalities that can and do restrict human choice and hence might conceivably bound accountability. Media ethics asks about the impact of those restrictions on consequential but not life-threatening (physical or psychological) practical decisions. This synthesis of real-world decision-making and

philosophical theory has the capacity to push philosophy itself in a new direction, one that may find a parallel in that domain's efforts to incorporate the concept of "bounded rationality" into thinking about "bounded accountability." Here, theory may find help from the law, which does hold organizations accountable for harm.

Contemporary discussion of privacy has a second, profound philosophical implication. Privacy is now the subject of technological intrusion, sometimes directed by the state, but more and more often directed by algorithms that are developed by human beings but function independently of them.

4 Technology: The theory disruptor

As much as the media have always been linked to technology – going back at least as far as the printing press – philosophy has only very lately begun to consider technology itself as a locus of theory. The initial question posed more than half a century ago by Jacques Ellul (1964) – does technology itself have moral weight – is still in dispute. On the one hand, there is a substantial body of literature that asserts that technology itself is morally neutral. In this view, what has moral weight is the use to which technology is put – a decision that is made by human beings (Bugeja 2005, 2008).

Technology makes some of these decisions, for example the human drive to affiliate, much easier. Now, technologies such as Facebook make it as easy to walk across the globe for a conversation as it is to walk across the room. Taken in the optimistic view, these technologies privilege egalitarianism and openness – two qualities rooted in ethics. Some scholars, for example Ward and Wasserman (2012), have proposed an "open" media ethics, the development and creation of ethical understanding based in an audience as opposed to a practitioner/professional perspective, one that emphasizes listening and a dialogic approach to ethical thinking. Whether the development of this approach would have been possible without technological innovation is not so critical as the acknowledgement that operationalizing these sorts of conversations about ethical choice in a global sense needs technology to succeed. However, the core concept here is that technology itself is neutral but put to ethical uses yields positive ethical ends.

Technology also injected the media into the core of human flourishing in a far more obvious way than was the case a century ago. As Denis McQuail notes, "The term communication revolution along with the 'information society' has now almost come to be accepted as an objective description of our time and of the type of society that is emerging" (p. 104). The term information society encompasses much more than media, and within that journalism and strategic communication, but the research in the field suggests that there are key ethical questions emerging within this smaller domain. Among them is the tension, which has historically existed, between accuracy and truth-telling and the need to publish quickly.

Technology has added a new dimension to the concept of quick – now measured by seconds and sometime nanoseconds rather than the days and weeks of previous eras. Preliminary scholarship has found that journalists who live in the online world privilege publishing quickly over accurately – a reframing of ethical priorities that puts the profession’s emphasis on truth-telling under stress as never before (Friend and Singer 2007; Singer and Ashman 2009). The quickness that technology enables has also allowed for a blurring of what were previously distinct genres because the creation of something that “looks like” a news story has become so much easier. Technology has provided fertile ground for the sprouting of “native” content. Again, this particular ethical question is not new in its inception, but the mushrooming volume of such content may be emphasizing ethical debates that were once less mainstream, for example, whether an excess of such problematic content can drive more readily identifiable persuasive messages out of the civic conversation to the detriment of citizens in their role as consumers. Technology’s relationship to the truth has also come to the front stage in the contemporary era of “fake news.” The impact on “fake news” on global elections is not known at the time of this writing, but the ethical questions it raises connect technology to truth-telling to human intellect in a way that has profound implications for theory as well as application (Wilkins 2013). Theoretically, “fake news” places the ethical burden on those who would create the “fakes” – it is an effort to misrepresent to gain power over individuals as well as to fundamentally undermine the role of “the press” in the commonweal. In this framing, technology is an ethically neutral tool. However, the dogged insistence that technology is ethically neutral does not entirely capture the impact of technology itself. In consequentialist ethical thinking, once it is possible to predict a negative outcome, the appropriate ethical reasoning is to select a different alternative. A different alternative might mean both a different technology or changing the social and political system in which the technology functions, but in either scenario, change is ethically appropriate and technology itself is not held entirely harmless.

In the opposing view, one that was articulated first by Ellul (1964), technology itself has moral force. Theorizing around privacy suggests that technology heightens the capacity to invade the innermost self. “Technology has raised in more pronounced ways the question of boundary between private lives and public information” (Plaisance 2009, 191). But, as Plaisance has noted, the philosophical questions begin with what technology makes possible and continue to the point more central to Ellul: does technology itself privilege certain ways of looking at the world while diminishing the impact of others. The most theoretical question this view raises is the answer to this question: what does it mean to be human and, a subsidiary question, what does it mean to be an ethical journalist and strategic communications professional in a computerized environment. In 2016, computers are communicating often through algorithms, algebraic equations repeated rapidly to sort massive amounts of data – data that is created by human beings sometimes in more self-aware ways and sometime in ways that are beyond self-awareness (for example, the information contained in an individual’s genetic code that is established before birth). In the contemporary

environment, algorithms “learn” (one process of artificial intelligence), which means they develop beyond human control even though they originate in the human mind. This is the sort of moral force of which Ellul spoke – that the ethical question is in the technology itself, even when the human element is added.

In this rendering, the working out of a theory of the human is a question for academic philosophy that cannot be thoroughly answered without serious consideration of the role of communication among individuals and in the creation of a community. Professionally, it is becoming clear that journalists, whose job was once the collection of fact and information, now have the role of putting that information into a context in which it can be understood and used. This changing role will privilege synthesis and analysis, an approach that has not characterized journalists in the twentieth century but that was the predominant mode of “journalism” in earlier centuries. Technology will resurface these questions of role: how they are answered by individuals in a way that will have theoretical import. Technology, because it is largely developed by capitalistic corporations, also raises the philosophical question of whether non-human entities (for example, corporations) can be held accountable for harm done to individuals by computers, computer programs, or emerging forms of artificial intelligence. Philosophy has long held that accountability and responsibility is lodged in the individual and not in the group. However, artificial intelligence places significant intellectual pressure on this widely accepted stance, particularly because the law in western countries is sometimes providing a different answer.

5 Professional ethical decision making

For much of the history of moral philosophy, scholars focused on the act of choosing. But, beginning with the work of Jean Piaget (1965/1932), psychologists increasingly focused on the components and underpinnings of choice itself. The study of moral development by psychologists generally began to outline why it is that people made certain sorts of ethical choices. In the 1970s and 1980s, studies of moral development (Kohlberg 1981, 1984) moved away from a focus on children to the study of professionals and professional decision making (Rest *et al.*, 1999). Intellectually, the work of Carol Gilligan (1982), which arose from the study of women making the decision whether to abort, provided the foundation for what became known as the ethics of care or feminist ethical philosophy.

While many professions were the focus of this effort, it wasn't until early in this century that journalists and later strategic communication professionals were studied. Weaver and colleagues (2007) examined journalists' ethics decision making through a survey of journalists that included some questions about ethical choice and outlook. Other scholars employing moral development theory began to examine whether and at what level of sophistication journalists and public relations professional made moral decisions (Wilkins and Coleman 2005). In a series of studies, professional journalists

and public relations practitioners were found to be sophisticated moral thinkers, particularly about issues surrounding the profession itself. Visual information, an important component of content creation in the digital world, was found to boost ethical reasoning. This body of work was broadened by Plaisance, who, by employing moral psychology, identified moral exemplars in the professions, and through a combination of psychological testing and biographical narrative attempted to articulate the qualities and experiences that help to define excellence in ethical reasoning (2015). This line of research has recently been expanded to include specific applied questions – for example, does knowing a person’s race (through visual information) impact the quality of professional ethical reasoning (Coleman 2006), does group membership influence moral choice, or at least the range of moral choice, and are there historic times when an entire profession, finding itself out of alignment with its standards of eras past, is forced to seek new ways of moral thinking and action that can resolve the existing structural conflicts (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, and Damon 2001).

One synthetic result of this accumulated research may offer the answer to a question that has long plagued both professionals and scholars: should journalism be considered a profession or a craft. One element that characterizes a profession is a body of knowledge that must be learned and mastered. Historically, journalism has lacked a specialized body of knowledge – indeed, journalists take pride in being “generalists” when it comes to knowledge acquisition. However, the accumulated evidence from the body of scholarship that explores the roots of ethical decision making suggests that what may constitute the specialized knowledge for journalists may not be so much a particular domain of facts but rather the ability and practice to reason effectively through the ethical questions that confront individuals working as professionals, which was examined in *Good Work* (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, and Damon 2001).

Some of this work also begins to connect scholarship in professional ethics with the insights of neuroscience, particularly as neuroscience has been applied to ethical development and decision making. Pamela Shoemaker, in the last decade of the twentieth century, suggested that the human mind was hard-wired for news (1996). She traced these developments equally to evolutionary and cultural roots: People need news to survive in the environment, and they need news to make sense of the human-created culture that constitutes much of that environment. More recent theorizing has linked neuroscience to the possibility of discovering universal ethical understandings (Wilkins 2008), what Christians has called “proto-norms” and which underlie all ethical reasoning, regardless of the theory of moral philosophy that seems to dominate.

6 What’s past is prologue

This brief review of four philosophical issues – truth-telling, privacy, technology, and moral decision making – are by no means an exhaustive list of the questions

that media ethics has examined in the past 150 years. But they are among the questions that can have, and arguably already have had, an impact of scholars outside of those who study mass communication and/or journalism. Because they focus on the larger question of truth, accountability for harm, the role of groups in influencing moral decision making and the societal institutions that sometimes respond to such choices, and whether moral thinking is an essential component of what it means to be human, they raise fundamental questions and invite new – or at least differently considered – answers. However, the beginning of those answers is just as likely to come from newsrooms and emerge on web 3.0. It is also likely to be a synthetic response, one that encompasses professional practice, ethics, political philosophy and the realm of meta-ethics in the academy. As new standards and practices emerge, thinking through their philosophical foundations will become the appropriate effort for practitioners of journalism and philosophy alike.

Further reading

Clifford Christian's 2008 monograph on media ethics in education provides an in-depth review of scholarship in media ethics through the early part of the twenty-first century. More than some other fields, media ethics research is also tracked closely in multiple college-level texts, among them Christians, Roztolls and Fackler's text, now in its 10th edition, the text by Patterson, Wilkins and Painter, now in its 9th edition, Bivins (2003) which focuses on the ethics of persuasion, and Plaisance's text, now in its second edition. The impact of seminal texts on the field can be traced to Hulteng's *The Messenger's Motives*, published in 1976, and Lambeth's *Committed Journalism* (1986). Dicken-Garcia's historical studies are the most directly applicable to media ethics, but other books that focus on the history of journalism provide insight as they trace the changes in the profession. The philosophical roots of those developments, particularly their genesis in England, are best traced by Ward (2004). Contemporary philosophical discussion of issues central to media ethics can be found in multiple books authored by Sissela Bok; profession specific discussion is the focus of Borden (2007) and various anthologies (Beasley and Haney 2013) and handbooks (Wilkins and Christians 2008).

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Ronald C. Arnett

3 Communication Ethics: Origins and Trajectories

Abstract: This essay describes the evolution and transformation of the study of communication ethics within the field of communication. I offer an impressionistic portrait of this area of communication study, relying upon summary essays on communication ethics that explicate and interpret this horizon of study. Additionally, I refer to organizational developments within the field of communication that institutionalized the study of communication ethics. I conclude in a manner consistent with the introduction, connecting communication study of communication ethics with a pragmatic understanding of origin: communication ethics is the origin of understanding of what matters between and among persons.

Keywords: communication ethics, goods, communities of memory, proper names, Marie Hochmuth Nichols, Kenneth Andersen.

1 Introduction

The hermeneutic center of my description of communication ethics pivots on one basic assertion: there is no one agreed-upon understanding of communication ethics. There are multiple perspectives on what constitutes the notion of communication ethics; communication ethics consists of what good or goods that we attempt to protect and promote (Arnett, Fritz, and Bell 2009). Communication ethics is the carrier of weight and height – that which matters within the human condition. The study of communication ethics does not seek to fix the world or to set it on a straight and narrow path, but rather to understand what another considers important enough to propel one’s communicative commitments. Communication ethics study is a conceptual and moral key to understanding what is of importance to another in an era of narrative and virtue contention (Arnett, Fritz, and Bell 2009). I consider communication ethics the study and understanding of performative commitments that guide human beings and institutions within the human condition.

Communication ethics is far from new, but the formal study of this area of inquiry is principally a twentieth – century phenomenon within the field of communication. Examining major review essays on communication ethics permits one to sense changes and movements in this area of inquiry. I situate my re – telling of review essays within a term borrowed from Robert Bellah et al. (1985) and Alexis de Tocqueville ([1835 and 1840] 1963), a community of memory. I trace communication ethics scholarship within

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-003>

the field of communication with a hope of reminding readers of the proper names (Levinas [1975] 1996) of scholars who made this study vibrant and thoughtful. This essay is both informational and relational, offering a professional thank you to those before us who made the study and practice of communication ethics a viable scholarly task. Solidifying communication ethics as a serious area of study begins with scholars who lent their scholarly reputations to a public call to enhance inquiry in communication ethics. Following this review, I turn to an examination of formal structures that continue to solidify the importance of communication ethics in “Community of Memory: Institutional Structures.” Finally, I explore a “Community of Memory in the Making,” investigating trends within the study and practice of communication ethics.

I begin and conclude this chapter with a statement on why communication ethics continues in importance. Each class I teach on communication ethics begins with discussion of communication ethics as practical; if you do not know what matters to another cooperative negotiation is unlikely. Imposing a communication ethic upon another, misses the importance of understanding another. Communication ethics is the holder of the good or goods that shape communicative perception and standpoint.

I contend that a mistaken study of communication ethics commences with the hope that we can discern one way to ameliorate all communication dilemmas and problems; communication ethics is inherently diverse. Its value rests within understanding, not imposition of my orientation upon another. Many of our difficulties with one another begin with a basic fact: we do not agree on what is important, what matters, or what goods to protect and promote in a given communicative context. My contention is that communication ethics, when imposed as an answer, not as an effort to understand a given good, is more likely to invite conflict than settle a dispute. Understanding is the key to this story about communication ethics. Communication ethics requires study of what matters to facilitate understanding of difference within persons and institutions. The world has never been a place of uniform agreement, as our history of war attests. However, the stark characteristics of goods protected and promoted in this historical moment make this perspective on communication ethics a form of common sense in an era defined by difference. We can no longer assume that mutual knowledge and commitments shape similar interests. The importance of communication ethics commences with practical knowledge that we disagree on both the important and the trivial. In this historical moment, we can agree that we cannot agree on what matters – hence the importance of the study of communication ethics dwells at the heart of understanding, the beginning of communication over and with what matters.

2 Community of memory: Institutional structures

Review essays on communication ethics frame a community of memory about this scholarly topic. In 1977 and 1982, distinguished colleagues urged the development

of a body of research in communication ethics. The stress on community of memory commences in this story about communication ethics with the insights of Marie Hochmuth Nichols, who was editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (1963 – 1965) and the president of the Speech Communication Association/National Communication Association (1969). I turn to a well – known and often – referenced speech delivered by her, which functioned as an important impetus for the study of communication ethics. Her keynote to the Central States Speech Association on April 15, 1977, “When You Set Out for Ithaca . . .” marshaled a charge to develop a body of literature and research on communication ethics. Nichols (1977) asserted: “We have not seriously studied the various systems of ethics; nor have we seriously studied social norms to which ethics is related” (150). She contended that the field of communication did not yet possess the intellectual resources necessary to answer Derek Bok’s question, “Can Ethics Be Taught?” (Nichols 1977: 150). Nichols’s concern was simple: to answer such fundamental questions, a community of memory on communication ethics must find constitution via ongoing scholarship. Nichols was a bell ringer, calling for increased scholarly investigation of communication ethics. Her address was a challenge to the field of communication – to enact an ethical obligation to develop a body of research on the various aspects of communication ethics.

Nichols stated that attention to issues of communication ethics embodies a healthy warning about future concerns; ethics are the key to forthcoming visions, and to ignore such study is shortsighted. Nichols dismissed claims of assurance about future directions; she argued against long-term proclamations, which undergirded the rhetoric of the Great Depression to the rhetoric of revolt to the assumption that behaviorism would be the final chapter on and about communication within the human condition. She called for a “disclaimer” on acts of “foresight” and undue confidence (Nichols 1977: 146). The title of her speech engages multiple historical eras and events within a single textured metaphor.

The term Ithaca consisted of Ulysses’s journey home and the importance of Cornell University¹ as a key developmental location with the field of communication. Furthermore, she offered a straightforward reminder that long before we arrived, much had already taken place in the development of communication. Confidence should not rest solely in the “not yet.” Nichols reminded her audience that, in 1939, B. F. Skinner had actually been a speaker at the Central States Speech Convention in Minneapolis, and in that same year, Laurence Norton was doing content analysis.

¹ For more on the scope of influence of Cornell University for the field of communication, particularly as it is tied to rhetoric, see Alexander Drummond’s (1925) edited book *Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of James Albert Winans*. This volume contains essays from the field’s most distinguished scholars connected to the university including James Winans, Everett Lee Hunt, Harry Caplan, Hoyt Hudson, Herbert Wichelns, William Parrish, and William E. Utterback. Herman Cohen (1994) announces the importance of Drummond’s edited volume in honoring the influence of Cornell University for the field of communication.

Furthermore, in 1939, discussion of speech preparation and group participation was present at the convention. She then paused and stated that she never viewed herself as Ulysses going off to fight a war; rather, she viewed her career as a call to be a participant in the ongoing and emerging life of this discipline. Temporal concerns are important, but when accompanied with too much speculation about the future, one discovers the danger of “siren songs.” Additionally, too much concentration on the immediacy of the moment can generate a social amnesia, cutting us off from creative and tested insight.

Nichols (1977) once again cited Bok, who called for “moral reasoning” as essential in a world rampant with blind reliance upon romantic images resting in the past or futuristic calls for progress (149). She contended that ethics tied to communication and decision making is essential, offering hope textured with thoughtful and critical discussion of cultural norms and standards. Connecting communication ethics research to questions about culture, norms, and public standards permits such inquiry to move from the trivial to the substantial. Her appeal for ethics included reference to Richard Weaver’s demand for understanding and participation within a vast array of opinions; in the public domain that houses cultural and historical information, the taken – for – granted must be examined and then called into account.

Nichols mentioned a national poll that found “half the population never has read any book at all that they can remember or identify” (Nichols 1977: 151); she championed Kenneth Burke’s delineation of the importance of tools for living. Such guidance comes from art, and understanding language and its multiple dimensions – “logical, ethical, rhetorical, aesthetic” (Nichols 1977: 154). This view of communication requires historical, critical, and experimental engagement. We cannot fight the future, let alone control every dimension of it; but we can bring historically grounded conceptual knowledge to the meeting of people and issues in the human condition. Interestingly, in this 1977 address, Nichols stated that at that moment, no more than one out of ten PhDs would enter the academy in a capacity similar to their professors; these graduates would need to find other employment (155). She stressed that such data should not generate despair; it should energize our disciplinary sense of purpose (Nichols 1977: 156).

Nichols reiterated that ethical purpose involves seeking Ithaka without a demand for finding it quickly or perhaps at all. Communication ethics is a performative journey of commitment that seeks Ithaka; such action permits one to discern a sense of purpose without locating a final answer. We must pursue communication ethics, without assuming clarity of a decisive answer. Without Ithaka there is little reason to begin; the journey makes the task worthy of doing. Near the end of her address, Nichols quotes Robert Hutchins, who was the President and Chancellor of the University of Chicago and the architect of the great books program (1929 – 1951): “In any practical activity, purpose is the guiding principle. Purpose is a principle of allocation. It tells you what to work on” (Nichols 1977: 156). Purpose is a conviction, not an answer. Communication ethics is content of purpose, adding weight and height

to ideas and action – the home of what matters. Nichols prompts us to note that the road to Ithaca is never completed and that we are not the first, nor the last, to find meaningful purpose in its pursuit. This lofty sense of calling continues with tenacious thoughtfulness in the groundbreaking contributions of Kenneth E. Andersen. Nichols and Andersen are keys in their calling for a community of memory in communication ethics scholarship. Both are classically educated and understand the field's connection to Aristotle and ethics within antiquity.

Andersen's (1983) Speech Communication Association (now National Communication Association, or NCA) address celebrated the theme of "Communication, Ethics, and Values." He enacted the charges of Nichols with another major contribution to a community of memory about communication ethics scholarship. The 1982 conference that Andersen organized as the planner/Vice President was a significant turning point in communication ethics scholarship; Andersen's public presence gave such inquiry an official secular blessing. In addition to this institutional contribution to the study and practice of communication ethics, Andersen provided public addresses that announced coordinates for communication ethics inquiry.

The National Communication Association conference, with Andersen at the helm in 1983, provided an impact of sizeable importance. Andersen brought communication ethics to the main stage of the communication discipline in the United States. He was the principal institutional champion of communication ethics. As Vice President of the Speech Communication Association in 1982 followed by his Presidential Address, later his chairing of the Communication Ethics Division, and finally his Carroll Arnold Address entitled "Recovering the Civic Culture: The Imperative of Ethical Communication" in 2003, Andersen brought communication ethics into scholarly public recognition within the field of communication. He institutionally paved a path for others to follow. Due to the historical significance of Andersen's contribution, I offer a summary of three of his important contributions.

On November 11, 1983, as the president of the then Speech Communication Association, Andersen reviewed the theme of his 1982 Conference, "Communication, Ethics, and Values." As he spoke in Washington, D.C., Andersen reflected on the charge of politics tied to ethics; he outlined the constructive and problematic nature of such connections, reminding the audience that Aristotle assumed an inexorable link between politics and ethics. The unity of politics and ethics undergirds concern for institutions and lives of others. Ethics and politics in tandem is social action at its roots; this foundation permits communication ethics to function as a principal background for understanding engagement with others. Andersen asserted the importance of working from an external standard in communication ethics capable of offering provisional collective and public guidance. Andersen offered two general tests for evaluating a communication ethics code: first, importance does not rest with what a particular communication ethics code prohibits; and second, a communication ethics code must encourage flourishing of human activity and productivity. Communication ethics invites community and simultaneously the individuation of persons, making

possible the promotion and seeking of particular versions of the good life. Andersen's understanding of a communication ethics code embraces a temporal public, not a singular individual position. He then offered six tenets that assist with maintaining vibrancy and creativity of a communication ethics code.

The first tenet assumes understanding as essential, if one is to assign the "proper burden" for doing a given communication activity (Andersen 1983: 2). He concurred with Aristotle's suggestion that roles guide responsibilities. A public code of burden calls one into account the moment one assumes a given role. The second tenet is the enhancement of future communication (Andersen 1983: 2). The goal of communication ethics is to facilitate the "not yet" without limiting possibilities for others; human flourishing necessitates a communication ethic that looks beyond the immediate moment. Such a communication ethic encourages one to act in a manner that encourages others to equate an ethos of reliability and trust with one's actions. One cannot remain solely in the present moment; one's commitments and actions must prepare for upcoming activities. Andersen (1983) stated: "As David Hume warned us, we tend to over – value the short – term and undervalue the long – term" (2). Actions need to stand the test of time, while recognizing that current behavior is the best predictor of future actions. The third tenet involves maximizing of choice (Andersen 1983: 3). Communication ethics requires a commitment to a task and public rationale for its value, which includes the manner of communicative engagement. Choice works within the dialectic of individual freedom and concern for a community of persons present without forgetting those who are "not yet" part of a given vision. Choice requires one to exercise the right to speech without forgetting the importance of making space for those disadvantaged by lack of power and influence.

The fourth tenet pivots on "respect for self and Other" (Andersen 1983: 3), which demands restraint and rejects any encouragement to follow an impulse to pull the wool over the eyes of another. Public admission of position and standpoint is central to enacting respect for another. The fifth tenet connects communication ethics with the charge of improving understanding and communication (Andersen 1983: 3). Andersen, once again, stressed that a major key to communication ethics involves maximizing attentiveness to future communication between and among persons. The final tenet emphasizes enforcement of communication ethics on self and other (Andersen 1983: 3). Andersen (1983) reminds us that communication ethics is not just for others, but for "me" as well (3). Concern for communication ethics begins with accountability of oneself in acts of self – legislation.

For Andersen, the task of communication ethics embraces protection of communication itself. Communication ethics works to minimize the debasing of the act of communication. Respect includes a communication ethics concern for self, other, and the communicative linkage between and among persons. Andersen's dream for the field of communication is not perfection, but a determined reminder about the importance of ethical standards that function as a prerequisite for uniting groups and individuals. Andersen contends that a communication ethics goal is public support

of ideas, persons, and context while refusing to reify the sacredness of a single perspective (Andersen 1983).

Andersen continued work as a champion of communication ethics as he tied public explication of a good to collective approval in the construction of a communication ethics code. This sensibility defined his convening of a 1999 National Communication Association Conference meeting on “Communication Ethics Credo Conference” in Arlington Virginia, from July 24 until July 26. Later reflection upon that meeting offered a consistent characterization from diverse voices; the meeting illustrated difficulty in finding consensus on what is and is not a communication ethic. Contexts shift what might be an appropriate guiding ethic. Sherry Morreale and Andersen described that 1999 meeting as follows: “Intense interaction, impassioned argument, and moments of sudden agreement and near exhaustion characterized the participants” (Morreale and Andersen 1999: 4). Throughout their work on a communication ethics code, they demonstrated public leadership consistent with Andersen’s unity of ethics and politics; they sought to involve the entire National Communication Association. They listened for patterns of concern and modeled attentiveness to the ideas of others. They attempted to do communication ethics as public access, enabling them to discern a significant diversity of definitions of communication ethics. Additionally, they discovered communication ethics explicated differently through numerous examples of communication ethics dilemmas. At the conference, the participants joined small groups for vigorous conversation. The groups generated thoughtful suggestions under the leadership of “process experts” Isa Engleberg and Dianna Wynn (Morreale and Andersen 1999: 4). The following outlines a summary of an initial draft of their work done at the conference, which offers a glimpse of their incisive work.

The draft from the NCA Credo for Ethical Communication, from July 30, 1999, commences with a basic assertion: disputes over what is right and wrong are inherent in communication between and among persons. The baseline concern of such disputes is that communication ethics should enhance “. . . human worth and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others” (Morreale and Andersen 1999: 4). The group articulated ten major points of discovered importance in their collective discernment. First, communication ethics assumes commitment to the essential integrity of truth telling. Second, freedom of expression is central to a civil society. Third, responses to another must begin and conclude with respect, even in moments of significant disagreement. Fourth, access to resources of communication and opportunities for discussion must be available to all. Fifth, communication ethics should foster environments of caring that seek understanding and respect of persons different from oneself. Sixth, any communication that attempts to degrade another necessitates questioning. Seventh, spaces for the enactment of courageous expression are required when communication ethics content offers contrary insight than that which constitutes the prevailing status quo. Communication ethics makes space for positions pro and con within the

public domain. Eighth, communication ethics assumes the importance of information sharing, while simultaneously enacting the responsibility of protecting individual privacy. Ninth, the quality of human life decreases with the rise of unethical communication. The heart of communication ethics pivots on a fundamental commitment: “we accept responsibility for the short – and long – term consequences for our own communication and expect the same of others” (4). Focus on the “now” alone is seldom sufficient. Major themes of their communication ethics credo were long-term concerns of access to information and space, respect for persons and ideas, and attentiveness to future communicative consequences. I summarize their work within a communication ethics tripod of access, respect, and attentiveness, which upholds that which matters.

Andersen then delivered the 2003 Carroll C. Arnold address at the National Communication Association on the topic of communication ethics – entitled, “Recovering the Civic Culture: The Imperative of Ethical Communication.” The Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture is a performative honor bestowed on “a scholar of undisputed merit who has already been recognized as such, a person whose recent research is as vital and suggestive as his or her earlier work, and a researcher whose work meets or exceeds the scholarly standards of the academy generally” (Andersen 2003). With Andersen’s national communication conference centered on communication ethics, his presidential address following a similar theme, and his central role in the construction of a communication ethics credo for the field of communication, he rendered a major institutional and public contribution to such inquiry. Andersen’s consistent championing of communication ethics unites insights by Aristotle and Isocrates with a basic caveat: “Living the maximally good life demanded a good community” (Andersen 2003: 10). Andersen initiated his address with discussion of three major terms – civic, culture, and community. All responsibility belonging to citizenship he termed as civic. Andersen stressed that patterns of human behavior take shape through the people and the institutions that constitute a culture. Locality of participation and common interests frame his understanding of community. Andersen states that community and culture offer ground under the feet of an individual and communities. Andersen understood communication ethics as an imperative, if culture and community are to invite civic participation with discussion of and about the nature of a good life.

Andersen alluded to Aristotle’s assertion that ethics, politics, and rhetoric are essential companions if the goal is enhancement of a community and a culture. Andersen made this case without forgetting the literal and figurative smallness of the Greek city – state that excluded so many due to their status as slave and/or woman, who worked outside the domain of public decision making. The classical world was far from being a dwelling place of democratic perfection. Andersen acknowledged Greek imperfections and demanded that we do better. He called for democratic participation that embodies concern for those close to us as well as those on the margins. His address of 2003 echoes today’s conversation about income disparity and the

growing reality of a “precariat” class² as he challenged conceptions of community that limit opportunity to but a few “big boys” making profit (Standing 2011; Andersen 2003: 11). Andersen challenges the small-minded, who attempt to ban together with an objective of oppressing those outside the realms of power and influence. His critique unmasked no one organization or group; his point of challenge was any communicative process defined by dismissive regard for those contrary to “my” perspective. He cited the fact that fewer and fewer active members now shape most communities; participation seems increasingly a demanding and difficult task. Andersen then paused and ventured a lament over a growing generation of persons choosing the route of disengagement.

Andersen called for ousting those using disingenuous communication; he rejected persons in politics and institutions using words and slogans void of behavioral confirmation. Such communicative action undercuts a culture of civic life; such misuse of the public domain demands confrontation. Additionally, we live in an era of information abundance without clarity about its meaning and importance. Andersen asserted that more is not always useful; information abundance is not the same as information access and discussion within the public domain. Communication ethics, when functioning as a publicly announced standard, works within a community with the objective of describing the important and the vital. Such a standard stands firmly in opposition to lying and deception, which finds far too much repetitive employment. Andersen (2003) stated, “Violation of the norms of ethical communication is, I believe, a major factor in the malaise that has led many people to withdraw from the civic culture whether of their profession, their associations, their political arena” (14). The communicative environment becomes toxic and leads to persons turning toward an exit. If ethical direction is in dispute, the baseline of protection is a public place where discernment is possible. In the doing of communication ethics, we do not have undue certainty, but rather we assume an unending sense of responsibility for assisting the health of the public and civic domain.

Andersen asserted that communication ethics assumes an obligation to those next to us and to those who repose afar; such communicative concern requires making a place for all to voice opinions. An ethical obligation belongs to self, other, and communities within which we participate and serve. An ethical community seeks to offer as much freedom to others as possible, while supporting a minimal number of restraints. The “why” of limits and constraints center public testimony about a given communication ethic. Communication ethics of civic space minimizes inappropriate infringement on the freedom of another and simultaneously affirms public

² For more information on the precariat class, see Guy Standing’s (2011) *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. Standing grounds the precariat class in the protests of EuroMayDay in May 2001, addressing labor instability. The precariat class consists of those who lack all control and security tied to their work (9 – 10).

limits. Andersen (2003) then warned against those who seek to benefit without carrying their share of burden for upholding a community; he termed such persons “free riders” (20), who take advantage of liberties within a community, while endorsing ethical rules for others that they themselves refuse to follow.

Andersen cited a poll from the National Opinion Research Center that stated that the percentage of those who can be trusted has shifted from a survey in 1964 of 53% to 35% in 2002. Civic society embraces a public space that is clumsy and without undisputed precision; nevertheless, in spite of the chaos, one must contend against an unwillingness to attend to questions of ethics. Our public participation in ethical questioning within a community shapes us through our participatory engagement and/or our refusal to engage. Communication ethics dwells in the performative actions of a human community, even when temporarily recorded in the form of ethical codes that call us into account. The greatest value of a communication ethics code resides in the collective construction of its existence.

The final major public contribution by Andersen is “A History of Communication Ethics”; this work lays out the civic and a rhetorical tradition of what he contends are originative insights for the study of communication ethics. Andersen asserts that the rhetorical side of the field of communication has long been marked by a long history of concern about communication ethics; his persistent citing of Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, and Cicero are public indicators of such a heritage. He commences with quotes from Isocrates that unite the desire to persuade with a rhetorical commitment to honorable discourse. Andersen follows with a discussion of Aristotle and character or *ethos*, directly linking persuasion with the character of the rhetor. Andersen states that communication theories and communication ethics share a basic assumption: each has intimate ties to the culture from which they arise. He insists upon the connection between communication ethics and communication theory; both live within “situation, medium, and message” (Andersen 1991: 6). He does not want to limit communication ethics or communication theory to messages alone. The classical rhetorical origins of communication begin with an assumption that the character of the rhetor aligns with the goods of the *polis*, which becomes the public house that shelters exemplary virtues. In contemporary society, however, ethical issues often arise in tension between individual and social goals. To navigate the loss of standards within the *polis*, Andersen suggests that greater attention to external ethical standards must define communication within a contemporary society. Throughout his career, Andersen emphasized the importance of publically known external standards; he articulated what he considers the foundation of communication ethics within a public arena much more diverse than the Athenian *polis*.

The first public connection between ethics and communication is “appropriate adaptation to the audience” (Andersen 1991: 14). Proper bonding with an audience commences with a refusal to conceal one’s actual beliefs. As audiences become increasingly more diverse, the importance of disclosing standpoint and position

becomes progressively more necessary, if ethical discourse is to bind rhetor and audience. The second external standard is an overt commitment to the “ethical value of various forms of proof” (Andersen 1991: 14), which emphasizes reasoned and logical argument. The key assumption is that the rhetor has a public responsibility to articulate points of evidence in a manner that an audience can follow. An ethical persuasive appeal necessitates a public roadmap that the audience can understand, offering an opportunity for persons to render an informed judgment. Andersen’s (1991) third major point is the “relationship of ethos, ethics, and ethical proof,” which announces a synergy that forms a performative communication public standard (15). Such a linkage permits “good will” of clarity of discourse and position, binding rhetor and audience without relying solely upon the past reputation of the rhetor (Andersen 1991: 15).

The fourth standard is “ethical responsibility for the audience” (Andersen 1991: 16 – 17); classically, this assumption is familiar to Plato’s *Gorgias* where he asserts that the rhetoric of the sophists is bound to “mislead” (Andersen 1991: 10). Communication ethics, for Andersen, requires clear public evidence, not a shell game of shifting of attention, which limits audience discernment about the quality of the content that sustains a given argument. The fifth public standard is “ethics and communication criticism” (Andersen 1991: 17). Andersen offers a lament stating that those who criticize institutional life and individuals are too often tempted shade truth in a manner that unnaturally places an opponent or an institution in an unfavorable light.

Andersen reminds: not all scholars within the field of communication adapt communication ethics as the fulcrum upon which the course of communication between persons pivots. Andersen laments that numerous communication theorists consider the entire communication process (including communication ethics) amoral (Andersen 1991: 3). They view their scholarly task as descriptive alone, eschewing reliance on public prescriptive standards for communication exchange. Andersen argues that the classical rhetorical tradition begins with ethical assumptions involving questions about individual obligation and the *polis*. He alleges that such a commitment would assist our contemporary world, countering an increasingly obvious public contempt for ideas and persons different from one’s own. Andersen states that the social science tradition in communication commences and concludes with description, avoiding contamination from assumptions tied to an ethical ought. The initial kinship of ethics and communication originates in Athens; he contends that this is logically appropriate for contemporary life in which we see and hear comments that progressively sound like playground talk between and among immature minds. Andersen calls for what both Immanuel Kant ([1790] 1951) and Hannah Arendt ([1989] 1992) understood as ethically essential – an “enlarged mentality” capable of examining evidence beyond the taken – for – granted and the commonplace.

Andersen has been the champion of communication ethics within the public domain. His advocating spirit embraced a tenacious hope that the world could find assistance as rhetors disclosed position and explicated the why of their public evidence. The addresses of Nichols and Andersen frame the rhetorical origins of

communication ethics. Their contributions are milestones that each student in communication ethics should know. They made one point abundantly clear: the public good depends upon admission of one's evidence and the standpoint that accompanies the interpretation of the data. Nichols and Andersen are exemplars of a larger group of communication scholars attentive to the innate linkage between communication ethics and diversity of goods announced by the protection and promotion of given practices.

3 Communication ethics in the making

The modern gathering of diverse perspectives on communication ethics begins with James W. Chesbro's (1969) essay, "A Construct for Assessing Ethics in Communication." A decade before Nichols' important speech, Chesbro added organizing substance to a community of memory about communication ethics. He understood that such inquiry requires a systematizing principle capable of situating communication ethics insights in a public manner that lends creative retention and retrieval of ideas, as one practices and studies communication ethics. Chesbro placed communication ethics within four major contexts/categories. First, he outlined the most well – known and long – standing understanding of communication ethics within the field of communication, *democratic ethics*. This perspective, as explicated by Nichols and Andersen, has roots in ancient Greece. Democratic ethics also connects to the communication field through the historical moment, with numerous World War II veterans adamantly opposed to totalitarianism. They fought and witnessed friends die for democratic ethics and values. Exemplars of such commitments were Franklyn Haiman (1958, 1976) and Paul H. Boase (1993); free speech was not an intellectual abstraction for them, but central to a democratic way of life for which they were willing to die in order to preserve. Chesbro's second category was *procedural standards and codes*; this approach has origins in the ancient Greek Hippocratic oath,³ which functioned as an external standard for care of patients that physicians continue to embrace today. Today, mission statements and codes of ethics in contemporary organizations adhere to a similar assertion: public codes of ethics are promises that seek to hold members accountable. The third category was *universal humanitarian ethics*; such a perspective propels the Enlightenment, personified by the demands of 1789 and French citizens storming the Bastille; their mantra was a call for universal rights, moving the French version of the Enlightenment to public action and our collective memory. Chesbro's final category is *contextual ethics*; a number of perspectives fit within this orientation, from Joseph Fletcher's

³ For more information on the Hippocratic Oath, see Steven H. Miles's (2004) *The Hippocratic Oath and the Ethics of Medicine*.

(1966) *Situational Ethics* to the contextual framework of Dietrich Bonhoeffer ([1949] 1954). Chesbro's contribution is important in that he gathered and organized perspectives on communication ethics inquiry. I contend that most importantly, acknowledgment of diversity of perspective in communication ethics is the central, long lasting ramification of his study; his categories acknowledge differences in the "what" and "how" of communication ethics constitution. Long before ongoing discussions of postmodern recognition of difference, Chesbro announced an explicit emphasis on difference in his explication of communication ethics arising in multiple contexts and positions. His work begins inquiry into communication ethics from the vantage point of difference and a perspectival standpoint. With a framing of difference in communication ethics, ethics inquiry begins to move from imposed answers to questions of origin about what matters in communication between and among persons.

Democratic ethics, ethical codes, universal rights and contextual ethics all presuppose contrasting positions from which one discerns the ethical importance of an idea or action. One witnesses differences in the ground of communication ethics, which then results in contrary discoveries and pronouncements. This orientation moves one from a focus on the communicative agent alone, a "Good Man [Person] Speaking Well" (Quintilian [95] 1892: 12.1.1; Morris 2011; Wiese 2016), to a recognition that an ethical perspective within which one lives and studies and shapes ethical outcomes and judgments. The situated conception of communication ethics is central to Ronald C. Arnett's (1987) additive contribution to Chesbro's insights.

In a 1987 essay, Arnett added a fifth category to Chesbro's description of communication ethics, *narrative ethics*. Arnett's work emphasized the narrative orientation of Alasdair MacIntyre ([1981] 2007) and Stanley Hauerwas (1981) as representatives of this approach. MacIntyre and Hauerwas understand the notion of narrative as communally comprehended as story – laden ground upon which one finds identity. Narrative was not something imposed upon others; it is something within which we stand and perceive. The Old Testament work of Walter Brueggeman (2012) marks this perspective in a well – defined fashion with W. Barnett Pearce (1989) providing an excellent understanding of narrative consistent with an Old Testament conception of the term. Such an orientation emphasizes the communal, not individual characteristics of narrative. Narrative works as value – laden ground or background that gives shape to social practices that lend understanding to what we consider good (Arnett and Arneson 1999). The popular emphasis on narrative scholarship in the field of communication, however, was largely due to the scholarship of Walter Fisher (1987). Outside the field, Charles Taylor's (1989) book, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, provides a historical account of narrative as shifting ground that reconfigures conceptions of the self. The value – laden ground upon which one stands via family, institutions, culture, society, and historical moment contour identity; we discern direction from the sources of the self that fashioned us and continue to offer direction. A narrative is a temporal home of ethical goods that yield identity and direction. Narrative ethics transforms the notion of trust, moving the focus from the person to

a value – laden story that situates a person. Narrative ethics explains Martin Buber’s differentiation between personal trust and existential trust (Arnett and Arneson 1999: 15). The latter, existential trust, takes on the character of a petite narrative that gives form to identity and direction. The former, personal trust, is tied to the communicative agent alone. In a later essay, Arnett, Pat Arneson, and Leeanne Bell (2006) added a sixth category to the study and practice of communication ethics, *dialogic ethics*. Narrative ethics makes possible a conception of dialogue that embraces the value – laden ground that one takes into conversation with another. Buber’s conception of dialogue embraces an existential fact: dialogue does not begin with conversation, but with the value – laden ground upon which each person stands before and during a communicative meeting (Arnett, Arneson, and Bell 2006: 158).

The emphasis on value – laden ground in both narrative and dialogic ethics reflects why narrative is important to understanding dialogue as a social, and not solely as an individual, effort. Communication ethics emerges from a plurality of standpoints with the major indicator of difference being the value – laden story-centered narrative that informs a given perspective on communication ethics (Arnett 2013). Most definitions of communication ethics revolve around the notion of “ought” (Arnett, Arneson, and Bell 2006: 67 – 68), which announces the prescriptive nature of a given good. The emphasis on a Kantian understanding of ought commences with a communicative agent who previously prioritized clarity of purpose, as discussed earlier in the Nichols address. Narratives are dwellings of value-laden purpose.

Waves of scholarship continued the conversation on communication ethics, overlapping with the ongoing contributions of multiple scholars, from Michael Hyde (2001, 2006, 2010), Lisbeth Lipari (2014), Janie Harden Fritz (2013), Pat Gehrke (2009), Pat Arneson (2013), and Ronald C. Arnett (1987, 2011, 2013) to name but a few of contemporary contributors to communication ethics scholarship. Of course, one cannot discuss media ethics without referencing the research of Clifford Christians (2005, 2007, 2009 2011) and the team of James Jaksa and Michael Pritchard at Central Michigan University, who provided a number of important contributions in article and book form (Jaksa and Pritchard 1994, 1996). Along with their work, the scholarship of Josina M. Makau and Debian L. Marty (2013) united communication ethics with recognition of diversity in an ever – broadening conception of the public argument.

The institutional contribution of Andersen and the above scholars made the teaching of communication ethics a viable option in curriculum distribution. An initial entrance into the area of communication ethics came from Thomas R. Nilsen’s (1966) *Ethics of Speech Communication* and Lee Thayer’s (1973) *Communication: Ethical and Moral Issues*. A major contribution followed with Richard Johannesen’s (1975) *Ethics in Human Communication*. Johannesen’s book on communication ethics became a scholarly standard for examining changes in the study and practice of communication ethics; each new edition bore witness to shifts in understanding communication ethics. His work made possible a number of other books

on communication ethics.⁴ Johannesen's insights spanned more than forty years of updating an encyclopedic treatment of communication ethics. Johannesen reminded readers of the outstanding work of Pritchard and Jaksa whose scholarship and energy provided institutional support for communication ethics with two significant contributions. First, they organized a Communication Ethics Commission (1985), which became a division in 1985 at the national level of the discipline. Second, they facilitated the Communication Ethics Conference (1990) every two years, first at Gull Lake near Western Michigan University. With the support of the Western Michigan communication faculty, the conference moved to Duquesne University in 2004. Johannesen (2001) contended that their work ensured public support for communication ethics, making trends and challenges about the topic readily available, which Johannesen continued in his *Communication Yearbook* essay.

Johannesen (2001) emphasized a classic work by Karl Wallace (1955), "An Ethical Basis of Communication." Wallace's essay, published close to ten years after World War II, articulates the first stage of communication ethics discussed earlier, the democratic perspective. Wallace's (1955) understanding of ethics outlines a democratic framework consisting of four habits of the heart necessary for the nourishment of such an ethic. First, a "habit of search" requires openness to new ideas (Wallace 1955: 6). Second, a "habit of justice" necessitates a commitment to factual accuracy (Wallace 1955: 7). Third, the "habit of preferring public to private motivations" keeps concern for the public good as essential to a democratic communication ethic (Wallace 1955: 8). Fourth, a "habit of respect for dissent" assumes a messiness of discernment and decision making, which generates public rationale for continual learning (Wallace 1955: 9). Wallace's keys are responsibility to and for the search for public evidence within a background of public motivations (Wallace 1955). Johannesen, like Chesbro, Nichols, and Andersen, acknowledged the vital heritage of democratic communication ethics within the field of communication.

Following Johannesen's 2001 identification of communication ethics trends, I offer the following suggestions for this historical moment. First I concur with Johannesen's suggestion about the importance of media ethics as he acknowledged the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, which began in 1985. Scholarship in media ethics has long been led by Clifford Christians and his work on protonorms (Christians, Ferr, and

⁴ Works such as J. Vernon Jensen's (1997) *Ethical Issues in the Communication Process*, Christians and Michael Traber's (1997) *Communication Ethics and Universal Values*, Makau and Arnett's (1997) *Communication Ethics in an Age of Diversity*, James Mackin's (1997) *Community over Chaos: An Ecological Perspective on Communication Ethics*, George Cheney, Steve May, and Dabashish Munshi's (2011) *The Handbook of Communication Ethics*, Arnett, Fritz, and Bell's (2009) *Communication Ethics Literacy: Dialogue and Difference*, Jaksa and Pritchard's (1994) *Communication Ethics: Methods of Analysis*, and Paula S. Tompkin's (2010) *Practicing Communication Ethics: Development, Discernment, and Decision Making*, and Arnett's (2012) *Communication Ethics in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt's Rhetoric of Warning and Hope* were influenced by Johannesen's book.

Fackler 1993; Christians and Traber 1997). He understands the pragmatic necessity of displacing the notion of objectivity while rejecting relativism. His work on proto-norms remains at the heart of this third alternative perspective. Additional insights from Nick Couldry (2013) and his work with Mirca Madianou and Amit Pinchevski (2013) continue to illuminate the complexity of media ethics.

Second, Johannesen emphasized *organizational communication ethics*, referring to the first National Communication Ethics conference in 1990; the leaders of the conference, Jaksa and Pritchard, invited W. Charles Redding to participate as the conference keynote. He worked within his role as one of the principal founders of organizational communication. He stated that the connection between communication ethics and organizational communication should be the highest research priority (Johannesen 2001: 208). Within organizational communication ethics, Stanley Deetz's (1992) concern for organizational structures is increasingly relevant. The work of Dennis Mumby (2011) on Jürgen Habermas and the importance of a discourse ethic for the disruption of ongoing corporatization further contributes to this conversation.

Third, Johannesen discussed "feminist communication ethics", which emphasized issues of the good that go beyond role and reason, calling for a recognition of persons and emotions responsive to contexts. Benhabib (1992) offered a counter to George Herbert Mead's ([1934] 1962) notion of the "generalized other" with an emphasis on the "concrete other;" this ethical standpoint propelled reconsideration of particularity, locality, and individual persons. Johannesen (2001) cited Benhabib's assertion that moral judgment is immersed in everyday life within a web of relationships; to withdraw from moral judgment is tantamount to pulling out of "the human community" (203). Andrew Smith (2012) offers a thorough examination of Benhabib's work in the field of communication. Benhabib's interest in Arendt unites standpoint with questions of caring and justice with an emphasis on Arendt's (1959) refusal to blur the private and public domains of the human condition. Arendt understood the social as a domain that disempowers the human, requiring one's life to lose the texture and difference of the intimate and the public. Benhabib creatively unites insights from Arendt and Habermas, working as a critical participant and thinker within modernity, framing the necessity for ongoing change with recognition of communication ethics yielding shifts in law, policy, and institutional engagement.

Fourth, Johannesen ended with a discussion of virtue or character ethics. This perspective assists within a known paradigm, such as the Greek *polis*. Character aligns with specific agreed – upon practices that define a given profession or narrative. Today, of course, we live within communities consisting of more than one paradigmatic set of practices of public virtues, making it inevitable that one set of virtues will collide with another. This concern continues with scholars such as Sandra Borden (2009), Patrick Plaisance (2014), and Jason Hannan (2012) examining the insights of Alasdair MacIntyre. Additionally, Janie Harden Fritz (forthcoming) offered an interpretive synthesis of virtue ethics within the field of communication.

Fifth, Johannesen ended with discussion of issues that continue to situate scholarship on communication within this historical moment. He explored the social nature of the self, the fragmented condition of a postmodern moment, and contrarily those seeking minimal forms of transnational ethical agreement. The struggle for contemporary ethics scholarship reposes within the interplay of the local and translocal, the diverse and the common, cyber/internet access, and challenges toward and with questions of privacy. Questions about international, intercultural, and standpoint ethics are essential in a postmodern era of narrative and virtue contention, a moment no longer reliant upon a single metanarrative capable of crossing borders of society, culture, gender, affectivity, and identity. The remainder of this century will examine the diversity of theoretical and practical conceptions of communication ethics that can lead to ongoing acts of conflict and violence (Arnett, McManus, and McKendree, 2014).

Finally, Johannesen pointed to cyber-internet access and challenges regarding privacy. These issues continue in dominance and salience. The work of Pinchevski (2005) and Cees J. Hamelink (2001) leads the way in framing questions central to a technological phenomenon capable of considerable good and disruptive and destructive action. Locality influenced by worldwide digital communication access yields a communication ethic defined by translocality. Samu Kytola (2016) summarizes research and implications within this communication phenomenon that both unites and blurs locality and global access. These six points garner our care, interest, and response in this historical moment. If one assumes that there is no one communication ethic, then only constant attentiveness to the questions of a given historical moment can lend insight into where communication ethics examination and questioning calls forth scholarly engagement.

I conclude with a full circle turn, returning to the introduction of this essay that pivots on a basic assertion: there is no one communication ethic. We remain as witnesses and testifiers to and for the good or goods that we believe necessitate protection and promotion. Communication ethics requires literacy – the ability to read with skill what others believe matters (Arnett, Fritz, and Bell 2009). With an increasing recognition of multiplicity and difference, a major conceptual shift occurs, moving communication ethics from a Kantian form of self – legislation to performative understanding and literacy. The emphasis on understanding requires reading the actions and behaviors of another, which reveal a particular good or set of goods that an individual or a community consider worthy of protection and promotion. I have written a number of works on communication ethics without hope of answering what communication ethics is; my task is to detail what another considers worthy of protection and promotion (Arnett 1987, 2011, 2013; Arnett, Fritz, and Bell 2009; Arnett, Arneson and Bell 2006). Understanding that which matters to another is the key to communication ethics.

Communication ethics is a performative space that we enter to discern what matters to others. When communication ethics functions as a universal answer, it is a communicative tool of imposition, finding its credibility from power resources

at one's disposal. The imposition of ethics was fundamental to Friedrich Nietzsche's (1897) critique of the master – slave relationship in which a narrative supported by undisclosed power cloaks the fact that one class works for and on behalf of another. Sartre ([1943] 1992) critiqued “bad faith” or lying to ourselves as a social disease; a narrative of self – lying is at work when a boss refers to all employees as family and then reduces salaries without taking a pay cut. Such a paternalistic gesture dwells within the assertion that the deed is for the good of all, permitting the company to remain solvent. The boss may actually believe the rhetoric of bad faith. The good protected and promoted within a narrative of imposition is quite different from the good resting within an embedded story of shared sacrifice.

Communication ethics is a dwelling where conflict is likely as persons meet and engage one another with differing understandings of the good (Arnett, Bell McManus, and McKendree 2014). Communication ethics does not give us an answer. The study and practice of communication ethics is both more modest and profound than the imposing of one answer. Communication ethics is the call for understanding. The primary habit of communication ethics is to understand what the Other deems as worthy of protecting and promoting. I contend that communication ethics gives us three unending burdens. First, we must learn what matters to others and to ourselves. Second, we cannot assume that what matters to another matches what I consider worthy of protecting and promoting. Third, the call of communication ethics is contrary to what Emmanuel Levinas (1985) referred to as the most dangerous person: “the self – righteous man.” Such a person of undue assurance seeks to impose a good upon the Other, enacting the work of colonialism and totalitarianism. Communication ethics dwells in that which matters, which often differs between and among persons, calling forth a “fear and trembling” in discerning an appropriate action at a given time (Kierkegaard [1843] 2006).

Communication ethics is the pursuit of understanding what matters ethically, devoid of undue assurance inherent in a template of undisputed correct action. Communication ethics is the performative signature of a human being engaging a journey of the absurd. Such action disavows any attempt to be the final arbiter who validates ethical choice and action. The performative life of communication ethics testifies to a defiant absurdity: in spite of not knowing the final answer, one joins the journey to Ithaka, and in the living one witnesses the courage and wonder of what it means to be human.

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Thaddeus Metz

4 Cultural Pluralism and Media Ethics: Theorizing in a Globalized World of Difference

Abstract: In the face of differences between the ethical religio-philosophies believed across the globe, how should a media ethicist theorize or make recommendations in the light of theory? One approach is relativist, taking each distinct moral worldview to be true only for its own people. A second approach is universalist, seeking to discover a handful of basic ethical principles that are already shared by all the world's peoples. After providing reasons to doubt both of these approaches to doing media ethics, consideration is given to a third. This under-explored approach offers moral claims that would be reasonable for nearly all long-standing cultures to accept even though they currently do not, with the aim of creating new common ground among them. The chapter advances some rights and responsibilities, particularly as they concern the media's role in respect of self-government and self-expression, on which many of those with African, Confucian, Islamic, and Western foundational commitments could sensibly converge.

Keywords: democracy, diversity, moral differences, overlapping consensus, relativism, self-expression, universalism

1 Introduction

A normative theory is a unity, a general principle meant to ground a wide array of data about how various agents ought to behave in particular situations. How can one theorize about morality in a globalized, multicultural environment that is characterized by an extreme degree of diversity? What is one to do when even the *theories* or philosophies are so varied?

Western moral theorists cannot agree among themselves about whether duties in respect of the media are theoretically reducible to what harms people and animals, what degrades people's autonomy, or what parties to a social contract would reject. How to proceed when the options are even more diverse, such that non-western thinkers consider duties to be a function of, say, what God has forbidden, what undermines communion, or what keeps people from carrying out hierarchically defined roles? In the face of such radical disagreement between moral philosophies and, in particular, their implications for media ethics, how should a media ethicist theorize or make recommendations in the light of theory?

A minor aim of this chapter is to illustrate just how pressing these questions are in the twenty-first century, when it is increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-004>

there are long-standing, thoughtful ethical traditions that conflict with one's own. Although there is now a decent multicultural literature on media ethics, it is not that common to consider how glaring the tensions can be between the different philosophies. The norm has rather been to encounter separate chapters of a book devoted to Islam, Confucianism, Buddhism, and so on side by side, which, while an enormous improvement over most twentieth century collections, has not featured much analysis about how to deal with the *clash* between these traditions.

A second, larger aim is to demonstrate that the most visible theoretical reaction to diversity, which has taken the form of seeking to *discover* extant universal basic values, is not enough to resolve some significant contemporary disagreements in global media ethics. The most prominent advocate of this universalist approach, Clifford Christians, is well-known for holding that all major ethical traditions at bottom accept the sacredness of human life and, derived from this foundational value, the desirability of truth and non-violence. However, this chapter argues that these values are not in fact universally held, and that, in any event, they are too thin to resolve substantive disagreements between widely held philosophies about the proper roles of the media when it comes to facilitating self-government and self-expression.

The third and most important aim of this chapter is to advance a fresh approach to dealing with such disagreements between world philosophies. It amounts to bracketing conflict between foundational commitments and offering interpretations of their implications that standard adherents to them would be reasonable to accept, in the hope of *creating* new common ground.¹ The chapter articulates some mid-level principles and conceptions of duties on which many of those with deeper philosophical disagreements could sensibly converge.

This chapter pursues these three major aims in the context of a range of moral theories salient in the modern West, the indigenous sub-Saharan Africa tradition, the Islamic parts of the Middle East, and the Confucian cultures of East Asia.² This choice has been made in part out of convenience, and is not meant to suggest that, say, the reincarnation philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism are false or unjustified.³ In addition, in order to facilitate discussion about global moral disagreements, readers should allow for broad generalizations about cultures, i.e., for finer details and

1 This approach is reminiscent of Rawls' (2001) attempt to find an overlapping consensus about distributive justice among those with a variety of reasonable comprehensive conceptions of the good life, as well as Beauchamp and Childress' (2012) advocacy of doing bioethics without appeal to basic principles. It is also similar to Fotion's (2014) suggestion that the field should strive to develop moral theories, but without seeking one that is able to address literally all issues.

2 In addressing these various philosophies, this chapter is heeding the apt call of Gunaratne (2007a), Rao and Wasserman (2007), Fourie (2011), and many others not to focus solely on western theories, and to appeal to those salient in the Global South.

3 For one thoughtful Buddhist approach to media ethics, see Gunaratne (2007a, 2007b).

particular instantiations to be glossed over. Still more, the chapter assumes the English-speaking reader is *au fait* with western moral theories, using much more space to articulate non-western ones that are presumed to be less familiar.

In taking up media ethical disagreements between western, sub-Saharan, Islamic, and Confucian moral theories, this chapter addresses not merely the duties of journalists, media companies, and governments, but also those of book publishers, public relations agencies, and social media platforms. Although a comprehensive account of media ethical matters is well beyond the scope of this chapter, it is not restricted to classic topics of reporting ethics and censorship.

This chapter proceeds by providing what is intended to be a plausible characterization of the current epistemic state of global theorization about media ethics (section 2). It advances reason to think that one should not rest content with particularism and should sensibly seek out theory, and, further, to believe that, instead of relativism with regard to which theories are true, a fallibilist pluralism is more accurate. Then, this chapter explores two major media ethical issues in some depth, noting how major moral philosophies around the world deliver contradictory conclusions about how to deal with them, and then considering how to deal with the conflict. In particular, it addresses whether and to what extent, on the one hand, news and opinion should facilitate democracy (section 3) and, on the other, social media should enable people to express themselves (section 4). With regard to these two disagreements, this chapter contends that putative universal values either do not exist or are insufficient to resolve them, and it then develops middle ground that typical adherents to the competing worldviews could reasonably accept. The chapter concludes by providing a brief summary of its findings, indicating that its three major aims have been achieved and what some next steps of reflection would aptly be (section 5).

2 Multiculturalism as theoretical pluralism

This section provides an account of the epistemic state of play with regard to media ethical theory at the global level. Is it possible to engage in theory, and, if so, is it worth doing? Is a theory true only relative to a given society's culture or other background, and, if not, how can one know which theories, or parts of them, are true? Although these are of course enormous questions, some *prima facie* plausible answers to them are advanced, so as to provide a sensible framework for the cross-cultural reflections in the following sections.

In the light of substantial moral differences, one might think that, roughly, philosophy is impossible and particularism is instead apt. According to the latter view, no meaningful unification of thought about duties is possible or perhaps even desirable. Perhaps the best we can do is to consider issues on a case by case basis, with a full appreciation of the contextual details (cf. Fourie 2011: 38–39).

However, the process of setting a given, apparent duty in the probabilistic and explanatory contexts of other, intuitive ones appears to be an essential means by which to know whether one is justified in accepting it. After all, it was in part through moral theorization that post-war Americans came to learn that they have no reason to believe that interracial romantic relationships are immoral or that it is wrong for television shows to portray them in a positive light. A purported duty to erotically love only those of one's race was not analogous to other, uncontested duties, was not entailed by what they have in common, was not essential to account for other duties, and so on. It did not fit with what else Americans reasonably thought they knew about morality, and so was aptly dropped by a large majority who put their minds to the issue. Particularism too greatly risks parochialism.

Even if one ought to think critically about a given duty in relation to other duties, it does not follow that one will arrive at a moral theory in the strict philosophical sense of a single, basic, and general duty that grounds all other, more particular duties. Although the jury is probably still out on whether that is forthcoming, one can really know that such a tight unity is unavailable only upon having searched in earnest for it and come up empty handed. Pessimism about the prospects of unification of media ethical duties is therefore not much of a reason to disregard extant theories.

Supposing, then, that there is good reason to theorize about media ethics, which theories are true? One answer that is tempting in the face of substantial differences of opinion around the world is relativism. Applied to moral theory, relativism is the view that an ethical philosophy is true merely in relation to the beliefs of a majority in a society. If most believe a certain moral theory (or perhaps must believe it on pain of inconsistency with what else they currently believe), then it is "true for them" but not true for others with different epistemic backgrounds. Where there is a lack of convergence among thoughtful people about an issue over time, one plausible explanation is that there is no mind-independent matter of fact that various minds could apprehend, and that they instead construct their own truths.

However, such an account of moral truth has great difficulty making sense of what many readers think they know about morality, which is that a given society's beliefs about it are fallible. If it is possible for a majority to be mistaken about right and wrong, then one must reject relativism since it entails that a given majority is always correct about ethics, simply by virtue of the beliefs it happens to hold. For example, if relativism were correct, then interracial marriage was indeed immoral for, say, nineteenth century America, as a large majority thought it was immoral. However, most readers will think that it was not immoral, and that the majority was instead mistaken about it.

Another serious problem with relativism, for most philosophers, is that it is self-refuting: relativists contend that, regardless of the current epistemic commitments of the society of which we are a member, we all ought to believe in

relativism—but relativism is the view that one’s beliefs about what people ought to do is fixed by the current epistemic commitments of the society of which one is a member. If the truth of the doctrine of relativism is not itself hostage to the fortunes of what a majority currently believes, then why think that of a given moral theory is? It would be surprising if relativism were the only philosophy that were true absolutely, i.e., not merely relative to a society’s beliefs.

Although these reflections are not conclusive, they are reasonable and will ground the analysis in the rest of this chapter. It will presume that it is possible and worthwhile to unify normative thought about the media to some real extent and that such unification is not true merely in relation to a given society’s extant beliefs. This combination of views entails that the variegated moral theories to be encountered throughout the world disagree with each other about a common subject matter, that some are probably more accurate than others (even if all have some share of insight), and that it is worth trying to ascertain which handful of theories have the most insight or which parts of them are accurate. Call this epistemic condition “pluralism”, the view that many theories have some truth in them, in contrast to relativism, the view that all theories are equally true (and in contrast to monism, the view that only one theory has any truth to it⁴).

Among those media ethicists who are theoretically inclined, a prominent reaction to pluralism has been to search for areas of consensus on basic values, the idea being that theories are particularly likely to be true where their foundational commitments overlap. Clifford Christians stands out as the most visible and influential advocate of this approach (e.g., Christians 1997, 2010, 2014; and Christians and Nordenstreng 2004), with some others either following along (e.g., Traber 1997: 340–341; Rao and Wasserman 2015b: 6–7) or proposing other putative values that (virtually) all cultures allegedly share (e.g., Hafez 2001). However, in the following two sections I argue that these values are probably not accepted by all major traditions, and, furthermore, are not thick enough to resolve major tensions between them, with a new truth-seeking strategy being needed in the face of pluralism.

⁴ A philosophically interesting form of monism is a dialectical or transcendental one, characteristic of Kant’s philosophy, according to which a particular conception of morality is implicit in a certain unavoidable human perspective. For instance, Habermas (1990) is well known for arguing that implicit in the routine practice of communicative action is a certain foundational moral norm that is binding on everyone, which approach has sometimes been invoked in a media ethical context (e.g., Arens 1997). Another sort of monism is more Aristotelian, and so is based on a certain conception of human nature (e.g., Traber 1997: 341–343). This chapter lacks the space to critically explore such monist rationales. Note that even if one of them were successful, there would remain the question of how to engage with those who have not yet accepted the proof, with the sort of approach to justification proffered in this chapter intended to provide guidance on that.

3 The media in relation to self-government

The default position among western media ethicists is that one major role of the media should be to sustain and enrich a democratic polity, in which citizens have the final authority to determine who holds political power over them. For one, news reporting and opinion making should facilitate informed debate among citizens about which policies they should support and which politicians they should elect. For another, media companies are expected to donate some reasonable amount of broadcast time to politicians who seek to advertise, debate, and more generally campaign, regardless of whether doing so is expected to maximize profits for shareholders.

This position is not merely ubiquitous among twenty-first century Euro-American-Australasian media ethicists, but also nearly unquestioned by them. Insofar as media companies have duties to more than merely shareholders (i.e., setting aside the small minority of libertarians), and are thought to have some social responsibility, their central obligation is invariably believed to be to facilitate democratic citizenship. That is the normative-political air we breathe in the West, where the value of self-governance, at both the individual and collective levels, is so salient. A fairly similar perspective is characteristic of sub-Saharan African worldviews, where values such as the common good and communion have tended to prescribe consensus-seeking in political choice (on which see, e.g., Gyekye 1997: 121–140).

However, the air is different in the East, and it would be hasty to *suppose* that it is merely polluted, something harmful to be cleaned up. There are major strains of both Islamic and Confucian ethics, held by well more than two billion people, according to which democracy is an undesirable political system, which, in turn, means that the media's social responsibility lies elsewhere.

Like the other Abrahamic religions of Judaism and Christianity, according to Islam one's basic aim in life should be to be obey Allah, to perform actions because God has commanded one to do so. God, understood as a perfect, spiritual agent who is the ground of the universe, is thought to have created it with a plan in mind, where treating other human beings well is an essential part of the role He has given us to play. Impermissible acts for us are what He has forbidden and discouraged, whereas permissible ones are those He has allowed, if not required or encouraged. According to Islam, we can know in the first instance what God has commanded by interpreting the *Qur'an*, but also revealing are the *Hadith*, the doings and sayings of his last prophet, Mohammed.

Now, it is a central part of the Islamic tradition to maintain that God's law comes first, and should suffuse everything in life, including human law (on which see Tibi 2011 for a critical discussion in the context of global communication). What would be the most effective way to ensure that politics is informed by the divine? On the face of it, the answer is a *caliphate*, putting those with religious credentials in charge. Those who are particularly familiar with the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*, and especially those who have lived according to the conceptions of rightness and goodness in these

authoritative sources, are most qualified to ensure that a state does what is likely to foster piety. They would be much more likely to enact laws and policies that would prompt the fulfilment of God's commands than the majority of the populace, which is, by comparison, not as informed and pious.

Hence, from this perspective, the responsibility of a Muslim mass media system would be: "to destroy myths. In our contemporary world these myths may include power, progress, science, development, modernization, democracy, achievement, and success....(as well as) the secular notion of the separation of religion and politics" (Hamid Mowlana quoted in Siddiqi 1999).

It might appear that there are some prominent Islamic documents extolling democracy, but, upon a closer look, one sees that they do not, at least not in the form common in Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas, and Australasia. The Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights says, "Subject to the Law, every individual in the community (*Ummah*) is entitled to assume public office" (Islamic Council 1981: Art. 11), while the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights says, "Everyone shall have the right to participate, directly or indirectly in the administration of his country's public affairs. He shall also have the right to assume public office in accordance with the provisions of *Shari'ah*" (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation 1990: Art. 23(b)).⁵ *Shari'ah* is of course Islamic law, and, so, what these documents say is that people's participation in government shall be determined by law, not so much that law shall be determined by people's participation in government. Another way to see the point is that neither assuming public office nor administering public affairs necessarily implies that a politician is permitted to influence the content of policy, say, in accordance with the views of those who have voted him into power.

Confucians, too, by and large reject democracy as an appropriate form of political governance. Although it is harder to encapsulate Confucianism into a pithy formula similar in form to "Obey Allah" in Islam, philosophical commentators contend that most Confucian norms are ultimately a function of developing one's personhood or realizing one's humanness in the context of some kind of relational value, whether it is familial relationship (Fan 2010), role (Ames 2011), or harmony (Li 2014). The relevant relationship is characteristically hierarchical, which has direct implications for political power.⁶

Aesthetic analogies with making music and cooking food are frequently invoked to illustrate the nature of the right relationship. Basically, it is a matter of different elements coming together, where differences are not merely respected, but also integrated in such a way that the best of them is brought out and something new is created. By this construal, to develop into a real person by relating harmoniously is

⁵ For the historical background to these documents, and discussion of their status in the Islamic world, see Masud (2007: 94–98).

⁶ The following paragraphs borrow from Metz (2014).

essentially neither to become the same as others, nor to agree with them. So relating instead presupposes the existence of a variety of interests and standpoints, where they are unified – but not made uniform – in such a way that is productive.

Probably the most important difference or variation is position in a hierarchy. To see this, consider the famous “Three Bonds”, the sites in which, and by which, one is particularly expected to become a genuine person by realizing relationship, namely, between sovereign/ subjects, parents/children, and, traditionally, husband/ wife. The hierarchical nature of the Three Bonds is palpable; essential to them is the idea of higher and lower positions. Sometimes the thought is that hierarchy is most likely to produce a familial or harmonious relationship separately and in the long run, while at other times it is that such a relationship is to be realized within hierarchy. Although there have been traditional strains of Confucianism interpreting the hierarchy in terms of unconditional obedience on the part of the inferiors, most these days instead stress the idea that it should involve reciprocity. Roughly, those in a superior position, while having more responsibility, are obligated to act for the sake of those in a lower one, while inferiors are expected to show respect for superiors, which need not mean unquestioning deference (even if it does normally mean compliance) and can include remonstrating.

Although Confucianism in no way justifies absolute monarchy, it does prescribe a division of labor, with managerial functions going to rulers who are older, experienced, knowledgeable, and virtuous and who strive not only to meet the biological and psychological needs of their people, but also to foster their social or moral good as beings capable of virtue. It is striking how many contemporary Confucian political theorists, even those trained in the West, continue to reject democracy in favor of meritocracy (e.g., see the contributions to Bell and Li 2013). For them, the right sort of relationship is one in which the more qualified act for the sake of those who are not as well qualified, particularly when it comes to government.

From a broad, philosophical standpoint, the Islamic and Confucian moral-political views share a common, powerful account of how to distribute political power, one that cannot be ignored or dismissed by secular democrats. In both non-western systems, there is the thought that the basic aim of a polity should be to improve the objective quality of its people’s lives (whether in terms of piety, needs, or virtue) and that those best positioned to do so are experts (roughly those with the right education and character).⁷ There is real debate to be had here about the proper function of a state (or other political organization) and its consequent significance for how to understand the social responsibility of the media.

This debate cannot be resolved in the short term, and certainly not by this short chapter. How to proceed in the face of disagreement about how the media should relate to politicians and citizens, given contrasting deep moral-theoretical principles?

⁷ In the Western tradition, this sort of view is advanced in Plato’s *Republic* and Hobbes’ *Leviathan*.

If we cannot say with real assurance that one major function of the media should be to enable citizens to make informed decisions when voting and otherwise exercising their equal rights to influence government policy, is there something we can say with some confidence?

Notice that Christians' universalism does not readily provide an answer to these questions. He maintains that the most basic principle inherent to all world philosophies is the sacredness of human life, which entails other values such as truth and non-violence.

Reverence for life on earth establishes a level playing field for cross-cultural collaboration on the ethical foundations of SR (social responsibility—ed.). It represents a universalism from the ground up. Various societies articulate this protonorm in different terms and illustrate it locally, but every culture can bring to the table this fundamental norm for ordering political relations and such social institutions as the press (Christians and Nordenstreng 2004: 21).

Of course, one might provide counterexamples to this bold suggestion. For example, many Buddhists would reject this claim, either not seeing a qualitative difference between the value of human and animal lives, or not seeing value in life as such but rather in the quality of life. Utilitarians, too, clearly hold the latter view, denying that there is anything special about human life as such, and rather directing our ethical attention to how well or poorly humans (and, often enough, animals) live. Still more, Confucians tend to eschew talk of "sacredness" and "dignity", but, when they do invoke it, they rather maintain that it is our capacity for virtue that is special, not human life as such (e.g., Li 2014: 160–161).

More deeply, let us suppose for the sake of argument that respect for human life were universally held. It unfortunately would not be thick enough to resolve the disagreement about how the media should bear on the distribution of political power; for this is not solely a life and death matter. Both democracy and autocracy could do comparable jobs of keeping human beings alive, but there would remain serious moral disagreement about which system is more just.

Christians might reply by appealing to the putatively derivative values of truth and non-violence, but these are also too thin to determine which form of political power is just. Democracy is not inherently less deceptive and less violent than autocracy, particularly the benevolent, meritocratic, and virtue-oriented sort that Confucians favor.

A more promising strategy by which to resolve the conflict about the media's proper function in relation to political power is to bracket deep values and instead to consider whether, with some minor modifications, different traditions could find mid-level agreement. To begin to execute this approach, consider that even if the autocratic perspective were correct, it would not follow that the media should merely toe the government line. For example, it might be that those who currently hold political power are not genuine experts, and so merit criticism. Or, it could be that, even if genuine experts are in charge, they have not invariably made the correct decisions

and so should be open to changing their minds in the light of evidence or enabling citizens to avoid severe burdens coming in the wake of their mistakes.

If a political elite were truly committed to doing what it would take to improve its people's quality of life, then it would welcome an independent press that critically evaluates the extent to which its laws and policies are succeeding or are reasonably expected to do so. Only those with weak selves who cannot withstand criticism and need to deceive or inflate themselves, or those who are selfish and want the trappings of power, have something to fear from a press that informs the public about what government is doing, what it might do instead, and how citizens could avoid deleterious outcomes if it cannot or will not change an unwelcome course.

Of course, in practice, many autocratic governments tightly control the press and do so precisely by appeal to values such as Islamic unity or Confucian harmony (on the latter, see, e.g., Gunaratne 2005; Yin 2008); in principle, however, they should do the opposite. Even if a political elite does know best on average, it does not *always* know best and it *cannot* know everything (setting aside papal infallibility and similar appeals to divine revelation). The logic of the rationale for autocracy, therefore, entails that a political elite ought to allow others, such as journalists, bloggers, and academics, to judge for themselves whether government decisions are making people better off, and that this elite should permit the media to publish their works widely.

Here, then, is some apparent common ground between the four major ethical worldviews this chapter is considering. None of them entails that it is right for those with political power to use it merely for themselves or their families, say. Instead, they all entail that the proper use of political power is to serve society as a whole, with one major job of the media being to inform and opine about the extent to which it is achieving this end, and what should be done differently in order to do so better.

There of course remains debate to be had about the precise nature of the public good. Is obedience to God key, or is living autonomously instead what matters? And should the state really be in the business of making people's lives go well, however that is conceived?

Yet, just because there is disagreement about some things does not mean there is no agreement about anything. Surely famine, pollution, drug addiction, gender violence, and racism are not in the public interest, whereas loving families, health care, beauty, self-esteem, and literacy are, to suggest merely a few examples.

Furthermore, even if one denies, in liberal fashion, that the job of the state is to reduce the bad and to produce the good, it is hard to deny that it at least ought not to produce the bad and to reduce the good, if it can avoid doing so at little cost to other moral considerations. One central role for the media, therefore, should be to facilitate informed reflection about the likely effects of government, and of course other institutions, on the quality of people's lives and what to do when these effects are insufficiently desirable.

The claim here is not that this position will command belief on the part of all modern Westerners, indigenous Africans, Islamists, and Confucians (let alone

universal acceptance). After all, some will proclaim a religious leader to be incapable of error, while others will maintain that the sole duty of a journalist is to maximize profit for those who own stock in her company. The claim is rather that there is a reasonable common ground about the media's social responsibility to be had among at least these four major ethical traditions as standardly interpreted, which is for all we can tell at the moment where the truth lies. In the absence of agreement on foundational ethical matters, at least interlocutors could sensibly converge on the position advanced here: neither a watchdog for a democratic citizenry, nor a lapdog for an autocratic elite, but rather a hunting dog for people in pursuit of a good life and a government that should avoid hindering that, if not aim to help them achieve it.

4 The media in relation to self-expression

“The realization of one's dreams and manifestation of an idea into the tangible is the goal of every human being on earth”. This quotation from the founder of Ama Kip-Kip, one of twenty-first century South Africa's more prominent fashion brands, is certainly false. Some societies do not value self-expression, or at least nowhere to the degree that other ones do. This section spells out how different global ethical philosophies entail contradictory conclusions about how social and publishing media should facilitate self-expression. However, like the previous section, it also critically interprets some of their values to forge common ground between them.⁸

The term “self-expression” means taking those parts of one's identity that are not easily or directly accessible to others⁹ and making them more so. It characteristically consists of linguistic, artistic, bodily, or other actions by which one intends to display mental states such as one's feelings, emotions, judgments, and imaginings. Good examples include saying “I love you” to a beloved, publishing a novella that conveys one's attitudes about a certain group in one's society, wearing a certain shirt because it suits one's aesthetic sensibilities, and posting a photograph onto Facebook or Instagram because one likes it.

Self-expression is a characteristically self-regarding, or individualist, value, famously sought out by western societies such as the United States. Its importance follows naturally from ethical philosophies that at bottom prize desire satisfaction (utilitarianism), autonomy (Kantianism), or self-formation (Foucauldian ethics).

In contrast, the societies associated with the other three major moral traditions considered in this chapter do not value self-expression, or at least not to the same

⁸ A few paragraphs in this section have been cribbed from Metz (2015a).

⁹ Supposing such literally exists! This conception of the self is implicitly western, not particularly shared by indigenous Africans or East Asians, for whom the self tends to be defined in terms of relationship (on which see Markus, Kitayama, and Heiman 1996; and Mpofu 2002).

degree or in the same way. Consider, for example, the World Values Survey (n.d.), which contrasts self-expression values¹⁰ with survival values, the latter of which are focused on physical and economic security. It indicates that African, Confucian, and Islamic societies score low for the former and high for the latter, with Euro-American societies exhibiting the reverse orientation.

To begin to understand why the non-western societies tend not to value self-expression, consider the interesting body of literature addressing it in the context of East Asian societies, including those influenced by Confucianism. First, self-expression is sometimes expected to disrupt social ties, and especially to place too much emphasis on oneself as opposed to others, whose interests and perspectives should take priority (Kim and Markus 2002: 437–439; Kim and Markus 2005: 185). Talking is “an act that can attenuate hierarchy” (Kim and Markus 2002: 440), where one should recall that one of the Three Bonds in the Confucian tradition is between parents and children, a relationship that should be characterized by “filial piety”, that is, an attitude of respect and care for those who have reared one. Teenagers should above all treat their parents as superiors, which often means showing deference and discourages expressing themselves in ways that would embarrass their parents, intimate distance from them, or suggest that the concerns of others are not of crucial importance.

A second reason why self-expression appears not to be valued highly by East Asian cultures, or at least not by the Confucian morality at the heart of many of them, is that the most important goods, concerning harmonious relationships between superiors/subordinates, are already public (Kim and Sherman 2007: 2). If filial piety and other kinds of role-oriented relationships are among the top values in a certain culture, then it is hard to see the point of self-expression, of bringing out one’s inner life for others to recognize; it does not appear to be essential for realizing the relational goods.

To make the point all the more concrete, note that two scholars have argued that the internet, at least in its present form, is incompatible with Confucian values. One remarks that for Confucianism:

a “person” is an essential part of a larger social group and, as such, personal “agency” is always socially defined....In China, where the main moral goal has always been some form of harmonious interdependence instead of the autonomous independence we pursue so devoutly in America, the Internet could present a threat to cultural identity (Bockover 2003: 164; see also Wong 2013).

Roughly, the internet, as it stands, encourages people to express themselves regardless of whether doing so is expected to fulfill hierarchically and contextually defined relationships, and indeed in ways that threaten to undermine such relationships,

¹⁰ Which include more than just ‘self-expression’ as narrowly defined in this chapter, for instance, a concern for environmental protection.

whereas the ultimate point of communicating, for many Confucians, is precisely to relate harmoniously in this way (Chen 2008).

More generally, “Confucian thinkers have been concerned about protecting people from misleading, seductive ideas – ideas that might beguile or blind good people from following the correct path to moral cultivation....(T)hey would out of principle be wary of unrestricted exposure to non-Confucian values” (Madsen 2007: 128, 129). This reasoning also suggests that an unregulated internet would be considered morally dubious from a Confucian standpoint.

The importance of moral development through relationship held by many traditional African peoples similarly explains the relative unimportance they have ascribed to self-expression. Indeed, both East Asian and sub-Saharan African cultures are often described as “collectivist” or “communitarian” by the value theorists who have systematically compared them of late (e.g., Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010; Bell and Metz 2011; Matondo 2012; Metz 2017). Despite the common focus on relational values, the Confucian demand for hierarchy is not as pronounced in the African tradition. To begin to appreciate African relationality, consider some representative quotations from sub-Saharan philosophers and theologians:

Every member is expected to consider him/herself an integral part of the whole and to play an appropriate role towards achieving the good of all (Gbadegesin 1991: 65).

We say, “a person is a person through other people”. It is not “I think therefore I am”. It says rather: “I am human because I belong.” I participate, I share (Tutu 1999: 35).

(T)he purpose of our life is community-service and community-belongingness (Iroegbu 2005: 442).

In these and other construals of how to behave from a characteristically African perspective, two ways to relate are often mentioned. On the one hand, there is considering oneself part of the whole, participating, and belonging, while, on the other, there is achieving others’ good, sharing, and serving. Basically, one is to share a way of life with other people and to care for their quality of life.¹¹

Now, neither one of these ways of communally relating appears to ground an interest in expressing oneself or using the mass media to help others to do so. A fundamentally other-regarding approach to values appears not to encourage self-regard, or at least not an interest in making public one’s likes, desires, imaginings, etc. Consider, after all, the central values listed by the magisterial historian of African cultures, John Mbiti:

(B)e kind, help those who cry to you for help, show hospitality, be faithful in marriage, respect the elders, keep justice, behave in a humble way toward those senior to you, greet people especially those you know, keep your word given under oath, compensate when you hurt someone or damage his property, follow the customs and traditions of your society (1990: 208–209).

11 For a fuller exposition, and in the context of media ethics, see Metz (2015a, 2015b).

Self-expression does not easily fit in here. As one scholar has pointed out, “In a communalistic environment, communication is....the bedrock and sustaining power of social relationships and social order (which is incompatible with—ed.) the right to do and say whatever one wishes, irrespective of who is hurt or happy” (Moemeka 1997: 184, 189).

Finally, a fundamental obligation to obey Allah hardly grounds a prescription for social and publishing media to help others express themselves. An Islamic media organization would be one that helps people become aware of God’s laws and prompts them to conform to them. Common in the Islamic media ethics literature are statements such as these: “(A)ll communication should be conducive to fostering goodness and combating evil” (Ayish and Sadig 1997: 113); “(I)t is the responsibility of every individual and the group, especially the institutions of social or public communication such as the press, radio, television, and cinema, to prepare individuals and society as a whole to accept Islamic principles and act upon them” (Siddiqi 1999); and “The ultimate goal of the Qur’anic expression of all speech is to promote veracity, the discovery of truth and to uphold human dignity” (Bhat 2014: 71). It follows that expressing oneself in ways that are not “within the limits prescribed by the Law” (Islamic Council 1981: Art. 12(a)) or that run “contrary to the principles of the Shari’ah” (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation 1990: Art. 22(a)) is simply not morally permissible.

Much more prominent in Islam are requirements for public decency, including women dressing in modest ways and men not appearing nude (for just one example, see Hashi 2011: 127), and a prohibition against blasphemy (again, for just two examples, consider Mohamed 2010: 142–143; Bhat 2014: 72–73). Indeed, the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights includes this article: “No one shall hold in contempt or ridicule the religious beliefs of others or incite public hostility against them; respect for the religious feelings of others is obligatory on all Muslims” (Islamic Council 1981: Art. 12(e)). If this is a human right, it is one on the part of those who would be offended by those who express themselves in certain ways. There is some debate among Muslims about whether and how to use force in response to indecency and blasphemy (on which see Bhat 2014, who favors the view that it is Allah’s, and not any human’s, job to punish these behaviors), but it is fairly uncontentious among Muslims that the latter are wrong.

In sum, when it comes to the value of self-expression, it appears that it is the West against the rest. The ethical philosophies and cultures of Euro-America-Australasia support the views that individuals do no wrong in expressing themselves in ways that might undermine certain relationships with others (roughly so long as they are not inciting violence or misrepresenting others) and that the publishing and social media do no wrong in enabling people to do so. The other, non-western traditions tend to support contrary views. What to do in the face of such disagreement?

As per the previous section, an appeal to the sacredness of life à la Christians, which he purports to be universally held, will not help to answer this question. Sometimes self-expression will raise a life and death matter, or one that concerns violence, but it will be comparatively rare. Some other values or principles are needed to answer the question of whether the media should facilitate self-expression that does not risk

killing anyone. Christians might be tempted to invoke the value of truth, but it is too abstract to be of use. *Which* truths should the media publish? They cannot publish all of them, and some truths surely merit much more attention and resources than others.

In contrast to Christians' universalism, the approach of this chapter is one that is less deep but arguably more rich and likely to hone in on the moral truth. In particular, a promising angle is to consider the various functions of self-expression more closely. On the one hand, fans of the West should acknowledge that certain forms of self-expression are more important than others, and, on the other hand, adherents to the non-western views should acknowledge that many forms of self-expression need not degrade, and indeed can frequently enhance, the relevant relationships.

With regard to western audiences, let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that individuals should have the legal liberty to express themselves in ways that are selfish, base, offensive, impious, and the like.¹² Even so, this question would remain: morally speaking, should they exercise this liberty, and is it one so important that the media should help them to exercise?

Plausible answers are "no". Focusing on the latter question, media owners and editors ought not to permit people to use their forums to express racist views, to glamorize being a sugar daddy's kept woman, or to insult a revered religious figure gratuitously, say, with cartoons. The general principle would be that the broader the expected reach of the impoverished expression, the more moral reason there is for a media outlet not to facilitate it. Such a principle would seem to prescribe these sorts of approaches: letting a person express his racism on his own webpage that others must actively seek out; allowing someone to self-publish a book about her sexual exploits; or permitting someone to put the blasphemous cartoons on a Facebook page that is not publicly accessible. However, it would conversely appear to mean that it would be wrong for a newspaper to allow someone to pen a racist op-ed piece, to review the aforementioned book, or to publish the cartoons to a wide audience.

Turning to the non-western audiences, let us suppose, again for the sake of argument, that communication should avoid undermining a substantive end in itself such as harmony, communion, or piety, and ideally ought to foster it consistently.¹³ Even so, quite a lot of self-expression would be permissible, even something to be encouraged.

First off, notice that the point of self-expression need not be something self-regarding. The expected effects of expressing oneself, if not the intention behind it, could be something relational, e.g., good for others. This is particularly clear in the case of Afro-communal values. Supposing that one is to donate one's attention, time, labor, and

¹² But see Cox (2011) for a strong argument in favor of enacting a law against blasphemy.

¹³ This formulation indeed differs from more extreme versions quoted above, to the effect that "all" communication ought to be in the service of a particular good. Does one really do wrong if one yells "Ouch" because one is in pain, when doing so is within one's control and unlikely to promote a certain desirable state of affairs?

wealth to others as part of a communal relationship, one can probably also be obligated to make available to others one's attitudes, at least if they are insightful, creative, interesting, educative, or the like. Self-expression is a matter of revealing one's mental states, which need not themselves be merely *about the self*, but can usefully be about others and the world in which they live. Revealing one's mental life can be a kind of gift, when it promises, say, to broaden others' horizons, to help them understand themselves or their society better, or just to make them feel closer to someone else. By extension, since Confucian and Islamic ethics centrally instruct one to help other people, adherents to these worldviews should deem sharing one's viewpoints with others to be one way to do so.

A salient theme in Islamic discussions of expression is "responsible freedom" (e.g., Ayish and Sadig 1997; Mohamed 2010), having the liberty to express oneself albeit with the purpose of promoting truth, justice, or some other element of piety. One finds a similar concept suggested in some Confucian (Yin 2008) and African (Moemeka 1997; Christians 2014: 39) accounts of media ethics as well. Indeed, in the African tradition freedom as such is invariably paired up with the concept of responsibility, and explicitly so, as one readily sees in the titles of salient documents on academic freedom, e.g., *The Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility* and *The Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Academics*. Here, the basic thought is that academics should be free to employ their judgment in pursuit of certain ends such as human emancipation; they are not considered free to do whatever they please, including watching porn on their office computer or assigning grades randomly. Analogously, when expressing themselves individuals should be free to employ their judgment in pursuit of, say, the end of making others' lives go well. Where they fail to seek out that end sufficiently, or express themselves in ways that are likely to undermine it, they are acting wrongly and are reasonably refused support from a publishing house or a social media site.

Secondly, there is a large range of self-expression that is "in between" what is racist, base, or blasphemous, on the one hand, and what is likely to promote a certain end such as improving people's quality of life, on the other. What we might call "unproductive but innocuous" self-expression would be permitted by the principle that communication should, in the first instance, avoid undermining a substantive end in itself. Putting a selfie online, liking a certain post on Facebook, and advertising a particular style of clothing are typically pointless from the perspective of the non-western ethics, but, on the interpretation of them advanced here, they are not immoral (supposing there were not such a predominance of them that they began to seriously detract from people's ability to pursue what is important).

5 Conclusion

Recall that this chapter has had three major aims. One has been to establish the point that, when it comes to multicultural media ethics, it is not enough merely to become

familiar with different moral traditions that have been widely held. In addition, one needs to become aware of how they can prescribe incompatible policies and practices. That is true especially when those who hold competing ethical philosophies will come into contact with each other, but it also applies to those who will not; for the mere existence of long-standing competing ethical worldviews provides *some* reason to doubt the veracity of one's own. Convergence of belief (among those qualified to judge) is a keystone of truth, and when it is missing, confidence should not be high.

A second aim has been to argue that the kind of convergence that a number of media ethicists, most notably Clifford Christians, have sought out is unpromising. They have tried to discover extant consensus among cultures with respect to foundational values, suggesting that all of them accept the sacredness of human life. However, this sort of consensus does not appear to exist, and, even if it did, it would not be enough to resolve some current and important cross-cultural debates, e.g., about the media's proper orientation toward self-government and self-expression.

This chapter's third aim has been to propose a different kind of convergence for media ethicists to seek out. This approach aims for overlapping consensus not at the level of a culture's deepest values, but rather at a more mid-level range of what is supposed to follow from them. It proposes principles, which might not be already accepted, but to which those with a variety of competing foundational commitments could coherently agree.

In particular, this chapter has argued that standard readings of secular western ethics, indigenous African communalism, Islam, and Confucianism all entail that two morally proper aims of the media are: to facilitate critical appraisal of the extent to which governments are enabling people to lead good lives (or at least are not hindering that end), and to enable people to express themselves in ways that promise to help people lead good lives (or, again, at least do not threaten that aim). The claim is not that literally all adherents to these worldviews will accept these principles or must do so on pain of irrationality; rather, the point is that these principles constitute substantial common ground among the world's moral philosophies, where outliers have extra reason to doubt their positions. In closing, the reader will notice a similarity between the two principles; it would be interesting to know whether further reflection about contentious matters among global ethical traditions continues in the same direction, grounding a truly global media ethic.

Further reading

For an overview of contemporary philosophical reflection on moral relativism, see Gowans (2015), and for overviews of the literature on alternatives to moral relativism, see Sayre-McCord (2015) and Bagnoli (2017).

The strategy of avoiding foundational commitments and searching for 'mid-level' principles that many could accept has been employed by Rawls (2001) in the

context of distributive justice and Beauchamp and Childress (2012) in bioethics. They, however, are speaking nearly exclusively to a western audience, and are not seeking principles that those in non-western societies could also take seriously.

Some maintain that all societies in fact share some foundational commitments. For example, beyond the view that all societies believe that human life has a dignity, as per Christians (2010), there is the suggestion that they more or less all accept the golden rule (Küng and Kuschel 1993). Others have proposed some mid-level principles that are purportedly accepted by nearly all cultures. Examples include the United Nations (1948), the World Commission on Culture and Development (1996: 17), and Nussbaum (2000). However, they arguably remain too contested in that they, for instance, include democracy.

For discussion of the need to develop ethical theory in the light of a wide array of traditions around the world, as well as the complications of doing so, see Kymlicka (2007), and for such discussion in the context of media ethics specifically, see Rao and Wasserman (2007). For edited volumes on media ethics that feature many non-western perspectives, see Christians and Traber (1997), Ward and Wasserman (2010), Fortner and Fackler (2011), and Rao and Wasserman (2015a). Finally, for media-ethical reflection on how to relate the global or universal to the local or parochial, see Rao (2011) and Ward (2015).

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5 Contractualism for Media Ethics

Abstract: The chapter explores this application of contractualism to media ethics. After defining the contractual approach in general, the chapter shows how contractual concepts have played an important part in the history of journalism ethics and continue to underwrite today's codes and writings about journalism ethics. The chapter considers whether this framework continues to hold promise today for the new ethics of digital, global media, and what challenges lie ahead.

Keywords: contractualism, ethical contractualism, contractarianism, social contract theory, journalism ethics, media ethics, global media, digital media ethics.

Ethical contractualism, in its many forms, views morality as based on an agreement among members of a culture or society.¹ Members of society agree that certain moral principles, duties, and rights are reasonable and useful, and therefore worthy of social support and enforcement. Their agreement both specifies and justifies the content of morality, ranging from what is good and right to what is virtuous. Contractualism stems from a familiar but important fact. Living in society, people interact. They must cooperate despite diverging interests. Agreements are necessary to make clear what we owe to each other and to ensure that promises, conventions, and contracts are kept.

However, not all agreements are moral contracts. Some are specific and non-moral; some are morally dubious. Specific contracts involving particular people in particular situations may be consistent with existing moral rules. For example, there are legal contracts for purchasing property and commercial agreements to rent a car on holiday. Such contracts presume that most people are inclined to follow general moral rules, such as keeping promises. But the contracts do not deal with the nature and justification of the moral rules themselves.

Some contracts are immoral, by almost any standard. There are contracts that are fraudulent and mislead parties to the contract. There are 'agreements' that are forced and unfair, and involve parties of unequal power, such as arrangements between property owners and their slaves. Here, agreement is better called submission.

Contractualism is not interested in specific contracts and, as an ethical theory, it can have no truck with dubious (or immoral) contracts. It is interested in *moral*

¹ Some philosophers, such as Darwall (2003) call the Hobbesian tradition in contract theory "contractarianism" and distinguish it from the Kantian tradition, which they call "contractualism". I find the dual terms confusing for readers. I prefer to talk of *one* moral theory called ethical contractualism (or contractualism) and to distinguish the Hobbesian and Kantian traditions as lines of thought within contractualism.

contracts in two senses: First, the focus is on basic moral agreements that say which principles should be followed by all. Such principles include the principles of political morality – what constitutes a just political society. Second, while it begins with existing rules, contractualism is normative. Contractualism is interested in scientific accounts of the evolution of cooperation and morality in society and human history. But, as normative, it is more interested in the implications of such facts for moral reasoning. It asks: What are the moral rules that people *ought* to follow, and what constitutes a valid moral agreement? Contractualism has a two-fold aim: (a) to articulate and critique moral principles and moral schemes, such as principles of justice, and (b) to justify the principles and schemes as flowing from a valid moral agreement.

Both (a) and (b) are closely related. By doing (a), contractualists engage in applied (or normative) ethics. They argue for specific moral rules and concrete applications. By doing (b) they engage in meta-ethics. They explain the purpose of morality and propose procedures for reaching agreements. They use this meta-ethical approach to justify rules articulated by (a).² In contractualism, applied ethics and meta-ethics interpenetrate.

Morality as agreement has been an attractive idea for journalism and media ethics.³ This is because journalism is a social practice that requires normative guidance, given its impact on community and culture. Ethicists and journalists explain journalism ethics in terms of a social contract with the public. In one version of this contract, a democracy guarantees freedom of the press upon the expectation that such freedom to publish will be used ethically – to properly inform self-governing citizens. Journalism ethics is regarded as a ‘sub-contract’ within a larger moral and political contract for society.

The chapter explores the application of contractualism to media ethics, historically and critically. Historically, it notes key contractual ideas in the development of journalism ethics. Critically, it assesses whether this framework continues to hold promise for the ethics of journalism in a digital, global world. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to do full justice to the variety and complexity of contractualism in Western philosophy, not to mention its critics. I provide a sketch of contractualism as a guide.

The chapter has three parts. The first section explains the idea of contractualism in ethics. The second section shows how contractualism has influenced journalism ethics. The third section reviews the current challenges to contractualism in journalism ethics.

² For the difference between meta-ethics and applied, normative ethics, see Ward 2011.

³ In what follows, I will use both “journalism ethics” and “media ethics” as equivalent in meaning. In both cases, I am referring to the ethics of journalism as a social practice.

1 The contractual idea

1.1 The contractarian test

Contractualism, among other things, offers a way to test moral rules. The test, in its simplest form, is this: *Might they (principles, values, aims), in suitable conditions, be agreed to by rational and reasonable persons seeking moral principles, judgments and decisions to guide their social interaction?*⁴ The test shows that the common element in contractualism is that “moral norms or political institutions find legitimacy, when they do, in their ability to secure (under the appropriate conditions) the agreement of those to whom they apply” (Sayre-McCord 2000: 1).

This formulation brings to our attention crucial dimensions of contractual reasoning. First, contractualism has the capacity to be an utterly general method. Its methods do not restrict the kinds of moral items that can be tested. Among the ‘things’ that can be tested are moral principles, other moral theories such as utilitarianism, theories about justice, and reasons advanced for (or against) an ethical judgment.

Second, contractualism is procedural in emphasis. Although contractarians advance substantive moral principles, such as Rawls’ (1992) principles of justice, the basic idea of contractarianism is that correct ethical judgments are the result of rational and reasonable people correctly following a procedure of evaluation and discussion. All moral principles must pass the contractual test. The evaluation is based on facts about the world and the issue at hand, principles of evidence and logic, and reasons that could be acceptable to others. People must carefully follow – together – some procedure of practical reason, not simply react emotionally, intuitively, or partially to proposed principles and courses of action.⁵

Contractualism, in its stress on procedure, reverses the normal order of explanation in ethics (Rawls 1991: 90-101). Non-contractual theories of morality, such as intuitionism, start with substantive values known through intuitions of theoretical reason. A moral intuition appends a truth about an objective, independent order of moral facts such as the intuition that torturing children for pleasure is evil, and coming to the aid of people in distress is good. If a moral statement appears wrong, e.g., it is morally permissible to break my promises without good reason, this is because it is an incorrect description of that moral order. We use these intuitions of moral facts to deduce concrete judgments about what to do in situations. Therefore, commitments

⁴ This is my modification of the test stated by David Gauthier (Hampton 2007: xii). My main modification is to add the crucial word “reasonable”.

⁵ By practical reason, I mean the use of reason to reach valued ends, and to evaluate both the means and the ends. The aim is the production of an ‘object’. Theoretical reason is the cognitive understanding of an object, not its production, through conceptualization, hypothesis and other mental tools. Theoretical reason is used to assist practical reason, so that action is based on facts about the world.

to mind-independent moral facts comes *first* in the order of justification, and there is little need for an elaborate contractual machinery for reasoning with others. To the contrary, contractualism asserts that a fair and careful reasoning procedure involving others is primary to arrive at and justify substantive moral beliefs and decisions. A correct procedure is primary, and the ground of ethics.

For many contractualists, morality is a natural social activity that is constructed by humans through contracting and deliberating. The contractarian approach either denies or does not use (or need) appeals to non-natural sources of moral authority such as God's will, or universal natural (moral) laws allegedly known through reason.⁶ Morality is a human invention and its source of authority is nothing more, and nothing less, than reasonable humans reaching agreement. Gauthier (2003: 91-93) advances this naturalism when, quoting Nietzsche, he says morality as traditionally understood (as knowledge of an objective, mind-independent moral order) will "perish" and this form of morality is already unable to address current moral issues.

Another feature is that the test is often regarded as hypothetical and ideal. On this view, contractualism is not an empirical theory about how people give reasons to each other. It is a normative and hypothetical theory about how humans *should* exchange reasons and what they, hypothetically, ought to agree to. The phrase "suitable conditions" in the test refers to the contractual assumption that any proposed procedure needs to build into its model such requirements as the capacity of participants to contract as moral equals and the fact that agents are reasonably well informed. The test's phrase "rational and reasonable" is another ideal requirement of contracting agents.

Finally, the generality of the test means that what the contractarian attitude implies about concrete moral issues is open ended, and up for debate. Using contractual procedures, contractualists differ on moral judgments about animal rights, abortion, foreign aid, human rights, and a myriad of other matters. For example, Hampton (2007) has argued that contractual thought, with its emphasis on distributive justice and the intrinsic worth of humans, is the ally of feminist moral theory.

1.2 Kinds of contractualism

Historically, contractual thought ranges from Plato's *Republic* written about 375 B.C. to Rawls's *Political Liberalism* (1991), some 2,300 years later, and beyond. Between Plato and Rawls, the list of contractualists is a virtual hall of fame for philosophy – Hobbes, Grotius, Pufendorf, Locke, Hume, Kant and Rousseau.

⁶ I use the qualifier "for many contractualists" since it is logically possible for someone to place contractual procedures within a religious or natural law perspective. For example, Locke's social contract theory is part of his commitment to a Christian view of the world and to natural law.

Sayre-McCord (2000: 247-48) notes how contractualism suffered a decline in popularity in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century due to the rise of utilitarianism and Marxism with substantive notions of political legitimacy, and criticisms of contractualism; and the rise of logical positivism with its view of ethical thinking as emotive and subjective. However, later in the 1900s, Sayre-McCord said there was a “dramatic resurgence in popularity” for contractualism as positivism, Marxism and utilitarianism declined and Rawls (1992) showed how contractualism could produce an important theory of justice.

Contractualism has taken two forms in terms of topic and two forms in terms of reasoning. In terms of topic, some contractualists are concerned to develop a theory of morality, while others are concerned to develop a political theory of government. Contractualism came into its own in the seventeenth and eighteenth century as a political theory that argued, against absolute monarchists, that legitimate government was based not on the divine right of monarchs but on a social contract that places limits on monarchs and government. It explained the origin of the contract as the passage from a state of nature to civil society, based on some agreement between citizens and rulers. The common theme was that citizens consented to government to reap the advantages of society, while requiring rulers to protect their basic liberties and rights. As a result, social contract theory is part of the history of liberal democracy and popular sovereignty.

In terms of reasoning, there is the Hobbesian and Kantian traditions that reflect, respectively, the distinction between reasoning from rational self-interest or reasoning from a broader, reasonable concern for fairness for all. Gauthier (1986), following the Hobbesian tradition, sees the establishment of agreements about moral or political rules as a rational bargaining from prevailing conditions, where each participant seeks to advance their own self-interest. Rational agents do accept some restraint on self-interest. Agents do not try to maximize their interests in bargaining. They seek an agreement where they do better off in the long run than if no agreement existed. We agree to follow moral agreements based on prudential, non-moral reasoning, not high-minded motivations such as love of humanity. We can think of this approach as a “hard-nosed” realism about agreements.

The Kantian approach, as found in Darwall, Rawls, and Scanlon, rejects the reduction of morality to rational self-interest. We should contract from a moral concern that takes the interests of others seriously, and seeks a fair and morally defensible agreement. It views all parties as free and equal citizens. This view is grounded in Kant’s categorical imperative (1997) to treat others as autonomous, rational beings who are not simply a means to my goals. Darwall defines contractualism as “mutually agreeable reciprocity or cooperation between equals” (2003: 1). Scanlon thinks of contracting as justifying our reasons to others: “An act is wrong,” he writes, “if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any set of principles for the general regulation of behavior that no one could reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced, general agreement” (1998: 153).

In the Kantian approach, the reasons put forward are not partial, private (or personal) or self-interested reasons, such as the view that the duty to repay debts does not apply to me since I am not wealthy. Contractual reasons are public and shared. They seek to be impartial and universal. Rawls (1992) requires that we test principles of justice by imagining an “original position” where contractors operate behind a “veil of ignorance” behind which they do not know what their place in such a society will be. Impartiality occurs because of a lack of self-knowledge.

For the Hobbesians, the Kantian approach is too idealistic, and unnecessarily so, since rational self-interest will do. For the Kantians, the Hobbesian approach can lead to unequal and immoral bargains, and it may not even count as an ethical theory since morality is not prudence.

In recent years, two developments are worthy of note. Contractual theory has received a substantial boost from scientific theories of how people cooperate. Game theory (Davis 1997) and rational choice theory (Hastie 2009) in economics has provided a more rigorous way of talking about how people make agreements and defect from agreements. As well, scholars have developed theories on the evolution of social cooperation, at the same time that anthropology and archeology provide increasing data on early societies. No longer are contractualists limited to philosophical speculation about states of nature long ago.

Meanwhile, a third tradition, deliberative or dialogic (Southwood 2010; Ward 2015a) contractarianism has developed that combines elements of the Hobbesian and Kantian traditions. It is fair deliberation among people considered as equals but the participants do not erect a veil of ignorance. They enter discussions aware of their interests and are allowed to put forward reasons from their perspectives. This dialogic contractualism is an extension of the non-metaphysical or “political” ethics of Rawls’s later work (1991), and the discourse ethics of Habermas (2001).

2 Variations

2.1 Transcending the state of nature

In political contractualism, contractualists agree on why humans chose to leave a state of nature for civil society, with agreements enforced by a powerful government. Our reason judges that we all are better off if we cooperate and restrain the pursuit of our interests so as to respect the interests of others. The coercive power of government ensures that people act reciprocally.

Yet political contractualists differ on the state of nature, and the resulting contract. Hobbes, taking a more pessimistic view of humans, warned that a state of nature inclines toward a state of war, where life is “nasty, brutish and short.” (1985: 63). People must choose between freedom or government, war or peace, and social

order requires an absolute sovereign. When people make their compact, they transfer their rights and liberties to the ruler.

Locke (1988) thought the state of nature was not so unpleasant and humans more sociable. In a state of nature, people were free and equal. They enjoyed the liberty to pursue interests and the right to defend oneself. Yet freedom, for Locke, is not license to do anything one desires. Our state-of-nature rights are limited by natural law. Locke agrees with Hobbes that the instability of the state of nature motivates humans to form civil society. But Locke argues, contra Hobbes, that people consent to a system of government *without* transferring their rights to a leviathan. The citizens maintain their liberties in civil society. They select a ruler as a servant of the people, protecting their property and their rights. Therefore, the people can withdraw their consent if government became a tyranny. Tyranny is a return to a state of nature. For Kant and Rousseau, the people come together to form a “general will” that is sovereign and legislates the rules of society. Through participation in the exercise of a general will, they consent to the laws made by their society. Citizens are co-legislators of the laws of their civil union.

2.2 Conventions and contractualism

Contractualists, such as Hobbes and Hume, think of morality as a set of agreed-upon rules they call conventions. Glaucon, at the start of Plato’s *Republic* (2007:41), was an early expression of conventionalism. Glaucon challenges Socrates to refute the popular view that people follow moral conventions to appear moral and trustworthy. They would follow their unbridled desires if they could get away with it. Support for morality is contingent and half-hearted. More recently, Gilbert Harman (1977) has made moral (or social) conventionalism a part of his relativistic moral theory.

The term “convention” stresses the constructed nature of moral rules, and contractualists are free to think of them as the outcome of contractual reasoning. However, we must be careful. The ideas of conventions and ‘social conventionalism’ are broader than the ideas of contractual agreement and contractualism. Many conventions are not moral but practical and legal, like the convention to drive on the right side of the road. Some conventions, such as not allowing black people to use public bathrooms reserved for white people, are immoral. Also, social conventionalism can be a non-critical form of relativism: morality consists of accepting existing conventions. What do we do if conventions collide or become questionable?

2.3 Impartiality

Contractualists differ on how contractual thinking can achieve impartiality, or reduce the influence of our partiality. We have seen how Rawls proposes a veil of ignorance to reduce partiality. Kant advanced the procedure of universalization, whereby we test

our practical maxims for partiality by seeing whether we could accept them as universal principles. Scanlon does not use the device of the veil of ignorance in an original position. Instead, he requires that agents justify their reasons as reasons that others could not reasonably reject. In assessing someone's reason, others attempt to place themselves in the person's shoes and see if it is valid.

3 Criticisms and worries

The following is a sample of problems and criticisms of contractualism. I do not attempt to provide answers to the worries. In the final section, it will become apparent that I think that some of these worries are valid.

Actual, hypothetical, or heuristic?

One of the oldest and most common worry about contract theory is that a legitimizing social contract, as Hobbes or Locke describe, never occurred. There is no clear historical record of people in many countries, long ago, consenting to leave the state of nature. No evidence of explicit, actual consent. This led contractualists, like Locke, to talk of tacit consent, and others, such as Hume and Kant, to interpret the social contract as a striking but hypothetical thought-experiment of what principles would gain the consent of rational people.

But not all thinkers backed away from the notion of states of nature. Locke argued that there *was* evidence of simple, pre-civil, human associations, similar to a state of nature, in the far-flung lands of America. He noted that when nations fall into civil war, as England had, a state of nature can return when central authority is absent. He argued that consent can be given tacitly or explicitly. Deciding to continue to reside in one's country is a form of tacit consent to its government. Also, Locke supported explicit oaths of allegiance for officials and clergy. For his part, Hume (1987: 480) said it was futile and unnecessary to go in search of a written contract because such contracts had evolved gradually before written history.

Kant and Rawls defend hypothetical reasoning as a common normative technique. Kant, in developing his theory of the state (2006:51), thought that reference to an original contract is a heuristically useful device, but it is not necessary to defend a state based on consent. Rawls thought his hypothetical "original position" was a heuristic for testing principles of justice.

3.1 Is contractualism committed to social or cultural relativism?

The extent to which any morality extends beyond a culture or national border is a complex problem for all of morality. In contractualism, talk of the legitimacy of agreements often presumes the contractors are citizens *within* a society or group. Certainly,

Hobbes' and Locke's social compact theories were intended to legitimize political arrangements for individual countries. Rawls (1991) said that any attempt to reach an overlapping consensus on political principles aims to articulate principles for a certain type of society, i.e., democratic. Deliberation must start from a specific political culture. Otherwise, we lack common values and principles as a starting point. Does this entail that the reasonableness or truth of moral beliefs are relative to culture or nation? Some philosophers think contractualism is an approach that can be used to provide principle for global ethics. For example, Pogge (2008) has sought to construct a global moral theory, building on Rawls's contractualism.

3.2 Redundancy, pluralism, incompleteness

Other criticisms question contractualism as an account of moral thinking. Is contractualism the real source of our moral judgments, or is it redundant? Is the Holocaust evil because it fails the contractarian test? Or is it evil because it violates substantive moral principles against murder, genocide and the evil of afflicting great pain? In other words, do we form moral judgments based on non-contractarian grounds? If so, contract thinking is redundant. It is not doing any real work in moral thinking.

Another worry is whether contractarianism is too tidy in being monistic. Contractualists seem to think that all moral questions can be tested by one (contractualist) approach. Scanlon (1998) concedes that there are limits. He says his contractualism applies only to that part of morality that deals with what we owe to each other. Also, are there cases where contractarianism is unhelpful and we need to resort to other moral approaches? Consider the famous trolley example (Foot 1978) where you can divert a trolley on to a side track and kill one person, or you can let it continue onward and kill five people. Contractualism seems to offer no basis for a decision. One could argue that most people would rightly divert the trolley to the side track, killing one person. But this conclusion does not seem to follow from contractualism but from consequential reasoning – a sort of utilitarianism that aggregates goods to make a decision.

In terms of completeness, contractualism has traditionally defined the parties to the contract as normal and rational people. But does this leave some people (or groups) outside the contract? Initially, Locke, Hobbes and Kant excluded women, citizens who did not own property and other categories. More recently, Nussbaum (2007) has criticized Rawls's model of contracting for apparently excluding future generations, the handicapped and animals.

4 Contractualism in journalism ethics

In the introduction I noted that morality as agreement has been attractive to journalism as a social practice. The meaning of "attractive" is crucial. Contractualism

has influenced journalism ethics by providing theoretical and practical premises for moral thinking. The premises can be implicit or explicit.

4.1 Theoretical premises

Explicit premises: When discussing moral theory, writers and journalists have, and still do, refer to contractualism in whole or in part. Ideas of social contract theory serve as premises for their theorizing. Also, the social contract is used as an analogy that helps to explain, literally or metaphorically, the contract that journalists have with their audiences and publics.

Implicit premises: In discussions of journalism ethics, one can detect a contractual frame of mind not far below the surface of the words, even if the writer does not refer to contractualism.

4.2 Practical premises

Contractual ideas play an implicit or explicit role when journalists defend a specific, controversial story, justify a practice, or explain their code of ethics by arguing that the action honors or at least does not violate journalism's contract, or the expectations of the public.

What are the main contexts where contractualism plays a role in journalism ethics? The main contexts are (a) expressing the moral aims and social functions of journalism; (b) explaining the nature and authority of codes of ethics, and justifying the norms in the code; (c) justifying institutional and legal measures to keep news media accountable and responsible, such as press councils and news ombudsmen; and (d) justifying an editorial decision or practice.

4.3 Historical influence

One way to grasp the influence of contractualism is to review the history of journalism ethics. The idea of a social contract has played an important part in at least three notable developments: the development of a "public ethic" for the growing daily newspapers in the eighteenth century Enlightenment public sphere; the ethical "restraining" of the nineteenth century libertarian press, and the creation of the first professional codes of journalism ethics in the first half of the twentieth century.⁷ The idea of a social agreement between a free press and society could not gain traction

7 For a detailed treatment of these eras, see Ward 2015b, especially Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

until countries began to leave behind authoritarian forms of society with strict censorship laws. By the eighteenth century, a public ethic for the press was constructed amid the growing size, audacity, and power of the daily newspaper press. Discussions of the press borrowed ideas from theories of the social contract to support the Enlightenment public sphere. Newspapers called themselves “public watchdog,” “tribunal of the people,” “instrument of public opinion,” and “bulwark” of the public’s liberty.

By the end of the 1700s, the press had constitutional guarantees of freedom in the French and American constitutions – a legal recognition of their social role. Edmund Burke, theorist of the British constitution, rose in Parliament to talk about a new player in democracy – a fourth estate, as a voice of public opinion. This was a new player in the social contract.

In the nineteenth century, the public ethic of journalism was developed into the libertarian theory of the press (1984). The press was to promote liberal society with its two free marketplaces – of ideas and of the economy. Drawing ideas from John Stuart Mill and others, libertarian theory defined journalism’s public role as the provision of a public forum where a free clash of ideas allowed truth to emerge and allowed public opinion to critique government. An independent press, representing the people, must be maximally free from government control.

Libertarianism, however, was suspicious of talk of journalism’s ethical duties and social restraints. Just make the press free, and the marketplace of ideas will, somehow, produce a serious, accurate and independent press. William Peter Hamilton, publisher of the *Wall Street Journal*, said: “A newspaper is a private enterprise owing nothing whatever to the public, which grants it no franchise. It is therefore affected with no public interest. It is emphatically the property of the owner, who is selling a manufactured product at his own risk”⁸ Libertarian theory erred in thinking that freedom of the press was sufficient for the press to fulfill its contractual role in society. By the late 1800s, the free press had become a commercial mass medium that was large, powerful, sensational, organized into chains of papers, influenced by business interests and used by press barons as instruments for their own political and economic interests. Was such a press really fulfilling its social contract?

To regain public confidence, journalists in the United States and elsewhere in the early 1900s began forming professional associations, such as the Society of Professional Journalists. They constructed codes of ethics. Journalists declared that they owed the public adherence to such principles of independence, objectivity, accuracy and serving the public, first. The contractual theme of “owing” something to the public was picked up by major newspapers. Joseph Pulitzer said that his *St. Louis Post and Dispatch* would “serve no party but the people ... no organ Republicanism but the organ of truth.” After taking over *The New York Times* in the late 1890s, Adolph S. Ochs

⁸ Quoted in Peterson (1984: 73)

issued his first, and most famous, editorial that said the *Times* would “give the news impartially, without fear or favor, regardless of party, sect or interests involved.”⁹ This was the paper’s contract with its readers.

In the early 1900s, the first journalism schools and textbooks appeared. The language of duties based on a contract with the public was common. In 1905, Walter Williams, the first dean of the University of Missouri’s School of Journalism, composed the “Journalist’s Creed,” which made the journalism aims sound like a religious calling: “I believe in the profession of journalism. I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of their responsibilities, trustees for the public.” In the late 1940s, the influential Hutchings Commission on the American Press made popular the “social responsibility theory of the press” as an alternative to libertarian theory (Peterson 1984). Social responsibility amounted to a list of public duties, e.g., to provide a rich forum of opinion. The commission made it clear that, if the press continued to fail to live up to its social duties, then government or some other agency might step in to ensure that it did.

Similar contractual issues were behind a number of royal commissions on the power of the press in Canada and Britain in the mid- to late-1900s. It led the news industry to set up press councils and news ombudsman by the 1980s. The idea of journalism self-regulation through codes and accountability mechanisms was based on the hope that journalists could, by themselves, make sure they were performing according to their social contract.

4.4 Codes and councils

Today, the language of public duty is widely employed. Consider this series of preambles to codes of ethics and press councils around the world:

- From the Society of Professional Journalists in the United States:
Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. Ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough. An ethical journalist acts with integrity.
- From Rwanda’s media council:
We, journalists and other media professionals of Rwanda, Convinced that the free flow of information and public’s blossoming constitute the foundation of freedom, democracy and development ... Drawing lessons from the media’s social role in Rwanda; Aware of the evolution of the Rwandan Society; Have adopted

⁹ Quoted in Tiftt and Jones (1999: xix).

this Code of Ethics spelling out the obligations and rights of journalists and media professionals in Rwanda.

- From the British Press Council:
A society which can expect decent standards from its press. Where publishers have the freedom to report stories in the public interest without fear of retribution from those with more political or financial power. Where people who are harmed by the press can get redress without the risk of huge legal costs. And where truly independent press regulation – without influence from government or business – can build a sense of trust between the public and the press.
- From the Swedish Press Council:
The far-reaching freedom of expression and freedom of the press we have in Sweden puts a huge responsibility on the individual newspapers, responsible publishers and editors of newspapers and other media. Freedom must be used with great care. Therefore, it is important that the press has its own code of ethics, in addition to the laws.

What all of these codes have in common is the belief that there must be a balancing of the freedom to publish with the responsible use of this freedom. “Responsible” is defined, in large part, as reasonable norms and restraints acceptable to the public in question. No doubt, other ethical views, other than contractualism, are at work in the codes. But it is difficult to understand these statements unless one presumes a contractual frame of mind.

5 Theoretical applications of contractualism

Contractualism plays a role today in theoretical discussions of journalism ethics. For example, in a work on normative media ethics, Christians and colleagues (2009) take their theoretical bearings from the contractual idea of what the media *should* do to fulfill the informational and other needs of citizens in democracies. Media scholars such as Helle Sjoavaag (2010) have drawn attention to the importance of contractualism in explaining journalism ethics, calling it one of the earliest principles of the press and noting how journalists use it to defend their institutional power. Sjoavaag sees contractualism as a “metaphoric agreement” between the institution of the press and their audiences that make up the public sphere. If journalists fail to live up to their contractual agreements, the public can impose sanctions via press complaints commissions and so on.

Thomas Hanitzsch has argued that the blurring of the definition of journalism to include not just professionals but amateurs threatens to terminate journalism’s social contract. Since journalism is widely recognized as a public good, there is a need to find new funding models for “public journalism.” He writes: “Journalism’s social

contract, and the normative expectations that come with it, become meaningless if we dissolve the idea of what journalism stands for” (2013: 205). Most recently, Slattery (2016) has sought to provide a moral framework to understand and compare codes of ethics. Codes can be conceptually messy, so a strategy is necessary to disentangle the ideas. In particular, we need to be aware of how the list of duties and rules in the codes reflect almost every type of moral theory, including contractual thought.

6 The future of journalism contractualism

Is journalism contractualism, with its origin in a pre-digital press, still relevant for today’s evolving journalism, which is digital and global, and practiced by citizens and non-professionals? With whom does the public contract if practitioners are members of a diffuse and global collection of professional reporters, citizen bloggers, and political groups? Secondly, does journalism contractualism, originally conceived of as agreements within nations, have anything to say to the ethics of global journalism? These are difficult issues for journalism ethics as a whole. Even if we cannot provide the definitive answers to these questions today, we can identify the new theorizing that should occur. The overall task for journalism ethics is to create a digital global ethics. The task breaks down into two daunting projects.¹⁰

Creation of an integrated digital media ethics: Contractualism needs to show how it can help journalists revise media codes so that norms provide guidance for responsible digital journalists. The pre-digital ethical framework on which journalism ethics was constructed is no longer sufficient. A new framework needs to be constructed that integrates professional and citizen journalism, and applies to traditional and new forms of journalism. Old principles, such as impartiality, will have to be reinterpreted. New principles will have to be invented.

Creation of a global media ethics: Digital journalism is now global in scope and impact. Global impact implies global responsibilities. Yet past and existing codes of ethics are contracts with local or national publics. A global media ethics would add a global element to the nation-based aims of journalism.¹¹ A global ethics would introduce cosmopolitan ethical principles such as the promotion of human rights and human flourishing. A global ethics would provide guidelines on how to cover complex global issues from terrorism to immigration.¹²

¹⁰ I have discussed these projects at length in Ward 2015a.

¹¹ One can think of a future global ethics as either an additional element or as a radical new way to approach journalism ethics, such as making the global aims and principles primary in the definition of journalism and its contractual responsibilities. I opt for this more radical approach (Ward 2015a).

¹² For an example of a global media code see Ward 2015a, Appendix.

Given these two tasks, what is the challenge to contractualism? It is the challenge of digital and global contracting. It is the challenge of a new multi-media, multi-societal contract that defines responsible journalism. Contractualists need to show that its procedures for reasonable deliberation, and the testing of proposed principles, can be successfully employed to develop an integrated digital journalism ethics, with a global perspective. This entails that it is possible to bring “rational and reasonable” journalists, groups, and members of the public from different cultures together to recognize certain aims and norms as the basis for a new ethic.

The contractual test must be explicitly applied to journalism: The test could read: *Might these journalism principles (values, aims), in suitable conditions, be agreed to by rational and reasonable journalists and members of the public as correct moral norms to guide digital, global journalism? Are these principles sufficient to ground a fair media contract between digital journalists and a global public?*

Also, it is possible, in advance, to state some basic conditions for the deliberations:

Condition #1: Equality: How ever the deliberations are organized, it must be clear that all parties will be treated as equals, and discussions will be open to a plurality of forms of journalism and journalism cultures. This is the journalistic version of the Kantian stress on treating others with respect.

Condition #2: Transcendence of partiality: In accord with the deliberative model of contracting, noted earlier, parties will not pretend to a veil of ignorance but speak from their places in the world. Yet parties will be asked to listen carefully to the perspectives of others. Impartiality will be the pragmatic, context-based result of people reasoning together.

Condition #3: Inclusion of public: The contracting should include a representative sample of (non-journalistic) members of the public, as recognition that the public, as part of the contract, are part of the negotiations by right. They must be given a meaningful role in discussions, and not simply asked for feedback after journalists draft a code.

Condition #4: An initial notion of good journalism: Rawls is correct to note that contracting must start from somewhere – some “materials” in the form of common values. Given the plurality of media cultures, this is perhaps the most serious limiting condition. Procedurally, all that can be done is that discussions *start* from some proposed conception of journalism painted in broad strokes, that has a reasonable chance of being accepted by most parties. It may change as discussion continues. I suggest that contractors begin with a conception of democratic public journalism, based on what publics in various countries need from their media (Ward 2015a).

Condition #5: Multiple realization of principles: Even if a new contract identifies a set of principles, the agreement should recognize that media cultures have the freedom

to interpret such general principles as social responsibility and freedom of the press in terms of their own culture and conditions. This does not mean that *any* interpretation would be consistent with the new contract. A media culture that places draconian restrictions on freedom of expression would violate the agreement. But it is entirely reasonable that transitioning democracies such as South Africa might define the social responsibilities of media differently than in the United States.

Condition #6: A global theory of the good: Contracting for digital, global media will need more than a notion of good journalism. It will have to show how this approach to journalism promotes basic moral goods. In particular, a global ethic will need to show how good journalism promotes global values such as human rights and global social justice. Without a guiding theory of the good, it is difficult, and probably impossible, to decide whether a proposed media principle is correct for global journalism.

With this condition, I mark my departure from some forms of contractarian thinking. I regard contracting (and the contractual test) as an important part of a full moral theory. But it is only one part. I am a holist, not a monist, in ethics. I believe that moral thinking employs a plurality of approaches, which includes consequential thinking, considerations of moral character (virtue theory), and deontological notions of duty and right. Contracting, on my view, asks what would rational and reasonable people agree upon if they competently and carefully considered any proposed principle with regard to the three great themes of ethics: the good, the right and the virtuous. I agree with the previously mentioned notion that moral principles should be tested by contractual thinking, and that contractual theory recognizes substantive values. But my view is that we need to give substantive ethics an even greater role in contractual thinking.

This is because the source of ethics is three-fold: our experience of things of great value and goodness (or evil); our experience of fairness and justice in the interactions of people, which is the source of contractual thought; and finally, our desire to be people of moral character and virtue. All of these considerations should be part of the contractual process, making it a rich reflective process, and not as it sometimes appears – a narrow, formal test. The contracting process should be formal and substantive, from start to finish.

These are demanding conditions. Therefore, we should frankly acknowledge that attempts to reach a new digital and global media contract may fail, or may be realized only in part. Yet, the effort to construct new contracts, even if they only have impact on regions of the world, is worthwhile.

It is important for contractualists to be constantly aware of the possibility of persistent and unresolvable disagreement in ethics and journalism ethics. Too often, contractualism is put forward in a manner that seems naïve. All we need is to bring some reasonable people together and figure out what is fair for all. This underestimates the difficulty in identifying the rational and reasonable people in any major dispute – in

fact, many people will think that those who disagree with them are unreasonable. It underestimates the many sources of reasonable disagreement in morals and politics, even after we have settled on the main facts of the case. Contractualists need to be realistic about the limits of deliberative democracy and ethics in a world of competing interests. In particular, contractualism needs a theory of reasonable disagreement.¹³

7 Conclusion

Despite these challenges, contractualism in philosophy and in journalism ethics remains a vibrant form of moral reasoning with potential. Indeed, contractualism as a moral theory in media ethics is underdeveloped. It will remain relevant as a moral approach because it is deep and it resonates with the nature of our world today. It is deep because, despite references to hypothetical states of nature, contractualists have always been involved with the most real and pressing problems of morality in their era. Hobbes and Locke did not idly dream up a social contract theory for no practical reason. The likely return to a state of nature in their own times, after a bloody English civil war, and the need to develop a new theory of government was desperately needed.

Contractualism resonates because it presumes a world of plural and intersecting groups with their different ideas about what is good or right. This is our world. An ethics that stresses fair agreement based on mutual respect is a plausible approach. Moreover, contractualism is relevant because it addresses one of the most basic questions of morality: Why be moral? Why do humans follow rules and what is the justification? It also asks: How do humans surmount their narrow partiality and find a more peaceful, impartial manner of cooperating? One of the strengths of contractualism is its attempt to take serious both aspects of our lives – our partialities and our desire to be fair and impartial. The capacity of humans to find new ways to contract amid diversity will determine the prospects for peace, the protection of human rights, and the future of the human species.

Further reading

Contractualism as a moral theory has a long history and therefore an enormous literature. Moreover, important concepts are embedded in larger works on political and

¹³ For a conception of the nature and causes of reasonable disagreement see McMahon (2009) The literature on contracting and deliberative democracy is vast. Some places to start are McMahon (2001), Gutmann and Thomson (1996) and Goodin (2003).

social philosophy. However, readers can gain a perspective on the origins of contractualism by reading several classics such as the “Of Man” section in Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, John Locke’s description of government by assent in the second part of *Two Treatises of Government*, and Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*. The three philosophers provide different descriptions of the origin of political society from a state of nature. For influential modern classics, see John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice* (1972), especially Chapter 1. Also, David Gauthier’s *Morals by Agreement* (1986) is essential reading.

Explicit and full-length discussions of the application of contractualism in journalism and media are less abundant and scattered. Often, works imply but do not explicitly refer to, or develop, underlying contractual ideas. For example, contractual ideas appear to be implied by some major codes of journalism ethics, such as the code for the Society of Professional Journalists <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>. Such codes suggest that ethics is a contract between journalists and society. Journalists agree to responsibly use the freedom to publish. In addition, theories on the social responsibility of the press can be regarded as at least consistent with contractual views of ethics and the media. On the relationship of contractualism and social responsibility theory, the reader can consult Peterson’s “The Social Responsibility Theory of the Press” (1984) and “Social Responsibility Worldwide,” by Clifford G. Christians and Kaarle Nordenstreng in *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 19, no. 1(2004): 3-28. For the use of contractualism in global media ethics see Ward’s *Radical Media Ethics* (2015a).

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Erin Schauster

6 Moral Psychology

Abstract: Moral psychology is the study of moral agency, which has been applied by media ethicists to understand the moral reasoning, motivations and behaviors of media students and workers such as journalists, advertising and public relations practitioners. The history of moral psychology begins with the seminal work of Jean Piaget and extends into the six stages of moral development proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg. The prevailing measure of moral reasoning relative to Kohlberg's six stages is the Defining Issues Test (DIT), developed by James Rest, which activates and accesses moral schemas ascending from acknowledging authority and avoiding punishment, to rationalizing decisions based upon principles of justice, reciprocity and respect. Additional methods employed include the Journalists' Ethical Reasoning Instrument (JERI), a measure of moral reasoning much like the DIT; Forsyth Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ), a measure of ethical ideologies; and Ethical Motivation Scale (EMS), which determines motives for ethical decision making. However, moral reasoning is understood as an interlocking system, dependent upon social interaction occurring within and influenced by one's environmental context, which presents limitations for these measures. In response to these limitations, proposed new pathways for media ethics research evaluate moral development relative to professional environments, life experiences, and emerging practices.

Keywords: moral psychology, moral reasoning, moral development, Defining Issues Test (DIT), life story interview, moral exemplar, organizational culture, socialization

... when a child encounters marbles for the first time, [the child] is already convinced that certain rules apply to these new objects. And this is why the origins of consciousness of rules, even in so restricted a field as that of a game of marbles, are conditioned by the child's moral life as a whole. (Piaget 1965: 53)

Now it appears that the most helpful thing you can do for a person's moral judgment isn't necessarily getting them into college, but is just to get them out of high school. ... In any case, much more detailed analysis of specific experiences and how they are linked to changes in moral thinking is necessary. (Rest et al. 1977: 17)

It remains rudimentary in that the field [of media ethics] has not articulated a theory that accounts for the range of influences that encourage or prevent moral action. (Plaisance 2015: 1)

As the excerpts suggest, moral psychologists are concerned with the cognitive development of a child's moral reasoning and moral judgment, first observed during the game of marbles, which was shown to advance into adulthood. Since the seminal works, moral psychology has been applied to the study of media ethics, yet there

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-006>

is much more work to be done. According to present day media ethicist and moral philosopher, moral psychology is defined as “the study of the intersection of behavior, motivations and questions about our moral agency” (Plaisance 2015: 14), which provides a founding framework, of theory and method, to empirically explore questions of moral motivation, reasoning and behavior among media workers such as journalists, public relations and advertising practitioners. The purpose of this chapter is to outline a brief history of moral psychology, discuss methodological approaches and key findings in moral psychology studies of media ethics, and propose new pathways for future research.

1 Moral development theories and methods

While there might not be agreement on one picture of moral development, as suggested by Goree (2000), media ethicists studying moral psychology should begin their inquiry reviewing the seminal works of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Piaget observed young children to understand how rules governed their play as well as their consciousness of these rules, which he argued represented stages of moral reasoning governed by the concepts of cooperation and autonomy. Extending the idea of consciousness, Kohlberg was interested in the moral rationale one gives to justify judgment and action, resulting in three levels and six stages of moral development ending with principles of justice, reciprocity and respect. An explanation of each theory¹ and methodological applications follows.

1.1 Piaget and the game of marbles

Piaget’s (1965) work in child psychology analyzed the “hows” of moral development by observing children and how they learn from adults while playing social games, e.g., boys playing marbles. He suggested that all morality consists of a system of rules, leading to the observation of children’s “*practice*” of rules and their related “*consciousness*” of rules (1965; emphasis in original). Unlike Kohlberg, who’s work will be discussed shortly, Piaget stressed the means in which children traversed stages occurring along a continuum, allowing them to move from one to the next, forward and back.

Piaget is credited with some of the early theoretical and methodological advancements in moral psychology. According to Rest (1979), Piaget introduced methods

¹ While the work summarized here is referred to as theory, Jean Piaget’s credited with the theory of cognitive development, which was later extended by both himself and Lawrence Kohlberg to explore and understand moral reasoning and moral development.

such as the presentation of an episode or story to evoke discussion and explanation, and the observation of children's game behavior. "Piaget identified a dozen specific features in children's moral thinking for making inferences about their underlying thought structure" (Rest 1979: 6) and used empirical data to justify a younger child's more primitive thinking to an older child's more developed thinking. Wilkins and Coleman (2005a) noted the practical nature of Piaget's work, which they suggested encourages the exploration of moral decision making in a professional setting. The proposed exploration extends Piaget's assertion that organism-environmental interactions impact moral development (Kohlberg 1969; Waters and Carmichael 2008), an assertion which will be discussed later in "Methods" and again in "New pathways."

According to Piaget (1965), in practice there are four stages summarized as 1) simple, individual regularity, 2) egocentrism and the imitation of seniors, 3) cooperation, and 4) interest in the rules for their own sake. Consciousness occurs in three stages. In the first stage, rules are not yet coercive or obligatory in character, but are seen as intriguing and are unconsciously enacted. During stage two, rules originate from adults and are regarded as sacred and unchangeable. During stage three, a rule is developed by mutual consent and perceived as law, which one must respect if one wants to be perceived as loyal.

In practice, the first stage embodies motor skills and individual character leading to more or less ritualized schemas versus collective rules. The second stage is egocentric and depicts intermediate behavior between purely individual and purely socialized behavior. Piaget suggested that play within the second stage favors motor pleasure versus social interaction, and that while each child feels to be in communion with the group, each is concerned with only himself. While a child in this stage can imitate an example of codified rules, he continues to play alone, without trying to play with others or without trying to win. Cooperation, the third stage, begins around the ages of seven and eight when children start to exhibit social interest depicted by a desire to win complemented by a concern for unifying rules. During this stage, children might attempt to reach an agreement but are still uncertain of and unable to articulate the concept of rules. During the final stage, codification of rules, which begins around ages 11 and 12, rules are known and the associated details are fixed so that reciprocity is ensured during game play. Children focus on and are interested in regulating the game with a system of rules as well as competing. The game has therefore become social, and real cooperation exists.

Regarding the consciousness of stages, during the first two stages (rules are received unconsciously and rules are sacred, respectively), a child self-assigns schemas of action that are voluntary versus obligatory. A child is permeated with rules and regulations dependent upon the environment where some things are allowed and others are not. Piaget suggests that it is quite possible that when a child encounters marbles for the first time, he is already convinced that certain rules apply. He further argues "this is why the origins of consciousness of rules, even in so restricted a field as that of a game of marbles, are conditioned by the child's moral life as a

whole” (1965: 53). This view is supported by the second stage in practice when a child may still be engaged in egocentric play, but begins to imitate rules by observing others. While egocentric, social elements influence play, which becomes prosocial and cooperative, yet is still constrained by adults. Therefore, Piaget suggests that the social relations of constraint and cooperation must be distinguished. Constraint suggests that a unilateral respect of authority and prestige exists. Cooperation suggests that individuals are on equal footing through interaction. Further supporting cooperation, in the third stage of consciousness, changes to the rules can occur if consensus is reached among those playing. However, rules that give precedence to easy winning, that negate work or skill, are deemed worthless and the child relies on the agreement of others to “eliminate these immoral innovations” (1965: 65).

The “moral organization,” as elaborated by Piaget (1965), underscored the importance of several related concepts, including constraint and heteronomy, as well as cooperation and autonomy, which together illustrate two types of morality. The early stages of development depict constraint and heteronomy, when rules are imposed upon the younger children by adults and by older children. This is a time when rules appear sacred, untouchable and immutable. Thereafter, a rule is no longer perceived as coercive but adaptable to the tendencies of the group, built up progressively and autonomously. As one advances in the stages of moral development, one develops autonomy. Wilkins and Coleman highlighted the importance of autonomy to Piaget’s work and noted that philosophers recognize that “genuine ethical action begins with an autonomous moral agent” (2005a: 4).

Furthermore, cooperation leads to reciprocity between children, representing moral universality and generosity. As they develop, children learn that rules are a necessary condition for agreement and reciprocity, and they begin to eliminate compromising variables. Cooperation is closely linked to justice as well: justice is defined by equality and is inseparable from reward and punishment. In early stages of development, children see punishment as the necessary condition for justice, or a means for putting things right. Kohlberg, “following Socrates, Kant and Piaget,” offers the idea “that the first virtue of a person, school, or society is justice – interpreted in a democratic way as equity or equal respect for all people” (1981: xiii) and argues, much like Dewey, that justice is a “pattern of equilibrium or harmony in a group or society” that underlies the stages of moral development (1981: xiii).

1.2 Kohlberg and post-conventional thinking

Kohlberg, like Piaget, was interested in understanding moral development. However, unlike Piaget, who focused on moral judgments, Kohlberg concentrated on moral justifications (Liebert, 1984). Moral justifications are “the explanations or rationale that a subject offers to justify his or her moral judgment or moral conduct in a

given situation, usually elicited by the question, ‘why?’” (Liebert 1984: 180). Kohlberg was also interested in moral socialization (1969; 1981) and believed that “exposure to others more mature than ourselves helps to stimulate maturity in our own value process” (1981: 14).

Kohlberg was strongly opposed to moral relativism and responded by conceptualizing culturally universal stages of moral development. For example, he noted that while two people might make different decisions, the decisions are based upon the same basic moral values (Kohlberg 1981). According to Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau and Thoma (1999), Kohlberg viewed moral philosophy as a social phenomenon, one embedded in the particular experiences and deliberations of a community. In fact, he was so invested in the concept of community that he later set up democracy-based school programs, known as the Cluster School to build a sense of community that promoted democratic values (Walsh 2000).

Regarding the theory of stages of moral development, Kohlberg extended upon Piaget’s stages, which he referred to as the “structural approach to moral development” (1981: 16). The structural approach to moral development assumes that basic mental structures are the result of an interaction occurring equally between tendencies of the organism and structures of the external world (Kohlberg 1969). Media ethics scholars continue to explore this assumption, which will be discussed shortly in “Methods.”

By studying 75 American boys, beginning in early adolescence, Kohlberg “constructed the typology of definite and universal levels of development in moral thought” characterized by three “distinct” levels with two related stages therein, which present “separate moral philosophies, distinct views of the social-moral world” (1981: 16). The three distinct levels are pre-conventional; conventional; and post-conventional, or the autonomous and principled level. Unlike Piaget, Kohlberg suggested one advances from one to subsequent stages. Stage change has been found to advance gradually and without significant regressions (Snaryey, Reimer and Kohlberg: 1985). At the pre-conventional level, a child goes through the stages of punishment and obedience orientation (1), followed by instrumental relativist orientation (2). At this level, a child acknowledges that rules exist and can label actions as good and bad, right and wrong. Within the first stage, authority is valued and punishment is avoided. Within the second stage, “right action consists of that which instrumentally satisfied one’s needs and occasionally the needs of others” (1981: 17). At the conventional level, an individual goes through stages of interpersonal concordance (3), followed by societal maintenance orientation (4). At this level, an individual maintains expectations and conforms to a social order, which is intrinsically valued despite the consequences. Within stage three, good behavior is that which the group approves of and that which pleases or helps others. Within stage four, the social order agreed upon is maintained by doing one’s duty, following rules, and respecting authority. At the post-conventional level, an individual goes through stages of social contract orientation (5), followed by universal ethical principle orientation (6). At this level, there is “clear

effort to define moral values and principles that have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or people holding these principles and apart from the individual's own identification with these groups" (1981: 18). Just as with Piaget, autonomy is also essential to Kohlberg's theory; it's important for individuals to feel autonomous to attain the post-conventional stage of moral development (Kohlberg 1981). In this level, stage five closely mirrors American democracy in that laws govern actions, but the possibility of changing laws exists. While individuals work to achieve consensus, they each work from an awareness of personal values and opinions. By stage six, ethical principles of justice, reciprocity and respect are chosen because of their comprehensive and universal nature.

1.3 Rest and the Defining Issues Test (DIT)

Lawrence Kohlberg and James Rest worked together at Harvard, until Rest left for Minnesota, thereafter constituting the Harvard and Minnesota methods for measuring moral development (Rest 1979). Kohlberg praised Rest's work as a paradigm, defined as "sufficient agreement in a field on a) problems requiring explanation, b) theoretical assumptions for such explanations, c) methods of measurement, and d) types of study design so that different researchers can do studies leading to similar conclusions" with meaningful results (Rest 1979: xi). In the foreword of Rest's book, *Development in Judging Moral Issues*, Kohlberg stated "the findings reported here support Rest's belief that his linking a cognitive-developmental moral judgment theory with an elaboration of a method defines a paradigm in the study of morality ..." (xi-xii). Today, the Defining Issues Test (DIT) is run by The University of Alabama's Center for the Study of Ethical Development.

The DIT is designed to work as a developmental measure of moral comprehension and preference (Rest et al. 1977). The measure works by "activating moral schemas (to the extent the person has developed them) and for assessing them in terms of importance judgments" (Rest et al. 1999: 6). The DIT utilizes a standardized format and objective scoring, resulting in what's called the P score, that makes comparisons of moral development possible (Rest et al. 1977). When taking the DIT, a subject reads a scenario depicting an ethical dilemma and then reads 12 statements, which must be rated on a scale of great importance to no importance, and then must rank the top four most important considerations out of the twelve. To account for the random selection of stages, or selection based upon the style and complexity of statements, the DIT incorporates meaningless statements; if these are chosen by respondents in specific frequency (see the DIT manual for frequencies), their questionnaires are thrown out. Since its inception, the DIT has been condensed from a six- (DIT-1) to a five- (DIT-2), as well as a three-scenario (DIT-1 short form) measure and is offered online as well as in its original paper form.

To establish validity and generality, the DIT has remained unchanged² (Rest et al. 1999). The DIT is often administered to small, convenience samples that Coleman and Wilkins (2002) justified with the criteria set forth by Riffe, Lacy and Fico (1998): material is difficult to obtain, there are limited resources, and it's an under-researched area. Rest, his coauthors, and others have applied the DIT to approximately 1,000 studies (S. Thoma, personal communication, April 10, 2017), including those using cross-sectional design, large composite samples, and different subsamples for each age and education grouping resulting in the “mega sample” of 45,856 DIT scores (Rest et al. 1999: 64).

In their earlier work, moral development was positively correlated with age and education based upon cross-sectional and longitudinal data (Rest et al. 1977). Rest and colleagues later found that formal education is more predictive of moral reasoning than age. The authors also considered the “cumulative impact” that “stimulating social experiences” have on development, encouraging further exploration of life experiences (1999: 125). In media ethics research, the DIT has been applied to understand the moral reasoning of journalists (e.g., Coleman and Wilkins 2002; Plaisance 2014; 2015; Wilkins and Coleman 2005a; Wilkins and Coleman 2005b), public relations practitioners (e.g., Coleman and Wilkins 2009; Lieber 2008; Plaisance 2014; 2015), advertising and marketing research practitioners (e.g., Castleberry, French and Carlin 1993; Cunningham 2005), as well as of public relations and journalism undergraduates (e.g., Cabot 2005). A review of these and related works follows.

1.3.1 DIT and media ethics education

Before the DIT, media ethics curriculum had been evaluated by measures such as the Ethics Position Questionnaire (e.g., Plaisance 2007), the Moral Judgment Test (e.g., Canary 2007), Rokeach's value systems (e.g., Surlin 1987), and a survey of perceptions post-graduation (e.g., Gale and Bunton 2005). These earlier works suggested that students' moral reasoning progressed as a result of taking the course. For example, in their survey of advertising and public relations professionals, Gale and Bunton (2005) found that those who attended an ethics class in college were made more aware of ethical problems on the job (86%) and better informed about professional codes of conduct (50%).

Since then, the DIT has produced varying results. Cabot (2005) compared moral reasoning of public relations students to that of journalism students, and questioned the impact college education has on moral reasoning. The study resulted in P scores for undergraduate students enrolled in public relations ($P=31.17$), broadcast

² As noted, logistical changes have been made such as offering online and paper forms, but there have been no alterations related to the underlying methodological or theoretical principles.

journalism ($P=28.84$) and print journalism ($P=33.60$), with no significant differences between journalism and public relations, and none for gender. Compared to previous DIT scores, however, these students demonstrated lower moral reasoning than junior high school students, prison inmates and adults in general, and the author suggested that this might be attributed to the changes in education since the early use of the DIT. Cabot (2005) argued that education at the time was more focused on employment post-graduation. Also, Cabot noted that participants were enrolled in college courses at a predominately commuter school, which might affect the socialization process that Rest (1988) suggested occurs when a student lives on campus and participates in traditional college activities.

Auger and Gee (2016) conducted one of the first studies using the DIT to measure the effect of a media ethics course as an intervention on moral reasoning. Auger and Gee (2016) administered the DIT as a pre- and posttest to students enrolled in one of two media ethics courses: one taught at night, once a week, and the other taught in the afternoon, twice per week. The authors used P scores as well as the new N2 scores, which consider a participant's consolidated versus transitional discrimination between schemas, the former describing those that clearly distinguish among the three schemas and the latter depicting less discrimination between the three. Auger and Gee (2016) heeded the influential nature of environmental context by noting the section-specific influence in moral reasoning differences: students in the night session of the course, versus the afternoon session, exhibited higher levels of moral reasoning. However, contrary to previous findings, the authors found no significant difference in scores relative to the participant's level of education, but did find significant differences between genders. Conversely, Cabot (2005) suggested that it is unusual to see significant differences in DIT scores related to gender. Bebeau and Thoma (2003) suggested that gender differences become more pronounced when one factors in differences related to education levels.

1.3.2 DIT and media ethics in practice

The DIT has also been applied to professional studies, linking moral reasoning to decision making (Rest et al. 1999). In media ethics research, the DIT has predominantly been applied to the study of journalism, public relations and advertising. Prior to the research conducted by Coleman and Wilkins (2002) and Wilkins and Coleman (2005a; 2005b), the DIT had been administered to journalists once, with an average P score of 48.1, which was reported in a dissertation by Westbrook (1994). Since then, the DIT has been administered to media professionals, and findings repeatedly suggest that journalists score higher than advertising and public relations practitioners (Coleman and Wilkins 2002; Coleman and Wilkins 2009; Lee, Coleman and Molyneux 2016; Wilkins and Coleman 2005a). However, exemplary practitioners both in journalism and public relations score the highest (Plaisance 2015). The DIT has

also been applied to interpret the findings of a unique survey administered to 217 television station managers to understand the issue of indecency, such as the Janet Jackson snafu during the 2004 Super Bowl halftime performance, and how moral reasoning contributed to this understanding (Loomis 2008). While most DIT measures find no significant difference between gender, Loomis's (2008) unique survey found that males were more likely to condone controversial content to boost station ratings.

Coleman and Wilkins (2002) measured the moral reasoning of 72 journalists by administering the DIT in person. The resulting average P score of 48.17 was reported as fourth highest behind seminarians/philosophers, medical students and practicing physicians. The authors also noted that while education is consistently one of the best predictors of moral development, participating journalists with an average of 4 years of college education scored better than dental, veterinary and graduate students who have about 1 to 2 more years of education. Yet education is only one of several factors influencing moral development. Plaisance (2014; 2015) found that journalists and public relations exemplars demonstrated a consistent ability to draw on higher-order reasoning when confronted with moral dilemmas and followed broad moral principles such as justice and avoidance of harm over more legalistic and relativistic justifications. Exemplars, averaging 45 years old, were characterized by personality traits such as extraversion and openness, and had an average 22 years of experience to name a few influential factors. Exemplars have been defined as people showing an enduring commitment to and the demonstration of good principles and values, but does not suggest the individual is "morally perfect or ideal" (Colby and Damon 1992: 27). Journalism exemplars received a P score of 51.62 versus 48.68 for journalists in general, and public relations exemplars received a P score of 50.38 versus 46.2 in general.

While public relations exemplars have scored relatively high on the DIT, that's not the case for public relations practitioners in general. In Lieber's (2008) study, public relations practitioners' P score was 45.41, which is higher than that of adults in general as well as of public relations students. While the author found no significance for the variables of age, gender and education, there were significant differences in moral development based on job setting, with solo practitioners (52.2) and academics (49.3) scoring highest and agency and corporate practitioners scoring lowest (39.8).

Therefore, when you consider the discrepancy of scores among media practitioners, one would assume that organizational factors impact practitioners' moral reasoning. For example, in response to low DIT scores, Cunningham (2005) suggested that when required to engage in ethical decision-making, advertising practitioners suspended moral reasoning to focus on other implications of their work, such as financial factors impacting their and their client's success. In contrast, while financial pressures that news organizations face might suggest that commercial considerations can undermine journalistic values and norms, Salana, Sylvia and McGregor (2016) found that newspaper editors could simultaneously reason from ethical and managerial perspectives. After examining the workplace of journalists,

Wilkins argued that “the organic human brain includes a hard-wired capacity for moral action influenced by an environment that shapes professional ethical response particularly at the intersection of care and duty” (2010: 24). For journalists, factors influencing moral action reflect an organizational environment embedded with ethical norms and values, which is perhaps consistently present but not necessarily consensual. Plaisance measured workplace climate in his study of exemplars and found opposing views from two groups of respondents; one was the belief that the organizational climate reflected relativistic thinking, the other was the belief that exemplars worked for organizations embracing an “ethic of caring for all stakeholders” (2014: 318; 2015). Wilkins (2010) orients these organizational factors to the context-dependent assumptions of Bandura, Piaget and Kohlberg. Piaget (1965) suggested that a child is conditioned by rules and regulations dependent upon the environment where some things are allowed and others are not. According to Kohlberg, cognitive development is the “result of *interaction* between structure of the organism, and the structure of the environment, rather than being the direct result of maturation or the direct result of learning (in the sense of a direct shaping of the organism’s responses to accord with environmental structures)” (1969: 348; emphasis in original).

1.4 Additional methods and key findings

Like the DIT, the Journalists’ Ethical Reasoning Instrument (JERI) is a paper-and-pencil measure of moral reasoning, which allows the researcher to tailor dilemmas specific to journalism (Coleman 2003). In an experiment with journalism students, Coleman (2003) found that exposure to a news story dilemma accompanied by photographs of African Americans resulted in significantly lower levels of moral reasoning than if the dilemma were about Caucasians. Later, Coleman (2006) wanted to measure the influence of visuals in general on moral reasoning. Again, participants were journalism students and the author found that photographs contributed to significantly more time spent processing ethical dilemmas, specifically when one considered stakeholders, defined as those affected by the dilemma, but the extended evaluation of the dilemma didn’t always result in higher moral reasoning. Coleman (2006) ran the experiment twice to try and replicate the findings but instead found conflicting evidence. The findings suggested, however, that images both encouraged mental elaboration, specifically about stakeholders pictured, and activated higher levels of moral reasoning. Coleman concluded that images add another dimension to ethical reasoning that results in explicit processing versus the automatic and unconscious, or implicit, processing of information. Meader, Knight, Coleman and Wilkins (2015) ran a controlled experiment to see if video could improve moral judgment the same way that still images have previously, but found the opposite. The authors

suggested that journalists continue to use photographs versus videos, especially when a story is ethically charged.

The Forsyth Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ) is a measure of ethical ideologies, categorized by idealism, the assumption that right action will always result in desirable outcomes, and relativism, the rejection of universal moral rules (Forsyth 1980). Based upon the taxonomy, and the degree to which someone favors both idealism (y-axis) and relativism (x-axis), a person can adopt one of four approaches to ethical decision making. Situationism (high relativism/high idealism) rejects universal moral rules and instead analyzes each act according to each individual situation. Absolutism (low relativism/high idealism) follows universal moral rules because they result in the best possible outcome. Subjectivism (high relativism/low idealism) appraises the situation based upon personal values rather than universal moral principles. Exceptionism (low relativism/low idealism) is pragmatic and utilitarian, and open to exceptions, although moral standards guide decision making.

In media ethics research, the EPQ has been applied to understand journalists' idealistic and relativistic thinking (e.g., Plaisance 2014; 2015), including those working in 18 different countries (e.g., Plaisance, Skewes and Hanitzsch 2012), as well as public relations practitioners' ethical decision making (e.g., Plaisance 2014; 2015) and consumers' moral judgments of advertising (e.g., Treise, Weigold, Conna and Garrison 1994). In the aforementioned study of exemplars, and based upon the EPQ taxonomy, Plaisance (2015) found that more than three quarters of the participants accepted universal moral rules (low relativism) and varied on their acceptance of idealism, thus populating the quadrants of absolutism (10 journalism, 9 public relations) and exceptionism (2 journalism, 3 public relations). The author suggested that "as we grow morally, we do tend to rely less on self-interest and views of what's right that are *relative* to our own sensibilities and move toward a recognition that, as moral agents in the world, we are called upon to act out a broader concern for others based on principles that are universal in nature, not relative to our personal definitions of goodness" (2015: 63; emphasis in original).

Finally, the Ethical Motivation Scale (EMS) determines a journalist's motives for ethical decision making (Singletary, Caudill, Caudill and White 1990). Based upon Kohlberg's stages of moral development and relevant literature, the authors identified 13 motives such as a general sense of morality, credibility with an audience and perceived standards of the field (for the complete list and definitions, see Singletary, Caudill, Caudill and White 1990). These motivations were later categorized as intrinsic motivations (e.g., what is morally right) and extrinsic motivations (e.g., adherence to professional codes) for ethical behavior (e.g., White & Pearce, 1991). In the preliminary study, the authors found a "mainstream ethical orientation" in which people were concerned with credibility and standards of colleagues and of the field, which suggested that "a great deal of commonality in ethical orientation does exist among journalists" (1990: 972).

1.5 Summary

Seminal works include theories of moral development examined by Piaget's methods of observation and story pairs, and Kohlberg's method of interviews. Since then, the moral development of media students and practitioners has been documented and measured various ways. The prevailing measure of moral reasoning, however, is the Defining Issues Test developed by James Rest. Findings in media ethics research suggest that journalists score highest on moral reasoning, above public relations and then advertising practitioners. While moral psychology in media ethics extends into various practices, the predominant findings focus on journalism practices. While this could be seen as a limitation, the findings provide a foundation on which to build extensions into similar and emerging paths of inquiry. Recommendations on building these paths of inquiry will be presented shortly in "New pathways."

2 Moral psychology limitations and updated frameworks

Seminal works in moral psychology have been praised and criticized, replicated and updated. Piaget and Kohlberg's early works were criticized for an emphasis on male's moral development, leading to Carol Gilligan's ethics of care. Gilligan (1982) suggested that females' moral development centered more on care than on Kohlberg's concept of justice. It's important to note that in addition to studying boys playing marbles, Piaget (1965) also studied girls playing hopscotch. Since then, gender differences – albeit intriguing to theoretical assumptions of moral development – have found little support in media ethics research, specifically when measured by the DIT. Other criticisms of these seminal works include the limited depictions of actual behavior and a monist perspective of moral development, reflective of Kohlberg's belief that the one irreducible and basic element of morality is justice. A brief review of these limitations follows, accompanied by research recommendations in "New pathways."

The analyses of cognitive development in children, college students and professional adults include limited depictions of actual behavior, i.e., the influence moral development has on moral action. Furthermore, high levels of moral reasoning don't guarantee moral behavior. Rest and colleagues' four-component model is the authors' attempt at synthesizing the "multiplicity of approaches, constructs, and phenomena" abundant in moral psychology literature to better depict the inner psychological processes that collectively influence observable behavior (1999: 100). "The basic idea ... is that various (four) inner psychological process together give rise to outwardly observable behavior," which are:

1. moral sensitivity – interpreting the situation, including how various actions would affect the parties concerned, imagining cause-effect chains of events, and being aware that there is a moral problem when one exists;
2. moral judgment – judging which action would be most justifiable in a moral sense;
3. moral motivation – (the degree of commitment to) taking a moral course of action, valuing moral values over other values, and taking personal responsibility for moral outcomes;
4. moral character – persisting in a moral task, having courage, overcoming fatigue and temptations, and implementing subroutines that serve as moral goal (1999: 101).

Guided by the four-component model, Lee and colleagues (2016) surveyed journalists working at large media outlets to investigate the relationship, characterized as a gap, between intention and behavior in journalism ethics, and how and why norms influence ethics in different contexts. Based on assumption that ethical behavior is normative, and our coexistence is social, the authors suggested that social norms have the most influence on moral behavior, which come in two forms: descriptive and injunctive. Descriptive norms are “our perception of whether other people, particularly those who are important to us, *are actually* performing the behavior in question” and injunctive norms are “our perception of what other people, particularly those who are important to us, think we *should*, or *ought* to do with respect to the behavior in question” (2016: 75; emphasis in original). The authors found that descriptive norms accounted for 48% of the variance in ethical journalistic behaviors more so than injunctive norms (28%). Lee and colleagues, therefore, concluded that newsroom leaders should clearly state examples of unethical practices and that they “must regularly recognize and share with their staff instances in which employees (or other colleagues) have acted ethically,” which will reinforce descriptive norms (2016: 81). Similarly, Bowen studied a morally exemplary public relations organization that avoided the “morass” of immorality by “clearly spelling out expectations, adhering to its ethics statement, providing ethics models and decision trees, training employees on the use of these tools, rewarding ethical behavior, conducting internal ethics surveys, and holding ethics performance reviews by superiors” (2004: 322).

The next limitation is the monist view of moral development. Kohlberg claimed that the most advanced people in every time and place independently reach the same moral principles, which arise at a natural end point depicting a universal progression in moral development (1981). However, scholars such as Liebert (1984) refute Kohlberg’s assumption that moral judgment is universal and progressive, and others suggest moral development should be studied from a pluralist perspective (Graham et al. 2012). Liebert (1984) suggested that norms, standards and values as to what is good, right, or moral vary widely from one culture to another, and as was presented earlier, from one profession to another (e.g., Lieber 2008). Liebert (1984), therefore, supports moral relativism from a cognitive-behavioral approach. Furthermore, Liebert was a

proponent of understanding individual differences, and suggested that, “moral development is a matter of learning *what* the moral standards and norms of one’s society are, of determining *how* and *when* they are applied, including *by whom*, *to whom*, and *with which* short-term and long-term consequences” (1984: 184; emphasis in original).

Based on the pluralist perspective, Graham and colleagues (2012) proposed a model (moral foundations theory) to describe the foundations of morality as they relate to nativism (the suggestion that moral development is innate), cultural learning (innate moral development is not one’s final draft, and moral development varies across cultures), intuitionism (moral reasoning is deliberative and conscious) and pluralism (representing five, but not the only, foundations of morality: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, sanctity/degradation). In part, their proposition is based upon the need for clear definitions of moral judgment, moral intuition and moral reasoning, according to Haidt (2001). Haidt suggested that “moral judgment is caused by quick moral intuitions, and is followed (when needed) by slow, ex-post facto moral reasoning” (2001: 5). Furthermore, Graham and Haidt believe in the “interlocking” nature of moral systems, dependent upon social interaction occurring within and influenced by one’s environmental context (2012: 14). Moral foundations theory aligns closely with the concept of moral ecology, which suggests that moral action is an integration of self, one’s surroundings, relevant skills and knowledge (Huff, Bernard & Frey, 2008). Similarly, Doris and Stich were concerned with studying “natural contexts,” but cautioned against experimental designs that empirically test moral motivations, because cognition and behavior are extraordinarily sensitive to the situations in which people are embedded (2005: 122). Based upon these limitations and suggested frameworks, “New pathways” will suggest ways in which empirical research can acknowledge multiple perspectives, by embedding data collection in experiences such as professional practice.

3 New pathways

A comprehensive understanding of moral judgment should come from a variety of data gathering methods and theoretical perspectives. These are the sentiments of Rest (1979) who advocated for multiple approaches to examining and understanding moral development; sentiments that have been heeded by media ethicists and evidenced by works such as Plaisance’s *Virtue in Media: The Moral Psychology of Excellence in News and Public Relations*. A mixed-method approach to moral psychology in media ethics acknowledges various perspectives that should continue to be explored, which is how the pursuit of moral psychology began: a crossroads of philosophy and psychology. In this vein, the new pathways presented here are an exploration of methodological and theoretical approaches, based upon and extending the work of media scholars and ethicists that acknowledges the collaborative nature of this scholarship and the media practices it represents.

3.1 Life experiences and intervening factors of media professions

A comprehensive understanding of media practices is informed by the role and influence of the self and organization, by examining personal and professional identity situated in social experience. Previously, moral development had been correlated with formal education. However, moral development theories and media ethics scholars acknowledge that development is more than a passage of time. “Development involves the cumulative impact of people trying to construct moral meaning in their lives in response to stimulating social experiences” (Rest 1999: 125). Therefore, how might we understand moral development as a reflection of professional experiences, perhaps as a result of membership in professional groups? In a moral reasoning experiment with 145 advertising practitioners, the authors found an interaction effect between gender and identity priming, guided by the theory of social identity that suggests people form memberships with those most like them, which in turn shapes their identity including professional identity (Schauster, Ferrucci, Tandoc and Walker 2018). When primed with their professional advertising identity, there were significant differences between moral reasoning scores for men (39.31) versus women (37.50). By comparison, when not primed, men scored lower (37.87) than females (44.53) leading the authors to two conclusions. First, women suspend moral reasoning, much like Cunningham (2005) suggested, when asked to think like an advertising executive, which suggests organizational socialization is at play. Second, men are more likely than women to move up the ranks into leadership positions, which is often accompanied by training, and therefore might serve as an intervention and positively impact their moral reasoning. Both propositions are explored further in the following section, “Organizational culture as life experience and intervention.”

To understand moral development, and the role of identity in moral reasoning, future research should continue to examine the life experiences of media professionals. This proposal is a continuation of Plaisance’s (2015) study of moral exemplars, which among other methods, included the data collection of life experiences via the life story interview. Life stories interviews are a qualitative, in-depth and cross-disciplinary method, intended to guide a researcher through a subject’s entire life course, including the moral experiences and psychology of the storyteller (Atkinson 2002). The life story evolved from oral history, and from the work of Henry Murray, who was one of the first to study individual lives to understand personality development (Atkinson 2002), such as how openness to experience is the personality trait most closely related to moral reasoning (McAdams 2009). Much like personality, one’s identity is represented in the life story. Based upon the work of Erikson, Blasi (1984) suggested that identity is rooted at the core of one’s being, involves being true to oneself in action, through the honest representation of one’s own understanding of reality, which surfaces in the life story. Furthermore,

[Stories] foster an unfolding of the self and help us to center and integrate ourselves by gaining a clearer understanding of our experiences, our feelings about them, and their meaning for us. The stories we tell of our lives bring order to our experiences and help us to view our lives both subjectively and objectively at the same time while assisting us in forming our identities (Atkinson 2002: 122).

Blasi (1984) also suggested that identity mediates moral knowledge and practical moral decisions. The argument is “when identity comprises moral concerns or ideals, or when such concerns are seen as central and essential to one’s self, one is said to have a moral identity” (Cervone and Tripathi 2009: 40).

Typically, the life story lasts an hour or longer, which can be broken up across numerous sessions, is conducted face-to-face, can be audio and video recorded, and is transcribed resulting in a wealth of data (Atkinson 2002). Both Atkinson (2002) and McAdams (2008) published a guide. However, Atkinson stresses the importance of the life story flowing in the “words of the person telling it” (2002: 131). Plaisance (2015) for example, transcribed interviews and thereafter the participants were asked to identify which passages they didn’t want included in the analysis. Colby and Damon stressed that the written representation of the life story should “establish the person’s own perspective” (1992: 8).

The life story can be applied to study the moral psychology of media professionals in a variety of ways, which are proposed next. The first is an extension of existing scholarship. The second is a new pathway that encompasses the intentions of the life story, to capture experiences, but that also utilizes pre- and post-testing to better understand potential intervening variables within the context of an organization as experience.

3.1.1 Life experiences of media exemplars

Life stories can be employed to better understand media exemplars. Building off the work of Colby and Damon, Plaisance utilized the life story, as one of several methods, to better understand the “factors that make exemplary professionals tick” by spending “quality time listening to them talking about themselves, their work and their values (2014; 2015: 39). Colby and Damon’s work examined the moral commitment of 23 extraordinary people. While the group wasn’t representative of media professionals (one participant did work as a journalist in some capacity), the findings depict several key insights worthy of notation. Exemplars embraced a striking openness to moral change. “The adult transitions of every moral exemplar chronicled in our study have been marked by a quality of active receptiveness to progressive social influence as well as by the process that we call the developmental transformation of goals” (Colby and Damon 1992: 14). The authors also characterized the exemplars’ reliability and simultaneous growth as the developmental paradox, which suggests that

reliability and stability in exemplars' moral commitments is influenced by the same characteristics that influence lifelong change and growth. And while these individuals are seen as leaders, their judgments draw heavily upon those closest to them. Additional characteristics of these individuals included certainty and moral courage, with exemplars willing to suffer sacrifices for their moral decisions; positivity and faith, the former being a capacity to enable exemplars to endure circumstances that most would find dispiriting; and the uniting of self and morality, suggesting that little separation exists between one's moral, personal and professional lives.

Of the 24 media exemplars Plaisance (2015) interviewed, identified by referrals from organizations such as the American Society of News Editors, 12 were journalists and 12 were public relations executives. McAdam's (2008) life story format was utilized, which includes seven sections. The *life chapter* asks the participant to think of one's life as a book or novel and to outline the chapters. *Key scenes* is an explanation of one's positive experiences (high point), negative experiences (low point), a turning point that marks an important change, positive childhood memory, negative childhood memory, vivid adulthood memory, wisdom event, and a religious or spiritual experience. *Future script* asks the participant to reflect upon and share dreams, future plans or perhaps a life project. *Challenges* address general problems as well as those related to health, loss, failure and regret. *Personal ideology* encompasses moral values as well as religious, political and social ideologies. One's *life theme* might be a message extending throughout the life story. Finally, the concluding prompt is a *reflection* of thoughts and feelings regarding the interview process and its potential effect on the participant.

Key motivating features of moral exemplars in journalism and public relations are explored in *Virtue in Media: The Moral Psychology of Excellence in News and Public Relations* (Plaisance 2015). For example, journalism and public relations exemplars were motivated in their work, and gained professional satisfaction by engaging in public service, driven by their concern for the "common good" (p. 109). Plaisance, much like Colby and Damon (1992), also found evidence of virtues such as moral courage, a sense of duty when faced with adversity, which was depicted in their personal and professional lives. However, media exemplars also exhibited egoistic traits such as elitism, entitlement and exceptionalism (2015). These are just a few key findings. However, a full reading of *Virtue in Media* is encouraged so that the reader might gain a full appreciation for the themes and nuances detailing the exemplars' life experiences.

To date, moral psychology in media ethics research highlights the education and practice of journalism in the U.S. While additional research in other media professions exist (e.g., Cunningham 2005; Loomis 2008), as well as in other countries (e.g., Correa 2009), expansive exploration is needed. Studies of moral exemplars in media need to continue contributing to an understanding of virtuous behavior in media and extend the examination of life experiences to include those yet to be explored. For example, ethical problems of deception, perpetuating stereotypes and targeting

vulnerable groups of people persist in advertising. And business practices such as the inability to conform to regulations only exacerbate perceptions of the advertising industry as morally immature. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) released new standards for labeling native advertising “advertisement” after holding a conference discussing native advertising’s lack of transparency (Levi 2015). Yet, according to a report from MediaRadar, 70% of websites publishing native content aren’t complying with these standards (Swant 2016). While these statistics illuminate ethical problems in practice, a question that arises in response to these concerns is, how might we apply Kohlberg’s theory of moral reasoning to better understand *why* individuals and organizations fail to comply with industry regulations?

And while ethical problems persist, it’s important to explore and learn from ethical role models and the socially responsible practices of the industry. Because simultaneously, moral behavior exists. For example, brand activism is on the rise, which is in response to consumer support for companies, products and brands that act environmentally and socially responsible (Sustainable Brands 2015; Mintel 2015). Companies such as Patagonia use its brand platform and network of stakeholders to speak out against issues, such as in response to President Trump’s reduction of federal land protection (e.g., <https://www.instagram.com/p/BcTKr6Xl6I8/?hl=en&taken-by=patagonia>), or to encourage behavior, such as avoiding food sources that impact climate change (e.g., <https://www.patagoniaprovisions.com/pages/unbroken-ground>). What’s occurring in practice, in an ever-evolving industry with a ubiquitous presence, has implications for advancing moral reasoning theory. According to a recent study, and since scores were last measured in 2005 (Cunningham 2005), advertising practitioners’ DIT moral reasoning scores have increased from 31.64 to 39.27 (Schauster et al. 2018). While informative and encouraging, these two studies provide a limited perspective for media ethics scholarship.

Therefore, the first new pathway is the study of moral exemplars in media practices where relatively little is known, such as in advertising, marketing communications, and emerging practices therein. Advertising is critical to the global economy (Ahner 2007), and the industry is comprised of agencies and advertisers, consumers and regulating agencies that often take ethical practices seriously (Synder 2016). Future research might apply the life story interview and measures of moral reasoning, such as the DIT, to respond to questions such as:

1. what levels of moral reasoning are representative of various roles in advertising, such as account executives, creatives, and media planners, and for those with high visibility and responsibility such organizational leaders;
2. to what extent do leaders in advertising possess greater moral reasoning skills than advertising professionals in general, journalists, public relations professionals, and the general public;
3. what psychological traits describe leaders in advertising;
4. what characteristics do leaders possess as depicted by their life story;

5. how have life experiences contributed to their philosophies of leadership and ethics;
6. and in what ways can we learn from these characteristics and experiences and encourage the spread of exemplary behavior?

In addition to understanding moral reasoning, responses to questions 4) and 6), when answered by applying the life story interview, will assist in providing a developmental perspective. The proposed new pathway acknowledges that moral reasoning, influenced by life experiences occurring over time, evolves over time. Future research should also examine how one's character develops over time. This line of questioning extends the philosophical notions of character, pondered by philosophers based upon empirical findings (e.g., Sinnott-Armstrong and Miller 2017; Solomon 2005; Doris 2002 as cited in Solomon 2005), who suggest that character is dynamic and in response to the social influences of one's environment. "Virtue ethics requires a solid notion of character, *but not a fixed and permanent notion of character*" (Solomon 2005; p. 651; emphasis in original). According to Solomon (2005), character is solid and impermanent; solid in that a person with good character can stand up to adversity and impermanent in that one need not solely act autonomously, but instead responds to challenges with emotional reasoning, in light of social influences, versus practical reasoning alone. Finally, this proposed research suggests we understand how moral reasoning and character might impact others through role modelling and processes of socialization, which further extends Plaisance's work with journalists and public relations practitioners, bringing us closer to understanding virtue ethics in media.

Finally, to understand the moral reasoning and life experiences of advertising practitioners, it's important to include those managing and influencing ethical decision-making from the client-side. Collectively, advertising and public relations, and the clients they serve, are referred to as marketing communications (marcom). Much like public relations, advertising professionals respond to multiple and oftentimes conflicting loyalties such as to their employer and to the client. Not only does the advertiser, serving as an agency's client, place certain demands on an advertising agency – such as how to service the client's account including what to say, to whom, when and how – the client often manages the account according to its own set of ethical standards, not to mention legal regulations. Marcom roles to examine in the future might include marketing managers, brand managers and chief marketing officers, to name a few.

3.1.2 Organizational culture as life experience and intervention

Rest was concerned with studying "real life" experiences by suggesting that "... the usefulness of a moral judgment construct is the demonstration of its crucial role in explaining real life decision-making" (1979: 258). Rest also emphasized the relationship real life experiences have with other factors, thus complicating the relationship

of variables, so that “simple, linear correlations cannot be expected” (260). Therefore, a mixed-method approach to moral psychology, begins to clarify the “range of influences that encourage or prevent moral action” (Plaisance 2015: 1).

Life stories are one method of a proposed mixed-method approach for the understanding of individuals’ experiences. The life story, along with other methods of moral psychology, focus on an individual level of analysis. However, media ethics research has also acknowledged organizational influences on moral decision making such as Plaisance’s (2014; 2015) examination of workplace climate, and an organizational ethnography that suggest two leaders of an advertising agency, including both their amoral intentions for the agency and subsequent virtuous behavior, influenced both moral myopia and moral awareness (Schauster 2015). Understanding and applying the various concepts of moral psychology and organizational culture might allow future research to account for these contextualized and often conflicting professional experiences.

An organization is a “dynamic system of organizational members, influenced by external stakeholders, who communicate within and across organizational structures in a purposeful and ordered way to achieve a superordinate goal” (Keyton 2005: 10). As a result of working toward these goals, and solving the problems that arise, people learn the shared basic assumptions and values that define organizational culture and represent what people hold to be important and true (Schein 1990), which is often times passed down from leaders. This process is known as organizational learning. Organizational learning is described as socialization, a process that implicitly and explicitly instructs new members how to make sense of their environment and experiences therein and subsequently model behavior (Gabriel 1999; 2000). Spitzack (2009) argued that organizations, as embedded members of a social context, can also learn from critical external stakeholders, such as in response to a crisis. In addition, learning can occur from observing organizational artifacts (Keyton 2005; Schein 1990) such as codes of conduct. Codes of ethical conduct are “systematic descriptions and articulations of the organization’s formal position with regard to values and ethical positions,” which provide moral guidance for and limits on behavior (Seeger 1997: 191). Ethics codes also serve as a normative framework, which practitioners perceive as helpful (Lee and Cheng 2012).

The influence of organizations, including pressure from external stakeholders, processes of socialization, and the emphasis placed on codes of conduct are three possible factors that might impact the moral reasoning of media professionals. One way to understand this impact is as an organizational intervention. The DIT, as a pre- and post-test measure, has been used to show sensitivity to moral education interventions in academia (e.g., Auger and Gee 2016; Rest et al. 1999). To what extent do processes of socialization, such as leaders training new employees, and codes of ethics, serve as an intervention impacting moral reasoning? Further exploration of organizational contexts and processes as intervening variables is needed. A proposed new pathway would explore organizational processes as intervening variables by measuring the moral development of organizational members involved in informal

and formal processes of socialization, such as ethics training, and by collecting observational data of organizational culture and the socialization processes therein. For example, while multiple codes exist for industries and organizations therein, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) code is well known and received in the field of journalism (Slattery 2016). An organizational/intervention study might collect observational data of a newsroom whose employees are members of SPJ. Observation would be conducted and focused on aspects of organizational culture such as leadership, philosophies of leadership, interaction between editors and newly hired staff, formal and informal programs for socializing new members, organizational values espoused and enacted, and the role of ethics therein. In addition, moral reasoning could be measured by the DIT longitudinally (e.g., beginning of employment, in one year, two years, etc.), as well as prior to and after the organizational intervention such as ethics training and exposure to SPJ's code of ethics.

As previously noted, in general, moral reasoning does not always result in moral behavior, and in media ethics literature, empirical evidence is sparse. Therefore, studying the adherence to ethical codes and guidelines provides an opportunity to examine moral behavior enacted in media practices as they evolve. In addition, while more and more practices are merging online and nearly all have digital formats, it's important to explore these emerging practices and how moral reasoning may be involved in decision making. For example, according to *Business Insider*, native advertising is projected to reach \$21 billion in revenue in 2018 and involves the industries of journalism, public relations and advertising.³ To what extent are guidelines related to emerging practice incorporated into ethics training, such as the Federal Trade Commission's native advertising guidelines,⁴ and how might these codes, as part of a training intervention, impact moral reasoning related to these practices? And while overall businesses are failing to comply with these guidelines (Swant 2016), what's the rate of compliance to these codes among businesses that offer formal training versus those that do not?

Finally, organizational experiences are complicated, often involving multiple duties and conflicting loyalties. However, moral reasoning measures such as the DIT, which attempt to illuminate the complexity of moral reasoning through a rating and ranking process, are arguably dependent on a narrowly structured deontological framework. To what extent can a moral reasoning measure address influential factors such as conflicting loyalties, and influential processes such as duty to act versus consequences of action? How might these measures complement or contradict our understanding of virtuous character and development of character over time relative to

³ For more on this topic, see *American Behavioral Scientist's* 60(12) special issue: Native advertising and the future of mass communication.

⁴ The FTC's guidelines can be retrieved at <https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/native-advertising-guide-businesses>

professional practice, which is a reflection of organizational processes such as socialization and professional training? Moreover, how might we understand the hierarchical nature of moral reasoning to better understand, as well as predict, when practitioners might suspend moral reasoning they possess (e.g., Cunningham, 2005)? Exploring these questions from various methodological and theoretical perspectives might lead us closer to capturing the “real life” ethical experiences of media practitioners.

3.1.3 New pathways summary

These are just a few questions and suggested approaches to better understand moral reasoning situated in and influenced by life experiences. As media practices continue to evolve, it’s important to consider the seminal works of moral psychology and how they too could evolve to examine new and emerging practices. It’s also important to understand the theoretical and methodological limitations so that new frameworks and new research pathways can continue to advance our understanding of moral reasoning in an evolving and dynamic professional landscape.

Further reading

While there might not be agreement on moral development (Goree 2000), media ethicists have much to gain by beginning their moral psychology inquiry with a reading of the seminal works of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg (e.g., Kohlberg 1975; Piaget 1965). These readings provide both an epistemological perspective, how youth were observed and what justifications they provided to rationalize decision making, and an ontological perspective, the three levels and six stages that characterize moral reasoning still used today. The work of Rest and colleagues would be the sequential reading that provides an overview of how the Defining Issues Test (DIT) was developed utilizing Kohlberg’s six stages, as well as tested for reliability, and applied across population segments including generational, educational and professional segments (e.g., Rest et al. 1977). Applications of the DIT are prevalent in media ethics scholarship, but two important books to consult that will inform intentions for and the design of your own moral psychology and media ethics study are Wilkins and Coleman (2005), which provides a historical overview of moral psychology preceding their study with 249 journalists and 65 advertising professionals (Cunningham 2005), and Plaisance (2015). In addition to cogently detailing the study’s mixed-method design utilizing life story interview and survey, Plaisance (2015) dedicates six chapters to the robust findings including a profile of media exemplars in journalism and public relations, as well as themes represented in the qualitative data that point to virtue, which he breaks out in subsequent chapters, such as exemplars

possessing moral courage and humility. Finally, to inform future moral psychology research, it's important to understand the limitations of both theory and method. Regarding theory, the work of Gilligan (1982) critiques Kohlberg's focus on male children and proposes a model of female moral development centered more on care than on justice. Regarding method, the work of Graham and Haidt (2012) and Graham and colleagues (2012) advocates for a pluralist approach to studying moral psychology that acknowledges the role of various influential factors including one's identity, as well as one's surroundings such as an organizational environment and the social interactions that occur therein.

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7 Theorizing the Ambitions, Opportunities, and Limitations of Democratic Dialogue

Abstract: Discourse ethics offers an ambitious, if controversial, framework for evaluating the degree to which discursive exchanges follow basic rules of dialogic reasoning in pursuit of moral judgment. These rules include incorporating the participation and views of all affected by an issue, affording each perspective equal weight regardless of standing or authority external to the exchange, and permitting relatively unrestrained participation in the deliberation that leads to mutual understanding of a common good. Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel have developed the foundational theoretical accounts of discourse ethics, which have in turn sparked spirited debate among critics who find discourse ethics to be unrealistically idealistic, to perpetuate harmful exclusions in democratic polities, and to limit democratic dialogue to the objective of consensus. Despite ongoing disagreements about the feasibility and preferability of discourse ethics, the framework has nonetheless informed important scholarship in a variety of communication fields and related academic disciplines, including work on clinical psychology, journalism, digital and online communication, pedagogy, philosophy, and social scientific inquiry.

Keywords: Karl-Otto Apel, communicative action, deliberative democracy, Jürgen Habermas, moral reasoning, philosophy of communication, public sphere

Imagine a scenario in which a group of socially united but not necessarily likeminded people have to reach agreement about what should be done regarding an issue for which there is no preexisting general consensus. This group has many options at their disposal for ending conflicts of opinion and determining a course of action: they could appeal to relevant structures of authority, identifying some leader or small subgroup with higher status than the others who can be charged with mandating a solution to the issue. Alternately, they could institute some sort of voting protocol, wherein all members of the group receive the opportunity to record their preferences, those individual preferences are aggregated, and the decision for the group is determined by the preference that receives the largest share of support. The group could work to reach some compromise, with some gaining the compliance of others by virtue of a promised tradeoff or reward separate from the issue at hand. In the least desirable case, the group may eliminate the conflict between their incompatible views by coercing some to adopt the position supported by others, either through physical force, manipulation, or dishonesty.

The preceding scenarios illustrate for us a range of options available for negotiating the conditions of contemporary life that present us with conflicting views of

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-007>

the right course of action in the absence of any universally accepted metanarratives supplying the answers for us. Yet none of these approaches utilizes communication to its fullest, relying on it not just as a means of coordinating action but as a constitutive force generating grounds for identification that might bridge the divisions that generate conflict. Discourse ethics, a framework initially articulated by Karl-Otto Apel (1990) and developed most systematically by Jürgen Habermas (1990; 1994; 1996; 2005), provides what is perhaps a more appealing – though certainly not universally accepted – option to those inclined to turn to communication as a means for transforming conflict and pursuing its resolution.

In its most basic form, discourse ethics is a framework that pursues moral judgment and action through dialogic, rather than monologic, reasoning. Viewing our opening hypothetical scenario through a discourse ethics lens, a community at odds over the morally supportable resolution of a particular issue will engage one another in argumentation and reason giving, expressing their individual points of view on the topic and refining their common understanding of both the issue and its potential resolution through the give-and-take of public dialogue. In its ideal form, this dialogue will include all who are affected by the issue and give each of their perspectives equal weight so that it is not previously established forms of authority that carry the day but instead the force of the better argument, in Habermas's (1975: 108) often repeated phrasing. If participants follow basic rules governing the discursive exchange – guaranteeing open access, unrestricted participation, and equitable consideration of all points of view – they resolve the conflict within their community through the generation of mutual understanding and voluntary consent to a norm vetted through deliberation and deemed valid by all.

This chapter aims to introduce readers to the key figures, conversations, and controversies of discourse ethics. I begin by exploring the social and structural conditions that, according to the proponents of discourse ethics, necessitate a new ethical framework grounded in communicative practice. Next, I review Habermas's model of discourse ethics, paying particular attention to the philosophical justification he offers for it and the procedural requirements entailed by his model. I then turn to both the critiques and applications of the discourse ethics framework, surveying some of the predominant charges leveled against discourse ethics before exploring the range of applications scholars have imagined for it. I conclude by reflecting on the model's possible future applications and ongoing relevance.

1 (Why) do we need discourse ethics?

If we were to articulate the impetus for Habermas's discourse ethics enterprise in a single inquiry, it might best be represented in this way: in conditions where there are multiple, incompatible, yet equally plausible conceptions of the good vying for public

acceptance, how do we resolve conflicts without resorting to violence? Habermas's answer, in its simplest form, is that we turn to communication. But communication can and does at times only serve to return us to those same irresolvable conflicts over competing conceptions of the good or even sharpen those divisions; conceived as a neutral channel of transmission for normative content, communication in any form cannot suffice to resolve the problems that arise in pluralistic society. For this reason, Habermas rejects the notion that communication is no more than a neutral channel for transmitting normative content and instead investigates the norms inherent to "communicative processes and forms of life [that] have certain structural features in common" (2005: 40). Because "these features harbor normative contents that could provide a basis for shared orientations," Habermas theorizes that communicative action oriented toward generating mutual understanding potentially produces solidarity across the fragmentary conditions of late modernity.

Habermas identifies these conditions as a "predicament in which the members of any moral community find themselves when, in making the transition to a modern, pluralistic society, they find themselves faced with the dilemma that though they still argue with reasons about moral judgments and beliefs, their substantive background consensus on the underlying moral norms has been shattered" (2005: 39). Discourse ethics does not attempt to rehabilitate the normative authority of any particular substantive background consensus, but it does articulate the means by which an alternative consensus can be substituted by investigating the universally shared presuppositions of participants in moral argumentation. As such, it articulates an alternative to "settl[ing] questions concerning the normative regulation of our everyday coexistence by open or covert force – by coercion, influence, or the power of the stronger interest" (Habermas 1994: 151). Discourse ethics opts instead for identifying conditions under which we may come to agreement on such questions of normative regulation collaboratively and consensually. This requires moving beyond simply pursuing our individual or group interests because "we can't expect to find a generally binding answer when we ask what is good for me or for us or for them; instead, we must ask what is *equally good for all*" (Habermas 1994: 151).

Given the highly abstract nature of Habermas's inquiry and a style of writing preoccupied with philosophical nuance over rhetorical flair, it is perhaps too easy to lose track of the sense of urgency with which Habermas proposes his account of discourse ethics. He concludes *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1990) with what he recognizes as a potentially pessimistic admission: that moral theory alone cannot be expected to solve all the dilemmas we currently face, nor can it generate substantive insight on our most pressing issues.

What moral theory can do and should be trusted to do is to clarify the universal core of our moral intuitions and thereby to refute value skepticism. ... By singling out a procedure of decision making, it seeks to make room for those involved, who must then find answers on their own to the moral-practical issues that come at them, or are imposed upon them, with objective historical force (Habermas 1990: 211).

Thus discourse ethics gives us the tools and normative orientations for moral argumentation, but it charges us with using them to engage practical issues demanding novel solutions. Habermas identifies four major issues whose contemporary urgency should compel us to collaborate in the pursuit of their resolution: global hunger and poverty, torture and violations of human dignity, economic precarity and inequality, and the potential for nuclear annihilation. Because no objectively compelling moral answers pre-exist our deliberation to solve problems such as these, Habermas offers discourse ethics as one means of grappling together with these most important dilemmas in pursuit of the normative answers the model itself cannot provide.

2 The Habermasian model of discourse ethics

With discourse ethics, Habermas seeks to transform a Kantian conception of monologic practical reason into a dialogic model that accommodates the incommensurability of visions of the good characterizing pluralistic societies. William Rehg (1997: 31) describes four key characteristics of discourse ethics that constitute its fundamental Kantian orientation despite its divergence from monological contemplation. Namely, discourse ethics is deontological, formal, cognitivist, and universalist. It is deontological because it attaches morality to the communicative acts that follow the rules of ideal speech. It is formal in the sense that it outlines a procedure rather than specifying the substantive content to be produced by practical discourse. It is cognitivist because it examines practical discourse and in its rational structure identifies an analogous relationship between a claim of normative validity and a claim of factual validity. And finally, discourse ethics is universalist because it purports to articulate formal procedures that transcend the particularities of individual cultures.

Habermas specifies two principles as the foundation of discourse ethics: the now famous (U) and (D) principles. The principle of universalization, or (U), clarifies the criteria by which we can distinguish morally valid norms and those that fail to achieve moral validity. The principle of discourse, noted as (D), roots the validity of norms in their vetting by the process of practical reason manifest in communicative exchanges. These two key principles form the cornerstone of discourse ethics and clarify its most important commitments; as such, each merits further exploration.

The principle of universalization (U) is described by Habermas as the condition that must be fulfilled for a norm to be considered valid:

(U) *All affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its general observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of everyone's interests (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation) (Habermas 1990: 65).*

What Habermas identifies as universal, therefore, is not any particular normative content but instead the process by which we expect to validate the norms on which

our arguments rest. Such validity claims emerge in the type of action Habermas calls *communicative action*, which remains distinct from *strategic action*.

Strategic action involves the use of incentives, penalties, or other forms of influence and force to gain compliance. Hence we encounter strategic action when “one actor seeks to *influence* the behavior of another by means of the threat of sanctions or the prospect of gratification in order to *cause* the interaction to continue as the first actor desires” (Habermas 1990: 58; Habermas 1984: 237–337). Notice here that Habermas is directing our attention to types of human interaction in which the participants have already formed their perspectives and preferences prior to encountering one another; in this way, strategic action negates the potentially constitutive power of its counterpart, communicative action, to transform perspective and preference through achieving intersubjectivity.

In contrast, communicative action occurs “when the participants coordinate their plans of action consensually, with the agreement reached at any point being evaluated in terms of the intersubjective recognition of validity claims” (Habermas 1990: 58). In communicative action, then, there is not the individual pursuit of influence and advantage. Instead, participants seek mutual understanding by virtue of three types of validity claims, involving

claims to truth, claims to rightness, and claims to truthfulness, according to whether the speaker refers to something in the objective world (as the totality of existing states of affairs), to something in the shared social world (as the totality of the legitimately regulated interpersonal relationships of a social group), or to something in his own subjective world (as the totality of experiences to which one has privileged access) (Habermas 1990: 58).

While communicative action entails all three types of validity claims, discourse ethics and the justification of (U) develops out of a concern with the second type of validity claim discussed above, namely the claim to normative rightness.

Here Habermas builds his case on the distinction between claims to truth and claims to rightness. Claims to truth, he argues, have a direct correspondence to a pre-existing state of affairs that we can apprehend more or less objectively; in other words, we warrant our factual validity claims with the implicit guarantee that if they fail the test of accuracy, they lose their validity. We might be tempted to think that normative validity claims operate in the same way, relying for their legitimacy on the accurate reflection of norms currently embraced by a given society. But Habermas is careful to draw a distinction: where “states of affairs, for their part, must be assumed to exist independently of whether we formulate them by means of true propositions or not,” the same independence of existence and articulation cannot be said to exist for norms, which are produced and reproduced through language (1990: 61). In fact, we see an important difference when we compare “the social fact that a norm is intersubjectively recognized and its worthiness to be recognized” (Habermas 1990: 61). In other words, for Habermas, the status of intersubjective recognition in one context does not guarantee normative validity in all contexts. This difference necessitates a

principle that can help us keep conceptually distinct the factual acceptance of specific norms as valid in particular contexts and the general conditions a norm must fulfill to be considered valid. Habermas offers (U) as that principle capable of making such a distinction.

But (U) alone does not suffice to outline the characteristics of communication able to produce a norm meeting its demanding requirements. When we turn to questions of process or procedure, we need an additional principle, what Habermas calls the principle of discourse (D), to help us conceptualize a model of communication capable of producing a norm meeting the expectations of (U):

(D) Only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity *as participants in a practical discourse* (Habermas 1990: 66).

To substantiate the necessary discursive procedures that follow from (D), Habermas turns to Alexy's enumeration of key rules participants must follow. These concern the access granted to those who would take part, the types of contributions to be accommodated, and the conditions structuring the discursive exchange. Habermas (1990: 89) offers these rules not just as conventions governing ideal speech but as the presuppositions of those who engage in communicative action for the purpose of reaching mutual understanding. His first rule states that "Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse," which necessitates the following qualifications:

- a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.
- b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.
- c. Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires, and needs (Habermas 1990: 89).

In light of these stipulations, a final rule comes into play: "No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights" in accordance with the preceding rules (Habermas 1990: 89). Habermas later revises these rules in the following form:

- (i) that nobody who could make a relevant contribution may be excluded; (ii) that all participants are granted an equal opportunity to make contributions; (iii) that the participants must mean what they say; and (iv) that communication must be freed from external and internal coercion so that the "yes" or "no" stances that participants adopt on criticizable validity claims are motivated solely by the rational force of the better reasons (2005: 43).

What do these stipulations of discursive process accomplish? Habermas contends that they allow interlocutors to engage in communicative exchanges organized around the shared objective of "*cooperative* competition for the better argument, where the orientation to the goal of a communicatively reached agreement unites the participants from the outset" (Habermas 2005: 44). Moreover, they ensure that the discussions that generate action on the basis of normative assent remain public and open to all

interested and affected parties. They prohibit the intrusion of force or fraud, thereby preserving the voluntary consent of any agreement that emerges. They demand that neither majority nor minority perspectives are excluded from consideration, and they generate a solidarity among participants in the form of collaborative communicative action.

3 Key characteristics of discourse ethics

Having reconstructed Habermas's model of discourse ethics and his basic philosophical justification for it, I want to direct readers' attention to several key characteristics of discourse ethics that set it apart from other ethical frameworks. These features help distinguish discourse ethics but may be lost when we focus too exclusively either on Habermas's philosophical grounding of the model or on the specifics of the deliberative procedures it outlines. There are five defining characteristics of discourse ethics that deserve greater exploration: its (1) dialogical nature, (2) public setting, (3) participatory operation, (4) combination of the universal and the particular, and (5) engagement with embodied, everyday experiences.

First, discourse ethics is dialogical and deliberative rather than monological. In other words, discourse ethics entails a reasoning process that cannot be carried out in the silence of individual contemplation or the generic reflection behind John Rawls's (1999: 15–19) veil of ignorance; instead, the status of ethically valid conclusions depends on their production in the intersubjective process of reason-giving between deliberators. Habermas clarifies that “it is not sufficient, therefore, for *one person* to test whether he can will the adoption of a contested norm after considering the consequences and the side effects that would occur if all persons followed that norm or whether every other person in an identical position could will the adoption of such a norm” (1990: 65). This sort of thought experiment approach to contemplating the perspectives of others does not suffice to meet the validity criteria of (D), which requires the actual exchange of reasons by participants in practical discourse.

Second, discourse ethics is public rather than private. This second characteristic stems from the first and also connects with Habermas's (1989) earlier work on the critical publicity of the bourgeois public sphere. Ethical discourse cannot take place behind closed doors, limiting participation to those who have access to private spaces or communities. Instead, Habermas's model of discourse ethics requires essentially open participation by all who are affected, interested, and inclined to join in the deliberation. Moreover, the exchange of reasons must be relatively transparent so that all may judge and respond as they see fit. T. Gregory Garvey (2000) explains that for Habermas and his model of discourse ethics, transparency ensures that the issues under discussion can be taken up by all; this only occurs to the extent that no aspect of the deliberation is hidden from participants, whether through secrecy or linguistic

distortion. In contrast to Kant's sense of universalism, which is justified by the assumption that all reasoning people can arrive at the same conclusion independently, Habermas's "principle of universalization requires that norms be legitimated in the crucible of a pluralistic public sphere" (Garvey 2000: 372). As such, discourse ethics requires publicity. Secrecy and privacy strip deliberation of its ethical potential.

Third, discourse ethics is participatory. Its emphasis on process means that a norm, lacking consensus produced through deliberation, cannot formally be considered moral. The same norm, having been deliberated and deemed acceptable by all, then earns moral standing by virtue of the participation and assent of the deliberators (McAfee 2008: 163–165). So it is not the specific content of the norm that establishes its moral standing so much as the testing and interrogation of the norm through the process of discursive engagement. David Ingram (1993) explains the participatory requirement of discourse ethics in terms of the legitimating process it requires to be carried out: "What is decisive in the legitimation of laws and policies is not that they are chosen as the most effective means for satisfying general interests" – in other words, the particulars of the consensus produced by deliberation is not the most important consideration – "but that they are adopted in accordance with an approximately fair procedure" (Ingram 1993: 295). Because the procedures of discourse ethics cannot guarantee the value of any particular outcome, it emphasizes the importance of adopting a process built on the valuation of equality, respect, reciprocity, freedom of speech, and freedom from coercion.

Fourth, discourse ethics marries the universal and the particular. Discourse ethics refrains from making substantive universal prescriptions; it recognizes that in conditions of pluralism there can be no one answer to questions of the good, nor does it aim to produce singular norms that can persist across all cultures and eras. Discourse ethics recognizes the variety of conceptions of the good emerging across and within cultures, and yet it still asserts a universality of *process* – in other words, it identifies how norms particular to individual contexts are engaged discursively through a process common to all. As Habermas clarifies:

The principle of discourse ethics (D) makes reference to a *procedure*, namely the discursive redemption of normative claims to validity. To that extent discourse ethics can properly be characterized as *formal*, for it provides no substantive guidelines but only a procedure: practical discourse. Practical discourse is not a procedure for generating justified norms but a procedure for testing the validity of norms that are being proposed and hypothetically considered for adoption. That means that practical discourses depend on content brought to them from outside. It would be utterly pointless to engage in a practical discourse without a horizon provided by the lifeworld of a specific social group and without real conflicts in a concrete situation in which the actors consider it incumbent upon them to reach a consensual means of regulating some controversial social matter (Habermas 1990: 103).

As we will see later in the chapter, even this qualified universality sets some critics firmly in opposition to the discourse ethics framework.

Finally, discourse ethics is grounded in everyday intuition and embodied perspective. Put simply, to apprehend moral phenomena, we have to occupy a participant's perspective, not one of an abstract or universal viewpoint alone. In the context of discussing P. F. Strawson's account of ethical consciousness, Habermas notes that "the objectivating attitude of the nonparticipant observer annuls the communicative roles of I and thou, the first and second persons, and neutralizes the realm of moral phenomena as such. The third-person attitude causes this realm of phenomena to vanish" (1990: 46–47). Far from expecting participants to adopt a disembodied or transcendent vantage point, discourse ethics requires participants to embrace a requirement of radical transparency because "the legitimacy of the discourse itself, as well as its ability to enhance our autonomy, depends on our ability to make our most private motives accessible to the scrutiny of other people" (Garvey 2000: 375).

These key characteristics of discourse ethics – that it is dialogical, public, participatory, simultaneously universal and particular, and grounded in embodied, everyday experiences – illustrate its conceptual complexity and open it up to a variety of critiques.

4 Critiques of discourse ethics

Habermas has developed his conception of discourse ethics across many iterations, often in conversation with his critics' objections. His "Remarks on Discourse Ethics" (Habermas 1994: 19–111) offers a revised explanation – as he notes, "in an unsystematic fashion" – that takes the form of an essay organized around the criticisms made by his most prominent critics. These critiques engage, among others, the common themes of unrealistic idealism, negative repercussions and exclusions, and the insufficiency of consensus as an organizing objective for discourse ethics.

First, Habermas is frequently criticized for proposing a hopelessly idealistic model of discourse ethics, one so generalized it no longer resembles the actual practices of everyday participants. Seyla Benhabib (1994: 35) identifies this strand of critique with the perspective of "institutionalists and realists [who] consider this discourse model to be hopelessly naïve, maybe even dangerous in its seemingly plebiscitary and anti-institutional implications." The unfortunate choice of the term "ideal speech situation," present in his earlier writings and abandoned in the later ones, no doubt made his theories an easy target at which to level this critique. Of course, Habermas recognizes that the ideal speech situation is just that – ideal in the sense of entailing unattainable standards in real-world practice. Participants in actually occurring practical discourse cannot reasonably be expected to achieve the ideal criteria set forth in his model, namely because

Discourses take place in particular social contexts and are subject to the limitations of time and space. Their participants are not Kant's intelligible characters but real human beings driven by other motives in addition to the one permitted motive of the search for truth. Topics and contributions have to be organized. The opening, adjournment, and resumption of discussions must be arranged. Because of all these factors, institutional measures are needed to sufficiently neutralize empirical limitations and avoidable internal and external interference so that the idealized conditions always already presupposed by participants in argumentation can at least be adequately approximated (Habermas 1990: 92).

Yet Habermas's concessions to real-world constraints on discursive practice fail to fully satisfy critics' concerns.

Gerard A. Hauser (1999: 277) articulates what is perhaps the most pressing critique of Habermas's approach for communication scholars: he contests the preoccupation in discourse ethics with "the rational ideological norms that apply to a search for a transcendental truth with emancipatory power." For Hauser (1999: 46), the deficiency of Habermas's model is apparent at first glance to those accustomed to studying real-world political discourse: Habermas fails to account for "the basic rhetorical character" of such discourse as it occurs in everyday democratic settings. Simply put, Hauser contends that the strict rationality inherent in Habermas's account may paint an appealing picture of practical discourse, but in reality participants are moved by ideological bias, emotional disposition, partisanship, and irrationality to participate in "the untidy communicative practices that prevail in everyday political relations at the level of *talk*." Of course, Hauser is not interested in defending these actually occurring practices that fall short of Habermas's high standards; as he clarifies, "while such practices are neither exemplary nor beyond critique, Habermas posits norms that are contrary to the character of the empirical phenomena he theorizes" (Hauser 1999: 46).

Thus Hauser expresses concern over the plausibility of Habermas's account to accurately and sufficiently represent and explain the forms of public discourse that occur in real communities. Furthermore, Hauser (1999: 49–52) contends that Habermas's procedural commitment to disinterested and dispassionate reason giving ends up preventing, rather than ensuring, the requirements of universal participation and open access by excluding those unwilling to bracket the personal interests that motivate their participation and those who do not share the dominant rhetorical style. Recognizing that "Habermasian ideal speech conditions provide procedural guidelines consistent with the assumptions of participatory democratic practices," Hauser still concludes that such guidelines "impose a seductive vision of rationality for assessing public judgments that themselves are not necessarily best made following these criteria" (Hauser 1999: 278).

Beyond the charge of unrealistic or overly idealistic notions of communication, critics also suspect Habermas's understanding of rationality and practical discourse may create potential harms for those who cannot or chose not to meet the specific standards laid out in discursive procedures. As Darryl Gunson (2006: 98) explains this critique, "the general problem here according to critics is that rationality has become

suspect, especially when conceived along universalist lines, because it is thought to marginalize the voice of the ‘other’ and consequently runs roughshod over the diverse forms of human thought and practice that our (post) modern situation requires us to appreciate.” In other words, where Habermas sees a potentially universal and unifying practice that transcends cultural difference, critics see a type of communicative rationality that claims neutrality but in fact favors the argumentative and symbolic repertoires of already privileged groups (Benhabib 1994: 39–41; Fraser 1997: 77–93; Young 2000: 63–70).

Fiona Robinson (2011) contends that discourse ethics fails to accommodate the development of moral subjectivities and prioritizes an empty sense of inclusion over the needs of the vulnerable. Grounding her argument in feminist critiques of discourse ethics – namely that it ignores power inequalities and hierarchies, that it misunderstands dialogue in terms of neutral procedures, that it is not generalizable to all cultures, and that it is overly reliant on abstractions such as justice, rights, and fairness – she contends that discourse ethics requires us to move further out of our purely subjective perspective to engage each other intersubjectively (see also McAfee 2000: 36–41). In contrast, she embraces an ethics of care that seeks to reclaim the value of subjective perspectives and experiences, primarily through a reinvigorated emphasis on listening to others. Robinson (2011: 853) rejects the discourse ethics framework because “moral recognition and responsibility require a longer-term commitment of listening and responding to the needs of those who are excluded, marginalized or exploited.”

Building on the charges made by Jean Cohen (1988) that Habermas conflates the good and the just, and by Benhabib (1985) and Agnes Heller (1984/1985) that he creates too rigid a distinction between the same, Thomas F. Murphy III (1994: 132–133) takes issue with Habermas’s characterization of justice as agreement: “If justice is characterized as agreement or consensus,” Murphy writes, “then issues have either the potential for just resolution here and now or they hold little or no promise of potential agreement being, in Habermas’s terminology, evaluative questions. There is no space within the Habermasian scheme for justice without agreement, and little room for a potentially transfigurative dialogue on values.” At stake for Murphy is the possibly disorienting misrecognition of consensus as the proper *telos* of politics. Instead of the emphasis on consensus at the heart of discourse ethics, he suggests instead that we recognize how it is in actuality debate and disagreement that characterize politics. Contrasting Habermas’s approach with Arendt’s theories of judgment and action, Murphy (1994: 134) suggests we understand discourse ethics “as a detailed explication of the conditions that need to be met in order to treat equals as equal in the context of a discourse.” Discourse ethics thus becomes one available tool among many for engaging in ethical political action through communication.

Despite these critiques, scholars continue to turn to discourse ethics as a promising framework for navigating contemporary conditions of public life, starting of course with Habermas himself.

5 Applications of discourse ethics

Diverse applications of discourse ethics have been proposed, and these begin with Habermas's own fitting of the model to the political and legislative institutions of liberal-democratic societies. In *Between Facts and Norms* (1996), Habermas applies the general tenets of discourse ethics to the context of a constitutional state that is governed by both the imperative force of laws that have achieved the status of facticity and the socially binding force of norms that have achieved validity through discursive engagement. An ideal democracy essentially minimizes the distance between facticity and normativity by making them interdependent: only laws that have been deemed normatively valid through discourse should become factual. Habermas brings his discourse ethics program into conversation with his earlier work on the public sphere to outline discourse procedures specific to democratic politics. His concern is with "the procedure from which procedurally correct decisions draw their legitimacy ... as the core structure in a separate, constitutionally organized political system, but not as a model for all social institutions (and not even for all government institutions)" (Habermas 1996: 305). In this context, the implications he draws from discourse ethics for an understanding of the contemporary public sphere(s) backs away from the earlier universalism asserted in the theory of communicative action.

Others have pursued applications of discourse ethics in fields as varied as clinical psychology, journalism, digital and online communication, pedagogy, philosophy, and social scientific inquiry. Joseph A. Fardella (2008) considers the contribution a perspective grounded in discourse ethics could make to a method of psychological treatment called the recovery model. The recovery model approaches the treatment of patients by prioritizing the facilitation of self-expression and agency through "a practice of self-care which emphasizes the ethical and therapeutic necessity of including individual/client participation in the process of both defining and actualizing the conditions most conducive to recovery" (Fardella 2008: 111). In contrast to therapeutic orientations that invest the clinician with ultimate authority and deny the value of the patient's viewpoint for determining a course of treatment, the recovery model intentionally includes patients in a dialogue with professionals to identify and clarify the treatments that might best serve the well-being of the patient and lead to improvements deemed worthwhile by professional and patient alike.

But where does discourse ethics fit into what seems to be an arena best shaped by medical expertise alone? Fardella (2008) suggests that because dialogue between those determining and receiving treatment is central to the recovery model, discourse ethics offers a particularly fitting framework for evaluating the degree to which such dialogue incorporates the perspectives of all involved and accommodates an exchange of insight and experience that could lead to mutual understanding about a proposed course of treatment. The payoff for the recovery model is potentially twofold: not only do professionals achieve greater levels of ethical treatment and arrive at potentially more effective proposals for care, but patients may also benefit from the dialogic

process as much as they do from the therapeutic recommendations the process produces: “The fact that professionals are protecting and facilitating dialogical space within which clients are recognized as having a point of view worthy of being listened to (no matter how irrational this perspective may appear to the clinician) may in itself foster a therapeutic recovery by the client of her self-respect” (Fardella 2008: 122). In other words, discourse ethics is valuable to the treatment process because of its aspiration to afford equal respect to all participants in the dialogue, no matter what the setting.

In the context of journalistic practice, discourse ethics promises to articulate a model of press accountability, according to Theodore L. Glasser and James S. Ettema (2008). As with the recovery model, this rehabilitated version of press accountability relies on the Habermasian emphasis on ethical process over ethical products. Specifically, Glasser and Ettema are interested in equipping journalists to reflect thoughtfully on the moral dilemmas they face in their professional activities, to pursue resolutions to such dilemmas in ethical dialogue, and to provide compelling justifications of their resolutions when articulating them to a public audience demanding answers.

To test their application of discourse ethics to journalistic practice, Glasser and Ettema (2008: 516) interview mainstream professional journalists about two relatively mundane moral dilemmas common to their experiences: the issues of whether to reveal one’s identity as a journalist and whether to secretly record sensitive interviews. These situations represent moral dilemmas to the practicing journalist because they concern the values of honesty, openness, and transparency. Glasser and Ettema are less interested in the journalists’ answers about whether these practices are ever acceptable than they are interested in the respondents’ process of reasoning from common-sense assumptions and experiences to arrive at their answers. Where professional codes of ethics may mandate a particular response to other moral dilemmas, the journalists’ responses, grounded in common-sense and experiential perspectives, allow for moral resolutions to emerge through testing and revision in dialogue with others. In this way, discourse ethics provides an essential supplement to professional codes of ethics: “Abstract in its presentation and utopian in its goals, Habermas’s discursive test of moral norms steers clear of any blueprint for conduct and proffers instead a regulative ideal to which journalists can turn to gauge the seriousness of their commitment to accountability” (Glasser and Ettema 2008: 530). Discourse ethics brings conversations about professional conduct and journalists’ accountability under the scrutinizing gaze of public dialogue.

An additional application of discourse ethics to the field of journalism comes in the form of Mark Cenite and Yu Zhang’s (2010) proposal to enhance accountability practices by incorporating comments section discussions in online reporting. At first glance, this suggestion may seem naïvely idealistic at best, given the frequently deplorable state of online comments section discussions where participants engage one another with little regard for mutual respect, verifiable information, sincere expression, and reasonable argumentation. However, Cenite and Zhang identify in

the inclusions of comments sections at least the potentiality that the technology can enable the kind of deliberative exchange governed by a discourse ethics framework. While all participants may not embrace the opportunity as intended, the use of comments sections at least present the possibility of providing a discursive space where readers hold journalists accountable through deliberation about their work. Furthermore, comments sections may closely approximate the universal access requirements of discourse ethics by allowing anyone interested in the topic to join the conversation, just as “discourse ethics aims to include those affected by the decision making, suggesting that if the process is carried about well, an ethical decision will be reached” (Cenite and Zhang 2010: 297). They note that while the procedural emphasis of discourse ethics hardly guarantees the success of the enterprise, simply engaging in the process demonstrates a commitment to open dialogue and accountability that productively enhance journalistic practice.

While the preceding accounts have sought to bring together agents not typically engaged in practical discourse about professional standards, others look to existing dialogic practices among practitioners charged with collective decision-making to see where discourse ethics might improve the status quo. For Rauno Huttunen and Mark Murphy (2012), school administration might benefit from adopting the procedural requirements of Habermas’s model. Specifically, they are interested in the challenges of school governance that must mediate between competing claims of which pedagogical and administrative approaches best remedy educational injustices and produce the best learning outcomes. Their repurposing of discourse ethics as a philosophical justification for radical pedagogy suggests that when schools “are committed to democratic governance, then *discourse principle D* and [the] Habermasian process model of ideal rational political will-formation can be applied in argumentation” (Huttunen and Murphy 2012: 147). Moreover, the insights of Habermasian discourse ethics can provide guidelines for more democratic interactions between students and educators, in much the same way that Fardella (2008) imagined anew the interactions between mental health professionals and patients in a discursively oriented recovery model. In a classroom structured by the commitments of discourse ethics, students and teachers alike contribute freely and openly to the discovery, interpretation, and production of knowledge and insight, leading to “communicative teaching [which] is a simulation of communicative action” (Huttunen and Murphy 2012: 149).

In addition to the application of discourse ethics in real-world contexts of professional practice, scholars engage the model to tease out its implications for scholarship in related fields. Despite the criticisms that Habermas’s theories remain detached from experiences of everyday life and provide methodologically suspect inquiries, Dennis A. de Vera (2014: 161–163) remains confident that discourse ethics in particular may be useful to social scientists, particularly those investigating Philippine culture and society. Chad Kleist (2013) considers how discourse ethics might provide a philosophical defense for Nussbaum’s capabilities theory, or the idea that human dignity may be recognized across cultures with different traditions and notions of the good

by focusing on the inherent human characteristics (found in common capabilities) that transcend individual societies. Kleist (2013: 279) finds discourse ethics and the procedural universalism on which it rests to be a potential justification of Nussbaum's capabilities theory despite critiques that claim the former has authoritarian and illiberal impulses and that diverse viewpoints, embodiments, and experiences cannot be accommodated within it.

As we have seen from this wide range of applications of discourse ethics to various settings of communicative exchange, Habermas's model still holds promise in the eyes of many scholars seeking a framework for improving the democratic potential of deliberation that leads to collective decision-making and conflict resolution. Discourse ethics provides at the very least a promising incitement to investigate how improving the mechanisms of dialogue and debate can lead to greater solidarity across difference, more equitable outcomes of the discursive process, and of course a common normative orientation in the absence of authoritative metanarratives.

6 The future of discourse ethics

Given Habermas's standing as one of the most prolific and influential thinkers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there is little doubt that his contributions, including discourse ethics, will continue to receive rigorous critique, defense, and debate. How the theory of discourse ethics will evolve through such engagement remains an open question. Joseph Heath (2014: 831) encourages us to think in terms of "rebooting" the discourse ethics framework, by which he means revitalizing its potential to "provide insight into the role that language-dependence in the human species plays in the development and entrenchment of increasingly pro-social behavior patterns within our institutions." Heath challenges scholars to begin by attending more closely to the shifts in Habermas's thinking that emerge across his publications on discourse ethics. For Heath, the shifts are stark enough to designate a "middle" and "later" view of discourse ethics, divided roughly between Habermas's early writings on the topic and his work appearing after the publication of *Justification and Analysis* (1994). Heath suggests that we return to more promising iterations of discourse ethics in Habermas's middle period to restore the connection between practical discourse and communicative action that is lost in later accounts.

In a similar call to renew enthusiasm about the discourse ethics enterprise, Nick O'Donovan (2013) proposes we re-examine Habermas's account in light of its most compelling critiques to see how a reformulation in conversation with the critics of discourse ethics might produce useful revisions of the original theory. Namely, he is interested in the critique of the asserted transcendental-pragmatic necessity of discourse ethics – or, put simply, the relativist objection to the presumed universality of the standards of rationality. O'Donovan does not see a way out of the relativist

critique, but he does suggest that discourse ethics need not be discarded wholesale as a result. Instead, he recommends we explore how discourse ethics can support “an interesting, if substantially weaker, phenomenological claim – namely, that discourse that is *not* motivated by a moral commitment to resolving disagreements discursively is also an integral part of social life” (O’Donovan 2013: 138). Following O’Donovan’s insight, we might extend the project of discourse ethics to investigate the emergence of deliberation against, or in spite of, or simultaneous with a communicative context “that does not presuppose principled commitment to discourse” (140) but that nonetheless provides an opportunity for social actors engaging each other discursively to collaboratively pursue resolutions to conflict in the form of normative dialogue.

Seeking the potential for discourse ethics to thrive in non-ideal practical conditions and seemingly inhospitable contexts requires future scholars to perhaps sacrifice some of the conceptual purity of the original account. We may not be able to retain Habermas’s defense of discourse ethics as a universal practice or a communicative ideal. However, the collaborative, democratic core at the heart of discourse ethics is worth pursuing, despite the limitations of actually occurring democratic discourse. Rehg (1997: 245) celebrates the “move beyond the individualism inhabiting Cartesian rationalism” that discourse ethics provides as it “locates an interpersonal, ‘communitarian’ moment at the very heart of moral insight.” While we may inevitably fall short of realizing its exceedingly high standards for discursive procedures, we can still engage discourse ethics as a framework that provides us with instructive aspirations for the best forms our democratic communication can take.

Further reading

Although the framework of discourse ethics is most frequently attributed to Jürgen Habermas, it was first conceptualized by Karl-Otto Apel (1990), whose account aimed to demonstrate the unifying potential of rational argumentation in advancing validity claims, generating consensus, and coordinating mutual understanding in the face of increasing fragmentation. Tina Sikka (2012) provides a masterful overview of Apel’s contribution to discourse ethics and to the field of communication more broadly. Within Habermas’s extensive writings, *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1979), and both volumes of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984; 1987) will be of interest to readers seeking greater understanding of Habermas’s formulations of universal pragmatics and general discourse theory, both of which underwrite the discourse ethics project. The discourse ethics framework itself is treated most extensively by Habermas in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1990), *Justification and Application* (1994), and *Between Facts and Norms* (1996). Communication scholars and political philosophers interested in rhetorical democracy and democratic deliberation have engaged the discourse

ethics framework to extend it and – more often than not, especially in the field of rhetorical studies – to critique it. Gerard Hauser (1999) theorizes a more rhetorically inflected public sphere, and Thomas Farrell (1993: 202) offers a “program of friendly rhetorical amendments” to Habermas’s account that resituates communicative action in the network of mutually constitutive forces that comprise the rhetorical situation. John S. Dryzek (2000), Iris Marion Young (2000), Bryan Garsten (2006), and Noëlle McAfee (2008), among others, have interrogated the conceptions of rhetoric that have historically caused distrust of democracy, and suggest more expansive perspectives for understanding the role of discourse in facilitating and generating democratic systems and cultures.

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Christopher Meyers

8 Deontology

Abstract: Most persons have intuitions that, for example, they should keep their promises, treat people justly, and respect autonomy. Deontological theories of ethics tap into those intuitions, translating them into commonly held moral rules or principles, while also explaining *why* such rules have moral force. Such theories differ: some are monistic, some pluralistic; some think intuitions/rules stem from theological or transcendently rational sources, while others explain them through evolutionary naturalism. All hold, however, that the moral force is *inherent* in the rule; rules do not receive their justification from external or contingent causes, but just because God, the universe, reason, or human nature dictates it. One should, thus, keep one's promises not (only) because doing so produces good consequences, but because it is *simply wrong* not to. Said differently, deontological theories emphasize *the right* – particularly as that is connected to motive – while consequentialist theories emphasize *the good*, the outcomes generated by one's actions. This essay clarifies deontology's distinctive elements and then reviews three central versions: Divine Command Theory, Immanuel Kant's rationalistic absolutism, and William David Ross's pluralistic intuitionism. I close with a brief discussion of how a deontological model works in journalism ethics reasoning.

Keywords: consequentialism, deontology, divine command, Kant, Ross, the right, the good, motives

1 Introduction

Promise-making is one of the more potent of moral actions. Telling someone you promise to do X means making a strong moral commitment to do everything in your power to see it through.¹ Moral persons recognize that one violates a promise only when one has sufficiently compelling reasons; the moral default is that one should satisfy one's commitment unless something beyond one's control interferes or something of greater import conflicts.

The moral power behind respecting promises is grounded in all the usual normative sources: It enhances trust and thereby promotes more stable commerce and personal relationships (utility) and we undoubtedly see others as honorable when they are trustworthy (virtue).

¹ Many of the ideas and a few explicit phrases are taken from Meyers 2011, 2016.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-008>

Deontologists see those reasons as at least morally interesting, maybe even compelling, but never *sufficient*. One should keep one's promises,² they hold, because there is inherent moral value in the act of keeping a promise and in the rule – fidelity – that serves as its abstract generalization. That is, even if there are no utilitarian or character-based justifications present in a given case, the deontologist will still recognize she has at least a *prima facie* duty to fulfill her promises.

Consider, for example, making a confidential promise to someone on their death-bed that you will carry out a trivial action post-mortem. The action in question is *so* insignificant that nothing of consequence rests on its fulfillment; further, while you generally believe character is in large part defined by faithfulness to one's commitments, you judge this to be moot here since it is a one-off and since your immediate, and clearly virtuous, motivation is to provide comfort in his final hours. There is thus no reason to keep your promise, *except that you made it* – which for the deontologist is all that is needed to create a strong (if defeasible) duty to see it through. The very making of a promise, deontologists hold, *changes the moral landscape*.

1.1 What distinguishes deontological theories?

A first distinguishing feature of deontology thus emerges: One achieves The Good by intentionally making choices that align with proper moral rules, and those rules are morally obligatory not for *external* reasons, but because they bring their own *inherent* moral worth. By contrast, the more plausible versions of utilitarianism (Mill 1864/2002; Brandt 1992) and virtue theory (Hursthouse 1999) certainly rely on rules to guide moral behavior, but the justification comes *externally*. For utilitarians, rules should be followed because of their utility, i.e., because doing so tends to achieve The Good, and many versions of virtue theory – the better ones, to my mind – also rely on rules to help work through ethical quandaries and thus to provide at least some guidance beyond the standard “do what a virtuous person would do.”³

For deontologists, actions are *good* only if they align with the proper moral rule and they are *right* if they are taken with correct *intent*. It is fine to make choices that accidentally align with the rule, but accidental alignment is largely irrelevant to true moral decision-making, in part because it is largely irrelevant to accountability ascriptions. Persons cannot be coherently judged for accidental choices, but only for those they *intend*.

² Not just promises, of course. As we will see, the number of rules to which deontologists appeal ranges from one to over a dozen.

³ See Rosalind Hursthouse on the “v-rules” (Hursthouse 1999: 36–39).

For utilitarians, The Good is generally held to be pleasure and the absence of pain, or preference satisfaction, while The Right is the instrument that promotes the best aggregate achievement of that good – typically the principle of utility. Motive is thus largely dismissed (as are concerns about accountability), except insofar as it reveals the agent’s character and thereby makes it easier to predict her future choices.

The categories of The Good and The Right are more complicated in virtue theory, but generally such theories define the former as excellence, *arête*, while right actions are those that are done virtuously. Motive is broadly present in that persons should *care* about striving toward excellence, via virtuous choices. But as persons work their way up the scale, becoming increasingly virtuous through years of habituated virtue, motive becomes more of a *meta* concern – the overarching disposition behind striving for excellence. The *fully* virtuous person, in fact, should not have to think about or intend specific choices; she just knows what to do and is habitually disposed to act accordingly.

1.2 The unlucky assassin and motive

An illustration will flesh out these differences. Consider the case of the unlucky assassin: In his attempt to shoot the president, he instead accidentally kills a terrorist just before she releases a devastating toxin, one that would kill or maim thousands. A strict consequentialist must characterize this as a morally good act, given the overall aggregate good that results. The assassin would likely be judged to be of bad character, not trustworthy, and this might justify locking him up for prophylactic or deterrence reasons. But punishment, *per se*, does not make sense, given that his action in fact turned out to be hugely beneficial.

The virtue theorist would need to assess the full picture: Was he a skilled assassin who truly did get unlucky,⁴ or was he in fact incompetent to the task? They would also have to determine whether the action could, in context, fall within the Golden Mean.⁵ Any proposed punishment, however, would be directly solely at improving his character (and others’ indirectly), not given *because he deserved it*.

4 Consider how many movies portray the assassin as heroic, glorified for their skills more than for their decency – see, for example, “Mr. and Mrs. Smith,” “Bourne,” “Bond,” even Anton Chigurh in “No Country for Old Men.”

5 Aristotle makes a deontological move when he notes that some emotions and actions, including murder, can be judged bad in themselves:

Not every action or emotion however admits of the observance of a due mean. Indeed, the very names of some directly imply evil, for instance malice, shamelessness, envy, and, of actions, adultery, theft, murder. All these and similar actions and feelings are blamed as being bad in themselves; it is not the excess or deficiency of them that we blame (Aristotle: 1107a8).

The deontologist, by contrast, would judge the act's rightness by assessing the assassin's motive, here clearly evil. It is lovely that he happened to get unlucky, producing a better outcome, but his action can still be judged evil. And since moral accountability is attached to motive – agents are rightly held responsible for actions they *intended*, not for ones over which they had no control or which were genuinely accidental – the deontologist has no problem holding the assassin responsible and punishing him in an appropriate manner.

As alluded to above, utilitarians and virtue theorists are much less – if at all – concerned with moral accountability, let alone *punishment*. Their focus is on, respectively, deterring negative future choices and improving character so as to more likely produce better future choices. Both will take actions that *look like* punishment – the utilitarian may harm or isolate wrong-doers so as to deter them or others, while the virtue theorist may use negative reinforcement as a form of character alteration – but those actions are solely intended to achieve the noted secondary purposes.⁶

Punishment for its *own sake* – retributive punishment – is almost exclusively the purview of the deontologists. While also giving attention to creating a better world, they are mainly *backward looking*, evaluating actions that have already occurred so as to determine whether the agent deserves praise or blame. Such concerns are, in fact, arguably the *raison d'être* for all of Kant's work in ethics: The point of moral theory is to determine how and when it makes sense to hold persons accountable for their choices.

It should be apparent, both from these opening remarks and from earlier publications (Meyers 2003, 2011) that I embrace deontology (or at least a modified version [Meyers 2016]). First, I think there is inherent moral force in principles and actions, so much that it creates a remainder, even in cases where we act correctly (Meyers, 2016: 204, 207); second, I agree with Kant that if we wish to hold persons accountable for their choices – and I think we should, otherwise ethics is little more than sociology and psychology – then we must give due attention to motive; and, third, it is only through a deontological model that we get essential moral principles like respect for persons and formal justice.

But *which* version of deontology? The differences among them, after all, are almost as great as their differences with utilitarianism and virtue theory.

The goal with this opening section has been to draw out those latter differences, that is, to show what makes deontological theories distinctive. In what follows I lay out broad descriptions of the three versions of deontology that most frequently appear

Not all virtue theorists, however, are willing to divorce moral evaluation from the social and historical context in which actions occur. See, for example, MacIntyre (2007) and Hursthouse (1999).

⁶ Utility is also served through retributive-*looking* punishment in that it assures an inflamed public that governmental institutions are in proper control.

in work in practical and professional ethics: Divine Command, Immanuel Kant's deductive model, and W.D. Ross's inductive. I pick these three because they are representative of the major camps and because they are the most frequently cited in ethics textbooks. A more comprehensive discussion would also include key figures from at least social contract (Scanlon 2008, 2003; Gauthier 1986), natural rights (Finnis 1980; Feinberg 1980), and procedural (Gert 2005; Beauchamp and Childress 2012; Frankena 1988) camps.

2 Versions of deontology

2.1 Divine command theory

Consider the Ten Commandments, among the most famous set of moral rules. Why are persons (of the faith) obligated to follow them? One certainly can interpret that duty in instrumental terms⁷: By following them one has a better chance of making it into heaven (egoism); if enough persons follow them, the likelihood of earthly paradise is increased (utilitarianism); or because if one follows them, one becomes a better person (virtue theory).

But surely those reasons, while more or less compelling in their own right, are not what the Christian and Jewish faiths demand of adherents: Believers are duty-bound to follow the rules because they are expressions from, and of, the perfect moral good – God. There are countless debates, going all the way back to the Euthyphro, about whether God dictates these commands and thereby makes them good, or whether God must dictate them because they are good, necessary elements of a moral universe. But for the faithful, those considerations – along with egoistic, utilitarian, and virtue ones – are at best secondary to the rules' moral status: *We should follow them because they are inherently good.*

Islam similarly demands that adherents abide by basic moral tenets, including a duty to be faithful to God and to those with whom we are bound, to be humble and charitable, and to be courageous and grateful. These are imbued in our conscience as a gift from God and we must follow them, not (only) for instrumental reasons, but because they have intrinsic goodness in them – again, as an expression from and of God.

⁷ Eastern religions differ from Judaism, Islam and Christianity in both theology (they are not monotheistic) and ethics. Greatly simplified, Buddhism and Hinduism both appeal to a kind of realism of cause and effect (Karma) and a virtue-like exhortation to make oneself a better person so as to avoid negative consequences, for oneself and others.

These moral systems thus achieve two key standards of morality, ones Kant will later make much of: Necessity and universalizability. Assuming the God of these monotheistic traditions – the omni-omni⁸ creator – entails also assuming that what He⁹ commands *must* be true and that it applies to *all* of His creation.

The theological approach requires, of course, accepting the unproven premise of an omni-omni God; and even if one could achieve such a proof, one would still have to determine which – if any – of the currently accepted versions is correct and what that God asks of us. Establishing the existence of such a God says nothing about whether this or that scriptural source is also proven. Even tenets as seemingly innocuous as the Ten Commandments admit of considerable variation, depending on the translation and purpose for which it is being used.¹⁰

Kant, though otherwise quite pious, reached the conclusion that one cannot, in fact, rationally prove God's existence, and thus one can make no associated knowledge claims (Kant 1781). One certainly cannot claim knowledge of duties attached to the Ten Commandments (or any other religious source). Yet, as noted, he also believed moral commands must be internally compelling, universally binding, and devoid of any contingent appeals. His theory is thus devoted to achieving those conditions.

2.2 Immanuel Kant

Kant (1724–1804) is among the giants of philosophy, included in most every ethics textbook. By-and-large, however, those texts focus mainly on his normative arguments, largely by-passing his meta-ethics, given how notoriously convoluted they are. They are difficult to understand, let alone defend, and his normative analyses are, by contrast, much more accessible, with intuitively compelling conclusions. Thus it is tempting to jump to them, bypassing all the metaphysical mumbo-jumbo.

Key to his view, though, is realizing that just because a conclusion *appears* compelling does not make it so; one must subject it to rigorous logical analysis. Take one of his more persuasive: All persons must be treated with equal dignity and respect. If this conclusion is, in fact, clearly true, the underlying logic of the justifying theory should prove that – which is exactly his goal. Let me, thus, start with an overview of his meta-ethics, after which I will move to the normative principle – the Categorical Imperative – for which he is most famous.

⁸ Omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, etc.

⁹ The traditions almost exclusively rely on a male pronoun in reference to the deity, hence my use of it here.

¹⁰ See, for example, “Which Ten Commandments?” www.positiveatheism.org/crt/whichcom.htm.

2.2.1 Kantian meta-ethics

The very meaning of morality entails, Kant argues, moral accountability: What are the conditions under which it makes sense to hold persons accountable for their actions? Compare that goal with that of the empirical disciplines that study what people in fact do or have done (sociology, history and anthropology) or what serves to motivate them (psychology and economics). In Kant's language:

Each of these two branches of metaphysics [the metaphysics of nature and of morals] *must be carefully cleared of everything empirical*, so that we can know what can be accomplished by pure reason in both cases, and from what sources it creates its *a priori* teaching (Kant 1785/1949: 4, emphasis added).

Accountability, in whatever realm, requires consistent standards that can be rationally applied across the wide range of human experience. Said differently, standards that guide human moral conduct must apply universally and with necessity. Otherwise, someone can easily enough say, "Well, sure, that injunction against torturing children is just fine for the rest of you, but it doesn't apply to *me*." And if it does not carry necessity, that same person could say, "Well, sure, I accepted the injunction against torturing children, but that was *last* week; things are different now." Those kinds of 'outs' would make it impossible to ever morally judge any actions, unless we had standards for judging the exceptions, and then standards for exceptions to *those* standards, ad absurdum.

The traditional source for such universalizability and necessity – God – has, Kant concluded, been taken off the table. Fortunately, we have another source: *Reason*. Reason gives us clear Truth, for example the methods and conclusions that emerge from mathematics, logic and analytic concepts. We know with certainty that $2 + 2 = 4$ (in base 10), that the conclusion of a sound argument (valid reasoning with true premises) must be true, and that a "bachelor" is "an unmarried male."

What if, he wondered, we could use that same tool to reach necessary Truth in morality? Success here would represent a huge leap in philosophical thinking, as previous theorists believed necessity was analytic only (including logic and mathematics), whereas morality was immersed in the synthetic world, where all actions are subject to cause and effect (thus negating freedom and accountability) and contingent upon existent physical circumstances. Indeed, the very beings making moral choices – humans – are part of the physical world, subject to the same physical laws and contingencies. Kant's solution: *One* component of human existence is physical ("phenomenal"); another ("noumenal") transcends the physical and is not subject to its laws and contingencies.

What might an ethics grounded in this kind of metaphysics look like? In showing us, Kant reveals not only his extraordinary intellect but also challenges some basic intuitions.

2.2.1.1 Acting from reason alone

To achieve necessity and universality, all parts of our phenomenal selves – inclinations, desires, happiness, emotions, achievements – must be set aside when doing moral reasoning. Why? Because they are all merely contingent; each of us has *different* inclinations, desires, etc., so it is impossible to universalize associated principles (or “maxims”). Further, because these non-rational motivations vary in strength, one is naturally inclined to think one has greater moral loyalties toward those persons with whom one has a relationship, whereas, for Kant, all persons are of absolute and equal value. Hence, reliance on emotions or relation-based preferences is rationally contradictory.

This is one of the more counter-intuitive elements in Kant and is a place where people such as Ross will part ways (see below). Before rejecting Kant out of hand, though, an example will help explain his reasoning and show why the argument is not easily dismissed.

Imagine a train is speeding toward your mother and a stranger, both tied to the tracks. You have time to save only one – who should it be? The vast majority of folks will answer that they should save Mom first. Why? Because they love her and recognize she sacrificed to help make them into the persons they are. It would be tragic that the stranger is killed and one should do everything one can to save both, but if only one can be freed, surely it should be Mom.

Kant adamantly disagrees, noting that ‘Mom’ cannot be worth more than the stranger: They are of equal and absolute value, so one cannot coherently prioritize her. One must, instead, essentially engage in triage, picking the one most likely to be saved. If the chances are equal, one should just pick randomly – flip a coin or the like. Kant even goes so far as to imply, in his example of the begrudging philanthropist, that one should intentionally pick the stranger to make sure one is not being immorally biased by one’s love for Mom:

There are many minds so sympathetically constituted that, without any other motive of vanity or self-interest, they find a pleasure in spreading joy around them ... But I maintain that in such a case an action of this kind, however proper, however amiable it may be, has nevertheless no true moral worth. ... [Such a] maxim lacks the moral import, namely, that such actions be done from duty, not from inclination. [Compare the sympathetic man with one in whom] nature has put little sympathy in [his] the heart; ... if he, supposed to be an upright man, is by temperament cold and indifferent to the sufferings of others, ... would he not still find in himself a source from whence to give himself a far higher worth than that of a good-natured temperament could be? Unquestionably. It is just in this that the moral worth of the character is brought out which is incomparably the highest of all, namely, that he is beneficent, not from inclination, but from duty (Kant 1785/1949: 15–16).

Again, most people find these conclusions problematic. Should not attachments, loyalties, even emotions play *some* role in our moral reasoning? They *cannot*, he says, because they introduce contingencies into an activity, moral reasoning, whose standards are strictly grounded in necessity and universality.

An example will help reinforce his conclusion: I gave the train scenario in class one day and, in response to my query about whom to save, a gal sitting in the front row hissed, “*the stranger*.” Despite my better judgment, I could not resist and asked, “Why?” It turned out she despised her mother (seemingly for quite good reasons) and would be only too happy to save the stranger and maybe even watch, gleefully, as Mom was scrunched.

Point being: Love – and all other non-rational motivations – is subjective, contingent, and thus cannot possibly serve as the ground for a universal and categorically binding moral rule. Neither can, for that matter, consequentialist evaluations. Students will invariably ask questions like, “How old is each?” What might the stranger achieve in the rest of her life – maybe the cure for AIDS?” The first question implies that moral worth is somehow attached to age – an incoherent proposition in Kantian thought – while the second relies on merely possible outcomes – guesswork, in other words. As soon as we make these kinds of moves, Kant argues, we are no longer doing moral reasoning, but sociology or psychology.

What we must do, instead, is commit to making sure all our moral choices are motivated by reason-based duty alone, devoid of all contingent influences. Is that possible? He fully grants that because our make-up includes the phenomenal, we will be subject to associated inclinations and enticements. But if we want to express our fullest nature as moral agents, we must *strive* to act out of duty alone; it is only in this way that we can guarantee morally correct choices.

2.2.1.2 Freedom

The noumenal serves double duty for Kant: It is the source of reason *and* freedom, the prerequisite for moral accountability. To hold someone blameworthy (or creditable), he believes, implies they *could have acted otherwise*; after all, “ought implies can.”¹¹ Yet, humans, as *physical* beings, are subject to all the laws of nature, including, most importantly, the law of cause and effect, implying one *cannot* have acted otherwise.

Since, however, his whole project is devoted to confirming morality – and thereby accountability – he has to make a problematic metaphysical move by positing that persons have dual natures. Yes, they have a physical nature, subject to all associated laws, but also a non-physical, “noumenal” nature that transcends those laws.

The problem is we cannot *know* the noumenal in the usual, empirical, way, given that it cannot – by definition – be perceived. His solutions to this quandary are as complex as any in philosophy; I focus on only one here – his admittedly “circular”

¹¹ Although the phrase is often attributed to Kant, he probably never says it explicitly. Here is one version that comes quite close: “The action to which the ‘ought’ applies must indeed be possible under natural conditions” (Kant, 1781, A548/B576).

argument from the Third Section of the *Groundwork*¹² (from which all the embedded quotations are taken):

- Morality demands freedom so that we may “conceive ourselves as subject to moral laws;” i.e., so that accountability makes sense;
- “We assume ourselves free” so that we can be moral and “we conceive ourselves as subject to the [reason-based] moral laws because we have attributed to ourselves freedom;”
- There must, thus, be a non-physical source of such freedom; that is, persons must also have a noumenal nature;
- We cannot, however, directly experience the noumenal;
- We can, though, experience the *effects* of free choices, even if we cannot observe the actual choice-making;
- Thus, the noumenal must *logically* be present – as an “Ideal Conception;” that is, as a free subject and as a cause.
- Further, if we reflect closely enough on our experiences, we can have something like a direct phenomenology of free choice.

I will not try to defend the argument here beyond noting it is the sort of view many people *hope* is valid: Most of us want to consider ourselves free and able to make, and to be held responsible for, moral choices. We also, importantly, want the fundamental (and explicitly Kantian) principle that the argument justifies: Persons, because they are alone¹³ in their status as autonomous moral agents, must be treated with dignity and respect.

One may, again, use utilitarian arguments to grant special moral status to persons (for example, persons have higher capacities for pleasure and pain and thus must receive greater moral protections). Free agency views, though, are the most robust. Hence, despite the problematic nature of the associated metaphysics and the general philosophical migration toward variations on soft determinism,¹⁴ versions of a Kantian view are still very much present in the literature (Chisolm 1963; Kane 1996).

2.2.2 Normative implications

Out of these metaphysical and meta-ethical preliminaries, Kant concludes, a deductive normative framework emerges: Morality demands a single moral rule that applies

¹² *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by Abbott as *The Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

¹³ He is careful to note that “person” is not co-extensive with “human,” using such language as “rational beings generally” (Kant 1785/1949: 26).

¹⁴ The view that moral accountability is grounded not in “could have done otherwise,” but in such criteria as sincerity of reasoning and identification with choices.

universally and necessarily. Hence: The Categorical Imperative (CI). It is “categorical” in that it applies to everyone (universality) and “imperative” in that morality *demands* we abide by it (necessity).

The result: Moral decision-making is straightforward: So long as one is motivated to act out of duty and one’s choices align with the CI, one can be assured one has acted correctly. There is no need to fret over contingent considerations like emotional attachments or consequences, since the former cannot be universalized and the latter relies, by definition, on uncertain predictions. Proper intent following the proper rule is all that is required.

To see this, reverse the earlier example: Seeing the assassin take aim, Susie tackles him before he can fire, thus inadvertently allowing the biological terrorist to set off her weapon, killing or injuring thousands. Per Kant, she acted morally, even if contributed to a dreadful outcome: Her intent was grounded in duty alone and in alignment with the CI.

2.2.3 The Categorical Imperative

What, then, is the CI? From among his multiple “formulations” (all of which he insists are semantically equivalent), most scholars hone in on two (paraphrased):

- *Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law; and*
- *So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only* (Kant 1785/1949: 38, 46).

The first satisfies the universalizability and necessity criteria in that it requires persons to ground their choices in a duty-based rule, as well as insisting that the rule be one all persons can logically follow. For example, one cannot consistently and coherently follow a maxim that one should violate promises – *not* because this would lead to bad outcomes (consequentialism), but because such violation makes the very notion of a promise *logically contradictory*: “My maxim would thus destroy itself as soon as it was made a universal law” (Kant 1785/1949: 21). The meaning of a promise *entails* a commitment of fulfillment. It is thus irrational, literally incoherent, to make a promise knowing one does not intend to keep it or even to later intentionally break it (in which case the original promise is logically nullified).

The second formulation captures persons’ extraordinary status as beings worthy of dignity and respect. Because they are moral agents, this formulation states, it is always wrong to treat others as a mere object or tool for one’s own or others’ purposes. Now, we in fact use people all the time – service relations, for example, are predicated on mutual use – but we should never *merely* use one another, defined as a use to which the other cannot, in practice or in principle, consent (Oneill 1989).

The CI also motivates the distinction between “perfect” and “imperfect” duties, namely the common sense idea that although there are a number of secondary rules persons should follow, those rules are not all created equal. Perfect duties (for example, communicate honestly, do not cause unjustified harm, cherish one’s life; do not commit suicide) are strict, never to be violated, precisely because doing so violates the CI. Imperfect duties (for example, charity and self-improvement) are recommended only; one can coherently decide, for example, not to be beneficent. The CI places no strictures on such choices.

2.2.4 Summary

Combine all this into an overall theory and what emerges is a remarkable system of morality that explains its nature, including how to make sense of freedom and accountability, and that provides a rule that, when properly followed, *guarantees* morally correct choices. And all of that is done strictly *a priori*, with no dependence on contingencies such as relational attachments or concern for (merely possible) consequences.

As remarkable as it is, however, it is rarely adopted as a means for actually guiding moral choices – at least in its totality. Contemporary ethicists cite Kant’s overreliance on rationality and his corresponding denial of the important role of relationships and context. Further, critics charge, his stringent prioritization of perfect over imperfect duties produces, in real-world situations, wholly implausible moral demands.

W.D. Ross (1877–1971), an early twentieth Century Aristotle scholar and moral theorist, picks up on these problems and develops a *pluralistic* deontology. He accepts that these principles have inherent moral force, but also notes they will often conflict with one another. The result, however, is that he rejects a key element of Kantian theory – the guarantee of correct choices. Instead, Ross concludes, moral decision-making entails uncertainty, or “moral risk.”

2.3 Ross

Imagine that you promise, with all sincerity, to meet a friend for coffee this afternoon. As always, you are running behind, but believe that if you step on it, you can get there by your promised 2:00 arrival. As you approach a major intersection, however, you come across a recent automobile accident. It is immediately clear there are a number of seriously injured people, and while there are other bystanders on the scene, they appear to be merely standing around, too paralyzed with fear to provide any real assistance. You slow down, knowing you can help, maybe even save lives, because

you have previously handled yourself well in emergency situations and, even better, you recently completed an intensive first-aid training course.

But you *promised* and, having just read your Kant, you know that a promise is a perfect duty, never to be intentionally violated. So you conclude you are duty bound to steer around the wounded and rush on to your scheduled appointment.

Right? Well, no, *not* right. Surely in this case, Ross argued, your duty of beneficence morally *outweighs* your duty of promise-keeping (Ross 1988: 18).

This was certainly not an original critique of Kant; utilitarians such as Bentham and Mill had used similar cases to dismiss his absolutism. But Ross was among the first to do it from *within* the deontological camp. And in doing that, he also provided a framework that would become one of the more dominant in contemporary practical and professional ethics.

In this section, I briefly discuss Ross's meta-ethics, arguing that he is not the thorough-going intuitionist he is frequently presented to be. Next, I explain why Ross is in fact a deontologist, despite his explicit appeals to forward-looking moral considerations and character. I close with a discussion of the limited methodology he provides for resolving ethical dilemmas.

2.3.1 Rossian meta-ethics

It is helpful to recall the historical context in which Ross's theory emerges: The theological traditions of the Middle Ages have been rejected; David Hume and Adam Smith, partly in response, then turned to an early form of "sentiment"-based naturalism; Kant, troubled by their appeal to the contingencies of the natural world, takes the opposite tack, into critical transcendentalism; Hegel then takes Kant even further, into his own even more convoluted version of transcendental idealism; last, Jeremy Bentham and his protégé John Stuart Mill reject all forms of idealism and return to the pleasures and pains of the natural world. G.E. Moore, writing around the turn of the twentieth century, surveys this landscape and concludes that the very heart of moral theory, The Good, is unknowable.

All this is enough to motivate a moral theorist to hang up her towel – precisely the reaction of many of Ross's contemporaries, who argued that ethics was little more than linguistic exhortations rooted in emotions and preferences.¹⁵ Not Ross: One of the period's most respected academics via his work on the Greeks, Ross determined that Moore was right: The Good is unknowable. But, rather than seeing this as grounds for rejecting moral theory, he embraced it as its *foundation*.

¹⁵ See, for example, logical positivism, emotivism and subjectivism – all dominant views during the middle part of the twentieth Century.

Specifically, Ross repeats Moore's conclusions that Kant and Aquinas (representing rational transcendentalism), as well as Hume and Aristotle (representing naturalism), were wrong: The former's metaphysics were too implausible, while the latter relied too heavily on contingent experience. He found the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill to be more compelling, but their characterization of The Good – the optimistically developed aggregate pleasure over pain – can be neither deduced nor induced. This would not be a problem if persons were omniscient, Ross says (in a theme that will reemerge later), but of course they are not and are thus left not knowing how to act.

Despite all these problems, Ross's predecessors were, he thought, also right on some key points:

- Morality entails accountability and standards;
- Certain basic moral duties have inherent moral worth, even if we do not know how or why;
- We need practical wisdom to discern the relevant details of a circumstance and to evaluate likely ramifications; and
- We must be concerned about how we impact the world, for good and bad.

The latter two points are of course core elements in virtue theory and utilitarianism, respectively; so why is he characterized as a deontologist?

2.3.2 Ross's pluralistic deontology

Recall the opening example about making a promise to someone on their deathbed; its genesis is in fact a passing line from Ross's best known book, *The Right and the Good*:

And if we suppose two people dying alone together, do we think the duty of one to fulfil before he dies a promise he has made to the other would be extinguished by the fact that neither act would have any effect on the general confidence? Anyone who holds this may be suspected of not having reflected on what a promise is (Ross 1930/1988: 39).

To make a promise, in other words, is to create a binding moral relationship – *regardless* of the impact associated with its fulfillment.

Why? Because persons are *bound* by the principle of fidelity; we have a duty to keep our promises and not to lie. Why again? Well, that second query takes him back to Moore: We do not and cannot explain how we know this, but we *do*, just as we also know the truth of mathematics and logic:

That an act ... is *prima facie* right, is self-evident ... in the sense that when we have reached sufficient mental maturity and have given sufficient attention to the proposition, it is evident without any need of proof. ... It is self-evident just as a mathematical axiom, or the validity of a form of inference, is self-evident (Ross 1930/1988: 29).

His version of intuitionism does not, however, spring out of thin air; rather, through *experience* we come to recognize the validity of duties in their *prima facie* state: “There is nothing arbitrary about these *prima facie* duties. Each rests on a definite circumstance” (Ross, 1930/1988: 20).¹⁶ Calling upon Aristotle, he says such understanding comes over time, as we experience circumstances with moral qualities, particularly those in which duties are violated. But, he insists, the principles’ validity exists independently of us: It is not created – individually or socially – but *realized*. Experience is necessary to produce enough cases for persons to achieve the requisite “mental maturity,” but when acquired, it provides *access* to the principles’ independent, self-evident truth. Further, many of the duties are predicated upon, and made more stringent by, an existing *relationship*; we look backward to those connections to learn why we are bound by, for example, principles of fidelity, gratitude and reparation (Ross 1930/1988: 22).¹⁷

The principles are, however, self-evidently known only in *abstraction*, in the recognition that, everything else being equal, we should always keep our promises, help others, express gratitude, etc. In the real world, though, everything else is *not* equal: Duties will conflict and one must decide which should prevail in that circumstance. Here, intuition is impotent; the correct choice in a moral dilemma is anything but self-evident; it is, rather, often fraught with complexity and uncertainty.

2.3.3 Contextualism, not relativism

Complex and uncertain is *not*, however, relativist. Relativism declares there is no universally binding correct moral choice; right and wrong are instead culturally embedded.¹⁸ Contextualists, by contrast, believe there are correct answers to moral problems, but if the morally relevant features change, that answer also changes. For example, lying in one case – say for personal gain – would likely be immoral, while another – say, to protect someone – could be appropriate.

Ross thus finds a middle ground between the relativists and Kantian absolutism: Duties in their abstract, *prima facie*, state are not only knowable by *all* (mature) persons, but knowable objectively, in the same way mathematics is knowable. Further, if we get the correct answer to a moral dilemma,¹⁹ we get *the* correct answer,

16 Ross listed seven *prima facie* duties: Fidelity (which includes promise-keeping and honesty), Reparation, Gratitude, Justice, Beneficence, Self-Improvement, and Non-Maleficence.

17 See Gert 1998 and Meyers 2016 for elaborations on the list of principles and on the importance of historical and emotional attachments.

18 Cultural relativism is the most commonly cited, but the view ranges from individual subjectivism (what I say is right, is right) to life-world relativism (rightness is determined through one’s theoretically, historically, and linguistically defined world-view). See Thomas Metz’s essay in this volume.

19 Defined as “a situation in which two or more *prima facie* duties are in conflict.”

the one that all morally committed persons must follow in morally comparable circumstances. But, contra Kant, judgments about what one should do in any given case cannot be known with certainty.

Why not? Because in actual cases there will frequently be key information to which we do not have access. The noted “complexity and uncertainty” includes epistemological deficits on such matters as determining all those who will be impacted by choices, in what ways, how intensely, and with what reactions. If we were “omniscient” (Ross 1930/1988: 32), with access to *every* relevant piece of information, we could at least approach certainty. But, given humans’ epistemological limitations, “our judgments about our actual duty in concrete situations have none of the certainty that attaches to our recognition of the general [prima facie] principles of duty” (Ross 1930/1988: 30). We are, instead, left with carefully developed conjecture.

Consider a contextually altered version of the earlier example: What if the friend you are meeting for coffee has just been dumped by his girlfriend and is feeling abandoned and vulnerable – even suicidal? Will your missed appointment push him over the edge? Build in that, unknown to you, the other bystanders are not, in fact, paralyzed with fear, but all trained EMT’s who just happened to be quickly assessing the scene when you drove up. Given their skill set – clearly superior to your first-aid training – they will undoubtedly do a better job of helping than you could.

Is it still clear that beneficence should outweigh fidelity?

“But how could I have known any of this?” you understandably lament. You probably couldn’t: Moral dilemmas are filled with unknown and often unknowable facts: What is truly at stake; what will be the outcomes of given choices; what if the person you save turns out to be a mass murderer? Because persons are not omniscient,

Where a possible act is seen to have two characteristics, in virtue of one of which it is prima facie right, and in virtue of the other prima facie wrong, we are ... well aware that we are not certain whether we ought or ought not to do it; that whether we do it or not *we are taking a moral risk*. We come in the long run, after consideration, to think one duty more pressing than the other, but we do not feel certain that it is so (Ross 1930/1988: 30–31, emphasis added).

Ross’s middle ground is thus apparent: Persons can have objectively true knowledge of moral principles, and there are correct answers to moral dilemmas, even if we cannot always discern what those are. At the same time, he rejected Kant’s insistence that moral decision-making is made in a factual vacuum; instead, he was comfortable with, even embraced, the doubt and ambiguity of real-world moral reasoning.

2.3.4 Rossian deliberation, moral accountability and the right

Unlike Kant’s deductive approach to moral reasoning, Ross sees deliberation in *inductive* terms: Given the complexities of human psychology, history and behavior, the

best we can generally hope for is answers that are *more* correct, just as in other forms of inductive reasoning. So what version of induction does he recommend? Unfortunately, he provides little direction, recommending merely that persons “reflect to the best of [their] ability” on the whos, whats, and hows present in a dilemma (Ross 1930/1988: 32). In William Frankena’s terms, “It is at this point that he says ‘C’est la vie’ and refers us to Aristotle’s dictum, ‘The decision rests with perception.’” (Frankena 1988: 27).

In his defense, Ross’s goal was not to create a new method of moral reasoning. Rather, he wanted to reconceive deontology. We cannot have certain knowledge of correct moral choices, in part because we have *no* knowledge of The Good; we can, however, stay within a deontological framework by focusing on The Right. For this, motive is the sole criterion. His call for “careful reflection,” with its implication of proper *intent*, is thus sufficient: So long as one is properly motivated, genuinely striving to determine correct choices – that is, doing the hard work of inductive moral reasoning – one has acted rightly and is thus blameless, even if the choice turns out to have bad consequences.

This emphasis on reflection and deliberation draws out a final contrast with Kant, here on the question of freedom. Even with all the prominence he gives to The Right and proper motive, he diligently avoids the kind of metaphysics that so occupied Kant. Rather, and anticipating later discussions of compatibilism (Frankfurt 1971; Dennett 1984), he seems to hold that one freely chooses precisely when, and *because*, one has reflected on it and “acts for that reason” (Ross 1930/1988: 32).

2.3.5 Summary

Throughout the nineteenth Century it appeared that deontology might be headed for the dust bin, as Kantian and Hegelian metaphysics helped motivate a turn toward varieties of the utilitarianism gaining popularity in the second half of the Century. Ross’s pluralistic move, early in the twentieth Century, resulted in a kind of revival; theorists saw it was possible to retain the core elements of deontology – its reliance on inherent value and its attachment of motive with The Right – without also insisting that answers to ethics dilemmas be knowable absolutely or that persons had to have some non-physical, undetermined, nature.

It should be no surprise, then, that as ethics took a practical turn in the 1970’s, Ross reemerged as a central theorist, with variations on his position making their way into the works of any number of contemporary scholars (Frankena 1988; Gert 2005; Beauchamp and Childress 2012). Notably these scholars also, to varying degrees, critique his intuitive starting point and devote effort to solving the method problem (McNaughton 1996; Meyers 2011, 2016). But, that scholars continue to embrace his approach, despite these significant problems, reveals just how vital of a contribution Ross made to moral theory.

3 Conclusion

How, then, does deontology fit in contemporary discussions of ethics theory and practice? As noted, it played a critical role in the practical and professional ethics revival, and it continues to have a central place in a wide array of ethics issues. Consider, for example, source confidentiality in journalism ethics. Keeping one's promise of confidentiality no doubt serves utilitarian needs by enhancing trust and thereby making it more likely journalists will gain access to vital information. Further, reporters realize that by being faithful, they and their institutions will be held in higher regard and deemed more honorable. But most journalists also think they should retain confidences *simply because they made a promise*. Bob Woodward, for example, refused to reveal that Mark Felt was "Deep Throat" even long after revelation could have hurt him (Brokaw 2005). Similarly, many journalists have sacrificed personal liberty, accepting imprisonment for contempt of court rather than reveal their sources (Belt 2010). Their motives in such cases are assuredly multifaceted, but many explicitly state they kept the confidence simply because *they promised they would*.

Should that promise always prevail? To my mind, no, but, given its prima facie moral force, the burden of proof falls upon the person who wishes to violate it on behalf of some other, more powerful, moral good.²⁰ Among those goods, importantly, are utilitarian and virtue considerations. In other words, good ethics reasoning must incorporate elements from each of the major camps: Moral agents must be concerned about developing a habituated character, strive to produce a better aggregate balance of good over evil, and rely upon inherently valuable moral principles. And, crucially, they must give due attention to their own and others' *motives*; moral deliberation absent motive is little more than behavior modification.

Further reading

Kant was among the Western world's most important philosophers, with seminal works in all major areas of philosophical thought. Focusing here only on his ethics, additional important works by him include *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788/1998), the most comprehensive – but also least accessible – of his ethics writings. Much more accessible are works intended for a broader audience, including, *An Answer to the Question: 'What Is Enlightenment?'* (1784/2009) and *On the Old Saw: That May Be Right in Theory But It Won't Work in Practice* (1788/1998). The latter essay reveals Kant both to be a terrific writer and someone very much concerned with whether persons can follow his theoretical guidelines when faced with real world problems.

²⁰ See Quinn 2010.

There is also no shortage of secondary interpretative material on Kant. Three of the better are Thomas Hill (2009), Christine Korsgaard (1996) and Onora O'Neill (1990).

While *The Right and the Good* is Ross's most widely read book on moral theory (he was also a highly regarded scholar on Plato and Aristotle), he expanded upon his ideas in *Foundations of Ethics* (2000), a series of lectures he gave as part of the Gifford series. Because they are public lectures, much of the material here is also more accessible. And because so much of his thinking developed in response to G.E. Moore, the latter's *Principia Ethica* (1903/1993) is also a must read.

Ross profoundly influenced many subsequent moral intuitionists, most notably Ewing (1959), Stratton-Lake (2002), and Audi (2005). I find Audi's work to be especially insightful, both in its clarity on moral theory and in its nuanced application of theory to practical problems.

Last, deontological moral theory has also found its way into seminal works in political philosophy. People like Nozick (1974) and Kamm (2006) take the Kantian insight about the absolute worth of persons and develop it in mainly libertarian political theory. Contract theorists like Rawls (1971) and Gauthier (1986) have also developed theories built upon the Kantian dictates that persons should be able to freely choose their political destiny and should abide by resulting promises.

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9 Consequentialism

Abstract: Consequentialism is the category of ethical theories that determine the morality of potential, current and past actions by analyzing the outcomes or potential outcomes of those actions. Here we discuss consequentialism as a method for analysis for production, distribution and use of mass communication based on the theory described by John Stuart Mill, a nineteenth Century philosopher. Consequentialism is applicable to the study of mass communication because the intent of mass communication is to have impact on an audience.

Keywords: consequentialism, happiness, aggregate good, double effect, justice

In 1956, British philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe recommended to her Oxford University colleagues that the university deny U.S. President Harry Truman the honorary degree for which he had been nominated (Solomon 2008). Anscombe argued that Truman had committed a morally prohibited act in ordering atomic bombs to be dropped on the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan in 1945. She believed that Truman's order, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians, disqualified him for such an honor.

Dropping bombs on civilians to end World War II was what Anscombe called an example of immoral *consequentialism*. She thought consequentialism – judging the morality of action by its intended outcome – insufficient for making accurate moral judgments. She said that moral analysis of action need to include review of unintended consequences as well as those that were intended. She claimed that consequentialism, in this case, had been used to provide justification for an act that was clearly wrong (Solomon 2008).

At the time, U.S. and Allied military leaders argued that dropping atomic bombs on Japanese cities was justified because it brought the end to a war that had raged for six years, resulting in global death and destruction. Ending World War II did benefit more people than it hurt. From this well-known, but mistaken, application of consequentialist analysis: “Do the greatest good for the greatest number of people,” dropping atomic bombs seemed to be a good thing. The mistake in this use of consequentialism was in doing a quantitative comparison of the number of people harmed with the number of people not harmed, without consideration of other essential moral factors.

Consequentialism is the category of ethical theories that determine the morality of potential, current and past actions by analyzing the outcomes or potential outcomes of those actions. Actions that bring about good results are morally permitted. Actions that bring about bad results are morally prohibited. What is best, is an action or a kind of action that brings about the greatest happiness or benefit. What is bad, is an action or a kind of action which causes pain, unhappiness or harm.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-009>

In this chapter, we discuss consequentialism as a method for analysis for production, distribution and use of mass communication, based on the theory described by John Stuart Mill, a nineteenth-century British philosopher¹ and on the work of more contemporary utilitarian theorists such as Peter Singer and Julia Driver.

Consequentialism is an obvious theoretical construct to turn to for analyzing the moral permissibility of acts related to mass communication. Messages published through mass communication, by definition, are intended to reach audiences regardless of the platform on which they are published. Messages are published with the intent of bringing about outcomes. Whether mass communication messages are meant to entertain, to inform, or to provoke, the intent involves creating some change, however small in the user or world. Virtual. Physical. Or both.

Let's further consider the U.S. military action credited with ending World War II to understand Anscombe's objections. History shows that American leaders were reluctant to be the first (and as of this writing, the only) officials to order atomic bombs to be dropped on civilian populations. Unlike traditional munitions, atomic bombs vaporize everything living within miles of the explosion by extreme temperature and radiation.

At the time that the bombs were dropped, the Japanese had already been defeated. Blockades of all port cities deprived Japan of desperately needed resources. Major cities were in ruins from relentless carpet bombing by the U.S. using traditional munitions. Nevertheless, the Japanese military commanders were unwilling to surrender. The U.S. and its allies were eager to put the war behind them.

In early August 1945, Japanese military command was delivered a demand for immediate and unconditional surrender, without being told the consequence if that demand was rejected. The Japanese declined. Days later, the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, resulting in the instantaneous deaths of more than 70,000 civilians and the destruction of the entire seaside city. Two days after the first bomb was dropped, when Japan still did not agree to an unconditional surrender, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki resulting in deaths and devastation that rivaled Hiroshima. Soon, Japan issued an unconditional surrender and the war was over. Hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians died from radiation sickness in the months that followed. Thousands more Japanese citizens died from radiation-induced cancers long after the end of the war.

President Truman justified dropping the bombs by the act's good intention: to force Japan to quickly and unconditionally surrender, thus bringing World War II to an end. The killing of Japanese civilians as a result of these bombings was the unintended, but foreseeable consequence (Solomon 2008). In contemporary wars, we

¹ John Stuart Mill credited his wife and intellectual partner, Harriet Taylor Mill, as co-author of all of his philosophical work. However, as Harriett Taylor Mill is not listed as co-author, this chapter cites John Stuart Mill as a single author. This chapter is then written with a silent nod in appreciation of Harriett Taylor Mill's often-unacknowledged input.

refer to such unintentional citizen deaths as collateral damage. Truman's intent was to end the war, bringing about world peace; his intent was not to slaughter hundreds of thousands of Japanese citizens.

Anscombe (1958) argued that it was wrong to ignore the magnitude of the killing and harming hundreds of thousands of civilians in the ethical analysis of Truman's choice. Anscombe's motion to deny Truman an honorary degree received only three votes in addition to her own, but her preoccupation with how morality connects to unintended consequences resulted in her major contribution to ethical theory, "Modern Moral Philosophy," which was published in the journal *Philosophy* in 1958 (Anscombe 1958). Anscombe's analysis of unintended consequences brought an added dimension to would be considered in consequentialist thinking that followed.

1 A brief history

While Anscombe is credited for the first use of the term *consequentialism*, many historical philosophers described moral theories that incorporated evaluation of outcomes and the effects of action (Driver 2012). The two main historical branches of consequentialist theories are hedonism and utilitarianism. Hedonistic theories judge pleasure and pain that is caused to an individual; utilitarian theories judge pleasure and pain (or as it is more broadly addressed, happiness and unhappiness) based on how groups of people or how the community as a whole will be affected. Hedonist theories hold that actions are right based on their ability to bring individual pleasure. Utilitarian theories hold that actions are right based on their ultimate usefulness or benefit for the community as a whole.

Utilitarianism is further nuanced by a division between "act" and "rule" utilitarianism. Anscombe's objection classified Truman's choice to drop the bomb as an example of **act** utilitarianism. She (1958) argued that the specific act was wrong when viewed with the particulars of the situation, including harm that was foreseeable although not intended. In making her argument, she could be seen as arguing for **rule** utilitarianism in concluding that the only moral way to apply consequentialist theories was to always use this rule in figuring out the most ethical thing to do: consider all foreseeable consequences, including those that are not intended. This is called **rule** utilitarianism because the theory argues that the best overall consequence comes about if people always apply a certain rule in thinking through ethical issues.

Greek philosopher Epicurus (300 BCE) is usually used to exemplify hedonism in the Western tradition. But, while "epicurean" has come to mean people who prioritize immediate gratification or satisfaction of desire, Epicurus actually argued that individuals are best able to maximize their pleasure by considering what a specific choice might mean in their overall life and development. Epicurus recognized that true pleasure was not the same as immediate gratification.

Chinese philosopher Mo-Tzu (also spelled Mozi), who wrote in the same period as Epicurus, might be called the first utilitarian because he rejected the determination of an action as “good” based on whether it followed the community’s accepted custom or tradition. Instead, he argued that actions should be judged based on their usefulness or harmfulness to the community (Driver 2012).

The rise of contemporary consequentialism began in Great Britain during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when social thinkers were starting to challenge traditional social, economic and political systems and the traditional belief that ethical analysis was tied to religion and the commandments of God (Vallentyne 2007). They were also responding to German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who argued that a person’s intent and one’s understanding of his or her moral duty should be the basis for an individual determining whether actions were ethical or not. According to Kant, all adults have the ability to use their rational and moral reasoning ability to decide what constitutes right action. All adults have the responsibility to do what they have determined to be the right action and to do that regardless of the consequences.

So, for example, if a professor tells her students that she will not accept late papers, according to Kant, that professor has a responsibility to keep her word no matter what extenuating circumstances there might be. If a student’s being hit by a car on the way to class has prevented her from turning in her paper on time and that would result in her failing the class and losing her scholarship, according to Kant’s theory, the moral action, for the professor is neither to consider the student’s extenuating circumstance nor the consequences of giving her an F in the class.

Kant believed that every situation had one morally correct answer that any competent adult could reason to. Moral reasoning, from this point of view, is no different from mathematical reasoning. (See Chapter 8.) People might choose to behave in a way that was not the best ethical choice, but Kant wanted individuals to admit when they were acting in ways different from what morality demanded. Kant’s intent was for all people to realize that doing the right thing is a struggle and that, as mortals, we all fall sort at least most of the time. Our duty, as human beings, was to keep working to figure out the best choices and to act on those principles.

Kant’s formula for how to figure out the right thing to do seemed complicated, at best, for many people. And, many people were not comfortable with the idea of morality being such an exacting science. While most professors do have a general rule about not accepting late papers, almost all of them have done so in extraordinary circumstances. If they are willing to bend the rule for all students who have the same kind of extenuating circumstance, many professors would argue that their willingness to extend a deadline for an individual student in a bad circumstance is not an immoral act.

British philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) is the founder of modern utilitarianism, which is the turn that consequentialism took in the nineteenth Century. Like Epicurus, Bentham believed that pleasure was good and pain was bad and that people should seek to achieve pleasure and avoid pain (Driver 2012). Bentham was a

social reformer, arguing that utilitarianism was the theory that should guide governmental as well as individual actions. The results of his calculus in the early 1800's included his enlightened views that slavery was wrong; that women deserved equal treatment under law; and that it was wrong to abuse animals. In his many published works, Bentham showed how utilitarian calculus could fairly distribute the division of community goods (Driver 2012). A difficulty that critics have had with Bentham's calculus was in trying to figure out how to weight the various elements that he considered important in calculating utility: intensity (of pleasure or pain), duration, likelihood, timeliness, and extent.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), a young contemporary of Bentham, took on the project of dealing with the criticisms that Bentham's calculus was overly complicated and that seeking “the greatest good for the greatest number” might result in a small number of individuals being sacrificed for the good of the larger community. Mill, for whom Bentham was a mentor, gave up Bentham's felicific calculus and replaced it with an analysis that included review to ensure that everyone involved be treated justly. Like Bentham, Mill's work was motivated by his desire to create social reform, to inform law and social policy as well as to help individuals think about how to analyze their potential, current and past actions (Driver 2012). Mill appreciated that nations, societies, and communities within them could have different combinations of people with different traditions, religions, and resources. But, according to Mill, “Whatever their origin and character, to count as well-constituted, these combinations of individuals must be founded on substantive principles of justice.... only the virtue of justice, which is grounded on the value of perfect equality, is consistent with the promotion of human well-being and the improvement of societies as a whole” (Morales 1996: 184). Mill's insistence on applying the elements of justice as a step prior to conducting the utilitarian calculus guarantees that no individual or less powerful group could be sacrificed for the happiness of the majority. As Mill's system for how and when to apply the utilitarian calculus consists of a number of essential rules, it is properly held as an example of **rule** utilitarianism.

2 Mass communication and consequentialism

As the point of mass communication is for the producer of messages to share their messages with a targeted or diffuse audience, consequentialist analysis of that action is logical. Almost every question relating to mass communication can be asked in a consequentialist way: How was information gathered and can that process be justified by the potential and actual outcome? How was the information presented and what was the presentation intended to do? What was the result of the action? Is the outcome beneficial or harmful? If it causes harm, can that harm be justified? If so,

how? Even if the intended outcome is good, are there unintended negative consequences? If so, how can those be justified?

The consequentialist analysis provided by John Stuart Mill is particularly appropriate for mass communication because along with his utilitarian theory, Mill was also a strong proponent of free speech, free press and governmental non-interference.² “Millian democracy is a form of life and, as such, it is an ideal that ought to govern the constitution of just communities of all kinds. On Mill’s own principles, the higher value of democracy is directly related to its role in promoting the improvement of the human condition,” according to one theorist (Morales 1996: 18).

3 The consequentialist theory of John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill argued that one can judge the morality of actions using a Utilitarian calculus, but he put three safeguards in place that thinkers are required to consider before determining which act produces the greater good (Elliott 2007).

First, he believed in the autonomy and moral importance of each individual. He said that people need to be independent so that they can figure out which actions are morally permitted, and which are not. Indeed, the lifelong duty for all people, according to Mill, is to “form the truest opinions they can” (Gray 1991: 23). As Mill explains in his essay, *On Liberty*, the only way that people can figure out the truth is by continually testing out their opinions, engaging in discussions with other citizens, and trying to really understand opinions different from their own. Mill was a strong proponent of personal liberty, free speech and open channels of communication because he believed that these are essential pillars of democracy.

The enlightened, educated citizen is someone who is not threatened by people who think differently. Mill’s ideal citizen seeks to truly understand what people with opposing opinions think and why they think the way that they do. Mill says, the person “who has calmness to see and honesty to state what his opponents and their opinions really are, exaggerating nothing to their discredit, keeping nothing back which tells, or can be supposed to tell, in their favour. This is the real morality of public discussion” (Gray 1991: 61). Yet, for all of Mill’s desire for citizens to respect differences, it doesn’t follow from his theory that all opinions are equally acceptable. Mill believed that the truth of our opinions should be tested over and over by individuals and by the community as a whole, but he did think that if individuals work at it, they would find their way to important truths, including beliefs that were unusual for people to

² Readers are encouraged to read John Stuart Mill’s essays, “On Liberty,” “Subjection of Women,” and “Utilitarianism,” which can be found in Gray, J. (Ed.) (1991). *On liberty and other essays*. New York: Oxford University Press.

hold in the mid-1800's: for example, slavery is wrong, and women should have equal rights to men. They would come to realize that, at a fundamental level, every person matters. “[b]y stimulating other-regarding attitudes, democratic participation fosters the development of sympathetic bonds among people and encourages their commitment to the common good. Thus, democratic participation has a profound socializing effect, tied closely to the development of morality” (Morales 1996: 18).

Second, as every individual has equal worth, Mill laid out elements of justice that must be considered as people are weighing their ethical options of how to act in regards to another person. As people are naturally inclined to give moral attention first and foremost to those most immediately affected by our actions and those who are closest to us, Mill wanted to make sure that no one's rights were trampled in the process.

Mill described five elements of justice: legal rights, moral rights, getting what one deserves, having promises kept, and being treated impartially (Gray 1991: 178–180). Every person affected by an action must be treated justly. First, they should not be deprived of what they have a legal right to expect. In addition, people should get what they are morally owed, even if the law is silent on the subject. Moral obligation includes people meeting their responsibilities toward others. For example, my students have a moral right to my time and attention even if there is no law that says that I need to provide additional help outside of class time and office hours.

When Mill argued his third element – that people should get what they deserve – he meant that in both a positive and negative way. Mill said that it was unjust for someone “to obtain a good, or be made to undergo an evil, which he does not deserve” (Gray 1991: 179). So, for example, a mother watching in horror as her child dies in a house fire, does not “deserve” to have her picture taken at that awful moment, published and shared throughout the Internet. The picture may be riveting. It may be newsworthy. But those arguments for publication would arguably fail on Mill's grounds that she was not treated justly.

When promises are made to a person, they should be kept. Those who have been promised may release promisers of their moral obligations. But as it is unjust for the promiser to break their promise without being released by the person affected. For example, journalists should not make promises unless they are very certain that they can keep them.

Lastly, Mill argued that people should be treated impartially. That relates directly to Mill's point that all people's lives are of equal worth. If people are similar in a relevant way, then people who have power to affect them should treat them in the same way. So, if a professor gives one student who has had an emergency a few extra days to complete an assignment, the professor must be willing to do that for any student in the class. Professors are not justified in giving a student special privileges that are not open impartially to others.

Mill understood that meeting all of these requirements is the ideal, but there are times when that might be impossible. He said, “Justice is a name for certain moral requirements, which, regarded collectively, stand higher in the scale of social utility, and are therefore of more paramount obligation, than any others, though particular

cases may occur in which some other social duty is so important, as to overrule any one of the general maxims of justice. Thus, to save a life, it may not only be allowable, but a duty, to steal, or take by force, the necessary food or medicine, or to kidnap, and compel to officiate the only qualified medical practitioner” (Gray 1991: 201). Decision-makers can make justified exceptions to meeting all of the elements of justice in every case, but that exception should be public, open to scrutiny and discussion.

The third safeguard is that benefit to the community must be based on *aggregate* rather than *arithmetic* good. If we allow the greatest number of people to benefit from an action, doing so implies that happiness of the majority is more important than the happiness of those harmed in the bargain. Mill said that this is a mistake. Every person has equal moral importance. In fact, with enough education and enlightenment, individuals can come to see that their individual happiness is dependent on the good of the community. If everyone has what they need to live, there is no need for people to steal for survival. (Gray 1991: 142).

Mill also held that people who think carefully about themselves and their community come to a surprising conclusion: the role of the enlightened, educated individual is to create the best community possible to promote the happiness of every person as they promote their own. Individuals who seek and learn “true opinion” (Gray 1991: 166) come to see that their own individual happiness and wellbeing rests on the good of the community as a whole.

4 Applying Millian utilitarianism

Mill’s utilitarian ethical theory is explained in his essay *Utilitarianism* and is based on something that everyone can appreciate: happiness. Mill calls it the Greatest Happiness Principle, which “holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness” (Gray 1991: 137). But true happiness, according to Mill, is not the same as immediate gratification, momentary pleasure, or even personal satisfaction. Mill tells us, “It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their side of the question” (Gray 1991: 140).

While it may sound contradictory to say that happiness can coincide with dissatisfaction, Mill pointed out that enlightened people become happy by trying to make the world a better place. He says,

All the grand sources, in short, of human suffering are in a great degree, many of them almost entirely, conquerable by human care and effort; and though their removal is grievously slow... yet every mind sufficiently intelligent and generous to bear a part, however small and inconspicuous, in the endeavor, will draw a noble enjoyment from the content itself, which he would not for any bribe in the form of selfish indulgence consent to be without (Gray 1991: 146).

The process then for applying Mill's consequentialist theory, utilitarianism, starts with identifying any other people who might be affected by one's action. The actor's intention is less important than the foreseeable effect that the action is likely to have on others. Once those people are identified, the next step is to think through the elements of justice and make sure that people are getting their legal rights, their moral rights, what they deserve, are having promises kept to them and are being treated impartially. If decision-makers determine that, in a particular case, it is morally permitted for an element of justice to be set aside, they have the additional obligation of thinking of how that unjust treatment could be explained in a public and transparent way. The only justification for treating any person in an unjust way is that this kind of treatment would support the interests of the community as a whole in such an obvious way that people most likely to suffer are likely to agree.

The justification of taxes is an example of this kind of reasoning. In most countries, the wealthiest individuals are those that pay the most tax. One might say that the wealthiest individuals are not getting what they deserve if they are being penalized for their riches. The justification for allowing this exception to the elements of justice is that the community as a whole benefits from the government having tax dollars to care for the neediest and because the wealthiest citizens have voted for the tax code (or voted for legislators who have created the tax code).

Never, according to Mill's utilitarian calculus, is it justifiable to determine most or least harm or good based on the *number* of people affected on either side of the equation. Good or harm must be evaluated based on what the consequence of bringing about the best constituted community as that is also, ultimately, best for individuals.

5 Contemporary work in consequentialist theorizing

Consequentialist theorizing, with its intuitive fit, has been further refined for application in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Contemporary philosopher, Julia Driver, has shown how Millian utilitarianism can work in a complementary fashion with feminist philosophical concerns. Driver echoes Carol Gilligan's groundbreaking work on women's approach to moral theory by saying that women

tend to try to solve moral dilemmas through negotiation and communication, through attempts to make the facts clear in a dilemma situation. For women, the suggestion is that we do not view ourselves in isolation, as men tend to do, and we do not therefore need to relate to each other through a system of rules and principles where impartiality is the moral norm (Driver 2005: 184).

Feminists have argued that the impartiality requirement of utilitarianism contradicts the experience of women, which is often relational-centered, partial and particular to the situation at hand. Driver argues "that consequentialism – understood here as a theory that holds the right action to be that action which maximizes the good, where

good is understood agent-neutrally – does not have any trouble accounting for some partial norms” (Driver 2005: 185). Driver distinguishes between **choosing** an action because it maximizes the good and **judging the rightness** of the action because it maximizes the good. This is an important distinction. Few of us choose a friend or a life partner because doing so maximizes the good of society. Yet, if we look at the effect of people being in relationship with one another, we can see that personal relationships do maximize the good by allowing for the pooling of resources, and by motivating care for children, the elderly and other vulnerable populations. As Driver (2005: 194) says, these motivating emotions are “an extremely good thing, from an impartial point of view, since without these emotions it would be difficult to motivate the sorts of sacrifices one finds in these relationships. But this is not what people have in mind when they love their children. Nor should it be.” Driver (2005: 197) quotes Harriet Taylor, John Stuart Mill’s unsung partner, in noting that morality derives “its power from sympathies and benevolence and its reward from the approbation of those we respect.” So, the rightness of partial actions can be judged impartially.

Contemporary utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer not only argues that affluent people who have more than they need should help out people in need, he has created an organization that helps people do just that. Singer’s 2009 book, *The Life You can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty* (NY: Random House) and the website, www.thelifeyoucansave.org provides opportunities for affluent people to donate at least 1% of their net worth. Singer’s (2009: 230, 1972: 229–243) argument is that “if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it.” Singer argues that saving unknown children from dying from starvation is not morally different from the obligation to pull a drowning child from a water puddle if all that we risk is muddy clothing. That obligation doesn’t change if other people are choosing to act immorally and ignore the need. In true utilitarian fashion, on the website, Singer includes the expectation that people who reach the level of enlightenment needed to act on his argument will feel better for having done so. The person who helps, in even a small way, to make the world a better place, achieves happiness.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, let’s return to the case we discussed at the start of this chapter. Elizabeth Anscombe accused consequentialists of ignoring an action’s unintended, but foreseen circumstances. When something harmful happens as a side effect to an intended good outcome, this is formally called “a double effect.” *The Doctrine of Double Effect* suggests that a bad side effect can be morally justified to the extent that the primary action is not intended to cause harm and to the extent that the consequence of the intended action promotes overall good. Mill’s consequentialism

removes the distinction that so troubled Anscombe – that only intended outcomes should be considered. From Mill’s point of view, if all people who are affected are treated in accordance with the elements of justice, and if the greatest good for the affected community as a whole is considered, the intention behind the outcomes of action is not morally significant.

Anscombe (1958) also argued that consequentialism does not provide a stable basis for analysis, as the desired consequence may change. Mill would disagree. Dropping atomic bombs on Japanese civilians arguably would not have passed an analysis based on Mill’s form of consequentialism. These civilians were not treated justly. From our contemporary perspective, we can see that, for most citizens, national identity is more likely based on where people are born or choices of their parents and grandparents than rational choice to support a particular form of government. In fact, democratic process allows for the possibility that citizens might be in support of leadership at one point and less in support as others are voted into office. Through an examination of Mill’s elements of justice, it is clear that the civilians killed or affected by the atomic bombs did not get what they deserved. By analogy, it is not justified for terrorists to kill or harm innocent Americans because they do not approve of the actions of the U.S. government or U.S.-owned corporations.

Mill’s form of consequentialism is embedded in a full analysis of democracy and the well-constituted communities that democracy can create. Mill believed that the only morally acceptable societies were those that supported egalitarian values; war, he believed, supported selfish competition that got in the way of creating communities capable of social reform. The primary value for judging the benefit or harm of an act for the aggregate good is whether that act can promote a just and democratic society. That is the primary value because, from a consequentialist point of view, living in this kind of community allows each individual to attain true happiness.

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10 Virtue Ethics & Media

Abstract: Virtue ethics (VE) theory and scholarship in media and communication have become increasingly vibrant and worthy of serious attention. For all VE has to offer, however, it is not unusual for the theory to be explained and applied inaccurately in the literature and in textbooks. This limits the theory's potential for addressing enduring issues in media and communication, as well as emerging ones. This chapter argues that a major source of this theoretical distortion is the epistemological hegemony of "thin concepts" in ethics to the neglect of "thick concepts." Thick concepts, such as "cruel" or "courageous" (i.e., vices and virtues), simultaneously evaluate and describe; they presuppose particular institutional and cultural contexts in a way that thin concepts, such as "right" and "impermissible," do not. The "thin" bias results in a *systematic* distortion of VE, which limits the theory's relevance to media and communication ethics. This essay will focus on the thinning out of four central concepts that are analytically distinct but closely related in VE: virtues, practical reasoning, *eudaimonia*, and the common good. The conclusion discusses implications for the VE agenda in media and communication ethics.

Keywords: virtue ethics, Aristotle, *eudaimonia*, common good, thin concepts, thick concepts, communitarianism, practical reasoning

1 Advancing the virtue ethics agenda in media and communication ethics

An increasing number of scholars in media and communication have become interested in virtue ethics (VE). Partly this has been the result of the "revival of virtue ethics" in moral philosophy more broadly. Partly it is because of the theory's relevance to the ethical challenges posed by rapidly changing communication patterns and pervasive media technologies. VE is at once constant and flexible, grounded in the realities of the human condition at the same time that it demands continual adjustment to conditions on the ground. The broad naturalism of Aristotelian approaches links ethics to concrete, historically situated activities and communities at the same time that it guards against ethical relativism.

Indeed, virtue ethics theory and scholarship in media and communication have become increasingly vibrant and worthy of serious attention. For all VE has to offer, however, it is not unusual for the theory to be explained and applied inaccurately in the literature and in textbooks. This limits the theory's potential for addressing enduring issues in media and communication, as well as emerging ones. I will argue that a

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-010>

major source of this theoretical distortion is the epistemological hegemony of “thin concepts” in ethics to the neglect of “thick concepts.” Thick concepts, such as “cruel” or “courageous” (i.e., vices and virtues), are “partly constituted by institutional and cultural facts” in a way that thin concepts such as “right” and “impermissible” are not (Abend 2011, pp. 156–157). The “thin” bias in ethics scholarship leads critics and even some advocates to cherry-pick elements from the theory and treat them as if they were thin concepts. I realize that cherry-picking is not an affliction suffered only by VE; all theories are susceptible to being misconstrued or oversimplified. However, this chapter argues that the “thin” bias results in a *systematic* distortion of VE, which limits its relevance to media and communication ethics. Correcting for modern philosophy’s tendency to neglect thick concepts in favor of thin ones was one motivation for reviving VE (Solomon 1988). In particular, I will focus on the thinning out of four central concepts that are analytically distinct but closely related: virtues, practical reasoning, *eudaimonia*, and the common good. I will end this essay with a discussion of implications for the VE agenda in media and communication ethics. First, I will briefly review what has already been accomplished using VE in these fields.

2 Key VE contributions in media and communication

Media and communication scholars have made substantial contributions to ethics theorizing and application in three major areas using VE: work on role morality, work on moral motivation and moral development, and work on the media’s contributions to human flourishing. Although some of this work has relied on Plato (e.g., Marsh 2001), the Epicureans (e.g., Brey, Briggie and Spence 2012) and Confucius (e.g., Ding 2007), most VE scholarship has been based on Aristotle’s classical theory or on neo-Aristotelian theories. Therefore, I will focus on Aristotelian versions of VE.

Aristotle claimed that humans achieve excellence when they actively pursue the virtues in their whole lives and in their particular moral judgments. His conception of what is good for humans was teleological; it aims toward the *telos*, or ultimate end, of *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing.¹ When fully developed, virtues are habitual dispositions to choose right action through the exercise of practical reason, perfected by what Aristotle called *phronesis*, or practical wisdom: the hard-won moral expertise that comes from experience and reflection. The virtuous character involves habits and emotions, as well as reason and the will. It is developed within networks of giving and receiving, to use neo-Aristotelian philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre’s (1999) term, and ordered to the common good. Exercising a virtue in the full sense involves working

¹ Annas (1998) made a good case for “happiness” being a more faithful translation in ancient usage. However, I will use “flourishing” to avoid confusion with modern notions of “happiness.”

out: (a) how to exercise the virtue (a) in all my roles at once (b) in a way that lends unity to my character and (c) coherence to my life as a whole (d) while maintaining continuity with those traditions whose shared ends I pursue with others and (e) that are integrated into the common good for all. This thumbnail sketch of VE will be fleshed out in the remainder of this essay.

2.1 Role morality

Aristotle's theory lends itself to the study of role morality because of his argument that all things have a function and what is good for them is what helps them to excel at performing that function. In journalism ethics, Klaidman & Beauchamp (1987) got the attention of scholars with their analysis of the most important "traits of virtuous journalists" (p. 19); they proposed reaching for truth, avoiding bias and harm, serving the public, maintaining trust, escaping manipulation, and inviting criticism and being accountable. Cohen (Adam, Craft, and Cohen 2004) likewise emphasized the virtues of individual journalists in relation to journalism's ultimate purpose, suggesting that journalistic competence could be mapped onto these virtues. Adam, in the same article, discussed virtues associated with writing as being key to understanding the role morality of journalists. Quinn (2007) suggested justice as the principal agent-neutral virtue for journalists and integrity as the principal agent-relative virtue for journalists. Similar to Klaidman and Beauchamp's approach, scholars have discussed specific virtues (including fairness, integrity, community, respect, empathy, honesty and shame) in relation to the decisions, strategies and organizations of marketers (e.g., Hartman and Beck-Dudley 1999, and Murphy, Laczniak, and Wood 2007) and public relations practitioners (Bivins 2004).

MacIntyre's (1981) concept of a *practice* has been important for relating virtues to the ultimate purpose, or *telos*, of particular media and communication activities. A practice is "an established human cooperative activity in which one participates for the purpose of achieving excellence in the realization of certain goods whose point and meaning are internal to the practice" (Borden 2007, pp. 137–138). Practices are morally authorized by, and accountable to, the traditions in which they are historically situated. In *Journalism as Practice*, I took up Lambeth's (1990) proposal to theorize journalism in terms of a MacIntyrean practice. Craig (2011) used a MacIntyrean framework to frame his findings from interviews with writers, editors and producers who were extending the practice of journalism by developing standards of excellence for the emerging platform of online journalism. Work outside journalism includes Mackey's (2014) critique of corporate public relations using MacIntyre's framework to argue that organizations should strive to "have a virtuous character which meets the community expectations of contemporary society" (p. 132). Harden Fritz (2013), evaluating the role of the professional more generally, conceptualized professional

civility as a communicative virtue at the level of organizational interaction, contributing to good work as part of human flourishing.

Because practices are defined in terms of purpose and internal goods – and not just skills, activities or institutional settings – MacIntyre’s conception helps draw helpful normative boundaries, allowing for moral distinctions between members of the practice and those who merely imitate them (e.g., Borden and Tew 2007) and cautioning against a completely open media ethics as proposed by Couldry (2013) and Ward & Wasserman (2010).² As Thomas (2016) noted:

The very nature of a role implies a measure of uniqueness, in terms of accepting particular role-relative responsibilities that distinguish the bearer from others. This then becomes tautological: if a role is dispersed – indeed, if a role is universalized – it ceases to be a role and lacks the moral justification that accompanies it. (p. 95)

2.2 Moral motivation and moral development

Craig’s (2011) strategy of studying leading practitioners to develop profiles of excellence uses the idea from Aristotle that we rely on moral exemplars to develop the virtues. These exemplars provide *regulative ideals* (Oakley and Cocking 2001) that can guide action. Baker (2008) suggested contrasting archetypes of good and bad PR and advertising practitioners based on specific vices and virtues they can develop in the context of their professions. Taking to the comics, Good (2010) relied on Kirkhorn’s (1982) *Quill* essay to propose Joe Sacco as an exemplar of virtuous journalism for his probing examinations of the human condition in his book-length works on armed conflict in the Middle East and Bosnia. Plaisance (2016), relying on neo-Aristotelian philosopher Philippa Foot, has developed an ambitious empirical agenda grounded in his own 2014 work on moral exemplars in journalism and public relations. He has proposed leveraging VE’s moral naturalism to marry psychological concepts to moral philosophy in a bid to study media workers’ moral motivation and moral agency. His program builds on previous empirical work using psychological concepts to study the moral development of journalists, PR practitioners and advertisers (e.g., Wilkins and Coleman 2005).

Some scholars have focused on how media and other communication performances influence the character of those who engage with them. Oliver, Hartmann and Woolley (2012) pondered the enjoyment resulting from feelings of elevation prompted by media portrayals of moral virtue. Charlton and Upson (2011) argued that even

² Couldry suggested “media” are a practice according to the MacIntyrean definition. However, as I argued in (2016), indiscriminately lumping together all activities involving the media and calling them a practice is not consistent with MacIntyre’s definition.

occasional participation in virtual child pornography hurts one's character because, by doing so, one contributes selfishly to the moral ruin of others without regard for their well-being. In a rhetorical analysis, Rossing (2013) analyzed racial humor as a site for understanding and practicing practical wisdom, understood as sophisticated reasoning plus sophisticated performance resulting from political struggle in discursive spaces.

2.3 The media's contributions to *Eudaimonia*

In 2007, I suggested that understanding journalism as a practice helps us to see how journalism is normatively defined by the moral purpose of promoting human flourishing; specifically, by helping citizens discover the common good as intellectually responsible participants in a diverse political community. Vallor (2012) relied on classic Aristotelian theory to address whether and how social media contribute to flourishing by promoting friendships of virtue. Morse (2000) took a MacIntyrean approach to argue that advertising – as one aspect of community – indirectly influences action to the extent that it influences people's conception of the good life and thus their moral development. Plaisance (2013) has suggested that Foot's "natural normativity" provides practical tools for promoting digital flourishing for those negotiating the responsible use of technology and for a global media ethics more generally.

Plaisance (2013) relied partly on Couldry (2013), who argued that virtue ethics poses the right sorts of questions about media ethics on a global scale, focusing not on abstract principles (as is the case with most global media ethics proposals), but on the "shared conditions of human life, and certain qualities of a good life that flow from these conditions" in relation to the media (p. 24). He suggested the virtues of accuracy, sincerity and care were particularly relevant to this project. Ward (2011) has offered his own version of flourishing, called "ethical flourishing" as the aim of a global media ethics.

3 Thick concepts and virtue ethics

Thin concepts in meta-ethics do not have much, if any descriptive content; they include "right," "impermissible" and "inappropriate." Here is an example of a thin judgment in communication ethics: "Calling women 'pigs' is wrong." This is how Abend (2011), a sociologist, described thick concepts: "Thick concepts have two peculiar characteristics, which make them qualitatively different from thin ones. First, they simultaneously describe and evaluate an object, yet description and evaluation are inseparable. Second, for a thick concept to be possible at all in a society, certain cultural and institutional facts must obtain there; that is each thick concept has distinct

cultural and institutional presuppositions” (p. 162). Here is an example of a thick judgment: “Calling women ‘pigs’ is dishonorable.” Other examples of thick concepts are “disloyal,” “kind” and “patient” – precisely the kinds of concepts that concern virtue ethicists (though not all thick concepts in ethics are either virtues or vices).

The term “thick concepts” first appeared in print in Bernard Williams’ (1985) *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. However, modern virtue ethicists began questioning the fact-value dichotomy years earlier. Anscombe (1958), for example, argued that the “brute facts” describing many moral concepts were sufficient to justify them. Foot (1977) argued that the meaning of many evaluative terms were logically constrained by the internal relations among moral attitudes and their real-world objects. MacIntyre (1988) took this line of argument further by claiming that it is traditions that make moral language intelligible and practical rationality possible. Christians (2015a) concluded that Foot (and, by extension, other VE scholars who question the strict demarcation between fact and value) was advocating relativism. This is a common, if unfounded, suspicion of VE. What Foot and other VE scholars are saying, rather, is that virtues and other core ethical concepts in VE are embedded in relationships, practices and cultures in ways that are not easily (if at all) separable from those facts. Aristotelians are moral realists, not relativists. As MacIntyre (2016) noted, practical reasoning in the Aristotelian tradition presupposes that there are “standards independent of our feelings, attitudes, and choices which determine what is and what is not good and that rationality requires an acknowledgement of the authority of those standards” (p. 190). A relativistic theory could not speak of the deformation of desire, disordered lives or moral error, as VE does.

It is not that virtue ethicists think there is no line between fact and value; they disagree about how to draw that line. When it comes to ethics, they think the most relevant concepts can be both factual and evaluative. One reason why thick concepts are hard to pin down is because they come in different “thicknesses,” depending on the complexity of their relationship to social, political and historical facts. Abend (2011) noted, “(E)ach individual thick moral concept has its own, distinct presuppositions (there is no such thing as the presuppositions of thick concepts, in general). Each one is ontologically dependent on cultural and institutional facts in a different way and to a different extent” (p. 157). Not all thick concepts exist in every culture, and, even if they do, they may not have the same meaning or even valence (Eklund 2011). Such indeterminacy seems to limit the usefulness of thick concepts. Hansen (2014) illustrated this criticism with the example of courage. *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, he said, demonstrated courage when reporting on Watergate; this display of courage was virtuous because the investigation “led to the fall of something unethical.” However, what about the case of a hypothetical journalist who dared to buck his newsroom’s prohibitions against bribery? In that case, Hansen argued, courage would not be virtuous (p. 238).

Meta-ethicists differ on the place of thick concepts in ethics. Particularists say that thick concepts are primary; some go so far as to say that all ethical concepts

are thick concepts. Generalists, however, predominate in all fields of applied ethics, including media and communication ethics. They suppose that “the moral thinker is not only lost in terms of her orientation to the world and to other folks but irresponsible in so far as she has failed to form her beliefs in light of moral principles with the requisite level of transparency and universality” (Smith 2008, p. 147). MacIntyre (2016) calls this way of thinking about ethics “Morality.” Although the reasons why we should obey Morality’s maxims vary from theory to theory, all Morality theories derive their character from “peculiarly modern social relationships and intellectual presuppositions” that VE does not share (p. 69). “Any conception of moral theory as rooted in and unintelligible apart from the particularities of moral practice is generally ignored,” he wrote. “Any notion of moral enquiry as needing to begin from or even include anthropological and historical studies of moral practice is ruled out and with it any identification of contrasts between the moral practices of the culture that we here now inhabit and those of cultures of other times and places” (pp. 71–72).

Some generalists acknowledge that any theory that does not incorporate virtue is incomplete, so they include virtue within their wider (principle-based) frameworks or undertake efforts to recover such virtue accounts in the work of others, such as Mill and Kant.³ However, virtues are still secondary in these frameworks. For example, Hansen (2014) argued against virtues as a starting point for media ethics because they are, by definition, incapable of articulation and specification in the way that rules are. Wright (2014) similarly argued for the necessity of stable rules to articulate in advance appropriate courses of action in complex news environments. Ward (2010) argued that principles in his proposed global system for media ethics could be normatively justified only if they were “of sufficient generality and logical fecundity” that they could support “the more specific principles and norms of our ethical framework” (p. 176). Bell (2007) explained the significance of adopting either a particularist or a generalist meta-ethical stance:

The difference between the two is not merely that it is important to be sensitive to the particulars of individual cases. Particularists and generalists can both accept this claim. The difference arises in how this sensitivity plays out. No matter how much they emphasize case-centeredness and awareness, generalists are committed to the view that cases can be subsumed under rules and principles. (p. 46)

When virtues are shoehorned into principlist theories, they are abstracted from the coherent theoretical structures in which they were originally embedded, leaving virtues as pale – thin – versions of themselves. To take the thickness of virtues seriously, one must commit to being at least a moderate particularist. Moderate particularists prioritize thick concepts but allow for thin concepts. Aristotle was a moderate particularist. He shared the classical view that thick and thin work together

³ Going forward, I will refer to such accounts of virtue as *virtue theories* to distinguish them from *virtue ethics*.

in a unified process of moral deliberation. However, rationality is articulated through *phronesis*, not through deduction from universals. He said as much: Rules are useful but are not constitutive of morality. The task of evaluating a whole life is not amenable to principle-based analysis. Rather, this task is best accomplished by reflecting on one's life as a "dynamic history which informs the present and the future" (Smith 2008, p. 150).

As far as particular moral judgments, they are more like selecting from "a stack of maxims" and applying them in particular circumstances than manufacturing "particular inferences on the basis of prior knowledge of universals." Moral deliberation in VE begins with the facts at hand – the "that" – and discovering the "rational relations that are immanent" in them – the "because" – rather than constructing "some unifying conception of how they fit together" (Smith 2008, pp. 148, 150). The "because" is inextricably connected to the social meanings that make thick ethical concepts such as virtues intelligible. Figuring out thick concepts requires thick description: detail and accuracy, yes, but also purpose and selectivity. "The description simultaneously is the evaluation" (Abend 2011, p. 161, emphasis in original).

3.1 The thin bias and virtues

- The focus on virtues as *individualistic* neglects the social and historical presuppositions that give virtues part of their content.
- Thus scholars may miss how important actual participation in concrete ways of life is for the development of moral knowledge.

Aristotle understood virtues socially (like other thick concepts). "Aristotle's account of the virtues, when fully spelled out, is or rather presupposes a psychology *and* a sociology," MacIntyre (2016) noted (p. 221, emphasis added). Even the virtue of self-knowledge, which on its face seems like an individualistic virtue, is not. Vallor (2012) explained:

Self-knowledge is not, for Aristotle, a matter of 'going inside' to observe some private, autonomous and unique inner core of the personality, as we often portray it in the modern West. Instead, self-knowledge in the Aristotelian sense is a matter of understanding properly where I fit in the world, what my proper role in it is, and the capacities I have (or lack) for actively flourishing in those roles. (page 193)

Nevertheless, "modern reduced accounts of virtue" stress reliable dispositions and attend to virtuous *individuals* and the *individual* exercise of the virtues (Annas 2003, p. 30). This can give the wrong impression that the virtuous agent is "the only piece of conceptual apparatus relevant to moral philosophy" (Hursthouse 1995, p. 72), leading generalists to conclude that VE promotes what amounts to moral navel-gazing on

the “personal question of investigating my own conscience” (Hansen 2014, p. 238). Even contemporary proponents of virtue often leave out Aristotle’s account of practical reasoning and how it builds up to practical wisdom, “an account which differs a great deal from the accounts often assumed by modern philosophers and psychologists” (Annas 2003, p. 30). For one thing, VE holds that humans can only develop and exercise their “particular kind of embodied rational agency” (Sherman 1993, p. 292) if they can count on others to care for them and when they can be counted on to care for others (MacIntyre 1999). And they learn the meanings of the virtues within specific social contexts. Without culture, there is no moral formation; it is culture that initiates moral agents into the relevant capacities they need to develop good character and live good lives. This involves both induction into the way things are as well as a critical sensibility to discern the way things could be. This critical sensibility, however, “must not be peeled-off from the content or from the form of life about which we are reflecting” (Smith 2008, p. 142). You cannot work out an ideal of virtue at an abstract level and then deduce from that a way of life that is removed from your actual circumstances (Annas 2002). You do not have to get a life. You already have one. And your goal is to live virtuously *within* it.

Participation in concrete ways of life equips us to appreciate reasons as well as non-moral features of situations that bear on those reasons. This understanding runs counter to Enlightenment views of reality as completely “out there.” Nevertheless, VE does not succumb to subjectivism. Smith (2008), analyzing MacIntyre’s moral realism, noted:

One of the valuable lessons of MacIntyre’s philosophical attitude is to help us be suspicious of the attempt to reduce complex social phenomena in the name of conceptual economy, and to render in theoretical terms what can only be adequately understood in practical historical terms. (p. 140).

And I would add practical linguistic terms. Part of thick ethical description is paying attention to language because normative distinctions are expressed through language. Yet one of the reasons that Christians (2015b) has rejected VE for media and intercultural communication ethics is its emphasis on reason as the central function of humans; he suggested discourse instead. I am not denying the relevance of Counter-Enlightenment authors in the philosophy of language – focusing on discourses and sense-making makes good sense for those of us studying media and communication. I am suggesting that this body of work has ready links to Aristotelianism. Hannan (2016) noted, for example, that MacIntyre’s moral theory presented a model of moral discourse, framing traditions as ongoing, intergenerational arguments and the self as one who is inherently discursive and, as such, always in relationship. Practices, the immediate context for moral development, entail social cooperation and common purpose with others. They, in turn, are authorized by traditions, the larger story of which the practice (and its members) are a part. And the narrative self is inherently situated in an even larger

story with plots and subplots situated in primary and secondary settings that make sense of her life as a whole. “We are thus not just storytelling, but also story-*living* creatures,” Hannan wrote. “Stories lie at the seat of human consciousness. They are the organizing bases of human action and account for the distinctly teleological character of practical reason” (p. 30, emphasis in original). If anything, the cultural turn in ethics could be read as an update of VE, not a rejection of it.

3.2 The thin bias and practical reasoning

- Emphasis on traits leaves out Aristotle’s account of practical reasoning and its development into practical wisdom.
- Thus scholars may misconstrue the structure and content of virtue.

Virtues are thickened not only by social context but by Aristotle’s account of practical reasoning. “This is because virtue, unlike a mere habit, is a disposition to act which is exercised in and through the agent’s practical reasoning,” wrote Annas (2003, p. 24, emphasis in original). Practical reasoning is particularly germane to the intellectual aspect of virtue:

The virtuous agent doesn’t just do the right thing, she does it for the right reason – because she understands that this is the right thing to do. And she does this dispositionally – she has a character such that she understands on each occasion what the right thing to do is. (p. 25)

The development of practical reasoning into *phronesis* follows the same pattern as other types of practical expertise. Some of this understanding can be taught, but some of this can only be learned from experience and reflection. The expertise, once developed, is reliable but not routine.⁴ Annas (2003) explained:

We want our practical experts to have learned from experience and practice, but we do not expect them to have developed a routinized habit that produces predictable outcomes whatever the nature of the individual challenges; if we find that our plumber or mechanic does have such a routinized habit, we realize that she is not an expert, since she lacks understanding of what she is doing. (And we go to another.) (p. 26)

Hansen’s (2014) example of the brave bribe-taking journalist would not demonstrate virtue in the full sense, according to Aristotle, because the practical reasoning required by virtue is not just situation-sensitive; it is also active and critical: “A virtue is not an entity in me determining my behaviour; it is the way I am, my disposition to decide” (Annas 2003, p. 27). Unfortunately, the constitutive role of practical

⁴ See Annas (2003) and Abend (2011) for VE responses to the situationist critique.

reasoning in the structure of virtue has been obscured in a number of ethics textbooks by the theoretical shortcut of the Golden Mean. As Cunningham (1999) pointed out, what originated in Aristotle as a metaphor for right action took on a life of its own:

The tenor of these conflict-driven deliberations is heavily rationalistic and almost exclusively epistemic because the elements of moral character and moral development are either ignored or muted. Conflict-driven ethics, typified by textbook case studies, is generally particular in its focus on situations and relatively atomistic in applying its energies to resolving a dilemma. The so-called Golden Mean, structured as it is by dichotomous extremes, appears as a convenient strategy within this answer-driven mindset. (p. 11).

Surveying media and communication ethics textbooks 10 years later, Wyatt (2008) observed improvement in the treatment of Aristotelian ethics, but noticed that the quandary mindset of applied ethics classes nevertheless still led students to continue making the Golden Mean error that Cunningham (1999) described. Further, because students tend to construe deficiency as not acting and excess as a choice that involves acting, “[t]he mean, then, always involves an adjusted – usually watered down – version of the proposed action” (Wyatt, p. 300), whether it be running a photo, retweeting a post or issuing an ultimatum.

3.3 The thin bias and *Eudaimonia*

- Rejection of *eudaimonism* robs VE of its distinctiveness. Thus scholars may subsume virtue under rival theories.
- OR *eudaimonia* is reduced to self-realization. Thus scholars may overlook its integral connection to the common good.

Reduced accounts of virtue also tend to neglect the way in which a prior account of the human good thickens Aristotelian virtues. *Eudaimonia* is the overarching concept in the wider theoretical structure for VE. When it is left out, or thinned out, VE appears theoretically weak or even anti-theoretical (Annas 1998). *Eudaimonism* is rejected among a number of ethicists, even those who offer contemporary virtue theories, because they worry that it carries too much pre-modern baggage. Adaptation to current conditions and empirical findings may necessitate specific changes in Aristotle’s account. However, simply abstracting features from his theory to suit modern sensibilities neglects the fact that *eudaimonism* guides moral action quite differently from ethical theories appealing to universal principles. As Prior (2001) explained, “The ideal, whether it be the phronimos, a Platonic philosopher-ruler, or a Stoic sage, represents the highest level of ethical life attainable by human beings, rather than the lowest common denominator. *Eudaimonism* justifies conduct in terms of an ability to promote or exemplify that ideal” (p. 336).

Nevertheless, VE mash-ups abound. An example from the media ethics literature is Ward's (2010, 2011, 2013) proposal to adopt "ethical flourishing" as the aim of a global media ethics. Flourishing in his account consists of developing individual capacities that are necessary for (Kantian) individuals to live with physical, social, political and ethical dignity. Ethical capacities include developing a rational plan of life, acting fairly, and showing impartiality and concern for others. Although virtues and practical reason are included in his account, he said that VE captures only one non-reducible aspect of ethical life and must be supplemented. Rather than basing virtue on *eudaimonia*, Ward (2010) used a Kantian gloss of virtue as a disposition strengthening the good will; i.e., it cannot itself identify what is good. Predictably, such a reduced account of virtue no longer makes it a plausible rival to Kantian deontology, but just one of deontology's moving parts.

Eudaimonia provided Aristotle with a coherent and distinctive way to describe wisdom and to determine which qualities should count as virtues. It also helped him to differentiate between intrinsic and consequential benefits, separating out the good inherent in the excellent use of reason from the consequential harms or benefits of a given action. This distinction allows us to see how every virtuous action benefits the agent without boiling *eudaimonia* down to a narrow emphasis on self-realization. Because the agent's good is inextricably linked to the common good, she does not face a choice between her self-interest as a person and her self-interest as a community member. Neither is it the case that virtues equate to benevolence (as Hansen 2014, seemed to suggest). Rather, as we have seen, virtuous activity involves congruency between the moral conduct of a situated agent and between the developed parts of her character and her emotional make-up. The virtuous agent becomes gradually more expert at doing the right thing using the moral knowledge gained from her embedded experiences; she does the right thing for its own sake and takes pleasure in doing so (Cunningham 1999).

Despite lip service to Aristotle's observation that humans are naturally social, modern accounts of VE often neglect the fact that *eudaimonia* is manifested between persons – rather than within them. Indeed, Aristotle's notion of flourishing is grounded in the notion of the shared life, "the social achievement that alone renders *eudaimonia* concrete for us; without it, the concept of 'flourishing' remains empty of content" (Vallor 2012, p. 196). The shared life requires sustained and concerted action between friends and community members, a lifetime of activity ordered to the highest forms of relationships. It cannot be reduced to social cooperation in order to promote individual ends, or even joint ends, for that matter. Aristotle recognized alliances, or friendships of utility, but these are not the sort of coming together that Aristotle had in mind for flourishing in civic communities, friendships of virtue, families or (a MacIntyrean might add) practices.

Mutual affiliation – typified by "creating a shared world," by discovering the common good together, by being attuned to each other's feelings and activities – is a character state worth cultivating, "a virtue whose focus is not on self or other, but on the fact of common doing" (Sherman 1993, pp. 278 and 298). It is part of the "structured composite of final and instrumental ends" constitutive of *eudaimonia* in

Aristotelian thought (p. 299). In contrast with Kant, the good of community in virtue ethics does not depend ultimately on a utopian ethical commonwealth defined by pure reason. It is firmly grounded in the human condition:

Finding pleasure in the mutuality of community is not simply a contingent end, like enjoying carpentry or dance or Wagnerian opera. Unlike these, it is a characteristic, albeit contingent, feature of our particular kind of embodied rational agency. Sociality appeals to material facts about human nature that are persistent, and that bridge local differences of taste and talent. It appeals to deep facts about us. (Sherman 1993, p. 292)

In contrast, liberal conceptions of the self and society have rejected Aristotelian teleology in favor of choices motivated by preferences. This can be seen in Ward's (2011) subordination of virtues and practical reason to the demands of Rawlsian justice.⁵ "To work towards the ethical flourishing of a global community is to promote a cosmopolitanism that emphasizes universal principles of human rights, freedom, and justice," he wrote (p. 741). The political community in Aristotle is not grounded in liberal principles precisely because VE prioritizes the good over the right and recognizes the necessity and desirability of dependence as well as independence, of given commitments as well as chosen associations (MacIntyre 1999). As Sherman (1993) noted:

The operative virtue here is not respect, nor beneficence, nor even cooperation, though each may enter non-essentially. At risk of being expansive, what seems to be at stake is some measure of transcendence; it is a relaxing of one's own sense of boundaries and control. It is acknowledging a sense of union or merger. (p. 282)

Nevertheless, the shared life is not monolithic. This is another reason why the classical *polis* was crucial to Aristotle's theory. The *polis* provided the moral umbrella for a range of excellences to thrive without the moral order collapsing or losing its function of connecting persons to the pursuit of the human good. As Seal (2008) noted, when the Aristotelian tradition is considered in all its thickness, it is a political tradition as well as an ethical one. This brings us to the last element of VE that has been downplayed by the thin bias.

3.4 The thin bias and the common good

- Conflating the common good with social welfare or the public interest blurs important differences between VE and other theories.
- Thus scholars may not seriously consider VE as a theoretical framework for communitarian projects.

⁵ Ess's (2013) virtue-based approach to global media ethics likewise prioritizes the right over the good and conceives of moral agents in liberal, rather than Aristotelian, terms.

When the common good is explicitly referenced in contemporary accounts of VE, it is often reduced to a pro-social orientation in individuals or to the aggregation of individual goods. Both characterizations blur what is distinctive about VE compared with rival theories. Individuals may care about benefiting others – i.e., they may be oriented toward service and exhibit benevolent attitudes – but these are orientations equally at home in utilitarian and deontological frameworks. A pro-social orientation is not a distinctive feature of VE. The shared life is. However, the shared life requires doing *with* not just doing *for*. Fostering the common good does not translate simply into being other-oriented.

The commonness of the common good, moreover, requires that the goods realized through the shared life are indeed shared goods, not merely goods valued by multiple persons or resulting in the private advantage of most individuals in utilitarian fashion. “The mainstream view disembods the self and operates by procedures,” Christians (2015b) wrote, resulting in Western moral philosophy’s overall neglect of community (p. 42). In response, he has proposed a communitarian framework for media and communication ethics, writing that community “is the context in which the nature of morality is understood correctly” (p. 43) and that “people are born into a sociological universe where values and meanings are either presumed or negotiated” (p. 42). Communitarianism holds that individuals cannot be fully realized except as members of communities and that communities, as well as individuals, have moral standing. These claims are quite compatible with VE, as I have shown. Christians did acknowledge that Aristotle advocated a “morality of social action” (p. 41). Nevertheless, he ultimately grouped Aristotle with Kant and Mill on the grounds that they shared a common deficiency regarding the communitarian project: a narrowly rationalistic and overly individualistic view of ethics. I hope to have already addressed this objection in previous sections of this essay.⁶

4 Conclusion

Scholars interested in VE recognize the value of checking their theoretical commitments against empirical findings. As De Haan and Meadows (2014) noted, “Aristotle was one of those clearheaded thinkers who always asked us to begin our inquiries walking on the solid ground of what is more known to us before jumping headlong into what is more known in itself and ending up neck deep in confusion” (p. 214). In fact, there has been increased interest in the study of personality and stable traits

⁶ Among neo-Aristotelians, MacIntyre perhaps has dealt most directly with the political dimensions of Aristotelian thought, though he disavows the label of “communitarian” because some versions of this political philosophy make the political community co-terminous with the state and/or the market.

(Fleeson, Furr, Jayawickreme, Helzer, Hartley, and Meindl 2015). However, empirical support for Aristotelian virtues has been mixed.

Some philosophers have responded by developing theoretical alternatives to Aristotelian VE that conform to empirical findings (e.g., Miller 2013). Others (e.g., Snow 2010) have tried to show that psychological studies fueling critiques of VE were poorly designed and that empirical grounding for the theory can be found in other psychological approaches. For example, empirical work done in social cognitivism and developmental moral psychology has illuminated the ways in which we might understand the possible role of non-conscious cognitive processing in responding “automatically” to consciously chosen ends, the self-regulatory processes involved in goal-oriented action, the development of virtue on the Aristotelian model of mastering practical skills, and the role of self-schemas in evaluating oneself as a moral agent (Annas 2015; Snow 2013).

However, media ethicists should proceed with caution when using empirical data to explain, support or criticize VE. To paraphrase MacIntyre (2016), empirical studies informed by Morality may have no place in their conceptual scheme for Aristotelian concepts, or, if they do, their presuppositions about desires, rationality and so on may be different from those of Aristotelians (p. 98). For example, social scientists may operationalize VE concepts such as virtues and *eudaimonia* in ways that may pose a false equivalence between, say, a utilitarian version of happiness as “life satisfaction” and the Aristotelian version of happiness as “human flourishing.” If an investigator proposes to measure human flourishing with a life satisfaction index, we must acknowledge that the investigator is not directly measuring human flourishing as an Aristotelian understands the term (Vallor 2010). Another example is the widespread use of the Defining Issues Test (DIT) to study moral development. Inferences about VE based on DIT results need to account for the fact that the DIT is based on a moral psychological theory that frames moral maturity as the outcome of a Kantian progression toward reliance on more abstract and more general rules (Annas 2015). As Vallor noted, such issues do not render empirical ethical studies invalid or unimportant. Nevertheless, scholars interested in refining or criticizing VE on the basis of empirical findings need to be alert to the kinds of inferences they may, and may not make, based on those data. For example, see Plaisance’s (2014) careful discussion of how various individual-level variables in moral psychology may relate to Aristotelian and communitarian concepts.

Even with such precautions, moral psychology and moral neuroscience will take us only so far in understanding thick concepts such as virtues. The VE research agenda will remain incomplete without simultaneously studying how particular cultures are manifested in social conceptions of virtues, virtuous behavior, social relationships and institutional structures. And this is not just a methodological issue. It is a theoretical one as well. Thick concepts, Abend observed, “challenge the prevalent conception of a hardwired and universal moral capacity in a specific and acute way, which thin concepts do not” (p. 162). Among topics that need to be examined empirically are the prevalence (and absence) of particular thick concepts, their uses, their

histories and their institutional manifestations. This agenda will require that other disciplines, such as history, anthropology and sociology, contribute to the empirical study of morality on equal footing with neuroscience and psychology.

In normative theorizing, we need more attention to taken-for-granted ethical terms in U.S. American scholarship that “carry within them both theoretical and normative commitments” that may be “thinner” than necessary to be compatible with VE (Douglass 1980, p. 114). For example, Thomas (2016) recently took on the concept of paternalism in media ethics. In defending a positive conception of paternalism, he stressed a thick conception of autonomy, defined as opportunity for the sake of promoting meaningful choices ordered to human flourishing. He contrasted this conception with the dominant one: a thin notion of autonomy as unhindered freedom to choose based on our preferences. For those interested in addressing the thin bias in VE in media and communication, we may need to go back to basics, as it were, interrogating concepts such as humanity, community, and politics (Codina 2016). A possible objection is that the thickening provided by the *phronemos*, the *polis* and so on in Aristotle’s theory is not workable in today’s modern pluralistic societies (Prior 2001). Vallor (2012), however, pointed out a theoretically coherent answer: Maybe we should be figuring out whether current socio-political arrangements are conducive to authentic development and flourishing. Virtuous agents always have to “fit” their circumstances, but some circumstances suit the good life better than others.

I would like to close, in Aristotelian fashion, with an exemplar of the kind of research needed to round out the VE agenda in media and communication. I propose Vallor’s (2012) study of how Facebook and other media do and do not contribute to flourishing based on their influence on friendships of virtue. A typical path would be to analyze the impact of social media on individual virtues, such as empathy and patience. In contrast, Vallor focused on how social media influence the collective development of virtues in the different forms of friendship described by Aristotle. In her analysis, she repeatedly drew attention to the social nature of the virtues needed for friendship. For example, she noted that online causes “made common through the combined efforts of anonymous individuals united by the sheer coincidence of their virtuous aims” do not constitute the kind of common endeavor envisioned by Aristotle for complete friendships (p. 191). Indeed, Vallor noted that the potential of social media to mirror the individualistic, self-interested tenets of contemporary life may actually hinder such friendships, impoverishing the good life for many. However, we can only assess this sort of issue by expanding the methodological toolbox for studying virtue in the media and communication to include social, as well as individual, concepts. Related to this point, we need more attention to traditions, which means more historical and comparative analyses. Critical-cultural studies in media and communication have much to contribute here, with their interest in culture, memory and discourse; these can be studied as sites for understanding virtues in media and communication.

The reason to seriously consider VE is not, as Annas (1998) noted, because it is ancient, but because it has centuries of theoretical development behind it and

because it happens to differ from modern ethical theories that many have found alienating. “Our intuitions about virtue are unsystematic and potentially in conflict, but we recognize that there is a powerful normative concept there, and we can recognize when another tradition has a more coherent version of it” (p. 42). If media and communication ethics scholars want to fully explore what VE has to offer, they will need to overcome the thin bias and engage the theory in all its thickness.

Further reading

Much of the early work applying virtue ethics (VE) to the media involved developing catalogues of relevant virtues for individual journalists and other producers of media content. Klaidman and Beauchamp’s 1987 *The Virtuous Journalist* remains paradigmatic, with subsequent lists (and alternative rationales) developed for journalists and other media practitioners. Some authors have developed profiles for exemplary media practitioners based on virtues believed to be important to their work. Plaisance’s (2014) research into journalism and PR exemplars stands out for its empirical grounding, part of a larger research agenda to link VE with moral psychology concepts using as inspiration Philippa Foot’s moral naturalism (see, e.g., Plaisance 2016, 2015). Moving on to the practice-based approach to VE, this strategy was first championed by Edmund Lambeth (1990) and was developed further by Borden (2007) and Craig (2011). Despite Alasdair MacIntyre’s insistence on the need for an historical analysis of virtues and practices, few such treatments in media ethics exist; see Bivins (2014) for an exception. MacIntyre’s point that Aristotelian ethics is necessarily political has not gotten much traction in the media ethics literature either. However, see Vallor (2010) and Hesmondhalgh (2017) for Aristotelian critiques of the information technologies and capitalistic media markets that structure the media environment in ways that are (or are not) conducive to the good life. Borden (2010), Mackey (2014) and Plaisance (2015) also have examined linkages between VE and communitarianism. Finally, VE has moved into current media ethics debates about intercultural ethics (see, e.g., Borden, 2015 and 2016; Plaisance, 2015) and digital ethics (see, e.g., Plaisance 2013; Brey, Briggie, and Spence 2012; Vallor 2012), sometimes intersecting with media studies (see, e.g., Couldry 2013 and 2006).

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11 Care Ethics: A Different Voice for Communication and Media Ethics

Abstract: This paper reviews the history of care ethics as a feminist ethic and surveys competing definitions of care that may serve as a moral framework for communication ethics. “Care” is shown to be a flexible moral concept that can be used to assess discourse practices in various contexts. It is argued that the practices of care and communication overlap such that communication is an ability that must be nurtured by care, and at the same time is often constitutive of care. The normative intersections between care and communication are explored in terms of both style and substance, highlighting how communication in care sometimes involves “epistemic empathetic projection”, and how care ethics as a discursive practice calls for what Nancy Fraser describes as a “politics of needs interpretation,” the discursive struggle for more caring and equitable relations.

Keywords: care ethics, sex and gender, pregnancy, childhood, epistemic empathetic projection, reciprocity, stages of care

The ethics of care, according to pioneering theorist Carol Gilligan, is said to be rooted in a “different voice” – a moral perspective associated with women and the work of care that is often missing or diminished in more traditional moral theories. Gilligan’s choice of the metaphor of “voice” to represent a marginalized perspective readily invites speculation as to how care ethics as a moral theory might inform communication and media ethics. In this chapter, I show that as a relational ethic rooted in the actual work of care, the ethics of care yields vital insights for communication and media ethics. This is because care is a sphere of practice that illuminates shifting interdependencies and vulnerabilities, but also universal human conditions undergirding the very origins and practices of communication. Care ethics finds communication to be substantive of relationship, and as such, to be a vital component of the normative injunction of care ethics, which is to maintain and sustain relationship. At the same time, it recommends certain style and substance in communication and media.

In this chapter, I trace the definitions and stages associated with care, showing how communication intersects with the practice of care, and how an ethics of care informs communication and media by positing a moral injunction to maintain relations. Such an ethic underscores the significance of pregnancy as a form of mediated communication, early-childhood relations and gender dynamics of care-giving in the development of communicative ability, as well as the role that communication plays in shaping care ethics as a moral orientation. In the first section, I briefly review the

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-011>

history of care ethics as a feminist ethic. Care is shown to be a flexible moral concept that can be used to assess discourse practices. In the second section, I consider how the practices of care and communication overlap such that communication is an ability that must be nurtured by care, and at the same time is often constitutive of care as a form of embodied mediation. In the third section, I examine the normative intersections between care and communication in terms of both style and substance, highlighting how care ethics as discursive practice calls for what Nancy Fraser describes as a “politics of needs interpretation,” the discursive struggle for more caring and equitable relations. I conclude by considering the promise and peril of social media and other communication technologies for the ethical practice of care.

1 History and theoretical qualities of care ethics

1.1 History

Emerging as criticism of male bias evident in various fields of study, the ethics of care is a feminist ethic. In her book *In A Different Voice*, psychologist Carol Gilligan challenged the idea that the moral reasoning of women is less mature than that of men, which in the West has tended to focus on ideals of justice and autonomy, and argued that the moral voice of women is “different,” but not inferior (Gilligan, 1982). She theorized that the “different voice of care” develops in many women as a result of their involvement in care relations within the family – relations that are essential to the perpetuation of humanity. In this way, she built on the work of Nancy Chodorow, who argued that women are socialized to be care givers, because as girls they remain in continued identification with their mothers from whom they learn to be empathetic to the needs of others (Chodorow, 1978). As moral agents, Gilligan found that many girls and women, and well as some men, look to meet the needs of others as part of their moral ideal. Gilligan thus affirmed that there is no one path of moral development, but multiple paths, and that concern for maintaining relationship is a viable foundation for moral theory.

Shortly after the publication of this work, Nel Noddings published her book *Caring*, which developed the ethic of care as a feminine ethic rooted in the activities of mothering and teaching (Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 2002). Sara Ruddick followed in a similar vein, publishing *Maternal Thinking* as a treatise on the type of moral ethic that emerges from the practice of mothering (Ruddick, 1995). Ruddick sought to expand care ethics beyond a strict association with women or femininity, by characterizing mothering as a practice that admits to gender neutrality, in that it can be performed by “mothering persons” who may be male or female. Subsequent care ethicists follow Ruddick’s lead in characterizing the ethics of care as one that is associated with the traditional work of women, but that is gender neutral in its larger

relevance to all humans. Despite these differences in how to understand the proper association between care work and femininity, care ethics today is inherently feminist at least three regards: First, it is concerned with exposing and eliminating unjustified power differentials between men and women (and other social injustices), especially practices that govern and shape care for children and others. Second, it highlights the ways in which so called “feminine” virtues of empathy, compassion, sympathy, and peace can usefully inform our moral experiences. Third, it challenges the distinction between private and public, and posits care as a moral value that can inform public as well as private relations. Beyond these basic feminist commitments, care ethics exhibits a number of other core characteristics that can be used to inform communication and media ethics.

1.2 Theoretical qualities of care ethics

To begin, the ethics of care conceptualizes human beings as intertwined in relations of interdependency that involve varying degrees of skills and capacities, and rejects understanding moral agents and subjects as fully autonomous rational deliberators who are interchangeable and non-distinct (Held, 1990). Care ethicists are quick to point out that individuals do not spring into life as fully developed rational thinkers and communicators (Baier, 1987). Rather, they emerge through an extended period of dependency and development, during which their identities and capacities are developed as a result of receiving care from others.

Secondly, the ethics of care favors particularity and partiality. It construes moral agents and subjects as *particular* others, and shows a preference for exploring ethics through *actual* rather than hypothetical examples, because of the detailed relational richness that is lost when situations are imagined and individuals are construed as abstract characters. Although care ethicists are not averse to applying some principles impartially, they question the absolutist assumption and application of principles without attention to contextual details.¹ Care ethics further avows that within more personal relations of care it is not only allowed, but encouraged to treat some others with partiality of care and concern.

A third component of care ethics is the embodied nature of care needs, and the appropriateness of emotion in moral deliberation and response. Human beings are not mere disembodied brains or loci of rationality, as is suggested in Kantian ethics. Rather, human rationality itself is enabled and effected by embodied states, and care for humans centrally involves meeting the needs of the body, as well as emotional,

¹ For example, care ethics endorses general principles such as the basic right of each person to have their needs met, or the general inappropriateness of cronyism in business and politics

psychological, and social needs. Care ethics thus posits a holistic understanding of the human person, which requires holistic responses, or as Selma Sevenhuijsen puts it, the employment of a union of “head-heart-hands” (Sevenhuijsen, 1998). As bodies change and grow, caring needs shift as well, but as Maurice Hamington observes, our bodies are made for care, and they serve not only as important loci of caring need, but also as vital resources for epistemological information (Hamington, 2004).

Finally, care ethicists argue that the main moral injunction is to maintain care relations in a way that is responsive to all within one’s web of relations, including oneself. This is evident in how care ethics resolves moral dilemmas, such as those posed in the “Heinz dilemma”.² In response to this dilemma, which was used by Kohlberg to test for moral maturity, those who exhibit a penchant for care ethics, such as the child “Amy” in Gilligan’s studies, reframes the question from whether Heinz should steal an overpriced drug to save his dying wife, to whether there is a way that Heinz may be able to save his wife while at the same time maintaining relations with the druggist, and himself. Rather than risk a theft that would dispossess the druggist of rightful property and possibly land Heinz in jail, preventing him from helping his wife, Amy recommends that Heinz borrow the needed money or come to some kind of arrangement with the druggist. In this way, the ethics of care recognizes and responds to the needs of all parties involved in a relationship, without requiring that this care become unjust or self-sacrificial. This ideal, as well as the former three qualities, all bear upon communication and media relations informed by care ethics.

1.3 Defining care

Despite these points of agreement, there is no one accepted definition of care, in large part because “care” is a concept that admits to great breadth and flexibility. This promises to complicate a communication and media ethic informed by care ethics, but also to lend it a certain complexity. For example, Noddings defines care as a set of skills that involve being more receptive-intuitive than objective-analytical, engages empathy and compassion more than cognitive analysis, and finds abstract rules to be of limited use (Noddings, 1984). She breaks caring into three stages of activity with correlative skills: attention to needs, response to needs, and completion, the latter of which is secured when the care receiver acknowledges and sanctions that care has been received satisfactorily. Finally, she distinguishes between “caring-about,” which means having a concern for others, and “caring-for,” which refers the actual work of meeting a need for care. Later, I consider the significance of these stages and

² In this dilemma, “Heinz” is faced with the question of whether he should steal an overpriced drug to save his dying wife.

distinction for communication and media ethics, but for now it is important to understand that there are numerous other ways to understand care, making it a contentious and rich concept.

Alternatively, other theorists are inclined to understand care as a practice, in large part to keep us mindful that care is work that must be done, and not just cultivated, admired, recommended, or analyzed. Thus, Joan Tronto and Bernice Fischer define care as “all that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Tronto and Fischer, 1999, 40). This operational definition is broad in its capacity to highlight how just about any activity can be construed as relating to care in some respect, including the activities of communication and media production, to the extent that they contribute to maintenance and continuation of the world in which we live.

Yet other theorists, such as Diemut Bubeck, seek an even more precise definition of care as a practice. She writes that “caring for is the meeting of needs of one person by another person, where face-to-face interaction between carer and cared for is a crucial element of the overall activity, and the need ... cannot possibly be met by the cared for herself” (Bubeck, 1995). Bubeck’s definition of care is narrower than that of Tronto and Fischer, and distinguishes care from personal services, which meet the needs of individuals capable of self-care, often for a fee. The difference between care and personal service is salient to media ethics most especially, as in capitalist societies, where advertisements for personal products and services often take precedence over political conversations about care in Bubeck’s more limited sense.

Daniel Engster posits yet another definition of care that accentuates the typical needs and goals addressed by care (Engster, 1995). For Engster, care includes everything we do directly to meet vital needs for food, water and shelter, to develop and sustain basic physical mental and emotional capabilities, and to avoid and alleviate unnecessary suffering. He writes, “The ultimate goal of care is to enable individuals to survive, develop as fully as possible ... and live and function in the world as long as possible,” what he terms as “basic well-being” (Engster, 2015, 19–20). Following upon this definition, communication and media ethics rooted in care ethics should center around the pursuit of fair and equitable distributions of basic well-being.

Given that all of these definitions offer different ways of thinking about care, should a communicative/media ethic prefer one over the other? I propose that we remain open to the ways that care may be alternatively defined, but that does not mean that each definition is equally employable for a communication/media ethic of care. For instance, Bubeck’s distinction between care and personal service is useful for tracing the ways in which we may demarcate care from broader market relations, but it has the downside of not capturing how long distance and technologically mediated communication may constitute care. This is because Bubeck’s definition discounts as care communication that is not face to face, and/or does not involve the meeting of a need that cannot be met by the care receiver. Under Bubeck’s more narrow definition

of care, then, communication of need and care completion that uses technology or long-distance social media (e.g. Skyping) will not be seen as activities falling under the purview of care work, at least as care work.

For this reason, it makes sense to define care more broadly when extending an ethics of care to communication and media ethics. Such a definition is offered by Virginia Held, who opts to define care as both a practice and a value (Held, 2006, 42). Held's definition has the advantage of being able to attend to the fact that care is work that must be done, but also to how care can be understood as a moral ideal that allows us to normatively assess such activities. Beyond this, we ought to retain the three stages of care described by Noddings, and be mindful of how care can also be understood as a motive, an emotion, and a moral orientation in the sense first discussed by Gilligan. When care is defined so as to include all of these different senses of what it can mean to "care," it becomes much more possible to understand various communicative practices and media activities/styles as falling under the rubric of care. It further becomes possible to evaluate and assess communication and media practices according to how they do or do not serve to constitute some phase of caring response – drawing attention to need, responding or facilitating response to need, and indicating caring completion in the form of acknowledgement that needs have been met satisfactorily.

2 Care and communication

Although the ethics of care is heavily invested in dialogical processes and mediated forms of communication, few care ethicists to date have explored these intersections at length. Such a project invites closer scrutiny of the gendered and embodied aspects of communication in caring practice, and how communication and care may be said to interrelate. A cursory look at the overlap between an ethics of care and communication reveals that care *as a practice* not only requires communication for successful completion, which media can enhance or erode, but also that care as a practice, ("caring-for" or "taking care of") is nearly always a form of communication itself, even if not always necessarily discursive. The relationship between ethical communication and caring thus reconfigures the standard understanding of communication as dialogical exchange between rational speaker and listener, into one capable of verbal and nonverbal intertwining networks.³ It furthermore construes ethical communication

³ The ontology of care ethics which posits individuals as being situated in webs of relations bears timely affinity with linguistic symbols used to represent modern computer technology, such as "the world-wide web," "internet," "social networking," "interfacing," etc.

as an integral part of ethical caring, and ethical caring as an indispensable form of ethical communication, that is inherently mediated by the body and social relations.

Moreover, the critical distinction between justice and care perspectives as developed by Gilligan and Noddings can be brought to bear on traditional approaches to communication and media ethics. Not only do texts on communication ethics and media ethics tend to focus disproportionately on liberal issues, there is a dearth of explorations of the significance of the origins of communication in early childhood as it relates to embodied differences between women and men. Most scholars of communicative and media ethics acknowledge the relevance of feminist ethics in recognition of the preponderance of sex based stereotypes in these social practices, but there is a tendency to overlook specific applications of care ethics to communication ethics. One way this is evident is that although there are many analyses of the significance of communication within parent-child relations, there is considerably less analysis of the origins of communication that involve women and children at the very beginnings of life, or how communication and media may enhance care relations more generally.

2.1 Sexual dimensions of communication studies

For instance, in his book *Philosophies of Communication and Media Ethics*, R.N. Kiran commendably includes feminist ethics as a philosophical framework with a rightful position in a full moral representation of communication studies (Kiran, 2000). He anticipates the development of care ethics, tracing how feminism has evolved from a focus on sex differences, to making women more like men, to giving voice to women. Noting that domination, violence and control of women by men is exhibited in virtually every cultural group, he describes feminism as a revolutionary movement arising out of a sense of outrage over this treatment and a desire to end sexism in all manifestations – sexual exploitation, violence, exclusion from public life, and unequal educational opportunities (97).

In the spirit of care ethics, Kiran creditably affirms that any development communication paradigm must recognize gender-based differences in life experiences (101). He reports that women have been “muted ... in relation to language, meaning and communication,” and are governed by communication ideals according to a different standard than men (97). One of these standards is that women are expected to be good at interpersonal relationships and to focus on people and emotion (99). Women who question the status quo are silenced by being labeled as deviant. Knowledge itself, he and others argue, is rooted in male identity and theory.

At the same time, Kiran’s analysis is typical in discussing the origins of communication in early childhood in deceptively gender neutral tones, without considering how the sexual dimensions of care constitute a form of subordination relevant to

communication ethics.⁴ For example, women still perform disproportionate amounts of care work, which at the same time increases their influence as teachers and educators of early childhood communication (for relatively lower pay), but also decreases their influence as communicators in other areas of life, especially the spheres of politics and business. Kiran and other communication ethicists ignore the ways in which sexually delineated patterns of childrearing influence the development of early childhood speech forms, values, and expectations, reflective of a culturally larger “missing caregiver” phenomenon, whereby children are raised and developed without any specific reference to the particularity or needs of their caregivers. Care ethics thus brings to communication ethics a heightened appreciation for communication at the start of life and beyond, which yields its own distinctive concepts and abilities.

2.2 Communication at the start of life

What most communication ethics texts fail to appreciate is that communication begins much earlier in the womb, as a pregnant woman interacts with the developing child in utero through voice, music, touch, and simply bodily “being with”, and that these experiences are not only commonly mediated by technology, but by human bodies. As a pregnancy develops, a fetus begins to recognize voices, can respond to music, rhymes, and other sounds, and has its own sleep and wake schedule that is communicable to the pregnant woman through fetal movement (DeCasper, 1994). Whether these are intentional communications on the part of the fetus is unknown, but during pregnancy a woman can begin to treat and interpret the “signs” as intentional, perhaps in preparation and hope for future more clearly intentional and mutual communication with her infant-toddler-child. This embodied relationship is rendered much more evident with the development of mediated technologies such as ultra-sound machines, which make images of unborn children detectable at the very

⁴ To offer but a few examples, Kiran notes of how in the Habermasian and Pragmatic traditions of philosophy, “the mind is a function which the child acquires as it learns meanings of things and activities in its environment...The ability to exercise communicative skills is required at various levels of human development and carries implications for achieving the universal pragmatic functions of communication as delineated by Habermas” (Kiran, 2000, 29). In speaking of the existential approach to communicative ethics, Kiran notes that “every new human being is not merely a creation of biological nature, but begins in human communication”. He cites Jaspers in declaring that “communication is the universal condition of man’s being ... The encompassing which is being itself exists for us only so far as it achieves communicability by becoming speech or becoming utterable,” concluding that “man, being communicative, things become communicable through him” (Jaspers, 1967, 520; Kiran, 2000, 36). In these cases, Kiran shows a deceptively gender-neutral/male awareness of the significance of the origins of communication in early childhood experiences, but not of the roles that caregivers, very often women, play in this phase of development, often to their own detriment.

early stages of a pregnancy. Such technologies make it easier for women to attend to the mediated communication that occurs in embodied pregnancies, and other forms of social media make this then easier to share with the larger community.

Once infants are born, communication between mother, others, and child develop according to a potential for mutual influence. Infants are recognized as capable of communicating with their cries, but until very recently it was not well reported that infants have different cries to signify different needs, and that there may be some kind of common cross-cultural infant “language” (Zeskind and Lester, 1978). The capacity for learning the language of their caregivers is found to be an innate capacity for most infants, in that their brains are hard wired for rapid language acquisition in the first few years. This capacity is influenced by relational variabilities, but language and communication skills are greatly developed in young children by regular, caring interaction with caregivers. When a caregiver is unable to communicate well, due to depression or other conditions, this impacts the communicative abilities of young children (Murray, et al, 1993). As Sarah Hrdy states in her book *Mother Nature*, “language is integral to the symbolic capacity that allows humans to understand cognitively what other are expressing at the same time that we understand at an emotional level what others are feeling ... but all human develop this empathetic component in the first few months and years of life as part of a unit that involves at least one other person” (Hrdy, 1999, 392). Thus, at its origins, communication is a relational exchange that is preverbal, embodied, and socially-developmentally rooted in care.

Given these factors, “communication” should be defined in care ethics without being limited to a verbal, dialogical, or reciprocal exchange, although communicative reciprocity is an important value and goal for care ethicists. Noddings discusses the importance of reciprocal response for the final stage of caring completion, because of how it sustains and motivates the caregiver (Noddings, 1986, 92). For Noddings, this response facilitates the act of care by replenishing the good will and motivation to care within the care giver. For most children, this early form of communication develops into more sophisticated ways of communicating with others that show reciprocal concern, and reinvigorate the chains of care. But the experiences of pregnancy, caring for infants, as well as for adults who are not fully articulate, reveals the need for a definition of “communication” that is able to reflect nonverbal, bodily, and reciprocal dimensions of care that admit to various developmental capacities and dispositional traits.

For this reason, “communication” in care ethics might better be understood to mean an actual or projective exchange of meaning that allows for a mutual being-with, when by “exchange” it is meant the ability to share, or projectively share, an experience or thought, even when the sharing is not fully intentional or reciprocal. Throughout life, the development of communication is ongoing, but originates and is ever entwined and mediated by bodily dynamics that admit to varying degrees of intentional exchanges of meaning. Feminists working to articulate some of the ontological dimensions of pregnancy and caring for children at the early stages of life

call this “enmeshment,” to represent the intertwining of flesh, as may be seen in pregnancy, lactation, or bathing of an infant.⁵ For care ethics, communication need not always admit to intention on the part of the communicators, because the body is a vehicle for communication that outstrips consciousness. While even newborn infants are typically capable of vocalizing their needs and desires, much communication between babies and caregivers involves non-verbal physical touch and the meshing of flesh. Lactation and other acts of care are not purely indicative of instinctive and inherent knowledge on either the part of mother or child, but involves communicative adjustments and interpersonal embodied learning. The ontology of pregnancy in particular reveals how the origins of life is itself a mediated form of communication, not only in the use of technologies such as ultrasounds, but in the enmeshed state of embodiment itself. Thus the envelopment and intersubjectivity that is evident in pregnancy is a mediated communication of not only a technological, but also a bodily sort.

2.3 Communication and the stages of care

The suggestion that care is a form of communication that occurs throughout a lifetime according to various stages and capacities for self-care, begs the question of how to understand the more precise relationship between care and communication. Looking within and beyond the stage of childhood, the capacity for communication is one that does not always admit to steady growth, but is halting and non-linear. Different communicative styles and capacities requires caregivers to find different forms of communication for different people and times. Trauma, disease, and aging may alter the ability to communicate in the same ways as one did before. What remains common throughout life and all types of physical conditions is that bodily communication through care is pervasive. In considering the intersections of care and communication, it also becomes clear that they strongly correlate to the three stages of care identified by Noddings: attention, response, and completion. That is, communication is not only instrumental for the successful employment of every stage of care, but in some cases, communication is rightly understood as care itself.

Consider how the first stage of care, attention, is generally triggered by communication between caregiver and receiver. The cry of a child, the drooping of a plant, a tragic news story, are all examples of communication that indicates a beckoning to the attention of moral agents who are in a position to notice and respond to a need. Caring for an ill person will often involve an initial discussion about symptoms, then move

⁵ Embrace, handshake, massage, and sexual intercourse are just a few other common examples of bodily enmeshment.

to further discussions about treatment options, how to properly take medication, etc. While communication at this stage generally involves a straightforward solicitation for, or noticing of an expression of needs, it becomes more interestingly imaginative and empathetic when communication does not admit to mutuality. Noddings' identified capacity for "projective engrossment" can in these contexts be understood as an important asset to caregivers at this diagnostic stage of care, when care receivers are not able or willing to clearly express their needs.

In the context of communication with care receivers who are unable or unwilling to express their needs, projective-imaginative engrossment, or what might be otherwise termed *epistemic empathetic projection*, refers to the ways that a care giver can perceive themselves as "communicating" with a person or being whom others might perceive to be non-responsive. This may include communication with beings such as the fetus in utero, a loved one in a coma, an animal, a plant, and perhaps even an inanimate object. In such cases, the caregiver imagines what the care receiver or object of attention might ask for or express a need for, were they able to speak. As a child "communicates" with a stuffed animal or doll and mimics a communicative response, so caregivers often become adept at projecting a responsive expression of need, creating imaginative communication, which may be greater than, hopeful for, or substitutive for an actual reciprocal response.

The ability to project a reciprocal exchange is a developmental tool for becoming more attuned to need and more proficient in responding to it. So a parent may tell a child "the dog is asking you for a drink" as a way to prompt the child to be more sensitive to how animals have needs that should be noticed and satisfied. Undoubtedly, this type of projective communication can be a dangerous substitute for reciprocal communication when the cared-for, or object of attention, is capable of communication on their own volition. In such cases it would be wrong to ignore what a person is actually saying in favor of imaginatively projecting what a caregiver would prefer to believe is being said. However, the capacity for projective engrossment is at the same time an important supplement to the attentive phase of care, when care receivers are not fully capable of intentional or adequately expressive forms of communication.

The second stage of care – response – often requires communication of a verbal sort. But this is not a necessary condition. A parent can change a baby's diaper without any discussion. Cooking a meal, folding laundry, or cleaning a room, are also activities that can be completed without any degree of communication at all. But communication is typically a key part of these activities. A caregiver will typically chat with a child as she or he changes a diaper. Communication enhances caring beyond the diagnostic phase because it actively engages the cared-for and makes these experiences more mutual. Some forms of care do necessarily require communication, in that communication is constitutive of the care in question. For example, dispensing medication, and teaching, are forms of care giving that necessarily require communication as part of their core nature.

At the same time that we recognize that some types of care require verbal communication, we can also say that an act of caring-for is always itself a form of communication more broadly construed, or at least the initiation of a communication. That is to say, the act of meeting a need is always an act that communicates on some level to the care receiver that someone cares enough to try to respond. As such, it is always a form of expressive connection, even if it is not ultimately taken up as such, or is not deemed as fully successful in the long run.

In like manner, the third stage of care, completion, benefits from communication between care giver and receiver. This is because it is during the completion stage that a care giver checks that the response or actions taken during the second stage have been successful. Completion is sometimes possible to affirm without fully reciprocal and intentional communication from the care receiver. A nurse may check the vital signs of an unconscious patient to ensure that a treatment is working; a parent may see at a glance that a meal is relished. But when care receivers are able to provide feedback, care givers should ask a care receiver if a course of action has succeeded in meeting the need, in an ongoing communicative loop.

In summary then, the ethics of care suggests that communication is not only an important enhancement to all three stages of care, but can be understood as care itself. In what remains I will consider how care ethics might normatively inform a communication ethic more broadly in terms of style and substance, and application to social media technology.

3 Care ethics as communication ethic – style and substance

The ethics of care is distinguished from more universalistic ethics in its insistence on the importance of contextual and narrative assessment of needs for the cultivation of relationship. As a communication and media ethic, care ethics recommends a certain style and content of communication, because how one communicates, and what one communicates about, is an expression of care and concern for others. Care ethics recommends that the style and content of communication be conducive to meeting the needs of the individuals who are in the process of communicating, and those who may be affected by the success or failure of such communication. Media and communicative technologies are to be assessed according to how well they facilitate caring goals. In each case, care ethics is distinguishable from liberal ethics in viewing autonomy, equality, and privacy in communication as values that, while vital, must be informed and tempered by the realities of human development and the goods associated with care, such as interdependency, trust, openness, collaboration, and mutual concern.

3.1 Care ethics as normative communicative style

Applied to communication as a style, care ethics recommends certain modes of comportment. The style of communication that is recommended by the ethics of care is one that is mutually respectful and considerate of the perspectives and needs of others in communication. Features such as tone and body language, attentive engagement, and mutuality, are stylistic features of communication that are morally relevant to an ethics of care because of how they are conducive to the creation of safe and honest discursive spaces. The ethics of care supports the moral imperative of speaking to others respectfully, in an empathetic way that shows concern for the potential harm of one's words, and the possibility of misinterpretation. To this end, the ethics of care recommends styles of communication that feature five basic qualities: empathy, recognition of audience, relational fluidity, partiality and particularity, and civility.

In the first case, the ethics of care recommends modes of communication that reflect and are constituted by empathetic exchange. For this reason, the ethics of care is attentive to the importance of empathy to forms of communication related to customer service and bedside manner – not centrally because of the ways in which they may fill some professional duty or facilitate the functioning of the market, but because of how they serve to create safe and empathetic atmospheres. For instance, Eva Feder Kittay discusses how, in receiving the devastating diagnosis that her daughter Sesha would be severely disabled for life, the family's pediatrician (a “good doctor”) eased the news gently, while others were overly brusque. In discussing the poor communication of one of the latter types, she writes:

His credentials as a physician who can correctly predict an outcome remains secure, but his understanding of how to approach parents with such harsh news, also an important skill for a physician, is quite another matter ... On our encounter with the third pediatric neurologist we were told outright – after a five minute exam – that our daughter was severely to profoundly retarded and that we should consider having other children because ‘one rotten apple doesn't spoil the barrel.’ As I type these words nearly twenty-seven years later, I still wonder at the utter failure of empathy in a physician (Feder Kittay, 1999, 149–50).

The failure that Kittay describes is not only that of being insensitive to the emotions of patients and families, but also the failure to care about caring, i.e., to understanding that caring communication is a morally necessary part of medical and other physical forms care.

The second and third stylistic features of caring communication involve the importance of listening and the desirability of mutual exchange when possible. The supposition of relationship is one shared in care and communication alike, and being ethical in terms of being a caring communicator requires mindfulness that one is both a sender and a receiver of information, and that good communication includes a context-sensitive balance of speaking and listening. When no one is listening, or when all speak at once, communication fails. This requires that a caring communicator take

a certain posture toward the other. Sevenhuijsen describes how, in striving to comprehend the needs of the other, “the recipient of care is, for [the care ethicist] not an ‘object to be known’, but someone to whom she listens, she tries to understand, and with whom she communicates” (Sevenhuijsen, 1998, 58). A caring communicator does not conceive of herself as an atomic self who is exercising autonomy by communicating ideas to others unilaterally, but one who is relationally engaged in communications with others, and who, under normal circumstances of non-violence, is obliged to listen as well as speak.

To this extent, care ethics challenges the commonly assumed binary of speaker/listener in exposing how, in the best practices of communication, the roles of listener and speaker are fluid, and there is attentive awareness to others as listeners and potential responders. As Fredersich Antezak states, every discursive text functionally defines an implied audience (Antezak, 1991, 81). These can be simultaneously listeners and/or readers, toward whom and from whom there are mutual obligations. As a text, conversation, or exchange unfolds, it reveals different types of “discursive communities” (Antezak, 1991, 81). Such communities can be judged as more ethical to the extent that they maintain and promote mutual exchanges of ideas and impressions. Thus a feminist ethic of care has the ability to incorporate alterity and diversity, and to use communication to make the strange knowable.

The fourth feature of care ethics as a communicative style is the recognition of partiality and particularity. Whereas norms of objectivity are often embraced as way to keep moral judgments dispassionate and unbiased, a feminist ethics of care understands this norm to be itself a state of partiality that begets certain emotional attitudes (Sevenhuijsen, 1998, 58–9). Stylistically, the ethics of care uses communication to explore and inform contextual moral judgment. This does not imply that the ethics of care is incompatible with norms of objectivity when it is important that communicators are able to separate their personal views and preferences from other considerations. But the ethics of care doubts that anyone can ever be completely neutral and objective, in that we are all shaped by our experiences and social situations. For this reason, care ethics favors the practice of acknowledging personal perspectives and interests in communication.

Furthermore, in emphasizing particularity, the ethics of care favors narrative styles of communication that communicate with an eye to real life. Stylistically, especially in journalism, the ethics of care underscores the power for moral motivation found in the form of personal narrative and autobiography. Looking at the stories and narratives of actual people generates empathetic response for actual people more readily than a fictional story, or a macro-level analysis of a problem. Rather than seeking for answers always in “hard data,” care ethics upholds the personal voice as a prime vehicle for revealing particularity in diverse perspectives. These features of the ethic of care indicate a preference for communication and media styles that utilize narrative storytelling to reveal human needs, and the means by which they may be met.

Finally, the ethics of care recommends a style of communication that is civil, meaning that it is respectful, collaborative, and resistant to excessively aggressive communication. Speech that is not caring in this way is commonly evident, and typified in hate speech. The climate that is created in caring relations through civil, respectful, and collaborative communication is vital to the health of relations. James Jaska and Michael Pritchard tell us that a climate of concern, warmth, acceptance, support, and trust is ideal (Jaska and Pritchard, 1994, 72). Quoting Thomas Nilsen, they declare simply that “Whatever improves, develops, enlarges, or enhances human personalities is good; whatever restricts, degrades, or injures human personalities is bad” (Nilsen, 1966, 14). Civility is viewed as a communicative good in care ethics, because of how it can function to maintain relationship and avoid the stirring of emotions that fuel violence.

In making this last point, it is important to clarify that the value of civil communication in care ethics does not mean that every occasion for communication has to be “caring” in a naive sort of way; there is stylistic room for pointed attacks, humor, sarcasm, insult, crudeness, and even profanity when done for some higher good or within an appropriate relational context. The standard for whether communication crosses a moral line is to be detected in the final stage of care, where a speaker scrutinizes the perceived reaction of one’s speech to see if it has caused harm, or has been helpful in the intended way. Upset alone is not a crime; sometimes important political exchanges necessarily cause painful realizations and uncomfortable ideas. Moreover, in responding to communication that is legitimately perceived by the receiver as harmful, one need not maintain dialogue in a manner that is self-effacing or dangerous. Rather, communication within care ethics is born out of a belief that respect is deserved until proven otherwise, and even then, that the dignity of a communicator is diminished when one returns hateful speech with hateful speech. The potential for reciprocal respect and care is to be left open, in the hope for mutual growth and understanding. However, care ethics does not require that one be abused, subordinated, or made vulnerable through the words of others. The moral intricacies of stylistic forms of communication within an ethics of care cannot be negotiated *a priori*, but rather must be decided within more substantial discourses about care and communication.

3.2 Care ethics as normative communicative substance

Apart from recommending certain styles of communication, care ethics also normatively guides the substance of communication, based on the context of the relations in question. The normative injunction of care ethics requires that, across a wide variety of contexts, the content of communication should focus on how best to maintain relationships within each stage of care. As Sevenhuijsen asks, “how can a community ever care properly for its members if there is no space to communicate and deliberate about the way in which people experience needs?” (Sevenhuijsen, 1998, 133). She posits that the

ethics of care “attributes an important place to communication, interpretation, and dialogue,” because “knowing is a social and dialogic process” (61). Some of the contexts that ought then to be focused on include education, politics, family life, journalism and business. What all of these contexts have in common is that they play vital roles in attending to, delivering, and assessing care on local, national, and international levels. As such, an ethics of care calls for citizens in democratic societies to have open discussions about care, so they may more freely and equally achieve basic well-being.

The need for substantive discussions at every stage of care means that within various domains of life, communication should be used to complete the caring cycle of attention, response, and assessment. Both private individuals and public institutions are responsible for the work of care, albeit in different ways, and hence have moral obligations to focus an appropriate level of their communications on the substantive business of care, within moral parameters. This translates to the importance of being able to carve out space and time for meaningful interactions where needs can be noticed, met, and evaluated. Building on the discourse ethic originated by Jurgen Habermas, whereby ideal discourse is marked by inclusion, equality, and freedom from internal and external constraints, care ethics pushes agents to realize such communication within and about non-ideal settings of care, where actual relations are often unequal and constrained (Habermas, 2005). This itself requires the cultivation of communicative habits that expand beyond mere verbal exchanges to issues of how to best manage and balance care with other values such as time, money, and liberty. Different public agencies and institutions have their own special sets of obligations for substantive caring discourse, specific to their abilities, capacities, and reciprocal duties. But care ethics, like Habermasian discourse ethics, sets certain general parameters on these discursive practices, even as it recognizes inequality as inherent in some care relations, and as sometimes the product of avoidable social disparities.

The ethics of care is action-guiding in respect to locating such discourses in the actual cultural practices within which they take place, which at this time in the United States means that care for many unfolds under conditions of extreme and growing differentials in wealth. It is important then to situate substantive discourses about care in cultural contexts increasingly dominated by unequal political and market forces. In reference to these realities, Virginia Held has called for the liberation of culture from market domination, for citizens to be informed, and for news to be produced in ways that are instrumental to democratic political values. For this reason, she suggests that the airwaves and internet be subject to government oversight with a view to public interests, and not just the goal of maximizing profits (Held, 2006, 123).

Considered in the abstract, it is comparatively easy to grasp how substantive communications about care are required at each stage in the above-listed contexts to the extent that family members, teachers, politicians, journalists, business leaders, and others each have communicative roles to play in noticing, providing, and assessing care. But it is more complicated to prioritize and motivate movement between the stages of care in ways that reflect a practical consensus about just distributions

of caring benefits and burdens. For this reason, substantive communications guided by the ethics of care must encompass what Nancy Fraser calls a “politics of needs assessment” (Fraser 1987; 1989).

Fraser suggests that in substantive discourses about care, needs should not be construed as objective and predefined necessities *simpliciter*, but as political discourses and mediums for the making and contesting of political claims (1989, 291). She writes:

needs-talk appears as a site of struggle where groups with unequal discursive (and nondiscursive) resources compete to establish as hegemonic their respective interpretations of legitimate social needs. Dominant groups articulate need interpretations intended to exclude, defuse, and/or co-opt counter-interpretations. Subordinate or oppositional groups, on the other hand, articulate need interpretations intended to challenge, displace, and/or modify dominant ones (1989, 296).

Fraser’s analysis reveals the importance of substantive communication about care, because it is through such communication that care ethicists are able to speak publicly of needs that have been traditionally depoliticized, and to break the silences of those marginalized and subordinated by dependency needs.

Adopting Fraser’s politics of needs interpretation as a form of discourse ethics, the ethics of care is able to articulate four substantive communication goals: to 1) the use of language and discursive spaces to challenge traditional social boundaries; 2) the articulation of alternative interpretations of needs; 3) the creation of new chains of discourse that disseminate these reinterpretations; and 4) the invention of new forms of discourse for interpreting need (1989, 302). In reference to how feminism historically relates to the latter strategy, Fraser notes that in speaking publicly the “heretofore unspeakable,” and by coining new language to describe their experienced needs (inventing terms such as “sexual harassment,” “the double shift,” “wife-battery,” etc.), feminists became a “discursively self-constituted political collectivity, albeit a very heterogeneous and fractured one” (303).

In the same way, care ethics as a discourse ethics can look to substantive communication about care to articulate linguistic concepts that reflect and guide caring practices, and to generate and dispense new language in service of caring goals. Discursive communities and political collectives can be built around such substantive conversations. This is especially true in the age of social media and technologies, which promise to dissolve traditional barriers between private and public relations of care throughout life, making it possible to articulate needs through the use of citizen-based broadcasting and social networking.

4 Mediated communication technologies, and care

While ultra-sound technologies allow for the visualization and projective communication with unborn humans in the womb, the use of other mediated technologies

increasingly inform and shape care practices across the lifespan. Recognizing that care ever more involves the use of mediated technologies such as cell phones, internet, and e-mail, at ever earlier ages, care ethics raises questions about the best use of these technologies within and on behalf of care, in terms of both style and substance. Care ethicists are positioned to assess these technologies as informed and tempered by the realities of human development and the goods associated with care, such as interdependency, trust, openness, collaboration, and mutual concern, and to develop their political potential on behalf of care. While a full treatment of this topic exceeds the scope of this study, it is worthwhile to end this chapter by making some general observations about the promise, peril, and political potential of mediated communication technologies for the ethics of care.

The proliferation of cell phones, the internet, and social media allows for caring communication with unprecedented speed and breadth, reshaping the public/private divide. Communication technologies reconfigure family time and social interactions, as more children as well as adults have cell phones and tablets that allow them instant and incessant access to family, friends, and internet sites. Technology grants fluid communication between care-givers and receivers, imbuing a new flexibility into care relations, but at the same time yields reasons to be concerned that such technologies are leading to estrangement, addiction, infringements on privacy and agency, and a general decline in face to face communication. Care ethics is positioned to say that mediated communication technologies, like other technologies, may be found to be more or less supportive of the normative goals of care.

On the “more supportive” side, Shelley Park is a theorist who defends the use of social media to provide care, recommending the use of mediated communication technologies to “mother queerly”, i.e., to mother so as to challenge traditional hegemonic and heteronormative institutions of mothering (Park, 2013, 184). Park elucidates how the reality of care may be altered through communicative technologies in her study of cyborg identity ala Patty Belle Hastings’ concept of “cyborg motherhood” (Hastings, 2002). As Park explains, cyborg mothers use modern communicative technologies such as cell phones, texting services, e-mail, instant messaging, and social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook, to care for their children and reconstitute maternal subjectivity by permitting different ways to occupy time and space (Park, 175). By facilitating communication with family members while away from home, these technologies allow for “co-presence” combined with unprecedented potential for agency and autonomy, the exploration of new identities, and the co-inhabitation of media spaces. Although she finds that new technologies are not completely novel in offering communal intimacy independent of physical proximity, they uniquely increase the speed and quantity of communication as compared to traditional correspondence. In short, social media allows families to “live apart together” (181).

Against critics who fear that the modern use of social media threatens the quality of care relations, Park argues that social media facilitates care in at least two ways. First, modern communicative technologies allow care-givers to choose whether and

how to open to others, and can inspire more reflective interactions with those for whom they care. When care-givers use social media technologies they leave traces of their interactions which may inspire them to communicate more care-fully in tone of voice or word choice, and if not, can invite reflection upon how care could have been offered in a more ideal fashion. Second, modern communicative technologies fill relational spaces so that distance need not be experienced as empty or alienating. She finds that while such technologies cannot guarantee response-able subjectivities, they should be embraced as “technologies of co-presence that are not artificial or inadequate bridges between subjects”, but instead are making possible “loving one another intentionally across emotional and cognitive as well as geographical and temporal boundaries” (186). In the face of concerns that modern technologies escalate demands for attention into all times and places, she points out that this is not an inevitable condition. The use of communicated technology may allow mothers to ponder the validity of requests on their time and more easily refuse them if deemed unreasonable. As Park states, communication technologies “make it possible for mothers to be present to their children ... to live autonomous lives outside of the confines of the nuclear family ... [and] to avoid becoming martyrs resentful of our children’s calls upon our time” (185).

Park is correct to surmise that care can be positively altered by such technologies, and that social media networks expand the ability to organize and share, interfacing with global labor markets contingent upon and motivated by care relations. But on the “less supportive” side of the debate, there are equally many concerns about how the use of mediated communication technologies may be harmful from a care ethical perspective. These harms range from mild to serious: The pervasiveness of communication technology often disrupts or sidesteps care relations, yielding superficial, acerbic, and even dangerous interactions. For many, the widespread use of phone, text, and internet makes it unnecessary and uncomfortable to maintain even simple personal interactions, and quickly becomes addictive. Many relationships mediated by such technologies are shallow and/or rooted on deceptions. In the extreme, use of these technologies has led to loss life through accidents caused by distracted driving or walking, suicides incited by internet hecklers, reckless stunts aimed at going viral, threats and violence in the form of cyber-bullying/stalking, and much more.

As the internet evolves from a primarily grass roots network for social communication, to a systemized platform for global commerce and political influence, other dangers emerge for care. It is ever more clear that what have been perceived and presented as innocent minded “social media” platforms, like Facebook, are also ideal tools for political manipulation, data gathering, and the disbursement of misinformation and marketing incitements. Additionally, in terms of substance, communicative technologies play vital roles in shaping and interpreting needs, but not always in satisfactory ways. Caring needs are often superficially wrought and satisfied, as the internet provides ever more ample but shallow means for the emotional fulfillment of manufactured desires to purchase, expound, commune, and respond. Communicative

technologies are not only increasingly commercialized, but are being developed with an emphasis on individualized and personalized use that blunts collective agency on behalf of care. Only rarely, precariously, and with great effort do mediated communication technologies yield forums that address the local and global needs for care with any moral or political depth. At the same time, care relations are opened to dangerous individuals and networks who are engaged in nefarious practices, from fraud, to catfishing, terrorism, sex trafficking, child pornography, etc. Governments, interest groups, and individuals exploit social media to shape the perception of who exactly is perpetrating such crimes to their own benefit.

What has been less pronounced, but remains as a great potential for the future of care ethics, is the use of social media and communicative technologies to serve care as a universal but locally diverse practice, by exposing nested and unjust relations of local/global care, and combating uncaring/unjust practices politically. The use of communication technology on the political behalf of care is currently mitigated by factors including how perspectives on care are parochially contained by shortsighted “personal usage” and invisible cyber-boundaries of nationalized and commercialized network servers. Distracting but entertaining “reality” vines, personalized advertisements, and the menace of “fake news”, make it difficult to expose caring interdependencies and realities on even local, much less global stages. Accordingly, for example, there is little awareness that cherished personal devices are manufactured with the use of repurposed metals harvested by children who pluck them from racially relocated 1st world toxic-techno waste dumps (Piasecki-Poulsen, 2012; Frankel, 2016).

Such factors remain impediments to the use of communication technologies to benefit care as a practice, but they are not insurmountable. By attending to how global chains of care intercede in the development and use of communicational technology, we can bring into focus questions about the justice of provision or lack of provision for care across a myriad of contexts. Thus, the way in which modern communication technologies have the potential to reform families queerly as described by Park, indicates an even greater potential in the use of communication technology and social media to reform beliefs and practices involving care from grass roots to global levels. More generally speaking, this calls for further speculation about the ideal and less than ideal ways in which we may turn to media and communication technologies to perform and theorize care, and indicates a new field of inquiry for both care ethics, and the ethics of media and communication.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, I have shown how the qualities and concepts of an ethics of care inform communication ethics by highlighting overlooked origins of

communication, and new communicative concepts such as the ability for *epistemic empathetic projection*. I have argued that care and communication overlap not only because communication necessarily facilitates each of the three stages of care, but also because communication is sometimes appropriately understood as care, and caring-for is recognizable as mediated communication that takes embodied as well as verbal and technological forms. I affirmed that care ethics can normatively guide the style and substance of communication, navigating what Fraser calls a “politics of needs communication”, and that this process has the potential to be enhanced by a critical use of social media and other technologies. This approach posits certain obligations for individuals and institutions to call attention to caring need, and resist market and political forces that erode communicative truth and the ability to meet basic needs. Ultimately, the ethics of care as a “different voice” is an important normative voice in the future development of any communication and media ethic.

Further Reading

The ethics of care is a young theory still in initial stages of development. As such, it has not yet been fully applied to communication and media ethics. However, those looking for further information about the ethics of care would do well to trace its development to discern latent applications to communication and media studies. Pioneering texts besides Noddings (1984) and Gilligan (1983) include Mayeroff’s *On Care* (1971). Anthologies providing a broad overview of the ethics of care consist of those by Kittay and Meyers (1987), Held (1995), and Engster & Hamington (2015). Kittay has since written extensively on care ethics, in the context of disability, and with regard to the principle of *doulia*, or caring for care-givers (1999). While not a care ethicist, Benhabib’s call for a communicative theory of needs interpretation that recognizes particular others is a central feature of the ethics of care (1987). Sevenjursen posits that because the ethics of care is open to the other, it grants an important place to communication, interpretation, and dialogue (1998). White discusses the work of Benhabib and others as she considers how conflicting political interests can disrupt dialogue (2000). Reeder Jr. conducts a comparative study of the vocabulary of the ethics of care and justice as virtues (Fritz-Cates and Lauritzen, eds., 2001). Engster’s earlier work develops a political philosophy of care that addresses needs assessment in domestic, economic, international, and cultural contexts (2007). Similarly, Tronto’s subsequent work expands on how care ethics may inform political philosophy by opening discursive spaces for care assessment, and shows how political discussions of care are influenced by implicit biases, the rhetoric of personal responsibility, and other communicative problems (2013; 2015).

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12 Harm in Journalism

Abstract: Harm – and more specifically, its avoidance, minimization, or mitigation – remains a prominent concern within journalism ethics and a frequent topic in discussions of journalistic performance. This chapter discusses some of the issues involved in defining harm (including the tension between universalism and relativism that is involved in developing such definitions) and draws on philosophers including Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and W. D. Ross in an evaluation of the philosophical issues relevant to considerations of harm. The chapter argues that the nature of much journalistic work, supported by journalism’s societal obligations and maximized by journalism’s reach and influence, makes harm inevitable and thus shifts the locus of concern to more granular questions of how harm can be minimized, including harm done to third parties. The chapter identifies a typology of journalistic harms, drawing on the work of Stephen Ward, and identifies utilitarian and duty-based justifications for harms. Finally, the chapter addresses emergent ethical concerns pertaining to harm that are brought to bear by the rapid changes engulfing journalism and how it is practiced and consumed.

Keywords: autonomy; duties; harm; liberty; mitigation; relativism; systematic moral analysis; utilitarianism

1 Introduction

It is regrettable that one does not need to look too far to find a story of journalistic harm. In August 2016, *The Daily Beast*, an American news and entertainment website, was embroiled in controversy after publishing a story by its reporter, Nico Hines, that “investigated” the use of dating apps at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympics. Hines, a straight, married man, used Grindr – a dating app for gay men – to arrange dates with athletes residing at the Olympic Village. His story, “I Got Three Grindr Dates in an Hour in the Olympic Village” was criticized on a number of grounds, including his deceptive means, the voyeuristic nature of the story, and the indeterminate public interest value. It was singled out for particularly stinging criticism for the reckless manner in which he put the safety of gay athletes in jeopardy. Hines’ article included information about “the height, weight, nationality, and language of an athlete from a country where discrimination and violence against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex community is widespread” (Hunt, 2016, para. 4). There were, in addition, more than 200 athletes at the Olympics representing countries where homosexuality is punishable by death (Sopelsa & Yohannes, 2016). Olympic swimmer Amini Fonua of Tonga, where sodomy remains a crime,

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-012>

described the story as “deplorable” (Guarino, 2016). Writing in *Slate*, Mark Joseph Stern strongly condemned the article for “the actual damage it will likely cause to real, live human beings – inevitable consequences that Hines blithely ignored ... Their teammates could ostracize and alienate them; their families could disown them; their countries could imprison them. And for what?” (Stern, 2016, para. 7). *The Daily Beast* initially modified the article to remove identifying information, then appended an editor’s note explaining the organization’s commitment to “equality and equal treatment for LGBT people around the world,” then apologized, and finally took the article down (Hunt, 2016). Certainly, should any of the individuals affected by the story be assaulted or ostracized in their home countries, we could say they have been concretely harmed. Furthermore, individuals may have been psychologically harmed by the subsequent alienation of their friends and families (Stern, 2016).

Harm is at the center of many debates about media performance. For example, debates about the “harmful” effects of media content in its myriad forms have long dominated public discourse (McQuail, 2003; Plaisance, 2009). Within journalism, considerations of harm are commonplace in journalistic codes of ethics (Slattery, 2014) and afforded ample space in journalism ethics textbooks (see, e.g., Bivins, 2009; Plaisance, 2013; Ward, 2011). Though examples such as the above are deeply troubling, we ought to avoid reflexive, generalized claims regarding media-inflicted harm, given that “most media practitioners are continually mindful of the need to minimize potential harm, avoid outright harm to people, or at least seriously weigh claims of harm” (Plaisance, 2013, p. 123). While we should be careful not to throw the concept around too loosely and thus dilute its meaning and significance, the fact that “harms are significant events” (Arthur, 2007, p. 402) and recognition that journalists’ reach and social role grants them “power to wreak considerable damage” (Elliott & Ozar, 2010, p. 18) mean that harm in journalism is a topic deserving close reflection.

This chapter addresses some of the core conceptual and practical issues involved in journalistic harm. It begins by outlining a definition of harm based on the work of Feinberg (1984) and discussing the challenges that moral relativism poses to a concrete definition of harm. It then examines philosophical perspectives on harm, taking into account the arguments made by Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and W. D. Ross, before discussing journalism’s unique position as “a socially vital enterprise” (Elliott & Ozar, 2010, p. 17) that balances questions of harm against the purpose of journalism in a democratic society. In this section, I consider the inevitability of harm, the emphasis on the minimization of harm rather than its outright avoidance, and the problem of harm to third parties. I will then delineate five types of journalistic harm, following a typology devised by Stephen Ward (2011): Physical, monetary, reputational, psychological, and social. Having established the means in which journalism can inflict harm, I will then examine utilitarian and duty-based justifications for journalistic harm before concluding with some final ruminations about new challenges posed by a changing media environment that raise difficult ethical questions.

2 Conceptual issues

First, it is important to provide a conceptual foundation for the discussion to follow. Answering the question “What is harm?” is not as straightforward as the term’s popular use would suggest. Harm’s indeterminate nature – that is, the lack of concrete guidance on what is constituted by harm – makes consideration of its normative dimensions difficult (Ward, 2011). This conceptual “fuzziness” is not aided by its shallowly-conceptualized use by critics of media performance, where it too often becomes a reflexive accusation leveled against media actors (Plaisance, 2009, 2013). It is also important to consider the scope of any definition, given the challenge that moral relativism poses to ethics theorizing (Christians, 2008). I argue that a concrete definition of harm that transcends cultures and contexts is useful not only for its own sake but as a bulwark against relativism.

2.1 Defining harm

Joel Feinberg’s seminal *Harm to Others* (1984) is instructive in developing a sense of harm’s properties. For Feinberg, harm must be differentiated from mere offense or displeasure, referring specifically to when somebody’s legitimate interests are “set back” in a concrete and significant way. These interests could be what Feinberg calls “welfare interests” such as physical and mental health and wellbeing, financial security, a safe social environment, and the ability to go about life with a degree of liberty, or “ulterior interests” such as the goals and aspirations that an individual might want to pursue in their lives and careers (Feinberg, 1984). Feinberg also suggests that harm is done when somebody suffers a violation of a legal right.

This creates a high bar in defining harm, and thus “transitory disappointments and disillusionments, wounded pride, hurt feelings, aroused anger, shocked sensibility, alarm, disgust, frustration, impatient restlessness, acute boredom, irritation, embarrassment, [and] feelings of guilt and shame” (Feinberg, 1984, p. 46) cannot be said to be harmful under this rubric. These “various unhappy and unwanted physical states ... are not states of harm in themselves” (p. 47). Applying Feinberg’s arguments to harmful speech, legal theorist Evan Simpson (2006) argues as follows:

Harm has occurred when bodily injuries or psychological damage restrict one’s ability to act as one otherwise could have acted, interfering with pursuit of one’s interests. Affronts to dignity and hurtful speech can have some of these effects, but this is not to say that pains and attempts to pain are themselves harms. In contrast to forms of unpleasantness and adversity that are spurs to useful action, pain must restrict one’s capacities in order to justify that equation (p. 160).

This high bar for harm is necessary, Plaisance (2013) argues, to prevent a lapse into a censorious, moralistic society where harm is used to stifle the perspectives of others

on grounds of offense or displeasure. Similarly, the U.S. First Amendment philosopher Rodney Smolla (1992) offers a three-part model of harmful speech that is helpful in moving toward a workable understanding of harm. For Smolla, the general concept of harm is comprised of physical harm (threats of violence or incitement to lawless action), relational harm (damage to one's reputation and relationship with others), and reactive harm (damage to one's mental or emotional state). Applying Smolla's legal analysis to ethics, Johnson (2017) argues that they are a useful framework for identifying and classifying media-generated harms.

The moral compunction to avoid harm is, at bottom, a restriction on liberty. In their discussions of harm, media ethicists Bivins (2009) and Ward (2011) define the avoidance of harm as a "liberty-limiting principle." While such principles "may seem to be the dark tools of authoritarian societies" they are in fact a necessary prerequisite to a functioning, complex society where individuals are not atomized beings with no responsibilities to one another (Ward, 2011, p. 165). There is, though, much variation across contexts of what this means in practice, even within democracies. For example, the protection of hate speech in the United States has been described as a product of that nation's underlying libertarian political ethos (Schauer, 2005) and a demonstration of faith in the market as the arbiter of moral worth (George, 2014). This model prides itself on "protecting the speech we hate and in tolerating speech that offends" but, in so doing, holds that "free speech is to be considered so valuable that it almost always outweighs other values with which it comes into conflict" (Shiffrin, 2016, pp. 1–2). In the context of hate speech, this means that free speech effectively triumphs over the civic equality of minorities. A different path has been taken in other democracies, where hate speech is subject to far stronger regulation because these countries have made a different calculation on how values ought to be weighed, balancing speech against values rather than "resolving ahead of time to pick one over the other" (Shiffrin, 2016, p. 7). Germany, for example, has an outright prohibition on Nazi imagery and Holocaust denial on the grounds that the protection of this "low-value speech" is of lesser import than the protection of more significant values, like "dignity, honor, equality, the protection of young people, public peace, and civility" (Bleich, 2011, p. 921). This is an important reminder of the difficulties involved in identifying harms due to the importance of cultural context. This poses a related challenge, however, in bringing to fore the problems of moral relativism.

2.2 The problem of relativism

A concrete definition of harm is helpful in evading the challenge posed by relativism. Relativism holds that as "each culture has its own inherent integrity with unique values and practices, value judgments should be withheld or suspended until cultural context is taken into account" (Fluehr-Lobban, 2013, p. 40). As an ethical theory, relativism maintains that "what is right or good for one individual or society is not

right or good for another, even if the situations involved are similar” (Frankena, 1973, p. 109). This creates problems for the identification and assessment of harms because adherence to the belief that moral judgments are wholly relative to context effectively renders claims of value null and void. It undermines the very enterprise of ethics, for “if I think ethical views are relative and no view is better than any other view, why bother to critically assess and improve ethics?” (Ward, 2011, p. 33). At worst, this can mean that very real harms, such as domestic violence, infanticide, honor killings, and genital mutilation, can be justified on cultural grounds (Fluehr-Lobban, 2013). The assumption that culture is an absolute that exists outside of ideology and relations of power, rather than a social construct maintained by people (moral agents) and thus riven with ethical questions that must be addressed rather than dismissed, must surely be dispensed with.

Nonetheless, there is a tension between universal and culturally-specific values that ethicists must navigate, and this is a problem that is germane to journalism ethics, given the western-centric tilt of much of the scholarship on the matter (Zelizer, 2013). The notion of a monolithic model of journalism predicated on western notions of what journalism is and how it ought to be practiced is looking increasingly anachronistic against the exigencies of globalization (Christians, 2008; Rao & Lee, 2005). However, this should not be a license to indulge moral relativism; there ought to be shared values at the core of journalistic practice to distinguish journalism from other types of mass communication (Elliott, 1988; George, 2013). This means that ethical assessments, including those involving harm, must navigate their way through equally unappealing positions, avoiding both “the practice of applying western theories uncritically to non-western contexts” and “balkanization into culture-specific relativism” (George, 2013, p. 493).

The challenge posed by relativism has led some scholars to a search for universals by way of mapping out a framework for “global media ethics” (see, e.g., Christians, 2008; Ward, 2005, 2009, 2011; Wasserman, 2010). One could say that this is very much a work-in-progress, and this effort has yet to find firm normative anchors for journalism that transcend cultural contexts. Indeed, as empirical research demonstrates, different conceptions of journalism and its values across the world make the enactment of global media ethics difficult, if not impossible (Rao & Lee, 2005). A parallel effort has been undertaken by comparative journalism scholars focused on internationalizing journalism studies and identifying the universals that constitute a culture of journalism worldwide (see, e.g., Hanitzsch, 2007; Plaisance, Skewes, & Hanitzsch, 2012). Much of this research points to the role of cultural and ideological contexts in shaping ethical orientations, meaning that more work is to be done if advocates of universals are to move beyond “a dreamy spiritualism about the brotherhood of man and universal benevolence” (Ward, 2005, p. 17).

A relativistic approach would hold that harm lies in the eye of the proverbial beholder; that is, that universal claims about harm must concede ground to particularized notions of harm relative to individual contexts and communities. George

(2014) contrasts the differing views on blasphemy in liberal, Western nations versus Islamic countries. Whereas the former countries tend to insist upon the demonstration of “some objective harm” before declaring speech impermissible, the latter group of countries have often argued that freedom of speech ought not extend to the defamation of religion. In both contexts, a legal framework to permit or constrain journalistic activity is built upon particular *moral* conceptions of what constitutes harm. Whereas western countries might hold that blasphemy does not transcend offense, Islamic countries might argue that it represents a true harm. It also raises the related question of whether harm must always be defined relative to a person or to an idea, belief system, or ideology. George (2013) has also cautioned against the “balkanization” of ethics such that we lose the capacity to make claims of value altogether and suggests that comparisons across contexts avoid both “a relativistic view that all different models are normatively equivalent” and the imposition of “standards from one society on another without assessing their validity” (pp. 493–494). He notes that an over-willingness to indulge claims of local context can unwittingly “play into the hands of authoritarian states, which are fond of justifying their restricted media systems by reference to exceptional circumstances, such as social instability or a cultural preference for harmony” (pp. 492–493). News accounts of jailed journalists in authoritarian nations speak to George’s argument, as in the case of Turkish journalists arrested on terrorism charges for criticizing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Nordland, 2016), or of an Egyptian journalist jailed for “harming Egypt’s reputation” (Galloway, 2015).

3 Philosophical perspectives

The ethics of harm – what constitutes it and the moral justifications for it – is a matter that has preoccupied philosophers for centuries (Elliott & Ozar, 2010; Plaisance, 2013). Here, I want to identify three of the major contributors to our understanding of harm’s normative dimensions: Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and W. D. Ross.

3.1 Immanuel Kant, autonomy, and respect for human dignity

Kant’s concern for harm stems from his exhortation that we respect human dignity, which ultimately stems from their autonomy. Kant considered autonomy as “the property of the will of rational beings. To have a will is to be able to cause events in accord with principles” (Hill, 1991, p. 29). Kant believed that our capacity for rational, autonomous action was what bequeathed us our humanity and thus makes us deserving of respect. The second formulation of Kant’s “categorical imperative” calls us to “act as

to treat humanity ... in every case as an end withal, never as means only” (Kant, 1785, p. 56). Thus, while Kant is not a philosopher of harm *per se*, his categorical imperative provides a clear indication of what would constitute harm, for the imperative would be violated by “any action that undermined people’s capacity for reason and their ability to exercise free will” (Plaisance, 2013, p. 123). For Kant, people have the capacity to ascertain their own interests and to treat people as a means to an end is to fail to treat them as a “person worthy of dignity and respect in themselves” (Johannesen, Valde, & Whedbee, 2008, p. 39). Furthermore, the second formulation leads to an imperfect duty to further the ends of others and advance their opportunities for autonomous decision-making. Kant’s framework means that “universally applicable conclusions follow deductively” rather than inductively, through the assessment of available facts and reasonable predictions (Meyers, 2016, p. 206). This leads to a weakness of a strictly deontological approach in addressing matters of harm because harms – whether potential or actual – are consequences.

3.2 John Stuart Mill, liberty, and the “harm principle”

Mill’s “harm principle” is in fact just one component of a much larger treatise about the importance of expanding and respect human liberty (Plaisance, 2013). In *On Liberty*, Mill outlines his beliefs about the limits of state power relative to the individual. Mill’s concern was for the tension between “individual independence and social control” (Mill, 1859, p. 11) and the boundaries of individual freedom. *On Liberty*, then, articulates a framework that maximizes human liberty. In the text, he outlines his “harm principle” and thus situates harm as part of a much larger discussion about human liberty, making clear that when we talk about reducing harm we are talking about reducing liberty of action (Bivins, 2009; Plaisance, 2013; Ward, 2011). Mill’s argument is as follows:

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinion of others, to do so would be wise, or even right ... The only part of the conduct of anyone, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign (Mill, 1859, pp. 20–21).

Mill therefore makes the prevention of harm to others (though not to self) the sole principle on which the state could legitimately limit the liberty of citizens. It follows that there are moral limits on what one can do to interfere with the judgment of another with regard to harm to themselves. For Mill, while this is an option available if the person in question is a child, it is ethically impermissible for us to substitute

our judgment over another adult's. We have the power of persuasion, but no moral standing for interference of judgment or coercion. Importantly, Mill also understood “inactions” and “omissions” as well as “actions” as harmful. This former suggests we have a “good Samaritan” mandate while the latter suggests that limiting an individual's capacity to choose is immoral. For Mill, we cannot impose too wide a definition of harm and must be willing to tolerate slights and offenses “for the sake of the greater good of human freedom” (Mill, 1859, p. 93). It is from Mill that we get a sense of the *normative* issues at stake involving harm as they are situated in a broader framework around human liberty. Indeed, when placed into the context of Mill's larger argument, the harm principle is correctly understood not as a moral directive advocating what one ought to do but a “negative liberty” constraining the conduct of another (chiefly, the state).

3.3 W. D. Ross and *prima facie* duties

Squarely within the deontological tradition but with more flexibility than a strictly Kantian framework allows, W. D. Ross' (1930) moral system built on duties helps us “understand what constitutes goodness by defining [the] essential duties we have as moral agents” (Plaisance, 2013, p. 124). Ross understood duty as “the highest ethical calling” arguing that “each of us knows intuitively what is right – what is our duty – in most circumstances” (Hindman, 2008, pp. 93–94). This is to say that these duties are *prima facie* – self-evidently right and not requiring further justification. While six of Ross' *prima facie* duties (fidelity, reparation, gratitude, justice, beneficence, and self-improvement) are concerned with what we ought *to* do, a seventh – nonmaleficence (avoid harming others) – concerns what we should *not* do. Though Ross shied away from a ranking of duties, he explicitly defined nonmaleficence as “a duty of a more stringent character” than the duty of beneficence and is therefore “*prima facie* more binding” (Ross, 1930, pp. 21, 22). As Meyers (2011) notes, while Ross is a deontologist he is not blind to consequences, for the duties of nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice are clearly directed to positive social ends. For Plaisance (2010, 2013), Ross offers an appealing framework for systematic ethical analysis because it emphasizes duties but insists on accounting for context in how those duties are applied. This helps it evade the inflexibility of a purely Kantian approach.

4 Journalism's social role

This discussion of duties is a helpful link to journalism. A duty, in general, is defined as “something which is due, something which falls to be done, either because it is

simply assigned or because it is involved, is prescribed by, part and parcel of, arises out of, or owes its existence to, a particular institutionalized position” (White, 1984, pp. 23–24). When we talk about the duties of journalists, we are implicitly invoking the *institution* of journalism relative to the roles it fulfills in society. Journalism fulfills a number of functions that are essential to self-governance, such as informing people about matters of public interest, providing the means for social empathy and deliberation, and holding powerful interests to account (Curran, 2005; Schudson, 2008). If journalism as an institution has particular normative functions, this means that the journalists within it possess role-related responsibilities that derive their meaning from journalism’s macro-level objectives (Elliott & Ozar, 2010).

Considerations of harm are also important due to journalism’s “power to frame the political agenda and influence public opinion” (Ward, 2009, p. 296). Seemingly simple decisions about what to cover and how to cover it shape the terrain of public discourse and influence public perception of issues, events, organizations, and individuals. This imbues journalists with enormous capacity to do good, yet by the same token grants them the capacity to wield their power for ill. It follows, then, that every story undertaken by journalists ought to be seen as a moral judgment or series of moral judgments. This is to say that decisions made in the process of producing news are not innocent or naïve but fundamentally ethical questions about the appropriate use of power, resources, and influence. This capacity for harm pays no mind to matters of geographies or scale, for harm can be inflicted in a number of equally grievous ways. The journalist working at a 24-hour cable news network has the capacity to inflict great harm by virtue of her nationwide reach and influence over other media actors and elites. However, the journalist working at a local newspaper in a small, rural town is also capable of inflicting significant harm to a member of his community by the disclosure of information that could harm an individual’s hard-fought reputation in a close-knit locality.

4.1 Minimization rather than avoidance

Ethicists recognize that because of journalism’s democratic obligations, amplified by its power, harm is inevitable in the course of journalistic activity. The choices that journalists make “cause emotional, physical, financial, or reputational harm; such harm is built into journalistic functions” (Elliott & Ozar, 2010, p. 10). It is for good reason that the code of ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) calls on journalists to “minimize” harm rather than avoid it outright, for “if journalists adopted the principle of ‘do no harm’ little journalism would get done” (Ward, 2011, p. 187). This means that “in many cases, harm is either a necessary by-product [of journalism] or literally unavoidable” (Bivins, 2009, p. 148). Indeed, journalism’s unique social functions may mean it has a *duty* to cause harm (Elliott & Ozar, 2010). This shifts the locus of concern to journalists’ ability to “effectively evaluate when they can

prevent or reduce harm, when such harm is fully justified, and how to explain their choices both to those they harm and to the citizens they serve” (Elliott & Ozar, 2010, p. 10). Journalists are called to demonstrate “moral courage” and “only to cause that which is necessary to and justified by the story” (Plaisance, 2010, p. 307). For Bivins (2009), the key question is: “How much does the public need the information, and how successfully does that need compete with the principle that we should avoid the harm that would result from its publication?” (p. 156).

4.2 Harm to third parties

Journalism does not occur in a vacuum. Likewise, the people that journalists report on are not disaggregated atoms but social beings with ties to others. This means that the harm that journalists inflict on others is not confined to those it reports on, for there is, regrettably, “collateral damage.” If a public official loses his job as a result of his corruption or malfeasance, their family (who are not culpable) are materially affected as a result. If a newspaper reveals information about the private life of a public figure, that can cause emotional harm to his or her family. These considerations are relevant whether or not the story is in the public interest.

5 Types of journalistic harm

It should be clear by this point that harm requires moral justification. I will return to justifications for journalistic harm momentarily, but at this stage it is helpful to discuss the concrete ways that journalism is capable of inflicting harm. Here, I draw on the five-fold typology of journalistic harms outlined by Ward (2011): Physical, monetary, reputational, psychological, and social.

5.1 Physical harm

Physical harm pertains to provoking “violent reactions” (Ward, 2011, p. 186) in response to journalism. Ward uses the example of revealing the identity of an anonymous source in a report that would place that source in danger of physical violence as an illustration of physical harm. McQuail (2003) reminds us of how “people have been driven to suicide following some public accusation or revelation in the media” (p. 178). Physical harm is an important part of First Amendment philosophy, such as the fighting words doctrine that limits speech that incites violence. Another instructive example of physical harm comes from the United Kingdom. British newspapers

are known for waging campaigns “based upon the direct advocacy of a specific cause” where the newspaper “devotes prominent positions in the paper to its advocacy and opts for a didactic tone” (Harrison, 2008, p. 41). While these causes can produce some worthy pro-social consequences, a “naming and shaming” anti-pedophile campaign organized by the (now defunct) *News of the World* newspaper “resulted in hundreds of residents taking to the streets ... to protest against suspected pedophiles.” The campaign was abandoned “as the public began to act as vigilantes and attack innocent people” (Harrison, 2008, p. 41). Here, the conduct of the newspaper led to direct physical harm on innocent people wrongly suspected of criminal activity.

5.2 Monetary harm

Monetary harm pertains to “negative effects on one’s wealth and future income” (Ward, 2011, p. 186). The loss of earnings one might incur as a result of journalism is a clear, material harm. If a corrupt politician loses his job as a result of investigative journalism that reveals vast misuse of public funds, they have been monetarily harmed. This is, perhaps, an obvious example. Yet other, seemingly innocuous, types of journalism such as criticism – the reviewing of food, music, film, television, theater, and so on – are equally as capable of inflicting this kind of harm. As Ward (2011) notes, “influential film reviewers may damage the revenue that a producer might make from her new film by writing damning reviews” (p. 186). It is for good reason, then, that the Association of Food Journalists instructs its members to “always be conscious that they are dealing with people’s livelihoods” (Association of Food Journalists, n.d.). A music critic reviewing an up-and-coming band’s first album is playing a role – however small – in determining the ongoing viability and therefore financial wellness of that band. These are important, not trivial, ethical questions.

5.3 Reputational harm

Reputational harm is harm that affects “the reputation and career of citizens and organizations” (Ward, 2011, p. 186). The case of Richard Jewell, a security guard at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, is instructive here. After finding a backpack containing a pipe bomb, Jewell alerted authorities and helped evacuate the area. Though two people died and 111 were injured, Jewell was hailed as a hero for his role in minimizing the harm to public life. However, his identification by the FBI as a “person of interest” led to a flurry of speculative media reports, most notably from *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and CNN, that Jewell had planted the bomb in order to be hailed as a hero after finding it. Jewell was, however, completely innocent

and spent the years up until his death in 2007 seeking financial restitution against a number of media organizations for the harm done to his reputation.

5.4 Psychological harm

Ward (2011) defines psychological harm as a “harmful impact on one’s mental states” (p. 187). Issues of privacy are illustrative here. Privacy is considered central to the development of one’s identity and thus an important marker of dignity (Benn, 1971). When a journalist invades the privacy of another, they undermine “a person’s conception of herself as a self-determining moral agent, damaging her self-respect and emotional well-being, and destroying reputations, relationships, and lives” (Gauthier, 2010, p. 221). For example, journalists have often been faulted for their insensitivity with dealing with victims of trauma (Walsh-Childers, Lewis, & Neely, 2011). For Coleman and May (2004), journalists must consider emotional harm inflicted on people who endure ongoing coverage of stories in which they lost loved ones and family members in national tragedies such as the 1986 Challenger shuttle explosion or the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. These are plainly stories of national interest yet, for these individuals, deeply personal tales of loss.

Psychological harm and emotional distress may be present in other aspects of journalism. Online comments sections – where readers can comment, often anonymously and unmoderated, on news content – are a prominent feature of the new media landscape yet they have become places where hateful, abusive, xenophobic, and threatening rhetoric is commonplace (Antony & Thomas, 2017; Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011). Some argue that comments sections can be riven by hate speech that is actively harmful to the mental states of readers. For *Guardian* columnist Tauriq Moosa, the comment section “sits there like an ugly growth beneath articles, bloated and throbbing with vitriol. It groans as hatred expands its force, waiting for any point of dissent to break it – to unleash its full fury on targets who dare convey some measure of civility or dissent” (Moosa, 2014, para. 1). Loke (2012) suggests that a *laissez-faire* attitude among journalists, stemming from avoidance of dialogue with the audience, is to blame for the fact that hateful speech dominates online news comments sections. This raises the vexing question of whether *journalists* are morally culpable for the psychological harm inflicted by a post written by an *audience member* in the comments section.

5.5 Social harm

Social harm is a broader category of journalistic harm that transcends the individual and speaks to journalism’s relationship to the broader social fabric. For Ward (2011),

journalism that is “uninformed and intolerant” journalism inflicts harm as it can “cause friction between groups in society, whip up xenophobia, support discriminatory measures against a marginalized group, misrepresent a religion or ethnic group, stereotype ethnic groups, or support an unjust war” (p. 187). The focus on “sensational or entertaining stories” at the expense of serious ones is also part of Ward’s rubric, as is “misinforming [citizens] or reporting incomplete facts on social issues” (p. 187). The late political economist C. Edwin Baker wrote of journalism’s *positive externalities* – the social benefits that journalism yields beyond its immediate consumption. It follows that journalism is rich in *negative externalities*, too:

Individuals are tremendously benefited or harmed if the country makes wise or stupid decisions about welfare, warfare, provision of medical care, the environment, and a myriad of other issues. These harms or benefits depend on the extent and quality of other people’s political participation. The media significantly influence this participation (Baker, 2002, p. 45).

6 Moral justifications for journalistic harms

Having established the different kinds of harms journalists are capable of inflicting, I turn to outlining moral justifications for journalistic harm. Considerations of journalistic harm strike at the heart of what constitutes a true ethical dilemma, which occurs “when elements of a moral system conflict” (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014, p. 4), for “it is the idea of potential or actual harm and our desire to avoid or minimize it that conflict with other competing values such as truth-telling, public service, and accountability” (Plaisance, 2013, p. 124). How should journalists resolve this dilemma? I discuss two approaches to resolving ethical dilemmas involving harm: utilitarian and duty-based justifications.

6.1 Utilitarian justifications

Utilitarianism is concerned with maximizing good outcomes. Too often, utilitarianism is reduced to a simple calculation of winners and losers, where its associated maxim “the greatest good for the greatest number of people” often substitutes for the theory as a whole (Elliott, 2007). The misunderstandings about utilitarianism have led Elliott (2007) to mount a spirited defense of the theory, arguing that the goal of utilitarian ethics (and the enterprise underpinning Mill’s work) is to seek what maximizes the “aggregate good” for the community as a whole rather than the “arithmetic good” for disaggregated individuals. This forces us to go beyond simply saying that harms to a minority are acceptable in light of goods yielded for a majority and consider what the community’s interests as a whole might be. The ability to determine the ethicality of harm, therefore, “involves more than mere computation” (Elliott, 2007, p. 101)

and must consider whether harming an individual will advance the community's interests. However, utilitarianism has been subject to criticism from other media ethicists who criticize its abstractness (Plaisance, 2009) and lack of precision, for "harm assessments are often uncertain predictions about the consequences of actions" (Ward, 2011, p. 163).

6.2 Duty-based justifications

Though journalism is not a formal profession, possessing no system of licensing, educational prerequisites, or unified body of knowledge, it possesses many of the characteristics of one, "not only because they serve the public interests, but also because of their relationships with others that embody additional rights, responsibilities, and expectations" (Coleman & May, 2004, p. 276). This means that considerations of harm must be balanced against "the press' primary responsibility to inform the public" (Coleman & May, 2004, p. 285). For Plaisance (2010), "the journalist must ... be able to show how her public service mission is often a compelling reason that, in the right contexts, she is justified in, for example, compromising a news subject's privacy" (p. 309).

6.3 Systematic moral analysis

The "systematic moral analysis" (SMA) devised by Elliott and Ozar (2010) integrates different approaches to ethical decision-making into a coherent whole, with particular attention to journalistic harms. Their framework begins by addressing three questions. The first of these is "Whom does journalism serve?" By way of an answer, Elliott and Ozar explain that "journalism's commitment is to serve 'all the people,' the society as a whole, and to relate to that society precisely insofar as people's actions actually or potentially affect the lives of others in the society" (p. 11). Second, Elliott and Ozar ask, "What good does journalism do for those it serves?" They argue that journalism: (1) provides information of public necessity; (2) provides information of public desire; (3) enhances citizens' autonomy (by holding powerful interests to account and reporting on matters of public concern); and (4) builds community (by connecting individuals to one another and generating social empathy). Third, they ask, "What is the ideal relationship between journalism and those it serves?" They argue that the relationship should be collaborative, with neither party being passive. Having established a normative-ideal framework for journalistic performance, Elliott and Ozar outline a process for ethical decision-making. The SMA integrates duties with outcomes, for we need to "discern just what the role-related duties are and whether associated harms are ethically justified" (p. 19). The process is as follows:

1. What are the courses of action available?
2. Does the action fulfill a role-related responsibility? Does it serve the public? Does it address the central values of journalism? Does it facilitate collaboration between journalist and audience?
3. Will the action cause potential harm?
4. Is causing this harm justified? Does it demonstrate respect for all persons affected? Does it treat all parties impartially? Does it protect rights and entitlements and promote the aggregate good?
5. Based on the above process, is the action ethically prohibited, ethically required, ethically permitted, or ethically ideal?

7 Conclusion: New challenges

The past decade has witnessed “radical change across all aspects of journalism ... with significant and wide-ranging consequences” (Franklin, 2014, p. 469). Economic instability, technological innovations, and the apparent dissolution of the boundary between journalist and audience are just some of the changes raising ethical questions that will fuel much normative reflection and empirical research in the years to come.

The literature indicates that journalists are increasingly having to do more with less, and thus increasingly feel dissociated from their normative obligations and unable to live up to the tasks the public demand of them (Hettinga, 2013; Reinardy, 2017; Siegelbaum & Thomas, 2016). As errors and shortcuts creep in, what does this mean for considerations of harm? As journalism is increasingly a solitary activity in an under-resourced field (Wyatt & Clasen, 2014), what are the possibilities for robust ethical debate about harm or for the transmission of values through moral exemplars?

Outside of the walls of traditional news organizations, new actors are claiming journalistic standing and thus raising new questions about harm. Ugland and Henderson (2007) note that, absent legal definitions, “the question of who is a journalist is in the eye of the beholder. Consumers decide for themselves who is a journalist, who is to be believed and whom to offer their attention and esteem” (p. 259). However, this assertion deserves analysis than taken as an empirical given, as the research on the matter is tinged with digital utopianism and offers little to suggest either that this collapsed distinction is an empirical reality or that it would be normatively desirable (Kreiss & Brennen, 2016). Moreover, normatively, it raises questions about duty and the problem for duty- and role-based models – specifically, what does it mean for a role-related responsibility when there is no clarity over who is occupying that role? One path forward is identified by Culver (2017), who praises the work of the Online News Association (ONA) in developing “an interactive ethics tool that allowed reporters, news organizations, and other communicators to build their own ethics codes,” an effort that was “largely lauded for its organizers’ efforts to open its

process to anyone who wanted to contribute” (pp. 477–478). While the idea of a personalized code of ethics is something of a contradiction-in-terms, this does indicate a path forward as a *process* for negotiating a shared media space, inasmuch as it may provide a framework – or at very least a backstop – in countering ethically problematic tendencies and harnessing them to ethical universals, of which the avoidance of harm is foremost (Elliott, 1988).

Elsewhere, journalists dealing with user-generated content could be counselled to apply journalistic values surrounding the avoidance of harm. With regard to online comments, scholars have argued for active moderation (Loke, 2012) or have questioned the normative value of comments sections altogether on the grounds that they can become hubs for corrosive, inaccurate, and conspiracy-tinged rhetoric on issues of public concern (Antony & Thomas, 2017), precisely the kind of “social harm” Ward (2011) describes. Another approach could be the application of traditional journalistic standards – that is, treating comments as part of the work of journalism and thus holding it to a higher bar (Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011).

It also bears noting that platforms like Google and Facebook are not journalistic organizations per se but are increasingly critical in the delivery of journalism and as public fora for the discussion of issues of importance (Johnson, 2017). What, then, are their responsibilities when it comes to minimizing harm? This suggests, as Johnson (2017) notes, a growing need to develop a more robust account of “platform ethics.”

All of the above are difficult questions that deserve close reflection. As journalism changes, so our theorizing must adapt to these challenging empirical realities. This does not mean, however, that ethicists ought to sign on blankly to a technologically futurist agenda. I argue that we are confronted with the challenge of dual relativisms – first, the aforementioned relativism across contexts that undermines the capacity to make claims of value and reduces comparative analyses to banal observations of difference, and second, the relativism that diffuses a role such that it ceases to be a role altogether and “journalist” becomes divested of its normative import. Elliott’s (1988) warning that there ought to be universals serving as the normative glue holding journalism together and granting it meaning was prescient and deserves revisiting. The goal ought to be pluralism rather than relativism (Elliott, 1988; George, 2013); recognition of an array of practices constituting standing as a journalist but underpinned by core axioms, of which the minimization of harm is foremost. This is to say that the vaunted blurring of lines between journalist and audience should not be taken as an empirical given and the word “journalist” ought not be bandied around so casually.

Further readings

In terms of outlining the properties of harm, Joel Feinberg’s work on harm to others (1984) and to self (1986) remain foundational. Harm has been an important

“animating concept” in journalism ethics research, an inevitable reflection of the centrality of harm avoidance and minimization to the practice of journalism itself. Plaisance (2010) provides a thorough summary of how issues of harm are brought to bear in journalistic work. Elliott (1988) notes how the avoidance of harm is an important “shared value” of journalists, arguing against a non-relativistic understanding of journalism. Hindman (1999) reminds us of the importance of disentangling ethical and legal arguments. Writing specifically about journalistic work in the context of risk and disaster communication, but with an argument that begs wider application, Wilkins (2010, 2016) has advanced the notion of journalists as “mitigation watchdogs” in the context of their capacity to both minimize harm and prevent future harms. With regard to ethical decision-making, scholars have advanced intriguing and theoretically syncretic frameworks where consideration of harm is a core component, such as those offered by Elliott (2007), Elliott and Ozar (2010) and Meyers (2011, 2016). Harm remains an important touchstone in normative and empirical work in journalism ethics, driving research on issues that are germane to journalistic practice, such as journalists’ responsibilities in covering trauma (Amend, Kay, & Reilly, 2012; Walsh-Childers, Lewis, & Neely, 2011) or in reporting matters of public health (Coleman & May, 2004). A number of recent works have examined harm in the context of emerging issues – such as the ethical responsibilities of digital intermediaries (Johnson, 2017) and the potential harms of anonymous online comments (Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011) – or emerging journalistic practices – such as data journalism (Craig, Ketterer, & Yousuf, 2017) or documentary journalism (Maccarone, 2010) – that will undoubtedly fuel much subsequent scholarship on these topics and others. In short, harm remains a central concept to journalism ethics research and the rampant changes affecting journalism (and all forms of mediated communication) only increase the importance of considering the multiple manifestations and impacts of harm.

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Edward H. Spence

13 Harm in Media Marketing: the Branding of Values

Abstract: This purpose of this chapter is to offer an ethical analysis and evaluation of the strategy and practice in advertising and marketing of associating brands with values so as to render those brands more marketable and ultimately more saleable, but in that process devaluing those values. To that end, the methodology employed, as befits the discipline of moral philosophy and applied ethics, is conceptual analysis supported by sound rational arguments. This analysis will attempt to demonstrate that the association of brands with values is ethically problematic. A second related but independent purpose, one not pursued in this chapter, is to establish the initial motivation and basis for a further empirical investigation, through interdisciplinary research, of the ethical impact that the association of brands with values has on consumers, and especially on young people and children.

Keywords: brands; values; manufacturing of happiness; Plato; advertising and marketing ethics; deontological and consequentialist arguments; exploitation; deception.

1 The manufacturing of happiness

“Happiness is ... Hyundai,” boldly declares an advertisement for Hyundai, the South Korean car manufacturer. Nice use of alliteration, but is it true? As an identity statement of the type $X=Y$, it can’t, of course, be true, as “happiness” is not strictly speaking the same thing as a “car with the brand name “Hyundai.” The statement merely suggests, implicitly if not explicitly, that the possession of a Hyundai car can make a person that owns one, happy. Even if not intended as a true statement in this secondary sense, the statement seems at least designed, through its association of “happiness” with the brand “Hyundai,” to create a favorable impression and a pro-attitude toward the brand in the mind of the consumer. It is designed to do so by the creation of a conceptual link of something highly valued and desired, such as happiness, to a specific brand name of a car. By doing so, it is hoped that the high value and desirability that

Note: This chapter is a revised version of an earlier published paper, Spence, E. (2014). The Advertising of Happiness and the Branding of Values. In Michael Boylan (Ed.). *Business Ethics* (2nd edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ, USA: Pearson/Prentice Hall.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-013>

people usually attribute to happiness will be transferred in the mind of the consumer to the brand of the car itself.¹

The Japanese car manufacturer Toyota seems to attempt something not dissimilar with their well-known and now instantly recognizable ad jingle “Oh what a feeling, Toyota!” which is usually accompanied by a picture of a seemingly jubilant Toyota owner jumping in the air with joy. At least that seems to be a reasonable interpretation of the ad based on how those words and human movements are normally understood in popular culture. Not missing out on the happiness bandwagon, the cosmetics company Clinique uses an ad caption for one of its perfumes to proclaim, “Happy – Clinique happy” next to a picture of a young woman’s seemingly contorted face of happiness. In its advertising campaign for Kraft Singles sliced cheese, Kraft joins the chorus with “Have a happy sandwich.”²

2 The association of brands with values

Another way in which consumer brands are associated with the concept of happiness is indirectly through the association of those brands with values and attributes that are generally highly regarded and valued in their own right but also valued as being conducive to happiness. For example, values and attributes such as “friendship,” “truth,” “romance,” “grace,” “elegance,” “carefree,” “freedom,” “independence,” “beauty” and “love,” to name but a few, have been regularly associated with various consumer brands. For example: *friendship* with bourbon in the Jim Beam ad, “Real friends. Real bourbon”; *truth* with the Calvin Klein perfume “Truth”; *amazing grace* with a woman’s watch in an ad by Pulsar; *romance* with the perfume “Romance” by Ralph Lauren; *elegance* with a watch in an ad by Longines; *carefree* with a brand name for tampons; *a declaration of independence* with perfume for an ad for the perfume “Tommy Girl”; and not least, *lovable* with “Lovable,” a brand for women’s lingerie. Philosophy, the pursuit of wisdom, is not spared either. *Philosophy* is also the brand-name for ladies’ handbags.

Insofar as those attributes and values are generally seen as contributing factors to people’s happiness and well-being, their ubiquitous association to consumer products is ethically problematic in the way that will be explained under four separate arguments here. Additionally, insofar as those attributes and values are in themselves considered highly valuable and important by most people and not merely by virtue of being viewed as contributing factors to happiness, then their pervasive and cumulative association with consumer products in advertisements can be seen as also

¹ A similar conclusion is reached by Debasish Roy in “Brand implies the happiness that a customer associates with,” *The Economic Times*, ET Bureau Apr 24, 2011. http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2011-04-24/news/29469200_1_brand-trade-mark-indian-business. Accessed July, 28, 2011.

² Stuart Elliott, *The New York Times*, “The Pursuit of Happiness in a Grilled Cheese Sandwich,” October, 1, 2007. Accessed 28072011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/01/business/media/01adcol.html>

ethically problematic. For the arguments are intended to show that such an association diminishes and degrades those attributes and values – it *devalues* them.

First, the association of bands with values deceives people by the implied suggestion that they too can have independence, beauty, friendship, elegance, romance, truth, and love in their lives simply by wearing a certain watch, perfume or lingerie (the argument from deception). Second, it exploits the gullibility of the young and vulnerable by that implied suggestion (the argument from exploitation). Further, insofar as it subverts the importance of those attributes and values, it sets up a bad example for children and thus undermines the importance of those attributes and values for future generations of citizens (the argument from setting a good example and protecting the vulnerable). And finally, it is paradoxical as it generates an internal inconsistency within the advertising messages themselves (the argument from paradox). In doing so, it undermines a fundamental and necessary epistemological condition for all communication of information, that of rational consistency. For communication that violates the basic principle of non-contradiction, namely, (“A” and “not A”) at the same time and in the same respect, is epistemologically problematic in that it can cause confusion and ambiguity in meaning, potentially undermining all meaningful communication. As a persuasion strategy, this might seem acceptable and instrumentally useful, but ethically, it might prove to be objectionable if it misleads or exploits its intended audience.

Aspirational³ values, attributes and feelings, such as happiness, freedom, friendship, independence, beauty, elegance, grace, love and truth, among others, comprise our common cultural, aesthetic, and ethical heritage. They create the moral environment in which we socially interact as citizens. It is indeed paradoxical how as *consumers* we, through ignorance, or indifference or negligence, allow those aspirational values, attributes and feelings, that give social, aesthetic and ethical meaning and direction to our lives as *citizens*, be subverted and corrupted by pervasive advertising. This is done through their constant and cumulative association with commodities and brands for the sake of satisfying our collective craving for more consumer products.

3 The Feel Good Argument

As an advertising and marketing strategy, the association of consumer products or services (for simplicity, the term “products” will henceforth refer to both products and

³ Understand *aspirational* as referring to ideal values, attributes and feelings that people generally aspire to possess because they are normally regarded very highly, socially, aesthetically and ethically, at least in western democracies, even if they are not always actualized in practice. Typically, such values, attributes or affective states are not limited but transcend the material and other physical or psychological conditions that pertain to those who aspire to them. It is in that sense that they can be considered “ideal” but capable of being actualized.

services) makes rational instrumental sense. Consider the following argument – let us refer to this argument as the “Feel Good Argument”:

1. The ultimate object of advertising and marketing (for ease of reference the term “advertising” will be used to refer to both advertising and marketing) is to persuade consumers to feel pro-disposed toward a particular product in the hope that consumers may actually become disposed to purchasing that product.
2. People are generally pro-disposed to their own happiness and the things that contribute directly or indirectly to their happiness.
3. The association of consumer products with the concept and images of happiness are designed to create in consumers the same pro-attitude or pro-disposition toward the products advertised as people have toward their own happiness and its contributing associated values.
4. If the association of consumer products with the concept and images of happiness in the relevant ads is successful, it is very likely that consumers will be persuaded through that association to feel pro-disposed to the advertised consumer products and become inclined to purchase those products.
5. Therefore, insofar as the strategy of associating consumer products with the concept of happiness and its related aspirational values is likely to succeed and prove effective, that strategy seems eminently instrumentally rational. For if successful, it utilizes effective means in achieving the ultimate goal of advertising: the promotion of the sale of consumer products. Moreover, it does so without offering much information about the products other than the implied suggestion that possession of those products is likely to make one feel happy.
6. Thus, the strategy of associating consumer products with the concept and images of happiness, if successful, proves to be information-efficient as it persuades through minimal content of product information. Moreover, in a market saturated with consumer products that *prima facie* at least have product parity, differentiating a specific product such as a car or a perfume from other similar competitors through the association of that product with aspirational values, such as happiness, seems to make good professional and business sense.

The “Feel Good Argument” seems to indicate that the advertising strategy of associating consumer products with the concept of happiness is instrumentally rational. This may help to partly explain the pervasive use of this strategy in contemporary advertising. For the strategy promises, at least in its design, to achieve the ultimate goal of advertising and marketing: the maximization of persuasion power over consumers to purchase consumer products at minimal information cost.

However, even if it is instrumentally rational, is the strategy ethical? Is this a case of a false promise, or perhaps a case of a promise that cannot be fulfilled, and if so, does the mere implied suggestion of such promises constitute a type of deception? If it does, is this type of deception a form of exploitation – a strategy of seeking to

persuade people to acquire products by misleadingly appealing to their highest aspiration for happiness attainment?

4 The ethical dimension of happiness

Before attempting to answer these questions, let us first look briefly at the concept of “happiness.” According to the Greek philosopher Aristotle (1953), the ultimate goal in life for every person is to be happy. For who wouldn’t want to be happy? People may pursue its attainment in many different ways, some through wealth, fame, job satisfaction social status, having a family, good health and good friends, but ultimately all these things are intermediate means toward the ultimate goal of being happy. Perceived by Greek and Roman philosophers including Aristotle, Plato, the Epicureans and the Stoics to be of fundamental importance to our lives, happiness or *eudaimonia* was placed at the center of their respective philosophical systems.⁴ These philosophers understood happiness or *eudaimonia* not merely as short-term gratification but far more importantly as long-term self-fulfillment or self-actualization. Aristotle referred to a happy life as a *flourishing* life (1953). Thus, a key practical goal of these philosophies was to at once explore the nature of happiness and determine the best possible means for its attainment. Conceived as *the art of living* (*techne biou*), Greek and later Roman philosophy sought to systematically explore and discover the best way to live one’s life so as to attain maximum and long-lasting happiness or *eudaimonia*.

Although these philosophers argued about the nature of happiness and the means of its attainment in different and sometimes opposing ways, they all thought that an essential condition for being truly happy was the adoption of an ethical lifestyle that emanated from a virtuous character. The idea being that unethical conduct undermined one’s integrity and corrupted one’s character, which in turn could, at least potentially, undermine one’s chances for real and lasting happiness. Unethical conduct was thus perceived as self-defeating. It was seen as using unsuitable means that were, at least potentially, more conducive to the defeat rather than the fulfillment of one’s ultimate goal of attaining happiness. An example of this would be a corrupt police officer. His acceptance of bribes for financial gain, for example, undermines his personal and professional integrity and risks a shameful dismissal and judicial punishment. This is self-defeating as it could, potentially at least, have the opposite effect to his desired goal of being happy. Martha Stewart’s conviction and imprisonment

⁴ For an excellent and informative exposition and analysis of Hellenistic and related Roman philosophy, see A.A Long 1986, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

for insider trading in America and that of Rene Rivkin in Australia for similar behavior are examples of how greed proves self-defeating because it potentially results in unhappiness, not happiness.⁵

The connection between ethics and happiness, even if not as close as the Greek and Roman philosophers thought it was, is nevertheless an important one. For it is reasonable to claim that even if ethical conduct is not always essential for living a happy life, it is at least conducive to a happy life. At the very least, it is conducive to the happiness of others that might otherwise suffer harm as a result of our own unethical conduct. For even if unethical conduct does not undermine our own happiness, doubtful as this may be, especially in the long run, it can nevertheless undermine the happiness of others. Thus insofar as there seems to be a connection between ethics and happiness, the concept of happiness in professional and corporate practice generally, and advertising and marketing practice in particular, is an ethically important concept. It must therefore inform all professional and corporate practices and policies, including those of advertising. In the case of advertising, the conceptual connection between happiness and ethics is close and challenging since advertising is by and large in the business of creating and manufacturing images of “happiness.” Hyundai’s “Happiness is ... Hyundai” and McDonald’s “Happy Meal” are just two examples among many others.

5 Plato’s Quarrel with the poets: Lessons for advertising and marketing ethics

Plato addresses his complaint against the poets in Books 2 and 3 of the *Republic*. In those passages, Socrates, the protagonist of Plato’s *Dialogues*, is having a conversation with Adeimantus about the appropriate education for the guardians of the state. To Adeimantus’ astonishment, Socrates finds fault with two of the greatest poets of the time, Homer and Hesiod. The thrust of his complaint is that these and other poets “who have ever been the great story-tellers of mankind” (Plato, 1952), lie. In short, they lie about the true nature of the gods and that of heroes. They misrepresent the gods by depicting them as cunning, dissembling, profligate, quarrelsome, lascivious, hot-tempered, self-seeking and self-serving, vain individuals who are morally no better, and sometimes worse, than ordinary men and women.

Socrates gives several examples of depictions by Homer of gods behaving badly. One in particular is the various transformations of Zeus, father of the gods, who changes into bulls, swans and other disguises so that he should seduce and have his

⁵ Rene Rivkin got depressed and committed suicide whereas Martha Stewart apparently bounced back and was back to business as usual.

carnal ways with earthly women. According to Socrates, “it is impossible that God should ever be willing to change; being, as is supposed, the fairest and the best that is conceivable, every God remains absolutely and for ever in his own form.” He goes on to say that “God is perfectly simple and true both in word and deed; he changes not; he deceives not, either by sign or word, by dream or waking vision.” He concludes that “the gods are not magicians who transform themselves, neither do they deceive mankind in any way.” Socrates’ argument about the true nature of God is based on a conceptual analysis that ascribes to God the quality of perfection. Being perfect, God would not want to change to something less perfect, especially as a self-seeking means for deceiving humans for his or her own selfish ends.

According to Socrates, the poets not only misrepresent the gods but they also misrepresent the true nature of heroes by depicting them as grabbing, selfish, arrogant, greedy and callous egotists who, like Achilles, would only fight for ransom and gifts from the Greeks after his slave girl is taken from him by Agamemnon. He acts like a thug when, after killing Hector, desecrates his body by tying it to his chariot and dragging it around the walls of Troy, refusing to surrender it for burial in contravention of divine and human laws. Is such a depiction of Achilles, the greatest of all the heroes, a true representation of what a hero is or at least ought to be? And what of the harmful effect that such a depiction might have on the impressionable minds of children, who, as Socrates claims, “the young man should not be told that in committing the worst of crimes he is far from doing anything outrageous.” He goes on to say that “a young person cannot judge what is allegorical and what is literal; anything that he receives into his mind at that age is likely to become indelible and unalterable; and therefore it is most important that the tales which the young first hear should be models of virtuous thoughts.”

We can see that Plato’s complaint against the poets as expressed by Socrates is a fundamental and deep concern for moral education and how false depictions of gods and heroes in the poetry of his time can have a detrimental effect on the character of children who are not yet capable of critical thinking that allow them to discern truth from falsehood.

Socrates’ arguments against the false depictions of gods and heroes in Homer’s poetry are of two kinds:

1. A *deontological* argument that seeks to demonstrate that the depictions of gods and heroes by poets are inherently inconsistent since those depictions are in direct negation of the essential attributes that characterise gods and heroes alike. A deontological argument is a rational argument that purports to show that an action is morally wrong, or at least ethically problematic, if it is motivated by thinking that involves an inherent logical contradiction. Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative,⁶ for example,

⁶ A formulation of Kant’s celebrated argument is as follows: “Always act in accordance with a rule or maxim that you can at the same time consistently will that it should become a universal law.” Thus, deception, for example, can be considered unethical or at least ethically problematic under Kant’s

is based on this type of argument. So gods and heroes cannot behave badly and immorally in a way that denies their inherent excellence of character and divine perfection, respectively. Vices are inconsistent with excellence of character and divine perfection. Given that heroes by definition possess or should possess excellence of character instantiated by virtues and the absence of vices, and gods possess perfect natures that cannot of necessity admit the imperfection of vices, depictions of gods and heroes that are inconsistent with the heroes' and gods' essential characteristics amount thus to lies.

So, for example, Achilles as a hero par excellence cannot, by definition, be ill-tempered, arrogant, petulant greedy, malicious, cruel, and unjust in the way described by Homer in the *Iliad*, because those are vices that are in direct negation of the cardinal virtues such as courage, moderation, prudence and justice that a hero must of necessity possess. Note also that according to Plato and later the Stoics, virtues come in a package so that if one is virtuous one must be in possession of all the cardinal virtues such as courage, prudence, moderation and justice. and not just some of them. For even if we grant that Achilles was brave, the absence of moderation, prudence and justice in his character would render him vicious, not virtuous.

To be courageous, one must sometimes moderate one's anger, which can take more courage than merely giving vent to it and seeking revenge at all costs. To be prudent, one must also be reverential to the gods – which Achilles wasn't when he desecrated Hector's body and refused to give it back to the Trojans for burial. To be just, one must sometimes constrain one's self-interest with regard to the legitimate interests of others. Achilles, by contrast, allowed his self-interest and sulking pride to jeopardise the interests of his fellow Greeks by withdrawing from the battle that almost cost the Greeks the war.

So either Achilles was not a hero or he was a hero and was falsely depicted by Homer as being vicious rather than virtuous. Either way, Homer lied about the true nature of heroes or about the true character of Achilles. So Homer's depiction of heroes generally, and his depiction of Achilles' character specifically, was a misrepresentation and thus a lie.

The second argument that Socrates uses against false poetical depictions of gods and heroes is a *consequentialist* argument, which demonstrates that children and young people can be adversely influenced by these false depictions of gods and heroes and furthermore, encouraged by those depictions they may learn to act viciously and immorally. Consequentially, this could prove detrimental to the good of the state. A consequentialist argument is a rational argument that purports to show that an action is morally wrong if it results in bad consequences overall.

By combining the two arguments, Socrates can rationally conclude that the false representations of gods and heroes in poetry, is ethically problematic. The poets engaging in such false representations should be asked to carefully consider for

categorical imperative since one cannot consistently will that deception as a favoured maxim should become a universal law. For all trustworthy communication will break down to the detriment of everyone including the person who stands to occasionally benefit from deception exercised selectively in his favour.

themselves the inherent inconsistency and potential harmful consequences of their false representations and desist from doing so. Moreover, he goes on to argue that the young must be educated to be sceptical and critical of such poetry, thus being equipped and able to recognise the many ways in which poets such as Homer distort the truth of many things, including the truth about gods and heroes.

6 The devaluation of happiness and values by advertising and marketing

There are several reasons that can be offered to show that the association of the concept of happiness and other associated values with consumer products by advertising can be viewed as ethically problematic. In this section, I will use the two types of arguments used by Plato to support those reasons.

6.1 Three deontological arguments

6.1.1 The argument from the diminution of values

The constant association of the concept of happiness and its associated values, either directly or indirectly, with consumer products diminishes or degrades the importance and value of that concept. For most people, the acquisition of a new car or a new perfume might be desirable and contribute in some way to their short-term pleasure or happiness, but it seems implausible to suggest that the serial and cumulative acquisition of commodities alone can constitute the whole of one's happiness. Happiness is a rich and complex tapestry comprising many different things, such as love, friendship, work satisfaction, family, education, social acceptance, travel, holidays, a stroll on the beach, creativity, the arts and sport. It cannot, therefore be reduced merely to the acquisition and consumption of products and their brands without degrading the richness and complexity of that concept. It cannot, without severely diminishing its value, be associated exclusively with a particular car, perfume or any other specific consumer product. To be sure, the piecemeal association of the concept of happiness with a particular consumer product by a specific commercial may not necessarily undermine the value of that concept. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to postulate that the *cumulative* effect of many such commercials for many different products over a protracted period of time may have a degrading and diminishing effect on that concept.

The suggestion that a single type of consumer product can exclusively be identified with the concept of happiness, if taken seriously, would amount to a perversion or a subversion of the concept of happiness. On the other hand, that suggestion may

not be taken seriously, for most people would probably recognize the identification of the concept of happiness with a particular product, be it a car or perfume, as merely an advertising gimmick, puffery and exaggeration. But even the latter suggestion seems to amount to a diminution of the value and importance of the concept of happiness. For under the second suggestion, the concept of happiness is presented as merely something that can be treated lightly and trifled with. If people's happiness is not a trifle matter, as assuredly it is not, then it should not be treated as such. For to treat happiness as a trifle matter in associating it with particular consumer products is to undervalue the concept of happiness and to treat it with disrespect, at least symbolically. And by extension and parity of argument, to do so also treats the majority of people who attach great value and importance to that concept with disrespect, even if unintentionally so. Ignorance, however, in treating others with disrespect by unintentionally diminishing the things they consider highly valuable, is not a valid excuse and doesn't let those who do it off the ethical hook. Thus, ignorance of appropriate ethical conduct, like ignorance of the law, is not a valid defense against ethical transgressions. At best, it is a form of moral negligence and that is equally ethically problematic.

6.1.2 The argument from deception

The association of a particular consumer product with the concept of happiness in the form of a straight identity claim of the sort $Y=X$ ("Happiness ... is Hyundai") is clearly false. Happiness is neither identical with a car nor a perfume nor any other consumer product. However, the association in all probability is merely intended as an implied suggestion that the exclusive acquisition of a particular consumer product that is directly associated with the concept of happiness will somehow render the person who acquires and consumes it happy. This suggestion also seems if not false, at least greatly exaggerated. It is highly unlikely that the exclusive acquisition and use of a specific consumer product could render one happy. For as we all know, happiness is a multifaceted and multi-splendored thing.

Gross exaggeration can be viewed as a form of deception, for it misrepresents a particular state of affairs. For if you boast to others that the size of the proverbial fish you have caught far exceeds its actual size, your exaggeration is a form of deception. Similarly, the implied suggestion that the acquisition of a specific product associated with the concept of happiness in an ad can make one happy seems like a gross exaggeration. If it is a gross exaggeration, then it qualifies as a form of deception. Since all forms of deception insofar as they seek to take an unjustified advantage over others are generally considered to be unethical, deception through gross exaggeration must also be viewed as unethical.

Moreover, insofar as the association of happiness with consumer products cumulatively distorts the nature and significance of happiness through that association, that distortion could also be viewed as a form of deception and thus unethical.

6.1.3 The argument from paradox

The association of consumer products to the concept of happiness in advertising and marketing is paradoxical and involves a rational inconsistency. On the one hand, the concept of happiness is associated with consumer products in ads precisely because the creators and producers of those ads want to impart the same high value that people place on happiness to the associated advertised products. In other words, it is precisely because advertisers⁷ take the generally recognized importance of happiness seriously that they choose to associate it with consumer products in the hope this will promote the sales of those products. On the other hand, however, the association of consumer products with the concept of happiness diminishes and thus degrades the value and the importance of that concept. This seems to suggest that contrary to the generally recognized and acknowledged importance of happiness, the advertisers are not taking that importance seriously, at least ethically seriously. Thus, those advertisers paradoxically at once acknowledge and undermine the importance of happiness. But this is ethically problematic. For something that is generally recognized and acknowledged as something highly valuable, and for that reason associated with consumer products, is nevertheless devalued though that association.

6.2 Two consequentialist arguments

The Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young song “teach your children well” has a few valuable lessons for advertisers too. Do we collectively as a society treat our children well when we might be encouraging them through a plethora of ads to associate happiness with the sole acquisition of consumer products?

6.2.1 The argument from setting a good example and protecting the vulnerable

Even if those ads are not targeted at children, the pervasiveness and ubiquity of advertising can reach children through many different mediums and at different times. Insofar as the direct association of happiness with consumer products diminishes its value and perverts its significance, the effect of that diminution on children over a long period of time could have a negative effect.

Related to this is the problem that children and other vulnerable groups may come to believe that the sole acquisition of consumer products will render them happy. This perception could potentially result in serious repercussions of severe

⁷ The term “advertisers” as used here is intended to denote both advertisers and advertising agencies.

disappointment or unhappiness when the acquisition of those goods is not forthcoming, or, if forthcoming, fails to live up to its expectations. Society at large, including the advertising industry, has an ethical responsibility to safeguard the interests of the vulnerable members in our society. Encouraging them to identify the highly valued and important concept of happiness exclusively with the acquisition of specific consumer products is thus ethically undesirable.

The problem of child obesity is presently becoming so acute that the advertising industry in the UK, United States and Australia has come under increasing community and government pressure to introduce regulatory guidelines that reduce if not eliminate junk-food advertising to children. Under such proposed guidelines, McDonalds' "Happy Meal," for example, could be perceived as a case of manipulative advertising that targets children through an association of junk food with the concept of happiness. Consequently, such ads could become subject to regulation that discourages manipulative advertising strategies that target children with junk food commercials.

6.2.2 The argument from exploitation

Happiness is undoubtedly, as Aristotle pointed out 2,500 years ago, the ultimate goal in life for most, if not all people, and its attainment, highly prized. Those who design ads that directly associate consumer products such as cars and perfume with the concept of happiness could be seen as exploiting the deep-felt desire and high aspiration that people have for being happy. Insofar as the implied suggestion that the acquisition of a specific consumer product can make a person happy is a gross exaggeration and thus a form of deception, that implied suggestion is also exploitative. For the deceptive implied suggestion plays on the deep desire that people have for happiness. It plays in a sense with people's deep-felt feelings associated with the paramount desire to be happy. Hence, insofar as that is the intention of those ads, then those ads are exploitative and since exploitation is generally considered unethical, then those ads that exaggerate the association between consumer products and the concept of happiness are unethical. At the very least, they are ethically problematic and should be avoided.

One objection to the above arguments might be as follows: "Lighten up, you are taking this too seriously. The ads that directly associate consumer products with the concept of happiness are meant to be taken humorously and with a generous pinch of salt. Your own serious reaction to a light-hearted association of products to happiness is the exaggeration!" In response, I reiterate that happiness, as something that is highly valued by most people, should be taken seriously just as friendship and other highly prized values are. To associate happiness and its associated aspirational values exclusively with specific consumer products is to diminish the value and importance of happiness and by extension and parity of argument, it amounts to treating all the people who value happiness highly with disrespect. Insofar as the association of consumer products with happiness and its other related aspirational values degrades the

concept of happiness and those of its related aspirational values, that association indirectly degrades the people who consider those values both significant and important. And to the extent that most people highly value happiness, then its degradation through advertising is no laughing matter.

It is, moreover, precisely because the advertisers themselves recognize the importance and significance that people attach to happiness and its related aspirational values, that they associate consumer products with the concept of happiness and its related aspirational values. That goes to show the advertisers themselves take the association of happiness with consumer products seriously! At least they take it commercially seriously.

7 Plato's relevance and lessons for the marketing of brands

Since values are generally seen as contributing factors to people's happiness, their association to consumer products is ethically problematic in the way indicated above under Plato's deontological and consequentialist arguments. Note that Plato's deontological and consequentialist arguments run parallel and inform my own arguments concerning the devaluation of happiness and values generally. Just as the description of gods and heroes by the poets in Plato's time ascribe characteristics and attributes to the gods and heroes that are inherently inconsistent with their true nature, so too the commodification of happiness and other aspirational values by advertisers, which ascribes to those values characteristics such as manufacturability, consumption, expendability, replacement, exchangeability, tradability, exhaustion, depreciation and price, are directly and inherently inconsistent with the true nature of those values.

Unlike consumable products that one trades for a price in the market place, our aspirational values as a society are non-manufacturable, non-consumable, non-expendable, non-replaceable, non-exchangeable, non-tradable, non-exhaustible, non-depreciable and ultimately, priceless.⁸ Unlike commodities, values are generally considered more ideal and spiritual than commodities and other material objects, no matter how valuable (in terms of price value) those commodities and objects are. Thus, values should not be compared and associated to commodities since they are essentially and inherently different types of things. Moreover, insofar as the association of values to consumer products degrades those values as argued above, there is a case to be made for some form of self-regulation within the advertising and marketing industry

⁸ Ironically, MasterCard ads uses the term "priceless" in its successful ad campaign to show that values such as friendship and love cannot be bought even with a credit card simply because they are "priceless."

along similar lines suggested by Plato's arguments for the self-censorship of poets. For just as those poets degraded both gods and heroes through exaggerations and misstatements, so too the exaggerated and misstated claims made about human values through their constant association with consumer products degrades those values. And to the extent that we as a society value those values highly, we should be ethically concerned about their degradation. We should require collectively as citizens that the advertising industry act responsibly by agreeing to some form of self-regulation to combat this problem: either self-regulation or if that proves impractical, a form of co-regulation between the advertising industry, appropriate government bodies, and citizen groups.

In keeping with the dialectical approach of this chapter, the regulation envisaged and suggested here is one that emanates from informed and rational balanced dialogue among all the relevant stakeholders, including the media, academics, the government and the community at large. As such, it is a bottom-up (dialectical) not a top-down (didactic) approach to regulation.

8 Conclusion

It has often been said advertising does not construct social reality, it merely reflects it. If that is true, then the association of consumer products to values by advertising does not accurately or adequately reflect social reality. For people generally do not think of values solely in terms of the acquisition of individual and specific consumer products. Moreover, most people generally do not think that the exclusive acquisition of consumer products will provide them with happiness, grace, elegance, beauty, freedom, truth, friendship or romance. Insofar as some people might believe the exclusive acquisition of specific advertised consumer products will provide them with all or some of those things, this possibility may be viewed as a case where advertising no longer merely reflects social reality but actually constructs it. If this is the case, it raises the question of whether this is ethically desirable. Namely, whether it is ethically desirable to create in some people the belief that the mere acquisition of consumer products will somehow provide them with happiness or the attributes and values that are generally thought to contribute to a happy life.

The answer seems to be that such a construction of social reality by advertising through the association of consumer products with values is not ethically desirable for all the reasons adduced above. Moreover, such a construction of social reality is a perversion of our highest aspirational values and attributes, which diminishes and thus degrades our collective humanity. For just as the triumph of Olympic athletes elevates our collective humanity by allowing us to share vicariously and symbolically in their inspiring achievements, so too the mugging of an old lady on her way home by a thug diminishes and denigrates our collective humanity. Analogously, but of course not to the same degree, insofar as the association of consumer products with

our collective aspirational values degrades those values, our collective humanity is by extension and by parity of argument also degraded.

As a diminution and degradation of our collective humanity, I believe that such a construction of social reality by advertising is thus unethical and should be avoided. The advertising industry has a moral responsibility to ensure that our aspirational values are not diminished and degraded through the uncritical and arbitrary association of consumer products with those values. This conclusion is in keeping with Immanuel Kant's central idea articulated in his categorical imperative, namely, that people should not be used merely as means to other people's ends as this degrades their inherent human value and moral worth. By extension of that argument, we can say the use of aspirational values merely as a means for the end of promoting consumer products degrades our collective humanity as those values constitute an important component of our collective human identity and dignity, one that should not be traded away for the sake of advertising brands.

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a preliminary conceptual and normative analysis of various ethical issues concerning the *pervasive* and *cumulative* association of consumer products and brands with values. Further collaborative and interdisciplinary research involving social scientists, including sociologists, psychologists and advertisers is required to establish empirically the extent, if any, to which the consumers' notions of values are influenced by advertising and marketing. This chapter has established that there is at least a *prima facie* case for ethical concern regarding the *systematic* degradation of values by advertising through the pervasive and cumulative association of those values with commodities.

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14 Harm and Entertainment

Abstract: In the last twenty years video games have become a focal point for the issue of entertainment and harm, both by comprising a significant public concern and also exemplifying the theoretical approach that many scientists and ethicists have adopted in the wider issue. This chapter investigates the prevalent harm-based attempts to assess the effects of video games and argues that this approach is largely incapable of settling the issues with the ethics of video games because of faults inherent in the empirical project of linking games to violence, but more importantly because of problems with developing such claims into an ethical evaluation of the playing or production of games. Comparing game playing to cigarette smoking – a very common rhetorical and theoretical ploy of critics of video games – actually is informative about the relationship of video games and harm, but only because the comparison shows the deep evidential and substantive differences that exist between these two cases.

Keywords: video games, harm, violence, philosophy, psychology, utilitarianism, smoking

1 Straight out of *Doom*

This chapter concerns the ethics of entertainment and harm, but is specifically focused on video games and their effect on violence in players and society. In many ways, video games have become a focal point for the issue of entertainment and harm in the last 20 years, both comprising a significant public concern and also modeling the theoretical approach that both scientists and ethicists have adopted in the wider issue. Here, I investigate the prevalent harm-based attempts to assess the effects of video games and argue that this approach is largely incapable of settling the issues with the *ethics* of video games, both because of faults inherent in the empirical project of linking video games to violence, but more importantly because of problems with developing such claims into an ethical evaluation of the playing or production of games.

In 1999 near Littleton, Colorado, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold armed themselves with shotguns, semi-automatic rifles and homemade bombs, and walked into Columbine High School where they began shooting. Twelve students and one teacher were killed before the two committed suicide. As would be discovered later, Harris and Klebold were not only gamers, but had a compelling interest in the archetypal first-person shooter *Doom*. A widespread rumor even had it that prior to the school shootings, Eric Harris had written a level in the game *Doom* to depict a scenario similar to that they would carry out in real life (Grossman and DeGaetano, 1999: 77; Anderson and Bushman, 2001: 353). Even if this was merely a rumor, what Harris

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-014>

and Klebold actually said in video tapes they made where they discussed their plans seems even more damning of the relationship between video games and the crimes they would commit. Harris, looking ahead to the deed, said,

It's gonna be like fucking *Doom* man – after the bombs explode. Tick, tick, tick, tick ... Haa! That fucking shotgun is straight out of *Doom*! (Gibbs & Roche, 1999).

Many critics will ask how the ultra-violent *Doom* could *not* have had an effect on what Harris and Klebold did. And how could the game not be *morally* to blame, if only partly, given that it seems an obvious part of the pretext for the massacre?

The connection of violent video games to school shootings and spree-killings has been discussed in any number of books and articles, most of them decrying the relationship. Gloria DeGaetano and Dave Grossman begin their 1999 book *Stop Teaching our Kids to Kill* with the cautionary tale of Michael Carneal. Carneal is infamous for a 1996 school shooting in Paducah Kentucky that left three people dead and five wounded:

Fourteen-year-old Michael Carneal steals a gun from a neighbor's house, brings it to school, and fires eight shots into a student prayer meeting that is breaking up. Prior to stealing the gun, he had never shot a real handgun in his life. The FBI says that the average experienced law enforcement officer, in the average shootout, and an average range of seven yards hits with approximately one bullet in five. So how many hits did Michael Carneal make? He fired eight shots; he got eight hits, on eight different kids. Five of them were head shots, and the other three were in the upper torso. The result was three dead and one paralyzed for life ... So how did Michael Carneal acquire this kind of killing ability? Simple: practice (Grossman and DeGaetano, 1999: 4).

DeGaetano and Grossman argue that video games not only motivate kids such as Carneal, Klebold and Harris to kill, but allow them to practice the killings. First-person shooters in particular allow players to use pretend guns to shoot people on a screen, and the repetitive nature of these virtual killings both improves the players' aim and *conditions* them to see people as a potential target. For the authors, such video games are “killing simulators” that employ “operant conditioning” to prepare children to commit acts of murder (1999: 72–73). DeGaetano and Grossman's book is subtitled *A Call to Action Against TV, Movie, and Video Game Violence*, and they intend to stamp out this harmful influence. The view expressed by DeGaetano and Grossman of video games as a malignant influence, and one that stretches beyond their effect on violence, aggression and crime, is enormously widespread among advocates, media commentators, concerned parents and social psychologists.

Understandably, the moral concern with video games has frequently reached into politics. Hillary Clinton, speaking to a child-care symposium in the lead up to her failed run for the Democratic nomination for the 2008 presidential election, claimed that

Children are playing a game that encourages them to have sex with prostitutes and then murder them ... This is a silent epidemic of media desensitization that teaches kids it's OK to diss people because they are a woman, they're a different color or they're from a different place (*The Times* 2005).

Clinton was referring to *Grand Theft Auto*, a game notorious for its inclusion of virtual prostitutes. This kind of moral positioning is common among politicians, of course, but that Clinton would pick this issue on which to state her political intentions in her run for president shows that video game violence is a source of deep conviction and a powerful moral issue among the centrist American demographic Clinton was hoping to appeal to. It is clear that video games, for many people, are a threat to the psychological health and morals of young people.

The regulation of video games, specifically the banning of their sale to young people, is typically seen as the way of eliminating this moral threat. In an interview with CBS, Clinton said more about her intentions to promote laws that would make selling mature- or adult only-rated video games to children a federal crime:

We need to do everything we can to make sure parents have a line of defense against violent and sexually explicit video games and other content that is being peddled to our children. That's why the legislation I will be introducing will put real teeth into video game ratings by instituting a financial penalty for retailers that fail to enforce the rules (CBS News 2005).

Implicit in this statement is a comparison of the games industry with the “peddlers” of pornography and drugs. And like DeGaetano and Grossman, Clinton's concern was clearly based on the *effects* that video games have on children, even though she did not quite go to their rhetorical extremes. She continued:

We know that violent video games have an impact on children. Just recently there was cutting edge research conducted at Indiana University School of Medicine, which concluded that adolescents with more exposure to violent media were less able to control and to direct their thoughts and behavior, to stay focused on a task, to plan, to screen out distractions, and to use experience to guide inhibitions.

Obviously, juvenile crime rates are influenced by a tremendous number of factors, including the economy, programs and interventions aimed at reducing crime, the presence of law enforcement, and more. What the research tells us is that for individual kids, violent media is harmful.

There have been four decades of research on the effect of media violence on our kids and it all points to the same conclusion – media violence leads to more aggression, anti-social behavior, and it desensitizes kids to violence. The American Academy of Pediatrics summed up this point in a report entitled *Media Exposure Feeding Children's Violent Acts*. “Playing violent video games is to an adolescent's violent behavior what smoking tobacco is to lung cancer,” it said. This isn't about offending our sensibilities – it is about protecting our children (CBS News 2005).

Clinton's criticism thus latched on to a comparison that is ubiquitous in the discussion of the effects and ethics of video gaming. For many, video games are to be considered as a pathological agent that is suitably classed alongside carcinogens such as tobacco smoke. Found throughout the literature on video games and violence, this comparison between video games and smoking and the epidemiological model implicit in the comparison, continues to drive the concern with gaming, providing a model of causation that often conditions thinking about the topic.

An initial clarification is necessary here. This chapter concerns the *harms* attributable to video games and not merely the negative *effects* they might have. This distinction has not been evident in the above and indeed, is often not evident in the literature about the effects of video games. But the two concepts are clearly not the same: that a person suffers some negative effect does not mean that they have thereby been harmed: during minor surgery I experience pain, but the surgeon has not necessarily harmed me by causing this pain because I have consented to that experience, or at least the risk of its occurrence (and of course, the pain is a side effect of a procedure that will hopefully greatly benefit me). We clearly need some account of the difference between harms and mere effects.

In his important work on the moral constraints on legislative action, the philosopher Joel Feinberg argues that harm occurs when two conditions are met: the harmful action “must lead to some kind of adverse effect, or create the danger of such an effect, on its victim’s *interests*,” and “it must be inflicted wrongly in violation of the victim’s *rights*” (Feinberg, 1992: 3–4). The key idea is that harms involve a “setback of an interest” and where this setback is indefensible, that is, not excused or justified by factors such as the consent of the individual being affected (explaining why the pain suffered during surgery is not a harm inflicted on the patient by the surgeon). The interests affected by harms comprise such basic human physical and psychological needs such as “the continuance for a foreseeable interval of one’s life ... physical health and vigor ... the absence of absorbing pain ... minimal intellectual acuity, emotional stability ...” and so on (1984: 37ff). Thus, extending Feinberg’s views on harm to the current issue, even if it can be shown that video games have the effects that are sometimes attributed to them – this is the topic of the first part of this chapter – this does not establish that they harm players or their society (much less that they are a significant such harm) because what would also need to be shown is that these effects impact the welfare interests of individuals, and do so in a way that compromises their moral rights.

One other point about Feinberg’s project is also worth noting. Feinberg’s main intention is to show when it is that “presumptive liberty” – the prevalent assumption that “Liberty should be the norm: coercion always needs some special justification” (1984: 9) – can legitimately be constrained by “liberty-limiting principles” (1984: 9–10). So for example, a person’s *right to be rescued* from a dangerous situation (especially if that rescue does not imply serious risks or costs on the potential rescuer) might justify Good Samaritan laws that obligate bystanders to perform rescues. That the issue of the potential moral basis of legal regulation has a relevance in the case of video games should be clear from the introductory discussion above, where the moral assessment of video games and their putative effects often turned into a discussion of how and why they might be regulated. Feinberg’s focus in the first volume of his major work on morality and law concerns the “harm-principle”: that is, the idea that “state interference with a citizen’s behavior tends to be morally justified when it is reasonably necessary (that is, when there are reasonable grounds for taking it to be

necessary as well as effective) to prevent harm or the unreasonable risk of harm to parties other than the person interfered with” (1984: 11). But for Feinberg the inference from having established the existence of harm, to the justification of a regulation protecting against that harm through the penal coercion of those who might commit it, is fraught with conceptual issues. The seriousness of the harm, the costs of regulating or policing the regulation, and the potential that the regulations will be effective, are all factors in deciding whether the moral conclusion – that a harm has been done – warrants a legislative response. Thus, there is an important limitation to the following discussion (which I will note on a couple of occasions): even if it can be established that video games harm players or society, this does not by itself imply a legislative response.

2 The causationists

The ethics of violent video games might most obviously seem to rest on the harms caused by those games. Ask someone what is wrong with video games and they may say that games are addictive; that they destroy the culture of reading; they lead to obesity in children; they encourage misogyny and racism; that they cause children to become inward and anti-social; they shorten attention spans; they undermine childhood education and encourage delinquency. But most of all one is likely to hear that playing video games causes children to become aggressive and violent; and, in fact, that video games are to blame for terrible events such as those seen at Columbine High School in 1999 (Anderson and Bushman, 2001: 353). If this association between violent video games and the described violent criminal acts is genuine, and actually signifies a causal relationship, it would seem to provide an obvious basis for the ethical criticism of game violence.

This *harm-based* approach to video game ethics is most frequently couched as a public health issue. For example, in her stump speech, Clinton identifies video games as a threat to the health of children, and that the prototype for the public health issue with video games is that of smoking. This public health approach to game ethics is also prevalent in the scientific concern with violent video games: the social psychologists Craig Anderson, Doug Gentile and Katherine Buckley end their book-length treatment of the effects of violent games, with suggestions for social policy (2007: 142–163). This, incidentally, is the “cutting edge research” referred to by Clinton in the quote above.

There has long been a scientific concern with the negative effects of media on its audiences, though the focus of this concern has ranged from newspaper crime reporting and dime store novels to comic books and violent television drama (Kutner and Olson, 2008: 29–56; Grimes, Anderson and Bergen, 2007: 31–52). Where it regards violence and aggression, the hypothesis holds that the mere viewing of violent media

is enough to cause increased aggressive attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors in viewers (Anderson, Gentile, Buckley, 2007). This science has its roots in the social learning theory that was developed in the social psychology of the 1960s, particularly by the influential psychologist Albert Bandura (Bandura, 1973). In many ways, the scientific literature on video games is an outgrowth of this general media effects literature, and seems predicated on many of the same assumptions about media and psychology. The communication and social theorists Tom Grimes, James Anderson and Lori Bergen have named the core assertion of this science the “causationist hypothesis”; that is, that simply viewing, reading, or listening to violent media is sufficient to cause aggressive or violent attitudes or behaviors in media consumers, especially if they are children (2008).

There are three key forms of scientific methodology in the causationist science: *experimental*, *cross-section* or *correlational studies*, and *longitudinal studies*. Each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses. In experimental studies, subjects are randomly assigned to certain test and control conditions, with the relevant variables being measured before and after, or with and without, exposure to these conditions. The randomness of the selection of subjects controls for previous bias in the sample with regard to the variables being investigated. A classic and influential example of an experimental study into the causationist hypothesis is Albert Bandura’s Bobo doll experiment (Bandura, Ross and Ross, 1963). In this experiment, 72 boys and girls of around the age of five were randomly assigned to three groups. One group acted as the control, while the other two groups would be exposed to aggressive and non-aggressive models, in the form of an adult playing with various toys: in the non-aggressive model, the adult would quietly play with the assembled toys, while in the aggressive model the adult would spend much of the time hitting and yelling at a plastic blow-up doll called Bobo. After exposure, the children were left alone with a number of toys including a mallet and the Bobo doll. Children who were exposed to the aggressive model subsequently spent a significant portion of their time physically and verbally aggressing toward the Bobo doll, and often in the exact method they had seen the model demonstrate, whereas children in the non-aggressive model group rarely did so. The researchers concluded that children were prone to imitate aggressive play, and the study was particularly influential on the development of the causationist science (Grimes, Anderson and Bergen, 2007: 202).

2.1 Experimental design

The methodology is much the same in experimental research into video games and aggression. Addressing what they saw as a hole in the literature, Anderson and his colleagues Douglas Gentile and Katherine Buckley designed an experiment to test the causal relationship between violent video games and short-term aggression in

children and college students (2007: 61–77). They took more than 500 students and randomly assigned them to groups to play violent and non-violent games. They were then tested using a computer program that measured their level of behavioral aggression. The test program involved the participant competing with an opponent (unknown to the players, the computer and not a real person) to react first to an auditory or visual cue. When the participant lost a round (which was determined by the program itself at a predetermined rate) they were subjected to a blast of noise the level of which they believed had been set by their opponent (but, in fact, by the computer program). The participants were themselves free to set the level of noise their opponent would receive. This computer program test of aggression is widely used and according to Anderson has a high degree of “external validity,” meaning that people who are aggressive in the real world are measured as aggressive when they take this test in the laboratory (2007: 62). For the purposes of the experiment aggression “was operationally defined as the number of high intensity noise blasts ... the participant chose to deliver to his or her opponent” (2007: 63).

During the procedure itself, the subjects were initially told that the experiment was designed to test the effects of playing games on reaction times, and were allowed to practice on the test program. The participants were then made to play either a violent or non-violent video game. The non-violent game was *Oh No! Not more Lemmings!*, a puzzle game in which players help cute green-haired lemmings escape a nasty fate. The violent games were the cartoonish *Captain Bumper*, a side-scrolling action game and the third-person 3D game *OttoMatic*, and the more mature-themed *Future Cop* and *Street Fighter*, the former a third-person shooter, and the latter a 2D fighting game. After 20 minutes of playing the video game the participants’ aggression was measured using the computer test described above.

Anderson, Gentile and Buckley’s prediction that playing the violent game would lead to more aggressive behavior in the test condition was verified: “As expected, the participants who played one of the violent games delivered more high intensity noise blasts than those who played the non-violent game” (2007: 70). Interestingly, the effect was noticeable even for the play of the cartoonish children’s game by the young children, and of both kinds of violent game by the older subjects. They concluded that a factor that is often thought to be a mitigating issue – that children’s games are cartoonish and unrealistic – does not lessen the measured effect. Indeed, in the older subjects, the effects of the cartoonish games were slightly larger (2007: 71).

The strength of this kind of experimental study (if it is well-conducted) is that it demonstrates a causal link between violent games and aggression because of the use of randomization and control conditions. Other experimental studies conducted by Anderson and his colleagues have a similar methodology and are an important part of the basis for their persistent claims that playing violent video games causes an increase in aggressive thoughts and behavior in children (and even adolescents and adults).

2.2 Correlational design

Correlational studies proceed by gathering observations and then subjecting them to statistical analyses to discern the correlations between the variables of interest. In the same source described above, Anderson and his colleagues gathered 189 Iowan school children between the ages of 14 and 19, and subjected them to various questionnaires to measure their attitudes toward violence, their own self-reported aggression, violent behavior, hostility and anger, the trait of forgiveness, and their exposure to violent video games (2007: 78–94). In most cases, these were measured with questionnaires that are methodologically well-established within psychology. For example, to measure the “aggressive behavior, hostility, and anger” of the participants, Anderson and his colleagues used the “Buss Perry Aggression Questionnaire,” which asked the participants to indicate the agreement or disagreement with statements such as “I get into fights a little more than the average person,” “I can’t help getting into arguments when people disagree with me,” and “I wonder sometimes why I feel so bitter about things” (2007: 80).

To measure the use of video games by the participants, Anderson and his colleagues used a scale that asked the students to “list up to five favorite video games, report how often they have played each in recent months, and rate the violence of each game” and also how many hours student spent weekly playing video games and watching TV and movies (2007: 81–82). The students were also asked for their grade point average.

The findings of these questionnaires were then subjected to statistical analysis to discern the correlations between the various measured items. The findings were relatively clear:

We found what we expected – adolescents who play a greater number of violent video games hold more pro-violent attitudes, have more hostile personalities, are less forgiving, believe violence to be more typical, and behave more aggressively in their everyday lives. However, because this study did not manipulate who plays violent or non-violent games, it is possible that some other variable accounts for the findings. For example, males tend to be more aggressive in personality, attitudes and behaviors, and also tend to play more violent video games. However, even after statistically controlling for sex, total screen time, aggressive beliefs and attitudes, we still found that playing violent video games was a significant predictor of heightened physically aggressive behavior and violent behavior (2007: 83).

2.3 Longitudinal design

Finally, longitudinal studies are potentially the most powerful means of psychological investigation because they can track how variables interact over time, giving a much clearer indication that the variables are causally related in the real world. Anderson and his colleagues conducted a longitudinal study – the very first to be conducted on

this issue, they claim (2007: 118) – with the students of five Minnesota schools (2007: 95–119). The students, and their peers and teachers were administered three confidential surveys, first at the beginning of the school year, and again six months later. The surveys comprised “(1) a peer nomination measure of aggressive and prosocial behaviors, (2) a self-report survey of media habits and demographic data, and (3) a self-report measure of hostile attribution bias” (2007: 96). In the first survey children were asked questions such as “Who hits, kicks, or punches others?”; “Who pushes and shoves other kids around?”; “Who says mean things to other kids to insult them or put them down?”; “Who does nice things for others?” The teachers were similarly asked to report on the aggressive and prosocial behaviors that they had seen particular children performing. For the self-report survey, children were asked to estimate the number of physical fights they had been involved in, but also their media viewing habits, including their favorite television shows, movies and video games, and also how violent the children rated each of these. The latter figures were used to calculate a “violence exposure score” for each child (2007: 99). Finally, the students underwent a “hostile attribution” survey. In this survey the children were read several stories in which an adolescent behaves provocatively, but the intent of the agent was left ambiguous so that the children could interpret the situation attributing an intention and motive to the agent. The children were then asked a series of questions about the intentions of the adolescent who acted provocatively, to discern their willingness to attribute relational or physical aggression (2007: 100). From all of these surveys, composite measures of aggression were calculated for each of the participant children.

Because the surveys were repeated six months later, this study allowed Anderson and his colleagues to discern how media use early in the year correlated with aggressive behavior and hostile attribution later in the year, presumably indicating a causal relationship between the variables (2007: 16). They predicted that “children who played a greater number of violent video games early in the school year would change to see the world as a more hostile place, and would in turn change to become more aggressive and less prosocial, which in turn would be related to them being more rejected by their peers” (2007: 102). After careful statistical analysis, these predictions were confirmed.

3 From science to ethics

On the basis of such studies, Anderson and his colleagues have a clear predilection for claiming that the debate about media violence and aggression “is over ... and should have been over 30 years ago” (Anderson, Gentile and Buckley, 2007: 4). They also claim that the debate displays the need both for serious ethical concern over video games, and the design of social policy to confront the issue (2007: 142–163). Nevertheless, there are (perhaps increasing) doubts about the status of this science, and its immediate use in ethical debate.

There have been at least four meta-analyses of this research – that is, reviews that aggregate the statistical findings of a number of independent empirical studies to discover an average measured effect (Anderson and Bushman, 2001; Sherry, 2001; Anderson, 2004; Ferguson and Kilburn, 2009). Anderson’s own reviews found the effect to be significant, and with Bushman he concluded that “These results clearly support the hypothesis that exposures to violent video games poses a public health threat to children and youths, including college-age individuals” (2001: 358). The meta-review conducted by John L. Sherry also found a significant effect, but was more hesitant in its claims about the extent of the effect. Sherry noted that “there is a small effect of video game play on aggression, and the effect is smaller than the effect of violent television on aggression” (2001).

However, in their more recent meta-analysis, the psychologists Christopher Ferguson and John Kilburn argued that the data from their “study do not support the conclusion that media violence research is a significant public health concern” (2009). Elsewhere, Ferguson has developed these ideas in a survey of the issues around violent media and aggression (2010). His conclusions are equally skeptical of the science of video games and aggression:

Social learning models of aggression, given their popularity in recent decades, have been subjected to frequent (although perhaps not rigorous) testing. Results have been weak, inconsistent and compromised by poor research methods [...] Meta-analytic studies of media violence effects have consistently demonstrated that links between media violence exposure and increased aggression are close to zero (Ferguson, 2010: 43).

Further, in an exchange of papers with Anderson that followed on from Ferguson’s meta-analysis (Anderson, et. al 2010; Ferguson & Kilburn, 2010), Ferguson and Kilburn ended on a very cynical note:

[...] we believe that Anderson et al. (2010) are sincere in their concerns for children and beliefs about VVGs [violent video games]. However, their current meta-analysis contains numerous flaws, all of which converge on overestimating and overinterpreting the influence of VVGs on aggression. Nonetheless, they find only weak effects. Given that discussions of VVGs tend to inform public policy, both scientists and policymakers need to consider whether these results will get the “bang for their buck” out of any forthcoming policy recommendations. [...] Psychology, too often, has lost its ability to put the weak (if any) effects found for VVGs on aggression into a proper perspective. In doing so, it does more to misinform than inform public debates on this issue (Ferguson & Kilburn, 2010: 177).

The debate then, clearly is not over. And as far as the ethical significance of this science goes, the debate hardly seems to have started. The most significant argument against the causationist project, in as much as it might be conceived as characterizing or solving an *ethical* issue with games, is that this empirical debate underdetermines the ethical issues with games (Tavinor, 2009: 158). Even if the causationist claims were true, this does not tell us whether the use or production of video games is itself ethically worrisome. To their credit, this ethical dimension is something acknowledged

by Anderson, Buckley and Gentile. Furthermore, they agree that scientific findings by themselves do not “automatically” imply or justify particular social policies (2007: 149). Rather, “scientific facts,” “legal issues,” “personal values,” and “political realities” each play a role in the design and justification of social policy. I suspect that ethics is something of what is referred to here as “personal values,” though this may entail a rather subjective and partial conception of ethics. Ethics concerns more than merely personal values, and spans value-orientated issues from the private to the public and the messy intersection between these domains of value.

So what specifically ethical complications are there with the use of this science to decide the moral issues here? A first complication is that evaluating any phenomenon for its ethical qualities demands the application of a *normative framework* that supplies the criteria for ethical evaluation. Without some conception not only of the human good, but also the source and nature of the rights and responsibilities of ethical agents, scientific findings such as those above are ethically equivocal. Even if it was shown that video games do affect players by making them more aggressive, it is an open question of who, if anyone, is morally responsible for that effect, and indeed, whether that effect is something morally bad for players and why this might be so.

The most obvious ethical framework to apply in the case of game violence seems to be *consequentialism*. Consequentialism is the formal moral theory that the moral qualities of an action or event are appraised in terms of its consequences. When questioning the morality of some particular action – for example, one that we may be considering performing – key to evaluating the moral qualities of the action are not the intentions behind the action, or the maxim on which one is acting, but the effects of the action will actually have. This formal analysis of course leaves open the precise nature of the morally relevant consequences. Often, these consequences have been specified as the contribution an action makes to well-being. In the classical form of consequentialism, utilitarianism, well-being was specified as *happiness* (Bentham, 1789) and proper ultimate end of ethics was to provide the “greatest amount of happiness altogether” where happiness is defined as “pleasure, and the absence of pain” (Mill, 1863). Understandably, there has been a lot of philosophical water under the bridge since Mill, but I do not have the space to survey those developments here.

Nevertheless, one might think that the case against video games would be relatively clear for the consequentialist critic: if video games cause aggression and violent acts, and so harm people by causing a setback to their interests, then video games can be considered unethical. Indeed, this seems to be the unstated assumption behind the criticisms of violent games encountered at the beginning of this paper, because such criticisms tend to focus on the welfare interests of players and society (particular with regard to these parties perpetrating and being affected by aggression and violence). But getting from the facts about games to an ethical judgment about games is not quite as straightforward as the moral critics of games might think, because a number of ethical and conceptual considerations undermine any straightforward claims. So how exactly do we get from a scientific finding to an ethical claim?

4 Risk, intentions and knowledge

A significant complication with the consequentialist ethics of violent video games is its proper focus. The proper focus of the ethics of video games is not video games *per se*, but *the uses to which such games are put*. By themselves, video games are inanimate things, and it is the context in which they exist that are of ethical interest. Compare this to the similar case with tobacco: the ethics of this substance cannot even be considered in absence of consideration of how this substance is used by people, that is, that it is consumed by smoking; that it is the subject of an addicting behavior; and that it is the product on an enormous international industry. With video games, two of these contexts are of principal ethical importance: the *playing* and *production* of games. Given their proximity to the putative harms caused by gaming – it is presumably the playing of games that harmfully affects the player’s interests, and the production of games that is the ultimate cause of the harmful effects on society – it is these two roles that deserve our greatest attention and where our criticism might have its best effect. It is also gamers and producers of games who most frequently come in for moral criticism. We have already seen the playing of games labeled as a deviant practice, and the producers of games being compared to peddlers of drugs or pornography.

An immediate problem with developing this ethical account is with the nature of the ethical judgments that can reasonably be based on the facts discovered in the psychological research about games. The causationist studies are statistical in nature, and this fact does have important consequences for their potential use in moral argument. When we morally praise or blame someone, it is typically because of an act that that individual has intentionally performed. A murderer or thief is blamed for his intentional performance of those acts. In daily life, ethics most commonly has this *individualist* and *concrete* ontology because ethical judgments are usually made about individuals (most often people, but sometimes groups such as corporations or governments) for concrete actions those individuals perform. It is also individuals who are the typical moral patients: that is, those people who are harmed or benefited by actions or who have rights and duties. The ethical criticism of video games also often seems to operate in this individualistic and concrete way. It was *Doom* that was blamed for being a contributing cause of the Columbine massacre (Grossman and DeGaetano, 1999: 101). Dave Grossman blames *Quake*, *Redneck Rampage* and *Resident Evil* for causing Carneal’s killings (Danielson, 2000). It is individual players of *Modern Warfare* who are charged with being “sick” for getting a thrill from virtually killing civilians (Ingham, 2009).

Unfortunately, the causationist science does not substantiate such concrete and individualistic claims. At most, the science surveyed above shows that that it is possible to perceive a small association between violent gameplay and aggressive traits within a group. Statistical science allows us to attribute causal powers to a variable only abstractly within the confines of the study, and it cannot be decisive on the cause

of any concrete events in the real world. Even in a case where a causal relationship is known with some certainty, such as the relationship between smoking and lung cancer, statistical science does not “prove” of a smoker who has contracted lung cancer that smoking was the cause of the disease. Thus, even if violent video games were shown to have a discriminable effect on the aggressive traits seen in a population, this gives us no firm guidance about whether a particular game is the cause of any particular case of aggression, or how any particular player is affected by a game. This undermines the attribution of moral responsibility – and perhaps often legal responsibility – in the cases where crimes are blamed on specific games, which surely depends on concrete statements about individual cases. But it also places severe limitations on the role that such statistical studies can play in identifying moral patients, that is, people who have been harmed in such cases. Hence, the statistical research on games and aggression does not seem to allow us to say much about the ethics of the production of specific games or specific acts of playing.

The basic problem here is that statistical science and ethical judgment often involve differing ontologies, and statistics may not provide the necessary *grain* for the moral assessment of particulars in the mode that the moral critics of video games desire. It does not allow us to say of *Doom* that it is morally responsible for playing a causal role in the Columbine killings – or for any other violent acts, for that matter. Correspondingly, if we want to condemn a particular game – whether it is *Doom*, *Manhunt*, *Call of Duty*, or *Battlefield* – we need to develop an account that has a concrete and individualist ontology. Only if we develop such an account could we justify the moral intuitions that do exist concerning particular games and the harms they putatively cause.

Such problems do not wholly discount the use of the statistical science in forming ethical judgments about the production and playing of violent video games, however. There are certainly cases where the causal propensities of substances or activities – discovered through statistical means – are very obvious, and where the level of harm caused by the agent is a serious general public health issue because of its impact on the welfare interests of the public as a whole. Even if the science does not allow us to say much with certainty about particular cases, the epidemiological relationship between the agent and social harm may itself motivate us to make ethical judgments. But what this means is that the moral issues surrounding the causationist science may best be approached in terms of *risk* and *risky behavior*.

It is clear that the performance of extremely risky behavior is something that we routinely ethically criticize: for a commercial pilot to attempt a barrel roll during a flight would be extremely risky behavior, and deserving of moral disapprobation. The ethical blame would be suitable even if the pilot managed to pull off the stunt just because of the risks to which it exposes the passengers. Also, the problem here need not be that the harm is intended, but that its possibility is envisaged (or should be to any reasonably knowledgeable agent). The concept of “dangerous” behavior is an alternative way to conceptualize such causally uncertain but ethically relevant activity.

As noted in my introduction, Feinberg argues that a harm is something that is a setback the interests of an individual. Now surely one can be harmed by being exposed to risk, because being in a risky situation leaves one worse off than they would be if they were not in that situation. This is because, first, the presence of risk might directly affect a person's welfare interests by causing them fear, anxiety, and so on (explaining, of course, why most of us are disinclined to take large risks). Second, being exposed to risk *in itself* may set back the interests of the individual. All things being equal, a person whose life is filled with danger or the immediate potential for failure is arguably worse off than a person whose life is secure. Indeed, Feinberg acknowledges the moral importance of risk at the very beginning of his work on the harm-principle: it is not just harm that can justify the limitation of liberty, but also the "unreasonable risk of harm" (1984: 11). This then, allows us to identify the moral patients in this issue: those with an interest not to be exposed to the risk of harm. So, if it can be shown that the production of video games exposes players or society to serious health risks or dangers they can be ethically criticized even if we cannot say anything with assurance of any particular cases of causation. Risk is a probabilistic concept, and so the ethical focus on risk matches the ontology of the ethical criticism with that of the causationist science. It is also a concept that already factors into the causationist understanding of video games and aggression (Anderson, Gentile and Buckley, 2007: 51).

A further complication with this consequentialist approach is that the intentions and knowledge of the agents involved in games must surely also be factored into the ethical evaluations of game violence. Even though the ethics of games and gaming seems to partly depend on the harm caused or risked by video games, determining the nature and extent of the harm actually caused is surely not sufficient to appraise the ethics of the acts involving those games (whether they are acts of production or playing). The consideration of *intentions* is crucial to ethical analysis because it is largely in virtue of being intentional agents and intending to achieve certain ends that people are morally praiseworthy or blameworthy for the consequences they bring about. It is getting dark and Greg intends to switch on the light to read, so he walks across the room and flicks the switch. Unbeknownst to Greg, his sadistic roommate Jo has wired the switch to an electrical torture device to which a third roommate, Kevin, is now connected in the next room. As Greg flips the switch, unaware of Jo's cruel experiment, he hears the screams of Kevin coming from the other room. Technically, Greg *caused* Kevin's experience of pain, but he is not morally culpable for the consequences of his action because firstly, he did not intend those consequences, and secondly, he did not foresee them.

Philosophers have sometimes questioned whether acts whose consequences are merely foreseen are morally equivalent to those where the consequences are also intended, but I think there is a *prima facie* reason to think there is at least some moral culpability in both cases, even if it is stronger where the consequence is an intended one. The next night, now aware of Jo's experiment, Greg again feels like doing some

late-night reading; though he doesn't intend to hurt Kevin, he flips the switch anyway. Even if he did not intend the harm as a goal, it was an "oblique" intention because the action was performed with full knowledge that harming Kevin would be a consequence of the act (Mackie, 1977: 207). Surely Greg has acted unethically.

Central to ethical evaluations, then, are considerations of the attitudes and knowledge of people: specifically, intentions that something happen, and understandings that something could happen, because it is these attitudes that guide decisions, and so are the locus by which ethics can have its effect on actions. Given that what one intends to do or can intend to do, or can foresee as following from one's actions, are all dependent on personal knowledge, the knowledge of an agent also conditions the ethical qualities of his or her actions.

5 Cigarettes and video games

The ethical comparison case of tobacco and smoking, seen in Clinton's remarks quoted at the beginning of this chapter, actually is illustrative for the consideration of the risk-based, intentional and epistemological aspects of the ethical evaluation of video games described above. Despite some common opinions, *tobacco isn't evil*; rather, it is a morally inert substance deserving neither praise nor blame. What we properly ethically criticize about tobacco are the harmful aspects of its intentional use by agents – particularly its production and marketing by cigarette companies. We know with assurance that smoking is harmful to smokers because it exposes them to risks of disease and death. It is the responsibility of cigarette companies for continuing to produce and market this harmful substance, and to do so in full knowledge of its effects, so profiting from the harm it causes, that strikes many as ethically blameworthy. This is a pretty obvious point, but it is worth making because this intentional aspect is often missing from the ethical argument about video games, where we will find that games are sometimes treated as if they were intrinsically unethical irrespective of their use by agents – treated as though they are "evil things."

Intentional considerations may complicate the ethical picture with video games because the defender of video games could argue that the introduction of intentions and knowledge undermines the moral case against games. We can modify the smoking example to see why. Though those who currently produce or market cigarettes seem morally culpable, it is not clear that the very first people who marketed and sold tobacco could be blamed for these actions, because they clearly lacked full knowledge of the effects of smoking. If a person lacks knowledge that his actions are going to produce a harmful effect it is not clear that he can be ethically criticized in the same fashion as one who intentionally causes such harm in full knowledge that it will follow from his actions. He is, in a sense, not freely choosing to harm even though the harm results from his actions. The defender of video gaming might claim that even if video games do harm their players, the producers of those games are not ethically

responsible for those harms because they lack the knowledge of the harmful nature of video games.

The problem for this argument in the current context is that a lack of knowledge is no excuse where the facts in question are something the agent *ought to know*. Even though the first people to sell tobacco may not have been morally culpable for profiting off of a disastrously harmful substance, those who continue to do so surely are. This, incidentally, explains the real point of wielded empirical science in the investigation of ethical issues such as the present one, because that use serves the purpose of bringing more and more consequences into the *domain of the foreseen*, and so increasing our ability to be responsible in our conduct. The ethical critics of video games will argue that games producers should know the effects of their product – *the debate is over*, after all (Anderson, Gentile and Buckley, 2007: 4) – but continue to produce and market games, perhaps even ignoring the impacts the product is having on players and their society.

There are some notorious precedents for this type of cynical commercial behavior. Cigarette companies in particular were widely suspected of trying to suppress the knowledge of the harmful nature of smoking, or of intentionally exploiting its addictive nature. Famously, Jeffrey Wigand, whose story was dramatized in the movie *The Insider*, blew the whistle on the tobacco company Brown & Williamson, who he accused of designing their product to be more addictive to users (Brenner, 1996). Similar behavior on part of games companies would surely open them to similar ethical criticism.

Hence, the ethical problem with the production of violent games seems to be best captured by the idea that the product exposes players to harmful and unnecessary risks in the same way that the production of tobacco cigarettes does, and that these harms should be foreseen by the producers. Exposing someone to a risky situation harms that person – even if they turn out not to be negatively affected – because the presence of the risk itself sets back the interests of the individual. Moreover, the comparison with smoking would again seem to present the obvious comparative model given that it is so often drawn upon by the critics of games, who frequently liken the effect size of video games and aggression to that of second-hand smoking and cancer (Anderson, Gentile and Buckley, 2007: 144). Science tells us that smoking puts one at risk of developing various illnesses, particularly lung cancer, and we have a pretty good knowledge about the pathology in this case (Hecht, 1999). As I will discuss shortly, we also have a very good gauge of the magnitude of the individual and social harms caused by smoking. We also know that smoking is addictive. Now, for someone to intentionally market cigarettes to people, especially children, understanding cigarettes to have such harmful and addictive effects, would seem to be unethical, just because it exposes those people to the risk of developing these illnesses. Buying cigarettes for your kids would also be unethical. Some might even think that selling such harmful substances to adults also to be unethical, though people may disagree on the practical upshot of this: whether the risky nature of the

product justifies regulating against its sale, or whether because of liberalistic principles consenting adults should be free to engage in risky private behavior, will still be a matter of debate. Nevertheless, second-hand smoking is often utilized to argue that this putatively private behavior does in fact have risks for others; and so it too, can be judged unethical.

Drawing the parallel then, if it can be demonstrated that playing violent video games generates the risk of significant negative effects, then we can formulate a consequentialist argument against them, even if concrete judgments about individual cases are impossible. This would be even worse if video gaming was shown to be addictive. For someone to produce and intentionally market violent video games to children should similarly be seen as unethical, just because it exposes the children to these risks. Moreover, though the potential harm was not a direct goal, it was an oblique intention because of the public knowledge of these risks. Buying such violent video games for your kids would also be unethical. It might even be that the private use of games by adults would be unethical if that use exposes those around them to the risk of harm; and indeed, this is something claimed by the causationists when they note that the effects of violent games are not limited to children (Anderson, Gentile and Buckley, 2007: 71). Finally, such consideration might support the regulation of the sale of video games (but as noted in the introduction, not count as sufficient grounds for that regulation).

6 The ethical significance of video games

There is then, a reasonable ethical schema for employing the causationist science to criticize the production of violent games. But unfortunately for the causationist critic, the ethical comparison of video games with smoking is not a fair one because of the extensive evidential difference between the cases. Even if the *formal comparison* between the ethics of cigarette production and violent video games production is apt, the *substantive and evidential comparison* between smoking and video games is not strong. The risks posed by video games are simply incomparable with those of smoking, passive or otherwise, and are so in a number of ways. First, the claim that the “effects size” measured for video games on aggression is the same as that between second-hand smoking and cancer, and that this equivalence has some kind of ethical implication, relies on a fudging of the notion of “significance” (Tavinor, 2009: 155). If the science is correct – itself a big *if* – the statistical significance of the correlations in these two cases may be commensurate, but *what is at risk* certainly is not. In the case of video games, the risk is of aggressive acts such as playground fights, sounding an unpleasantly loud noise and other such disruptions (because this is what was measured in the studies of games and aggression); in the case of passive smoking, the risked effect is cancer and other serious illnesses. Even if these statistical risks are commensurate, the harms inherent in what is at risk surely are not because the cases are not commensurate with respect to human interests. Exposing people to the risk

of disease and death is a serious threat to their welfare interests; but exposing people to minor cases or aggression or unpleasantness – some of which, indeed, might be better thought of as “offenses” rather than “harms” (Feinberg, 1985) – has nothing like that moral importance.

Carefully inspecting the level of societal harm associated with smoking shows how incomparable the two cases genuinely are, and incidentally, what a real public health issue looks like. The social costs of smoking are terrifying in their magnitude. According to the Centers for Disease Control *Smoking and Tobacco Use Fact Sheet*:

- Worldwide, tobacco use causes more than 5 million deaths per year, and current trends show that tobacco use will cause more than 8 million deaths annually by 2030.
- In the United States, tobacco use is responsible for about one in five deaths annually (i.e., about 443,000 deaths per year, and an estimated 49,000 of these smoking-related deaths are the result of second-hand smoke exposure).
- On average, smokers die 13 to 14 years earlier than non-smokers. (CDC, 2012)

Unlike the nebulous harms attributed to video games, these harms are easily quantified. Given the gross disparity between the harms caused by smoking, second-hand or otherwise, and video games, it is stunning that the ethical comparison of smoking to video games is as common as it is.

In reality, there is a singular lack of evidence that the growth in violent video games as a social phenomenon has led to anything approaching this magnitude of social harm. In fact, in the places where video games are the most popular, there often seems to have been a decrease in the harms ostensibly associated with games. In his 2008 study of the relationship between game violence and societal violence, Christopher Ferguson contrasts games sales data with youth violence data, combining them in the following graph (Figure 1):

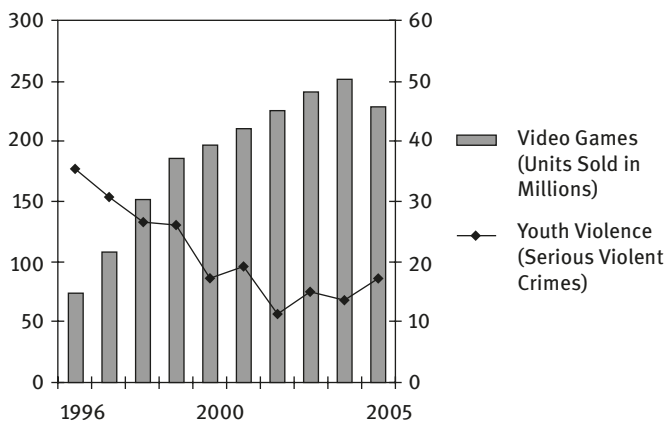


Figure 1: Ferguson, 2008: 33.

He concludes:

The reality is that [...] as violent video games have become more prevalent, violent crimes have decreased dramatically. This is true both for police arrest data, as well as crime victimization data. Similar statistics for reduced crime have been found in Canada, Australia, the European Union, and the United Kingdom using both arrest and victimization data [...]. This is certainly not to say that violent video games are necessarily responsible for this decline, even partially. However, this certainly cuts away the basis of any belief that violent games are promoting societal violence. The correlation (an astonishing $r = -0.95$) is simply in the wrong direction. This would be akin to lung cancer decreasing radically after smoking cigarettes was introduced into a population, which is simply not the case [CITE.]

Interestingly then, what scientific concern there is with video games as a public health issue runs in an almost contrary direction to that with smoking: rather than a demonstrable harmful epidemic (cancers, and other smoking-related illnesses) provoking a scientific investigation into the cause of the epidemic, with violent video games there appears to have been an investigation into the epidemiology without evidence that there actually is an epidemic to be explained. This is reminiscent of the methodology of the pseudo-sciences such as parapsychology, where even though there is an entire absence of evidence in everyday life of telepathy, telekinesis and the like, scientists nevertheless spend their time searching for, and “discovering” trifling effects.

Finally, the *statistical* comparison of smoking and video gaming – the comparison that has been the basis of the ethical approach I have investigated here – is just a red-herring anyway. It is fairly clear that the science does not support the epidemiological comparison of smoking and video games. The psychologists Lawrence Kutner and Cheryl Olson do an admirable job in showing how the statistical comparison between even passive smoking and video games is inappropriate, and it is worthwhile repeating their specific criticisms (2008: 61–63). Amongst their compelling points is that wherever it has been measured, as rates of smoking go up in a group – be it with men, women, or an ethnic group – so rates of lung cancer increase within that group (2008: 62). Second, the more one smokes, the more likely one is to get lung cancer. Third, lung cancer is operationally well-defined as a disease, and its physiology is well-understood and identifiable in sufferers. The corollaries of none of these facts have been established for video games and aggression: rates of societal aggression do not correlate with the prevalence of violent video game use; more play in an individual does not lead to more aggression, and in fact the opposite may be the case (Sherry: 2001); and video game aggression is not well-defined because it manifests in heterogeneous actions and behaviors the aggressive nature of which is open to interpretation (Connor, 1989).

The justified skepticism about the causationist science on games and aggression thus looms very large here. What we know about the causal relationship between video games and aggression, and the strength with which we know it, do not warrant

attribution of a careless ignorance to game producers, much less a malevolent intention to disregard or suppress knowledge for their own gain. It is clear that some scientists do suspect the entertainment industry of actively combating the causationist science: Anderson and other causationist scientists have often imputed “fiscal” motivations to their critics (Anderson, Gentile and Buckley, 2007: 139). But I doubt this insinuation really would work as a compelling ethical premise, because only the most cynical of moralists would claim that producers of video games knowingly and dangerously expose the consumers of their products to serious health risks. Unlike tobacco cigarettes, the evidence for and predictability of the harmful effects of video games is simply not compelling.

Further reading

The literature on video games and harm comes in at least three forms: popular and often moralising works on the worrying effects of games on violence; the psychological and sociological literature specific to ascertaining the effects of video games on aggression and violence; and more broadly focused works that attempt to understand the debate as a phenomenon. Grossman and DeGaetano’s book on video game violence (1999) is a classic and somewhat histrionic piece of the first kind. Grossman has recently revisited the issue (2016). The effects literature itself largely comprises the many research papers that Anderson and his colleagues have published over the years (see e.g. Anderson, C. A. 2004; Anderson, C. A., and Bushman, B. J. 2001). Anderson, Gentile and Buckley sum up the methodology and findings of this research program (2007). Freedman (2002) is an early skeptic of this scientific literature. Another skeptical voice is Ferguson (2008; see also Ferguson & Kilburn, 2009a & 2009b). As an example of the third kind of source, Ferguson and Markey (2017) give both an assessment of the quality of the science on games and aggression, and a discussion of the moralism they think is a prevalent motivation in the science. A dense but worthwhile sociological assessment of these issues is found in Grimes, Anderson, and Bergen (2008). The psychologists Kutner and Olson (2008) take a broad, practical and skeptical view of this issue in the context of child development. An interdisciplinary collection of papers describing various aspects of the debate can be found in Kowert and Quandt (2015).

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15 Harm in Public Relations

Abstract: This chapter summarises the main positions of public relations ethics, characterising the field as profoundly divided between the organisation-centred functionalist approach of the ‘Excellence’ project and the more societally-aware rhetorical/critical schools of writing. The former delineates best practice but has been interpreted as descriptive rather than normative; as if best practice tells the whole story. Unlike Excellence, rhetorical schools embrace advocacy and accept persuasion. Growing numbers of critical and cultural scholars have changed the focus from organisation to society. These positions are explored, particularly regarding their ethical stances and attitudes to a central problem for public relations: the role of persuasion in practice. This is symptomatic of a deeper problem: conflicted loyalties to employer – who pays the wages or fees – and society – which bestows the title of profession only on those who can be seen to contribute beyond an employment contract. Exploration of these problems leads inexorably to contemplation of the potential for harm in the practice and theory of public relations.

Keywords: public relations; excellence; persuasion; rhetoric; professional ethics

1 Introduction

Harm is an almost invisible concept in public relations literature – that is, literature written by PR theorists for PR academics or curricula. The dominant narrative, of which more follows, tends to emphasise the positive, relentlessly. Yet the scale of the sector, particularly in the Anglo-American sphere, and its consistent growth in times of economic hardship requires deeper scrutiny. UK Public relations has experienced considerable growth in the past decade (PRCA 2016) and is now worth £13 billion to the UK economy (from £9 bn in 2013). It is estimated there are 83,000 practitioners in public relations, of whom fewer than half belong to the main professional bodies. PR workers now outnumber journalists, creating a power imbalance between the sources of information in a news-hungry age and the capacity to speak truth to power (Greenslade 2016).

The sector expanded with the growth of consumerism in the twentieth century (Ewen 1996) and in the explosion of social media in recent decades. While many still associate the field with publicity, it also comprises corporate communication, strategic communication planning and implementation, internal communication and a plethora of sub-specialisations. There is common resistance to the term “public relations” due to its pejorative connotations, with some preferring to identify themselves by their specialisation – or even say they are in advertising (Thurlow 2009). But this

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-015>

chapter addresses broader issues affecting the field as a whole and I therefore use the term public relations as a loose term encompassing a range of non-sales related communication practices across commercial and not-for-profit organisations, particularly those involved in building and maintaining relationships with key groups.

Given this wide spread of professionalised communicators producing terabytes of communication content for all sectors of society, the potential for harm – and good – is incalculable.

This chapter summarises the main positions of public relations ethics, characterising the field as profoundly divided between the organisation-centred functionalist approach of the “Excellence” project and the more societally-aware rhetorical/critical schools of writing. The former delineates best practice but has been interpreted as descriptive rather than normative, as if best practice tells the whole story. Unlike Excellence, rhetorical schools embrace advocacy and accept persuasion. Growing numbers of critical and cultural scholars have changed the focus from organisation to society. These positions are explored, particularly regarding their ethical stances and attitudes to a central problem for public relations: the role of persuasion in practice. This is symptomatic of a deeper problem: conflicted loyalties to employer – who pays the wages or fees – and society – which bestows the title of profession only on those who can be seen to contribute beyond an employment contract.

The competing values of these approaches are exemplified in the central image of the role of the public relations professional regarding their ethical duty to organisation/client. The Excellence school is adamant that the PR person must act as the ethical conscience of the organisation; rhetorical schools, with their Aristotelian foundations, embrace advocacy; and critical schools point out the emptiness of the claim to ethical guardianship.

This chapter explores these tensions, with particular attention to questions of ethical role and identity and provides examples where public relations has the capacity to increase social harm – or social good – before concluding with comments regarding a more generalised cultural damage to which public relations – among many other types of communication – has contributed.

2 Only the best – the absence of harm in PR literature

Literature searches for harm, ethics and public relations yield results for harm reduction programmes advocated or resisted in the development of drug and alcohol dependency approaches. The concept of harm in or by public relations barely surfaces (though see Slattery 2002) largely because there is an emphasis in the dominant literature on best practice; positive values are repeatedly ascribed to the field. The “Excellence” project, based in systems theory and developed in

quantitative longitudinal studies (J. E. Grunig & White 1992; L. A. Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier 2002), seeks to measure the dimensions of best practice both in its country of origin (USA) and worldwide. Here the practitioner is mainly described as a boundary spanner, linking external publics to organisational strategic communications. This role achieves its highest level in two-way symmetric communication when the full range of negotiating and diplomatic skills is used to secure positive outcomes for all parties: “In the two-way symmetric model . . . practitioners serve as mediators between organisations and their publics. Their goal is mutual understanding between practitioners and their publics” (J. E. Grunig & Hunt 1984: 22). This level is the only one that is seen as inherently ethical, meaning that the “Excellence” approach to ethics relies on structural issues, particularly codes (see below). “It is difficult, if not impossible, to practice public relations in a way that is ethical and socially responsible using an asymmetrical model” (J. E. Grunig et al. 1992: 175). This positivist, functionalist approach has in many ways set the template for public relations as a management function that eschews persuasion and relies on Codes for ethical insight (Parkinson 2001).

Nevertheless, other frameworks for examining the field have emerged in recent decades, including Relationship Management (Ledingham & Bruning 2001), which characterises public relations as primarily about the management of internal and external organisational relationships. While it has its roots and personal communication and psychology, rather than the systems theory at the foundation of the Excellence project, these two schools have converged somewhat over the past decade, partly due to the shared focus on the role of communication as a management function.

In contrast, rhetorical and critical schools see public relations in its societal context, asking questions about persuasion, propaganda and social responsibility. Rhetorical schools (Heath 2009; Heath & Vasquez 2001; Toth & Heath 1992) study words and symbols used by communicators to influence others, dating back to Aristotle and classic roots of democracy. Persuasion is accepted but only within limits (see below). There is also developing interest in public relations as a dialogic function (Kent & Taylor 2002; Pieczka 2010) though recent research suggests most practice is monologic and fails to create what Macnamara (2016) calls “an architecture of listening.”

Critical approaches, including post-modernism, political economy and, at the outer reaches, propaganda studies, are sceptical of the claim that public relations contributes to social good. L’Etang summarises this grouping as “an interdisciplinary approach that seeks to define assumptions that are taken-for-granted with a view to challenging their source and legitimacy” (L’Etang 2005: 521). Critical writers scrutinise the power dynamics of organisations and their publics and often reveal persistent involvement of PR practitioners in propaganda and deception, past and present. Here notions of harm are visited frequently as the “underbelly” of practice (see Ewen 1996 for an abrasive history of public relations).

There has been a flurry of scholarship in recent years, examining public relations' relationship with society, challenging the unsubstantiated claims of social good and seeing the field in sociological or socio-cultural terms rather than as an organisation-centred function (Bardhan & Weaver 2011; Edwards & Hodges 2011; Heath 2006).

There is also an increasing focus on activism and communication (Coombs & Holaday 2012; Holtzhausen 2012), reversing the focus from organisation to publics. This development highlights how core texts treat activists as the source of harm to organisations. The location of public relations as a management function (Grunig et al 2002) and its curricula within business schools can obscure the central conflict facing the field: does it serve the client or society?

3 Conflicts of duty: The role of the ethical practitioner

There is a famous, if rather old, instance of PR agency involvement in presenting false testimony – involving lurid accounts of babies flung from incubators – to Congressional hearings which precipitated US entry into the 1991 Kuwait war. This is usually cited (e.g., Kitchen 1997) as an extreme example of the harm public relations can do. Recently, however, this story was reframed in an ethics chapter (Morris & Goldsworthy 2015) as an example of professionals “doing their best for their client in a situation which could scarcely be more critical” (56). The notion of harm – either in the construction of the communication or its consequences – is not examined. The duty to client trumps all other moral considerations.

So where does the public relations practitioner's loyalty lie? According to the Excellence approach, the PR professional should “act as the ethical conscience of the organisation”. The proposition is that public relations practitioners who aspire to be excellent should act as the conscience of the organisation, ensuring that the ethical dimensions of business decisions are fully evaluated and refusing to take part in unethical practices or communications. St. John and Pearson (2016) trace the emergence of this expectation through twentieth-century US literature and into this century, where a majority of the professional body, the Public Relations Society of America, expressed strong feelings that they should play an important role as the ethical conscience of the organisation (PRSA 2010, cited in St. John and Pearson: 21).

The major supporting argument (Bowen 2008; Heath 2001) is that the public relations function is one of counsellor, advising decision-makers about the consequences of their actions and that this places them in an ideal position to act as ethical guide. For example, Bowen (2008) asserts that systems theory “provides a normative theoretical framework to explain why public relations is the best suited function to advise senior management on matters of ethics” (273). This argument has been researched: the IABC report, *The Business of Truth*, a guide to ethical communication (Bowen

et al. 2006), collected quantitative and qualitative data from nearly 2000 senior practitioners in North America, New Zealand, Israel and Australia. Their key findings were a) that practitioners considered dealing with ethical concerns to be part of their everyday practice, though it was frequently not labeled as such and b) that practitioners distinguish between the ethical counseling role, which involves advising management on particular situations, and managing core values by embedding relevant qualities in all communications and other activities. This could be seen as differentiating between ethical acts and ethical agents. Nevertheless, the research found a sizeable proportion of respondents rejected the “ethical counselor” role, feeling that was the province of the legal department or the CEO/board, and mentioned their lack of training in ethical theory or practice. Bowen’s (2008) exploration of this material groups respondents into those who seek to offer ethical counsel (which she terms “pro-ethical”) and those who embrace the advocacy model (“anti-ethical”), implying that there is no valid ethical position other than that endorsed by the excellence approach. Given that Grunig (2001) has conceded that most practice consists of asymmetrical communication or persuasion, which is considered unethical in this schema, this leaves the majority of practitioners on the “wrong” side of the wall.

Both supporters and critics of this position concede that practitioners are simply unqualified to play such a role, lacking sufficient (often any) training in ethical theory or practices (Bowen et al. 2006; L’Etang 2003). Moreover, as Curtin & Gaither (2007: 33) point out, to see the “public relations practitioner as sole ethical decision-maker in the organization ... [is] typical of the modernist perspective of the powerful individual who can control and direct his environment.” The counter-position, proposed by many of the rhetorical school and also by many practitioners, is that the public relations professional is employed to serve the interests of the organisation. Good advice may well include highlighting likely reactions to poor practice or abuses of customers or workers; but the motive here is mitigating harm to the employing organisation, not the wider society. Where those interests converge, well and good; where they don’t ...

This is the advocacy role, which is theorised from Aristotle in the rhetorical school of public relations, where the public relations or communication practitioner is equivalent to the speechmaker seeking to persuade fellow citizens to a point of view. The roles of speaker, audience, the choice of message and the dynamics and characteristics of each provides the focus of study. Classic theory describes persuasion as comprising *ethos*, appeals based on character; *pathos*, the feeling quality of the audience; and *logos*, the appeal to reason. Here, advocacy belongs to an honourable tradition. Heath (2007) explores the tension between the symmetry proposed as the basis of ethics in the excellence approach and the ethical aspects of advocacy, noting Grunig’s (2001) acceptance that not all ethical dialogue can be symmetrical, or there would be no room for debate. Rather, argues Heath, ethical advocacy requires equal access to the structures and platforms of debate. This draws on discourse ethics, founded in Habermas’ (1989) theory of dialogic communication, which in turn draws on Kantian and critical theory. Discourse ethics requires that all participants have an

equal chance to initiate and maintain discourse, free of manipulation and enjoying equal power relations – a somewhat idealistic prescription for ethical engagement.

There is also a marketplace version of advocacy, often popular with practitioners, which uses First Amendment arguments to propose that the practitioner's role is to offer communication as a service to facilitate the exchange of ideas in the marketplace (Fitzpatrick & Bronstein 2006). His or her own moral leanings are not relevant – a position often claimed by practitioners, who find analogy with the cab-for-hire or legal model of the professional. While resonating with practice, the main problem with this position is that it fails to recognise that professional status is dependent on avowed commitments to serve society above the needs of self or client (Seaman 2011).

In Fawkes (2012c), I argue that the promotion of the ethical “saint” image has led to a saint/sinner, good/bad binary that oversimplifies the complexities of communicating multiple messages to diverse audiences, a problem I return to later in this chapter. Bivins (1993) blames this impasse on the inadequacy of the field's conceptualisation of the “public interest” it, like other professions, claims to serve, and contradictions between the claim to serve the client and society in general. Like later writers (Pieccka & L'Etang 2001), he finds it hard to support the idea of public relations as an ethical profession. Bivins forensically deconstructs the “public interest” claim, noting that “it is left to the individual practitioner to discharge what they believe to be a tacit obligation to society through either the competent carrying out of their normal functions which will somehow ultimately contribute to the well-being of society as a whole, or by such means as pro bono work” (126).

A different version of the role of the practitioner is proposed by St. John and Pearson (2016): that of facilitator of dialogue between parties. This is very appealing on many grounds. It moves away from the hyperbolic expectations placed on communicators to resolve ethical issues in organisations, recognizing that solutions lie with all participants, not just PR people. Further, it builds on dialogue as the first principle of communication ethics (Arnett, Bell, & Fritz 2010); and finally it makes proper use of the communication skills of practitioners, not to fix problems but to create spaces in which discussions can take place. The authors provide an example of communication in a health crisis; there are also explorations of this potential to reduce harm through collaboration in Northern Ireland (Somerville, Purcell, & Morrison 2011), Israel (Toledano & McKie 2007) and in the work with Scottish school children that closes this chapter (Pieccka & Wood 2013).

Underpinning these multiple and often conflicting images of the ethical expectations of public relations lie somewhat underexplored applications of incompatible ethical theory. Is my duty to my employer, myself, my family or society in general? Do I navigate ethical dilemmas by referring to such duties or calculating consequences in a cost/benefit analysis? Or just falling in with what everyone else does? The next section summarises the key theoretical approaches found in the field.

4 Public relations and ethical philosophy

The tensions described so far can also be summarised in terms of their underpinning philosophical approaches, though these are not always explicit in leading texts (e.g. Chia & Synnott 2009; Johnston & Zawawi 2009; Theaker 2012), which offer simplistic summaries of consequentialism and deontology, or ad-hoc combinations of both. This confusion is also apparent in professional codes of ethics (see below).

There is some scholarly engagement with Kantian approaches, notably from critical scholar L'Etang (1992) and excellence supporter Bowen (2007) who, unsurprisingly, come to differing conclusions. While L'Etang suggests that codes of ethics do not stand up to Kantian principles, Bowen declares that Excellence ethics conform closely to Kant's imperatives, finding that "ethics is a single excellent factor and the common underpinning of all factors that predict excellent public relations" (275). This is the discourse which generates the "ethical guardian" image, despite L'Etang's (2003) challenge that public relations practitioners do not have the training to take on such a role. Discourse ethics (Habermas 1979, 1996) has been cited extensively (Haas 2001; Pearson 1989) to support symmetrical communication; despite very different philosophical origins, both Habermas and the Excellence approach marginalize persuasion as inherently unethical (Pfau & Wan 2006) and the latter relies heavily on codes to uphold these exalted standards.

While Habermas offers one source of philosophical engagement with communication ethics, MacIntyre's (1984) revival of virtue ethics offers another, which has been embraced by the rhetorical school of public relations (Baker & Martinson 2002; Edgett 2002; Harrison & Galloway 2005; Pater & van Gils 2003). Virtue ethics considers issues of character rather than discrete acts, asking questions about who we want to be rather than advice-on-risk calculation. It is esoteric, or inward looking, rather than exoteric and rules-based. Ideas of advocacy are found here, as rhetoric is less hostile to persuasion and seeks to balance multiple demands rather than to perform idealized acts. Baker (2008) explores virtue ethics in public relations, suggesting that there are principled advocates, who bring humility, trust and accountability (among other virtues) to their persuasive communication and what she terms "pathological partisans". The latter disown moral responsibility and use deceit, concealment and manipulation in their practice. Her analysis offers real insight into the degrees of persuasion found in public relations and helps identify causes of harm in the field.

However, experience and observation in social justice campaigning suggest that one can elevate self-interest or self-protection to moral heights in certain circumstances and that many advocates are self-persuaded beyond the point of reflexivity. Good intent is often offered as a defence when harm is caused and there is little awareness of the limitations of this position (Tadros 2015).

Other advocates prefer the marketplace approach to advocacy, as suggested earlier (Fitzpatrick & Bronstein 2006). This model recognizes that public relations often plays a more asymmetrical or persuasive role than is encompassed by the

boundary spanner, is strongly located in US jurisprudence, and while it is uncritical of free market morality, it does acknowledge the need for awareness of factors such as access, process, truth and disclosure (Fitzpatrick 2006).

All of the approaches discussed so far have their origins in western philosophy and treat ethics as normative and positivist, often with an emphasis on rationality, rules and procedures, especially in their application to professional ethics. In recent decades this position has been challenged by feminist ethics (Benhabib 1992; Gilligan 1982), postcolonial (Appiah 2005) non-Western (Koehn 2001) and postmodern perspectives (Bauman 1993), among others. Some of these ideas have recently made an impact on public relations ethics (Curtin & Gaither 2007; Holtzhausen 2012) but generally these new(er) directions are rarely reflected in PR text books or chapters on ethics. There is not space to elaborate each position, but they may be very broadly summarized as rejecting rationality as the primary indicator of ethics; embracing unconscious, emotional and mixed motives; challenging universal values based on patriarchal attitudes (and research methods) to include virtues of care and responsibility; rejecting universal values as hegemonic and ideological; and arguing for co-construction of meaning, and hence, ethics. These approaches strongly challenge unexamined cultural assumptions about “good” and “ethical,” though they also seek to avoid reductionist cultural relativism where “anything goes”. They speak to deeper philosophies than can be found in codes.

Recent research (Bowen & Erzikova 2013) finds a fascinating schism between US and European public relations pedagogy regarding ethical precepts; the former refer primarily to practice norms and professional codes; the latter to underpinning moral philosophies. This is important as, despite a range of recent publications from European scholars, the field is still dominated by US approaches, not only in texts but in codes of conduct worldwide (Parkinson 2001).

4.1 Codes of ethics – the global export of excellence ideals

Public relations codes of ethics are largely based on the Excellence approaches to the field, explicitly or implicitly. Public relations codes have been studied in the US (Ki & Kim 2010; Parkinson 2001), Australia and New Zealand (Breit & Demetrious 2010; Harrison & Galloway 2005) and in a global context (Sriramesh & Vercic 2009). While Ki and Kim’s (2010) claim that codes and value statements can be correlated with higher standards, Pater and Gils (2003) conclude that this is not the case, except where there is supportive training in ethical issues. Parkinson (2001) suggests that the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) code of ethics is strongly influenced by the excellence model in its emphasis on symmetry and avoidance of persuasion. He argues that this in turn has influenced models exported around the world: the Global Alliance approach to ethics is broadly similar in tone and content, for example (Breit

& Demetrious 2010). This suggests that the ethical guardian ideal has been promoted as a universal norm and written into professional codes around the world. Yet the absence of detailed discussion of ethics from the core Excellence texts (J. E. Grunig et al. 1992; J. E. Grunig & Hunt 1984) is striking: codes are presented as sufficient to handle the complex conflicts of duty, which constitute real ethical debate. Moreover they are rarely used as a disciplinary tool, making them doubly idealistic, not to say hypothetical, both in content and application. Perhaps the primary power of professional codes lies in their embodiment of an imagined identity, both individually and collectively, as the counsel who offers wise words to the dominant coalition and refrains from doing harm. Yet some critics, such as Brecher (2010) argue that codes are themselves anti-ethical, because they “instrumentalise moral concern; and in doing so, both take morality out of the picture and depoliticise the object of what might have been moral concern” (353). So, codes cannot prevent harm and may even contribute to it by appearing to address ethical concerns.

5 Persuasion and harm

Earlier in this chapter I suggested that there are conflicting self-images of public relations practice, which I characterize as saints vs sinners. The ‘sin’ here is persuasion. So is persuasion the central harm of public relations? If so, doesn’t that assume all persuasion is harmful?

The distance that the Excellence school places between public relations and persuasion certainly implies there is risk of contamination. The source of this taint is almost certainly propaganda, which was used as a synonym for public relations – including as the title of Edward Bernays’ influential 1923 book – until post-Nazi connotations required a re-think. But many suggest that public relations, propaganda and persuasion cannot be so easily disentangled (Weaver, Motion, & Reaper 2006). For example, Porter (2010) has revisited the issue of persuasion in public relations, arguing that the dominance of the Grunig models and their distaste for persuasion has “vilified” one of the key aspects of modern PR strategy: “. . . the ultimate outcome of public relations efforts will always remain influencing attitudes and, ultimately, behavior. Public relations professionals are paid to advocate ideas and to influence behaviour” (132).

Others suggest that public relations has problems with the concept of persuasion because it confuses means and ends: the Grunig approach mentioned earlier concentrates on means, or processes –i.e., whether they are symmetrical or not. But, they suggest, “Public relations is best viewed as a form of strategic communication, in which persuasion plays an integral role . . . Many of the core functions of public relations, such as community relations, media relations, crisis communication and others, manifest an implicit if not explicit goal of cultivating or maintaining a positive organizational image” (Pfau & Wan 2006: 102).

Curtin and Gaither (2005) look at persuasion as part of a “circuit of culture,” which sees communication as a dynamic process of constructing meaning in a social and cultural context, noting that “the dominant normative paradigm has removed propaganda and persuasion from the ranks of legitimate public relations practices, but the circuit demonstrates the need to recognize them as part of the repertoire of legitimate practices ...” (109). Persuasion is seen as a central component – not the whole story – of all communication from the interpersonal to organisational efforts. Attempts to disown it are ultimately futile. The timelessness of persuasion is explored by Charles Marsh (2015) through classical Greek mythology, finding issues of contradiction and ambivalence that date from ancient times to modern public relations, suggesting there is nothing new in these debates.

My own view is that persuasion cannot be viewed as automatically harmful. Indeed, most health campaigns require persuasive communication. Demonising persuasion may cause more harm by lessening scrutiny of the choices involved. Baker’s attributes of principled and pathological advocacy are helpful here. It is not the act of persuasion that is intrinsically harmful but the potential for deception – and, I would argue self-deception – in achieving goals. There is a Kantian aspect to this notion of harm in that the danger of unethical persuasion is that information is withheld in order to gain compliance of the other – an attack on their autonomy, of course.

As with other forms of Kantian ethics, it is hard to operate within these absolutes. The nature of persuasion is that some aspects are stressed and others marginalized in presenting the organisation’s interpretation of events to the particular audiences. What about releasing bad results on a crowded news day to minimize chances of exposure? Or delaying the call to a journalist until after the relevant deadline? Outside of media relations, public consultations are often presented as two-way exchanges when minimum alterations are permissible. Given the evidence that persuasion is a timeless human activity, perhaps we need better training in decoding persuasion attempts, rather than exhortations to just stop it.

To illustrate the kind of dilemma faced by practitioners: In May 2016, the long-running inquest into the deaths of 96 people at a UK football match in 1989 concluded that the actions of police and other authorities contributed to the death toll. Following this verdict, Hayley Court – an experienced press officer – reported that she felt pressured into presenting the past decisions of South Yorkshire Police Authority in the most favourable light throughout the hearings, despite the fact the organisation had earlier apologised for their part in the disaster: “The police should not have been seeking to spread the blame on to others at the inquests, and seeking to influence the media to take that line,” she told *The Guardian* newspaper (Conn 2016). Her statements were widely reported in the UK and led to discussion among PR practitioners in social media. Many supported her position, arguing that she was being pushed to take unethical actions in “spinning” court hearings to put the police in a more favourable light. For example, the CIPR President, Rob Brown, said, “A public relations professional who feels they are being put under pressure to act in a way that could break our

code of conduct is right to speak out about it and push back against unreasonable and unethical expectations.” (CIPR 2016) However, other commentators stated that it is the job of the PR person to put the best possible light on the organisation’s actions, as long as they are not actually lying. The question of loyalty is seriously underexplored in PR literature, as Bivins pointed out in 1993, leading to confusion of theory and practice (though see Slattery 2002 for exploration of introducing loyalty dilemmas into PR education).

6 The harmful client

The most frequent ethical discussion among PR students and academics concerns working for tobacco/arms/oil companies. This can be a reductionist debate, as if working for worthy causes exonerates the practitioner from ethical dilemmas. It also calls for a moral taxonomy of organisations with no clear mechanism for establishing such rankings. Clearly vegans would hesitate before working for meat or dairy companies, making such choices very personal expressions of value. It is worth noting that most critics of public relations (e.g., Miller & Dinan 2008) focus heavily on the corrupt communications of certain multinational corporations, ignoring the reality that any entity that communicates internally or externally is engaged in some kind of public relations. It does not help clarify these issues when communication and the nature of business are conflated.

This is not to say that the issue of representing harmful organisations is irrelevant. Consider the damage caused by the intense promotion of carcinogens throughout the last century. The involvement of public relations companies in the obfuscation around climate change is notorious. The simple introduction of doubt into this debate, the encouragement to use the term “contested,” coupled with the obligation of public broadcasters to offer balanced reporting has played its part in the parlous state of the planet. Vast fortunes have been spent on public relations expertise to achieve these results. Given that the growth of public relations as an industry is tied to the expansion of market forces capitalism, it is not unreasonable to connect the success of one with the success of the other. Indeed, a sociologist (Cronin, 2018) suggests that there may be a force she terms “public relations capitalism”. Communication is an expression of power in its access to resources and reach, though not-for-profit movements – such as Occupy, for example – remind one that money is not the only capital. An indication of the toxicity of the role of PR in climate change is the decision taken in 2015 by leading PR agency Edelman to refuse climate change deniers as clients. However, the UK trade journal PR Week found this stance was not widely supported:

Given the weight of scientific opinion and the potentially catastrophic effects of global warming, many think that those who deny climate change should be denied a platform for publicity because they endanger the future of mankind.

The world's largest PR agency certainly does. Last month, Edelman made it known that it would no longer work with clients that produce coal or deny climate change.

However, that view is not shared by the majority of UK PR agencies, according to a straw poll carried out by PR Week Just six out of 20 UK agency chiefs questioned said that they would not work with climate change deniers. (Benady 2015)

The discussion of climate change is a reminder that some organisations intend to cause harm to others (including their own descendants) to protect immediate financial interests. They deploy communication and public relations activity, as well as lobbying and other forms of influence, to achieve those ends. Legal constraints may have some effect here, but ethical codes are unlikely to weigh heavily in such discussions. These are largely consequentialist arguments, examples of public relations and organisational communication leading to measurable harm. The next section turns to a more interior approach, looking at the role of the practitioner in the communication. This echoes the characterisation of the saint/sinner image outlined at the beginning of the chapter, but seeks a subtler fusion of these aspects, through a Jungian ethic.

7 Mitigating harm – a new approach to conscious practice

Having considered the role of public relations in planetary harm, I want to return to the role of the individual practitioner as the site of ethical conflict. Given the inadequacy of codes to assist in ethical conflicts, it falls to the practitioner to carry the burden for maintaining professional standards. The cost of this burden is explored by Kang (2010), through a survey of PRSA members: more than 65% of respondents reported experiencing ethical dissonance, including being forced to be silent and being unable to challenge unethical decisions from above. Some left their organizations; others suffered a range of stress symptoms. It seems the codes were of little use as “keeping silent is regarded as proper by some public relations practitioners, while others think that it is definitely unethical” (154). One of the prime exacerbating factors was the inability to discuss ethical issues openly with management. Such experiences call for a new approach to public relations ethics, moving from external codes to internal guidance.

This shift in focus also challenges a common reliance on good intent as a defence against causing harm; one of the most irritating political responses to a crisis (often both predictable and predicted) is “well, with hindsight” Ethical decision-making requires foresight. And foresight requires effort, gathering information, evaluating reliability of sources, consideration of outcomes as well as the interests and intentions of all involved. It also requires reflexivity, the ability to express uncertainty and

doubt. The devastating effect of silencing dissent is well-documented in regards to the Challenger disaster and hospital death rates (Robinson 2002; Smith & Robinson 2015). Kang's research suggests this is a continuing problem in public relations.

I have argued elsewhere (Fawkes 2015) that the emphasis on idealised practice acts as a suppressant to proper discussion, suggesting that the archetypes at play resemble Carl Jung's notions of Persona and Shadow. In summary, Persona is the idealised public face we present to the world; Shadow all that we wish to conceal. The immature character rejects all the Shadow material and projects it on to others, blaming them for his or her own perceived failings or fears. Given this pattern of projection, is the insistence on moral probity (in contrast to the appalling behaviour of Others) at all times an indication of doubt? Maturity requires the ability to navigate between these impulses, and the recognition that our hidden selves may actually contain insights, even wisdom, if we can learn to listen. In Jung's schema, codes and assertions of ethics may belong to the realm of Persona; doubts and conflict – which hold the key to mature ethical decision-making, reside in the Shadow.

Jung distinguishes the moral code from the conscience. The moral code is a human institution, while conscience is the reaction of the unconscious. ... in the case of the ethical conscience, the unconscious places one in a dilemma where one is forced to choose between incompatible duties. In this case, Jung believes one's moral duty is to suffer the conflict to the end, without trying to escape (Proulx 1994:114–115).

This ability to sit with a conflict until a resolution emerges is part of what Jung calls individuation, the integration of separated parts of the psyche into a self-regulating whole. It is hard work, as all Jungian scholars attest, but one outcome of this process, according to Beebe (1992) is integrity. Engagement with the unconscious reveals the futility of decision boxes and purely rational ethics; instead of leaping to “fix” an ethical problem, Jung asks us to stay with it, to savour it in all its complexity. Here, ethics is not located so much in character, as in virtue ethics, but in consciousness. It is a less binary approach. If, as Baker (2008) suggests, there are virtues and vices in public relations practice, a Jungian context allows us to look at what might be attractive in the vices, unattractive in the virtues. Jungian studies of literature often note the alluring nature of the anti-hero, the character who can act against societal prohibitions (Hauke, 2005). Are we (sometimes) drawn to situations that seem to sanction manipulation, deceit, secrecy? Public relations practitioners are often involved in the drama of crises, or have access to high-level information before it is more widely available, for example. Does this feed a certain sense of importance?

Moreover, in a culture of hyper-communication, responses are always required in real time, so contingency usually prevails. The virtues of transparency, humility and respect require time for reflection and debate and may be too difficult to bring to everyday work when organizations ask for the opposite. A real ethical debate would start from these premises and develop approaches for behaving ethically under pressure rather than simply reciting empty codes of practice.

8 Harm amplified and reduced: Examples from practice

This section offers two examples of how public relations can contribute to social unease and also to social well-being. In considering the harm done by the 2016 UK referendum on whether or not to stay in the European Union, I will try and avoid commenting on the substantive positions of the main parties in order to highlight the communicative issues. I may fail. As noted at the start of this chapter, public relations is often sub-divided into specialist fields – internal communication, crisis communications, investor relations and so on. In this approach, the campaigns around the UK referendum fall under the political communication umbrella. However, the convergence of persuasive communication in political and consumer campaigns render such divisions increasingly redundant, as evidenced by the extensive network of national and regional PR and advertising agencies retained by all sides of the argument (Rogers & Burne James 2016). Moreover, the tenor of political campaigns both expresses and amplifies profound social fault lines, as exemplified by both the 2016 UK Referendum on staying in the European Union and the 2016 US presidential election.

The morning after the referendum result, leading “Leave” campaigners simply disowned the claim that £350 million per week currently going to the EU would be returned to the NHS, despite this being painted on the side of the campaign bus, and repeated in posters, speech content and so on. On the other side, the “Remain” arguments included remarkably specific sums by which every UK family would be worse off and summoned apocalyptic images of the consequences of leaving. The Leave campaign tended to use simple, emotional slogans, evoking independence, autonomy, and freedom; the Remain campaign focused on economic arguments. While debate continues about the significance of the decision, the outcomes of which will unfold over many years, there is agreement that the campaigns were simplistic and misleading. The Electoral Reform Society condemned the “glaring democratic deficiencies” in the debate that left the public confused and ill-informed (Syal 2016).

As leading practitioner Philip Sheldrake observed – before the actual vote – the campaigns of both sides failed to follow Aristotle’s injunction that successful persuasion requires *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos* (Sheldrake 2016). Opposing campaigns each emphasised different aspects to the exclusion of others. In this view, the Remain campaign, with its emphasis on economic arguments and effects, could be said to be taking the *logos* position. It appeared to operate from the deficit model, suggesting that persuasion consists of providing more and more facts until agreement is reached. But facts aren’t arguments. Of course, it also embedded emotional appeals, particularly the fear of change – an aspect seized upon by the Leave campaign, which accused its opponents of emotional manipulation.

This charge seemed to carry weight, despite the Leave campaign taking an almost entirely emotional approach, evoking images of an imaginary past when the nation was self-sufficient and free of foreigners. Despite the absence of facts to support such assertions (including cricketer Ian Botham's assertion that England is an island), this proved to be the more attractive appeal. As Berry puts it (2016 14),

Leave campaigners employed a classic KISS (Keep it simple stupid) strategy. They concentrated on a simple message – “Take Back Control” which was repeated at every opportunity. The message was effective because it was both easily understood by different social groups and open to multiple interpretations.

There are echoes here with cool logic versus the fact-free emotionalism of the 2016 US presidential election. Trump has torn up various public relations' rule books which generally recommend avoiding giving offense to potential supporters or making statements which are manifestly untrue. For example, while many PR people might claim a rally was a great success, few would claim that 15,000 attended, as Trump did of a rally in Phoenix in 2017, when anyone with a cell phone could disprove it (Pasha-Robinson 2017). Much has been written about the Trump election and what it says about contemporary US society; one of the most interesting being a series of essays by Jungian analysts and commentators who suggest Trump exerts the allure of the Shadow, the disinhibited player who says what ‘nice’ people do not (Cruz & Buser 2016).

For communicators the disregard for the basics of ethical communication is significant. Former BBC director-general Mark Thompson (Thompson 2016) argues that this degradation of public discourse amounts to a “crisis in public language”:

In Britain, the ugly shambles that passed for a once-and-for-all national debate about our place in Europe. In the US, an official candidate for the presidency seemingly capable of any exaggeration or untruth – including wondering aloud if the US's gun owners couldn't do something to stop Hillary Clinton – but still retaining the support of tens of millions of voters. In continental Europe, the extremists gaining ground in many countries [...]. And almost everywhere – whether in the debating chamber, on prime time TV or the smartphone in your pocket – a sense of a public discourse that is losing its power to explain and reconcile, or indeed to express anything beyond hatred and division.

While some have claimed that public relations is a champion for democracy (Vercic 2005), political communication in 2016 – much of it directed by public relations advisors – suggests this is a sphere of harm. There is evidence of carelessness both of consequences and in respect to voters' autonomy. There is serious cause for self-reflection within the profession if it wishes to continue to claim to practice according to ethical standards.

But I conclude the chapter on a cheerier note. As well as large-scale campaigns based on deception, manipulation and threat, there are PR people in many organisations creating space for discussion and engagement. They demonstrate the virtues of

reflective communication, though their achievements may be local and modest. I offer this concluding example an illustration of deeper ethical practice based in dialogue, respect and empowerment.

Since 2010, public relations academics at Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh have conducted action research with local schools to help pupils create their own discussion spaces for exchanging views on alcohol consumption. The training has not been about alcohol but the principles of dialogue, storytelling, conflict resolution and other resources to enable the pupil project leaders to facilitate non-judgemental discussion between peers (Pieczka & Wood 2013). The feedback from project leaders and participants has been powerful. They express surprise at the range of views on drinking in contrast to the media messages they had assumed were universal, but also register new confidence in listening, reflecting and articulating their own positions. The importance of teenage-led discussion contributed to a continuing project involving a number of schools in the area. This work has been welcomed by members of the Scottish Parliament and local police officers. It illustrates two dimensions of harm reduction: the literal reduction of alcohol-related harm through communication, and an example of how communication skills can empower groups that are often treated as passive recipients of public information campaigns. It also illustrates the version of the public relations practitioner exercising moral agency as a facilitator of dialogue rather than the sole speaker (St. John and Pearson 2016).

9 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the potential for harm in public relations, suggested that inadequate exploration of ethics in practice and academia has led to a reliance on codes and best practice, while evidence of actual harm caused by communication accumulates. I have argued that widespread failure to engage with ethical theory and the marginalisation of persuasion, despite its central role in practice, undermine claims to ethical competence. The inability or refusal to engage with what Jung calls Shadow aspects results in harm, as ethical awareness requires reflexivity.

Examples of harm have been offered from the political and commercial fields, but I want to close with a broader concern. It is not just the values embedded in corporate and campaign communications that contribute to harm, but the growing imperative that every situation must be “handled,” the emphasis on presentation and self-presentation to the extent that we are all celebrities in our own life-stories. Cumulatively, public relations has served the consumerist expansion of the last half century well; in turn it has flourished. Professional public relations is indispensable in the modern world. Even – perhaps especially – terrorist movements have sophisticated communication campaigns. Everyone is permanently on display, or performing the self, to use Goffman’s (1959) term. What does this shift from reflection to performance do to a

culture? Mark Thompson's (2016) remarks on a crisis of public language speaks to the harm that public relations can do.

Over the course of the 20th century, empirical advances were made in the way words are used to sell to goods and services. They were then systematically applied to political messaging, and the impressionistic rhetoric of promotion increasingly came to replace the rhetoric of traditional step-by-step political argument. The effect has been to give political language some of the brevity, intensity and urgency we associate with the best marketing, but to strip it of explanatory and argumentative power.

I conclude with modest suggestions to mitigate harm. The first is through consciousness; raising self-awareness to the point where practitioners feel more confident of raising ethical dilemmas in the workplace (Fawkes 2015). The second is an acceptance of the centrality of persuasion as a core practice: practitioners should learn both the principles of rhetoric (not commonly taught outside the USA) and strategies for resistance. Finally, we should eschew both saints and sinners as archetypes for PR; there is no justification for communicators either being ethical guardians or unthinking loyalists. Reframing communication as a dialogic action would require alterations to curricula and the collective identity, but it might help reduce harm done.

Further reading

Writing about ethics in public relations has stayed fairly predictable in the past decade – though see my own monograph (Fawkes 2015) if you are interested in the sociology of professions, approaches to professional ethics and in particular, the notion of a Jungian ethic.

However, related debates concerning public relations' effect on society have expanded considerably. In particular, for media students who want a closer analysis of the production of public relations, particularly by corporations, Sue Curry Jansen's (2017) *Stealth Communication* offers a damning overview of public relations practice, with particular focus on abuse of public discourse by private interests. This is more detailed than some previous diatribes, and includes examination of the economic spread and influence of PR as a field; it also recognizes two groups of scholarly critics: outsider critics such as Stauber and Rampton (2004) or Miller and Dinan (2009) and insider critics who have practiced and researched in the field (L'Etang & Pieczka, 2006; Edwards & Hodges 2011, for example).

Cronin (2018) develops the notion of harm in public relations beyond the egregious incidents described by Jensen, She declares: 'PR's social and political impact is far more detrimental than that suggested by straightforward critiques of its partisanship or mendacity' (5). It is not the content of managed communication that is under scrutiny but the migration of democratic transactions from the public to the private

spheres, where it is PR practitioners rather than elected officials who determine the nature of dialogue and consent. She is concerned with PR's contribution to the democratic deficit.

Cronin contributes to a growing literature on promotional culture (Fitch 2017; Davis 2016; Edwards & Hodges 2011; Bardhan & Weaver 2011) which reposition the field as inherently concerned with persuasion and influence, in contrast to the dominant efforts to define public relations entirely by its contribution to strategic management. This is part of a growing inter-disciplinarity as scholars from sociology, politics, media and celebrity studies engage with each other to explore the hidden powers of public relations.

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Shakuntala Rao

16 Justice and Media Ethics

Abstract: This chapter advocates for an understanding of justice, one that focuses on globalism rather than localism. The task is to develop improved conceptions of justice and move toward them in our discussions of global media. While contemporary philosophy, as well as various other disciplines, have attempted to address the differences between distributive and retributive justice, in this chapter I advocate for a theory of transformative justice for media ethics that focuses on a global perspective based largely on the work of economist and noble laureate, Amartya Sen. Media ethics literature has been replete with analyses of justice theorists such as John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas, and Michael Sandel, but not much attention has been paid to the work of Sen. In developing a notion of transformative justice for media, this chapter reviews Sen's capabilities approach and how it can be useful to media ethicists. I use the coverage of rape by Indian media as an example to suggest the successes and possible changes that could take place through the use of journalism practices based on transformative justice as a foundational ethical principle guiding democratic media.

Keywords: global media, justice, ethics, India, Amartya Sen, rape, journalism, transformative

When pondering the concept of justice, it is not uncommon for people to envision a blindfolded woman holding a set of scales. In other cases, television shows such as *Law and Order* and *The Practice* or movies such as *Legal Eagles* and *Presumed Innocent* might better represent a person's idea of how the justice system works. Laws, courts, police, judges, and other social control agents constantly inform our conceptions of justice. But does Lady Liberty truly represent justice for all? Should we think beyond such symbols to gain a better understanding, especially within the context of media ethics? Would a more nuanced understanding of justice, one that focuses on globalism rather than localism, be more appropriate than one that focuses on control and narrow parochialisms? Can we develop improved conceptions of justice and move toward them in our discussions of global media? Contemporary philosophy, as well as various other disciplines, have attempted to address the differences between *distributive* and *retributive* justice. In this chapter, I advocate a theory of *transformative* justice for media ethics that focuses on a global perspective, based largely on the work of Amartya Sen.

1 Distributive and retributive justice

Social theories of distributive justice engage societal and political developments in the formation of conceptions of justice. In other words, to understand what is seen as

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-016>

“just” or “unjust,” we must look to sociopolitical and historical developments, and how some notions of justice have gained greater acceptance than others. Distributive justice pertains to “notions of fairness in the distribution of benefits and burdens in a given society” (Armstrong 2011: 52). Armstrong goes on to define distributive justice as “the way that the benefits and burdens of our lives are shared between various members of a society or community” (53). Limited wealth and resources have prompted the question of how to distribute those benefits. The most common answer is that public assets should be distributed such that each individual receives a “fair share” (Armstrong 2011: 60). While there could be some contention as to what that “fair share” would involve, there is a necessity for some consensual method or process to be in place, at the societal level, to agree to such distribution and allocation of resources (Armstrong 2011: 60). Distributive justice is based on the premise that such justice works in the best interests of society as a whole. While the pragmatic implications of distributive justice can be – and frequently are – contested, the interests of society, over the interests of the few, remains the main tenet. For instance, Dreze and Sen (2013) argue that the biggest challenge to a democratic media in India, as well as elsewhere, is its partiality in favor of the rich and powerful, and that dominance of the privileged leads to public policy and state spending priorities that benefit the wealthy. Dreze and Sen believe that such non-distributive policies remain fundamentally unjust because they perpetuate the lopsidedness of development and marginalize the needs of the majority.

Another largely circulated theory of distributive justice has been to proceed according to a principle of “equity, and distribute benefits in proportion to the individuals’ contribution” (Konow 2001: 138). Thus, those who make a greater productive contribution to their group deserve to receive more benefits. In theory, such a principle would advocate for a position that people who work harder, or in specialized fields, and in more valuable jobs should earn more. This sort of distribution is associated with a system where there is the possibility of equal opportunities to compete. In competitive systems, wealth or goods might also be distributed according to effort or ability (Cohen 1987). Countering such understanding of distributive justice, advocated by scholars such as Fraser and Honneth (2003) among others, is a pluralistic theory of distributive justice that would be contextually sensitive, and rooted in pragmatism. With parity in participation, justice emerges out of the process of making of justice, and each individual recognizes, in ongoing discourses, the other as equal.

As is well known, philosopher John Rawls’s master proposal concerning distributive justice is that social advantage is to be measured in terms of an index of primary social goods, general-purpose resources of which any rational person would prefer to have more rather than fewer. Rawls position, which underlines his notion of justice, is that morally appropriate response to misfortune specifies distributions that tilt in favor of worst-off individuals in a civil society and give priority to them. While the degree of this tilt could be scrutinized and critiqued, distribution would include a spectrum of equal opportunities based on some fundamental notion of talent which would bestow more wealth on some over others. While Rawls’s ideas

about distributive justice has come under intense criticism, it outlines a compelling principle of social surplus where redistribution is not merely about wealth – though Rawls is acutely aware of the significance of economic advantages – but also of rights and liberties and, most notably, opportunities.

Unlike theories of distributive justice, retributive justice has been centered on individual action and the notion of “an eye for an eye” punishment or response to harm. Most enthusiastically adopted by members of the criminal justice system, retributive justice has been focused on society punishing people because they have broken the law and are culpable and deserving of punishment. This viewpoint has been understood as backward-looking to the extent that the lawbreaker’s degree of culpability is examined. It is not forward-looking in justifying punishment with the aim of ensuring a future good (Wharton 2012). This justification assumes individual responsibility, free will, a rational calculator, and an implicit assumption that a lawbreaker deserves punishment in proportion to the crime committed. Capeheart and Milovanovic (2007) write, “Retributive justice demands equal suffering” (60). Some forms of this justice could include a component of therapeutic rehabilitation, rather than justice purely as a form of punishment. The working presumption throughout this process is, however, one of guilt, and each operative who makes a decision does so by determining the probability of guilt or innocence. Stories of retributive justice have dominated media for a long time, especially with the popularity of true crime stories and dramas in television and movies. Such a perception of justice, as Braithwaite (1989) argues, has “focused on lawyers, on the rich, and on being angry” (202).

2 Transformative justice based on globalism

The general notion of transformative justice was first popularized in the writing of Van Ness and Strong (2002), authors who took the discussion of justice beyond distribution and retribution to a process of “transformation of persons, perspectives, and situations” (28). In the late 1970s, a critical body of work had begun to evolve, mostly in response to the apparent failures of the retributive criminal justice system. Critics such as Zehr (2002) wrote about the possibility of restorative justice as recognizing “the needs which crimes create, as well as the roles implicit in crimes” (37). The general idea was to expand the number of stakeholders in the process of justice to include victims, community members, and offenders. The three salient features of restorative justice, wrote Zehr, were that “it focuses on harm, that wrongs and harms results in obligations, and justice must promote engagement and participation” (38). Van Ness and Strong’s critique of criminal law took the discussion further by advocating for the recognition of inequalities within a society or community; these inequalities could be economic, racial, social, or gendered. Once the imbalance of power is recognized, Van Ness and Strong argue, the system – and institutions – would make

people feel healed and empowered, and lead to acceptance of justice as a coproduced phenomena. Transformative justice is presented as an alternative hypothesis to pure punishment (retributive) or a largely economic response (distributive).

Transformative justice is only possible with a revised notion of community. A revised notion of community allows for two levels of engagement: (1) connections with others who are not present in the community as a form of solidarity, and (2) questions concerning the oppressive nature of community politics. A good example would be the Black Lives Matter hashtag, which was first used on social media in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the shooting death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Florida and to the refusal of a grand jury to indict a Ferguson, Missouri, police officer for killing 18-year-old Michael Brown. Almost simultaneously, Ethiopians in Israel began protesting, using the hashtag, “#BlackLivesMatter”, after an Ethiopian member of the Israeli army was attacked by Israeli police while in full uniform. The systemic anti-black discrimination against Ethiopians living in Israel became connected to the North American Black Lives Matter movement, with Ethiopian Jews demanding recognition that their black lives mattered, too (Khan 2015).

If there is one word that has gained enormous currency, in every field of study, in the past two decades, it is *globalization*. Globalism expresses itself in our understanding of our place on the planet and goes far beyond the theories of multiculturalism often influenced and determined by national boundaries. Numerous theories of globalism abound, and scholars from every discipline are jostling to find their epistemological location in the spectrum of globalism, including ethics and justice theorists. One of the best definitions of globalism is provided by Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard (2004), who write, “While human lives continue to be lived in local realities, these realities are increasingly being challenged and integrated into larger global networks. ... Human experience is linked to economic realities, social processes, technological and media innovations, and cultural flows that traverse national boundaries with even greater momentum” (2). Globalization has necessitated an understanding that how one defines the baseline for justice – and injustice – in one nation is often directly or indirectly linked to the politics of another. Barry (2008) takes the discussion further in his analysis of rich countries’ humanitarian aid to poor countries by writing:

We cannot sensibly talk about humanity unless we have a baseline set by justice. To talk about what I ought, as a matter of humanity, to do with what is mine makes no sense until we have established what is mine in the first place. If I have stolen what is rightfully somebody’s else’s property, or if I have borrowed from him and refuse to repay the debt when it is due, and as a result he is destitute, it would be unbecoming on my part to dole out some part of the money that should belong to him, with various strings attached as to the way in which he should spend it and then go around posing as a great humanitarian (206).

While Barry is not directly invoking transformative justice as a possibility, he wants to persuade readers to return to the historical-political roots of globalism and international relations. By outlining justice as recognition of historical global inequalities, Barry is asking

scholars to reach beyond simplistic – and dualistic – notions of distribution and retribution. In the next section, I outline a theory of transformative justice for media ethicists that is inherently connected to media globalization, borrowing ideas from Amartya Sen.

3 Transformative justice in media ethics

The literature of media ethics has been increasingly interested in justice with most works traceable to Rawls's influential work, *A Theory of Justice* (1971). This work moved justice forward in the agenda of political and economic philosophy; a revival of applied ethics was already under way, and the last few decades have seen a phenomenal expansion of study in all areas of applied ethics, including media, bioethics, climate ethics, health care ethics, and business ethics. This development has resulted in discussions that dissolve the traditional divide between ethics and justice, and connects individual duties with institutional responsibilities. The result has been a renewed interest in global ethics and global justice. Hamelink (2011) argues for a global media that is committed to a notion of global human rights and justice with the understanding that “all people matter”, not just one's own family, community, and parochial well-being. He writes:

After the end of the Second World War international the community made a serious attempt to break through the unsatisfactory state of humanity: through the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it solemnly pledged that the 20th century's unprecedented barbarism would never happen again. This did constitute a crucial moment in contemporary history since the declaration embodied fundamental principles of morality. [...] The most essential notion in the Declaration was “everyone”: nobody was to be excluded from the rights and freedoms in the Declaration. The declaration provided for the right of everyone to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration can be fully realized (27).

The drafters of the declaration gave the world a sense of what global justice could mean: a global society in which all people would matter and enjoy the protection of their dignity. However, Hamelink laments that we have developed media that span the globe, offer instant exposure to local events, and provide unprecedented possibilities for human interactions, but we lack the mental capacity to use them in cooperative, compassionate and communal ways (28). In other words, successful global media networks do not imply a concurrent and parallel commitment to global justice. The media have failed on multiple fronts in addressing issues of global justice, writes Hamelink, in terms of allocating enough material resources and expertise to adequately cover justice and human rights issues, often writing off those calls with excuses of “no demand” (i.e., the global audiences are not interested in watching, reading, or listening to justice-oriented news and stories).

Beyond the failure of global media to position themselves ethically and in a just manner, there is the position that “media is not the issue, justice is the issue”. Gregg (2011), quoting the activist Mylkie Cyril, writes, “Media is not the issue. Justice is the

issue. Media is the infrastructure for how we communicate about the issue of justice” (83). For social justice activists, writes Gregg, tilling in rural communities and small cities on issues such as police brutality, environmental devastation, and access to health care, the media reform movement does not match the urgency to get their stories and perspectives in circulations, and to represent themselves instead of having the challenge of overcoming the distortions of others. This appears to be a narrow argument and a failure to fully understand the significance of global media in one’s day-to-day interpretations of the world. Not demanding a clear justice-oriented media focused on structural and content changes takes away power from activists who want to be heard.

4 Applying Sen’s idea of justice to media

The work of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen is well established and accepted in economics and finance, though he far less known in media studies circles. It is difficult to identify any single aspect of Sen’s work that media and scholars can wholly integrate into their own as directly as they can his idea of justice. Sen’s groundbreaking study on famine and poverty, for which he garnered much international acclaim, is inherently connected to his later scholarship on justice. The idea of entitlements Sen advocated in his study of Indian famine and poverty is the conceptual frontrunner to the idea of capabilities he later developed (Sen 1977, 1983). Traditionally, it was believed that famines occur because of declining food production and supply in the region. Sen’s economic analysis of famines challenged this conventional wisdom and showed that famines occur not mainly due to any significant fall in the supply of food, but because people lose their entitlements and purchasing power to acquire access to food. Referring to the 1943 Bengal famine, in which three million people starved to death, as “entitlement famine”, Sen (1987: 34) posits the cause of that particular famine as a lack of political will and speculative greed that perpetuated and exacerbated the hunger and deprivation people experienced. Sen emphasizes that hunger and deprivation relate not only to food production and availability of food but, more significantly, to the distribution of food and to the economic and political arrangements that directly and indirectly influence people’s capabilities to acquire food and to achieve health and nourishment. Sen (1990) insists on viewing the interconnections between people’s basic economic freedoms, such as living a life without hunger, disease and deprivations on the one hand, and political freedoms, such as freedom of the press, democracy, and political participation on the other hand.

For Sen, any proposal about justice and the criterion by which people should be treated as equals in a society might be assessed from at least three points of view. We can, first and foremost, assess them as a philosophical proposal about what constitutes living well (Sen 1993). The inquiry here is largely focused on whether the proposed criterion – be it based on utilities, primary goods, basic income, capabilities, or virtues,

among others – is the sort of thing we would want our life to be enhanced by. But we can also assess a proposal on justice for its legitimacy as a political objective in the sense of whether or not we, as a political community, would like to realize this possibility through political means and institutions. And finally, we can look at a proposal about justice for the influence it exerts on policy implications – whether it provides accurate measures for designing or evaluating economic and social policies. The distinction between these perspectives need not, however, deny their interrelatedness. If we, for instance, do not think capabilities are important features that enhance human life, we are also less likely to think of them as desirable political objectives that we, as a political community, should strive to realize. The capabilities approach derives its legitimacy as a political ideal from the fact that it seeks to promote citizens' conditions of real freedom such that they are reflected in their capability set. Accordingly, the state as a moral agent ought to create appropriate conditions for the realization of real freedom.

Sen proposes that theories of justice have to accommodate not only the diversity of objects of value that the theory recognizes as significant, but also the type of concerns for which the theory might make room (e.g., the importance of different kinds of equality and liberty). Different kinds of reasons and evaluative concerns – whether offered by an individual or a community – come with the recognition that we can often *prioritize* and order the relative importance of competing considerations. “One implication of this line of reasoning,” writes Sen, “makes room for non-congruent considerations within the body of that broad theory and need not thereby make itself incoherent, or unmanageable, or useless” (2009: 322). Sen argues that it is not an obstruction to a theory of justice that prevents public reason from delivering any finality. Comparative assessments must be made without reference to an overarching final ranking; there will always be an incompleteness due to the intractability of disagreement over values. Such incompleteness, Sen argues, does not preclude us from making comparative judgements about justice. Sen illustrates the plurality of reasons with an example: Take three children and a flute over which the children are quarrelling. Anne claims she should get the flute because she can play it. Bob says it should be given to him because he is poor and has no toys of his own. Carla has spent many months working to make it and argues it should be hers since it is the fruit of her labor. How do we decide which is the most valid claim? Sen’s answer is that we might never reach a final ordering of plural values (117). Consequently, there might not be a clearly identifiable, perfectly just arrangement on which impartial reasoning would converge. However, impartial reasoning does not preclude definite conclusions, which can emerge despite the plurality. The acceptance of an unresolvable diversity of views is, however, a last resort, rather than a first option, since all disagreements first need to be critically examined and assessed. There are multiple variants that influence social prioritizing, but the task here is to recognize social prioritizing as fully functional in acts of decision-making and in enhancing democratic living, even at the grassroots level. “Reasons may sometime compete with each other in persuading us in one direction or another in

a particular assessment,” writes Sen, “and when they yield conflicting judgments, there is an important challenge in determining what credible conclusions can be derived, after considering all arguments” (2009: 394). Public reasoning is not to be understood as an impasse; it is the recognition of different and normative modes of reasoning to arrive at the social choice, and a just one, that is most desirable over multiple others.

The content of public reasoning that underlies the capabilities approach to justice is, for Sen, far more encompassing than the instrumental Rawlsian approach to justice, which would be narrowly considerate of and focused on basic liberties and opportunities that are found in constitutional democratic states. By breaking from the traditional Rawlsian approach, Sen’s public reasoning would *recognize* basic capabilities and prioritize them for policy considerations, while simultaneously keeping in mind that they do not lead to another citizen’s capability deprivation and, thus, lead to further injustices. It also gives a global context to justice, far beyond Rawls’ approach of assuming pre-existing recognitions of liberties and opportunities. In this context, Sen has provided many examples, but his recent example of the spending priorities of the Indian state is particularly illuminating.

Sen strongly critiques the Indian state’s misallocation of public revenues, especially given the enduring nature of India’s inequality based on caste and gender discrimination. The resources available for public spending are expanding fast in India, note Dreze and Sen (2013: 269), because of the exponential growth of India’s GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in the last two decades. This would be a valuable opportunity to make good use of public revenue to enhance living conditions through public service and support for the people, especially the very poor. However, even a cursory analysis of the spending priorities, write Dreze and Sen, has shown no such evidence. For example, Indian Central government subsidies for petroleum and fertilizer alone are expected to cost more than INR 165,000 crores per year in 2013, which is about *four times* what the government spends on health care. The gross imbalance between subsidies provided to large industries and manufacturing groups overshadow the misguided priorities of the state. The media, which ought to be the platform for public reasoning, they write, functions with a remarkable indifference to and “a serious lack of interest in the lives of Indian poor, judging from the balance of news selection and political analyses.” Dreze and Sen elaborate further:

The weakness and often failure of the Indian media to rise to the challenge of India’s problems, including the disparities and inequalities that characterize Indian society, arises mostly from media’s own biases and selective focus – playing up some issues and events while ignoring others. A major part of the bias ultimately relates to the unequal nature of Indian society, which influences what is easy to sell. Rather than confronting it, the media has tended to take the easy course of going along with it – and even humoring it (264).

This is one of the few times that Sen has directly spoken to the role of media either in enhancing economic and political freedoms or perpetuating inequality and injustices.

I suggest that Sen's capabilities approach is fundamental to a theory of transformative justice for global media.

If we acknowledge the reach and power of global media, a theory of transformative justice would go beyond simple unbiased and truthful coverage of events to a coverage that recognizes media's role in transforming individuals and community, identifying – through public reasoning – the capabilities of a society, social and economic priorities rooted in the local *and* global, and a recognition of contextual ethics. There appears to be, on face value, contradictions in these transformative elements of justice. Can one, for instance, ask for prioritizing capabilities rooted in the global but at the same time recognize the contextualization of justice? I believe so. It cannot be denied that persons are situated in different contexts: they are members of different (ethical, legal, political, and moral) communities, in which they are faced with practical questions they must answer with good reason. A theory of justice must begin in intersubjective-practical contexts to reconstruct the different modes of validity and justification according to which autonomous persons act correctly. People must find solutions that work globally. If one were to contextually understand and unpack the significant expansion of India's GDP, one can see that a narrow path to economic and industrial growth has been achieved through burning large amounts of fossil fuel and deforestation, which, in turn, has devastated the environment. India now has five of the top ten most polluted cities in the world. Environmental disaster has displaced people in large numbers and has created havoc for the poor. So, while India's economic stature might rise globally, the quality of life for most Indians is on the decline. The media's role in applying transformative justice could be critical here. Stories can be told from multiple perspectives about the health crisis Indians face, especially considering the rising pollution – India now faces the worst water crisis the country has ever experienced. While these are uniquely and parochially Indian concerns, a story framed in transformative justice would be cognizant of the situation's global dimensions. For example, India's rising GDP is dependent on India's acceptance of neoliberal policies and politics often dictated by multinational companies and financial entities that are uninterested in alleviating poverty, providing better health care, and supplying clean water and food for all. In the following section, I describe and analyze a specific case study from India that points to various opportunities for the use of transformative justice in media practice.

5 Transformative justice in action: Rape coverage in India

On the evening of December 16, 2012, a 23-year-old woman and her male companion boarded a private bus traveling through Delhi, the bustling metropolis and capital of India. On that trip, the woman was raped by a group of men inside the moving

bus as it drove through the city. Battered, naked, and bleeding, she and her male companion were left at the side of a highway in Delhi, where they were found by a passerby. The woman died from her injuries thirteen days later. Six men were arrested and charged in connection with the assault. What was new about this news story? After all, Delhi has frequently been referred to as the rape capital of the world, with 706 rapes reported in 2012, even as activists assert that the majority of rapes go unreported (*The Hindustan Times* 2013). Conviction rates for crimes of sexual violence are near zero – one person was convicted of rape in Delhi in the year 2012; he received a prison sentence of three years, astonishingly light by Western standards. With more than 24,000 reported cases in 2011, rape in India registered a 9.2% rise over the previous year (*International Business Times* 2013). Yet this case brought Delhi to a standstill. On the morning of December 17, 2012, students and activists began to gather at *Jantar Mantar* and India Gate, two major architectural landmarks in Delhi, to protest against police inaction and to demand safety for women. These protests lasted about two weeks; the media coverage of the rape and its aftermath continued over the following two months.

As the global media ecology has changed – Delhi protests were tweeted continuously and by thousands (Poell and Rajagopalan 2015) – India’s media culture has given space to new voices of resistance. These changes include the rise of a politically conscious class that is demanding accountability from its democratically elected representatives and removal of all corruption within the police force and justice system. The media in India is beginning to provide a space where citizens can voice their demands for changes in governance. Sen (2013) acknowledges:

One of the positive consequences of the agitation following the barbaric incident of December 16 has been to draw attention both to the prevalence of sexual brutality and rape in India, and to the failure of the media to report on it seriously, thereby limiting public discussion and the likelihood of social change. Even though Indians buy more newspapers every day than any other nation, the reporting of sexual assaults and sexual harassment had been quite rare in the widely circulated papers. It is, therefore, impressive and encouraging that newspapers in India, smarting from intense criticism of the negligence in their coverage, rapidly reinvented themselves as rape-reporting journals, and many of them have been devoting several pages every day to reports of rapes gathered together from all the different parts of India.

The wall-to-wall media coverage of this particular rape has led to a number of policy changes. In 2013, a parliamentary bill was passed that aimed to better protect women from sexual and gender-based crimes, including sexual harassment, stalking, voyeurism, violence committed with acid or other chemicals, and “disrobing” (Yanks 2015). These laws also expanded previous legal definitions of rape and increased jail time for rapists, the possibility of the death penalty for serial rapists and sexual attacks that end with the victim comatose or dead. However, such policy changes have not impacted the reality of day-to-day life for most women. In 2012, India was ranked as the worst country for women among the G20 countries, when

one took into account women's quality of health, freedom from violence, participation in politics, work place opportunities, access to resources such as education and property rights, and freedom from trafficking and slavery (Pidd 2012). In 2014, Delhi's public transport was ranked fourth most unsafe in the world's largest capitals (*Thomas Foundation Reuters News* 2014). This survey studied gender-friendly urban spaces. Delhi polled second-worst on safety at night for verbal harassment and fifth-worst for physical harassment such as groping and slapping (*Thomas Foundation Reuters News* 2014).

One can argue that the intense – and increased – media coverage of rape could be attributed to a new awareness of sexual violence in the Indian society, but transformative justice in media practices would be more encompassing than simply increasing coverage of rape as individualized or isolated crime. Transformative justice would ask journalists to understand the very nature of female disadvantage in India, which can take many different forms and goes far beyond particular instances of rape. If the lack of safety of and for women is one aspect, the phenomenon of “boy preference” in family decisions is another (Bagchi, Guha, and Sengupta 1998: 11). Boy preference is closely related to the deep-rooted problem of “missing women”, which refers to the shortfall of the actual number of women from the number we would expect to see given the size of the male population, and the female–male ratios that would be expected if gender equity existed in Indian society (Dubbudu 2015). Some suggest that the problem lies not so much in a particularly high incidence of rape, but in the country's inefficient policing, poor security arrangements, slow-moving judicial system, and, ultimately, the callousness of Indian society at large. Recent research has shown that the growth of a neoliberal economy has led to marked differences in the demand for women as a labor force, and that social attitudes concerning gender relations are beginning to change slowly in response to changes in market conditions (Sharma 2008). It is too early to conclude that the large number of educated women entering the Indian workforce has had a dramatic impact on gender relations and filial arrangements, but ongoing media coverage has shown a growing awareness of issues relating to women's rights and safety. At the same time, however, there remains strong evidence that the economic and social options open to women remain significantly fewer than those available to men; going beyond women's well-being, journalists have yet to question either the limited role women play in Indian society or their circumscribed ability to act independently, nor have they yet touched upon how media's initiatives and actions influence the lives of men as well as women, boys as well as girls (Sen 2013).

One positive consequence of the protests following the December 2012 rape is the increased attention both to the prevalence of sexual brutality in Indian society and to the failure of the Indian media to report on it seriously. Still, there also has been criticism that crime and sexual violence against poor and *dalit* (untouchable) women have failed to elicit similar comprehensive media coverage, street protests, or demands for changes in state policies, or to influence judicial outcomes (Rao

2014). Research shows that the majority of the sexual violence in India is perpetrated against *dalit* women, and most of the crime takes place in public spaces – streets, women’s public toilets, and fields – and the perpetrators are predominantly upper-caste landlords. Further, *dalit* women who are victims of crime face greater atrocities of grievous nature (rape, murder, and mutilation) when compared to victims from higher castes. They also have far less access to the legal system. Often they cannot reach a police station in time and so are unable to file a complaint. Poor and *dalit* men and women have not previously been able to mobilize tactics of pressure in domestic and international forums to embarrass and expose the state in the hopes of compelling it to reconsider faulty policies and securing justice for the very poor. Guru and Chakravarty (2005) argued that some *dalit* social movements have formed to fight for human rights issues, such as an end to sexual violence and rape, but such movements often fizzle out. They rarely demand fundamental changes in the core social and economic structures that create poverty and foster a sense of exclusion. A model of journalism focused on transformative justice would critique the very nature of knowledge production to uncover how such exclusion of the marginalized and poor is perpetuated.

Media practices based on transformative justice would not yield a singular focus on a rape case and any problematic judicial outcome thereof, but rather a comprehensive examination of the nature of gender relations. The media could provide comparative and global gender analyses in rebutting culturalist and parochial responses to sexual violence, especially when Indian politicians are heard making statements such as, “It is not Indian culture that women should venture out with men who are not relatives”, “Boys are boys, they make mistakes”, or “Just because the country attained independence at midnight, is it proper for women moving at midnight?” (Rizwan 2015). The media’s role would be to cover stories advocating for gender equity from an early age, including measures that ensure equal access to education, health care, and security, as well as a general, society-wide commitment to the well-being of female children across castes and classes.

I concur with Sen: “The general pursuit of justice might be hard to eradicate in human society, even though we can go about the pursuit in different ways” (2009: 415). Largely adhering to this call, media ethics literature has been replete with analyses of justice theorists such as John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas, and Michael Sandel, but not much attention has been paid to the work of the Indian economist, noble laureate, and philosopher. In developing a notion of transformative justice for media, this chapter reviewed Sen’s capabilities approach and how it can be useful to media scholars and ethicists. Most scholarship on justice focuses on redistributive or retributive justice. While there is now a growing body of literature on social justice focused on social and political change, I propose transformative justice rooted in globalism, given the reach and scope of global media. Transformative justice in media must also reject what Sen (2009: 118) has called “exclusionary neglect in global justice,” where the goal is to reach a border-crossing public framework of

thought where peoples of different nations are not marked only by divisions but also by solidarity. I use the coverage of rape by Indian media as an example to suggest the successes and possible changes that could take place through the use of journalism practices based on transformative justice as a foundational ethical principle guiding democratic media.

Further reading

The philosophical literature on justice is wide ranging and there are clear attempts to integrate justice into studies of media ethics. While one can trace justice, in the Western context, back to Plato's *Republic* and *Nichomachean Ethics*, in the twentieth century, the works of Rawls (1971) and Nussbaum (2001) are important to mention. More recent work of noble laureate and economist Amartya Sen (2009) has critiqued the Eurocentric nature of justice as used by economists such as Smith, Samuelson, and Rawls. Sen borrows much from the early India's Vedic philosophy of *Nyaya* (or justice). In this area the writings of modern-day *nyaya* philosophers such as Chakrabarti (1999) and Radhakrishnan (1967) can be useful. There is a growing body of literature around transformative justice which has been influenced by both Sen and Nussbaum. Works of Vogel and Braswell (2008), Mertens (2008), and Morris (2000) are important, in and outside of media studies. Critical approaches to justice in media ethics has been compiled by Rao and Wasserman (2016).

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17 Principled Advocacy

Abstract: We live in an age of advocacy that is characterized by an omnipresent and persistent environment of persuasion, partisanship, sponsorship, and endorsement. All members of society are engaged in these practices of advocacy in one way or another (professionally, socially, and via social media). Because advocacy has real and significant social and moral consequences (good and bad) for individuals and for every aspect of civic life, it is incumbent on anyone engaged in advocacy and persuasion of any kind (i.e. all of us) to do so ethically. The chapter (based in an applied neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics perspective) identifies and focuses on the moral principles that must be enacted and demonstrated in ethical advocacy. An archetype of a principled advocate (juxtaposed to that of a pathological partisan) is described as a heuristic for gaining ethical insight and for making ethical decisions in advocacy, persuasion, and partisanship. The moral virtues and principles embodied and enacted by an ethical advocate include being truthful, fair, authentic, respectful, transparent, and in being concerned for others and for the good of society.

Keywords: ethics of advocacy, ethics of persuasion, ethics of sponsorship and endorsement, applied neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, ethical responsibility of citizens as advocates, ethics of advocacy in social media, Model of The Principled Advocate and The Pathological Partisan

1 Introduction

Advocacy has real consequences for individuals, and for every aspect of civic life. This chapter, which is based in an applied neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics perspective, focuses on the moral virtues that are required for the practice of principled advocacy, and the vices that are antithetical to it. Virtuous advocates are those who, in the particular practices of advocacy, “reliably [do] the right thing for the right reason” (Appiah 2008: 56). Virtue ethics clarifies the understanding that we simultaneously reveal and shape our characters by what we advocate for, and the ways in which we advocate. The chapter discusses an archetype of a principled advocate that is designed to help guide personal deliberations about one’s own ethics and virtues in the practices of advocacy and partisanship. The chapter begins by addressing the role and pervasiveness of advocacy in society, and the basic elements of the neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics perspective.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-017>

1.1 Functions of advocacy

... efforts at persuasion (advocacy) can serve 'individuals, groups, and society. It can serve badly or well' (Martinson 1996: 44, citing Andersen 1978: 41).

The basic assumption about advocacy taken in this chapter is that it is an important societal function that enhances our personal and collective lives, and that advocacy and persuasion in general are noble enterprises when conducted by virtuous advocates, for worthy causes, with ethical means, and guided by honorable motives and moral principles. Societies and individuals rely on ethical advocacy for many functions, including: democratic discourse and self-governance; the circulation of ideas informing individual and collective decision-making; the advancement of truth, knowledge, and innovation; the facilitation of commerce, and the promotion and provision of goods and services. The caveat, however, is that these positive benefits and outcomes are fragile, and that harm and negative consequences can result if those engaged in the practices of advocacy are unprincipled.

The focus of advocacy ethics is the point at which “partisan and mutual values intersect” (Pearson 1989: 58).¹ “*Mutual* values take into account the viewpoints, interests and rights of others.” *Partisan* values, by comparison, do include virtues such as “commitment, trust, loyalty and obedience;” however, because they can be based on the assumption that the position for which one is advocating is right and correct, they can lead to “excessive partisanship,” and to the belief that “the end justifies the means.” (Pearson 1989: 56–57, summarizing Sullivan 1965a and 1965b, emphasis added.)²

1.2 All citizens are advocates

If the old ‘division of labour in democratic discourse’ between media producers and media consumers is now open to challenge, then our understanding of media ethics also needs to change ... (Couldry 2010: 59, citing Bohman 2000).³

We live in an age of advocacy; an age characterized by an omnipresent, persistent, pervasive environment of persuasion, partisanship, sponsorship, and endorsement in broadcast, print, internet, social media, and private conversations. In addition

¹ See Fitzpatrick and Gauthier (2001) for a discussion of the Pearson article.

² “Advocacy ethics as an area of inquiry arises from a concern about practices of persuasion that operate only on the basis of what is effective in the quest to achieve advocacy objectives, without sufficient regard for the basic moral principles that might be violated, or the people and interests that might be harmed in the process.” (Baker 2009: 115)

³ My appreciation to Patrick Plaisance (2015 and 2016) for bringing to my attention the work of Nick Couldry (2010 and 2013).

to commercial- and issue- advocacy, this is an age in which people are persuaded, through advocacy to particular worldviews, to commit acts of terror against innocent others, and in which partisan political advocacy is sharp and all-pervasive no matter where in the world we might live.⁴ It has become increasingly and glaringly apparent that advocacy has very real large-scale and global consequences, as well as significant impacts on individuals. Given this environment, an open, broad-based societal discussion about the ethics of advocacy is needed.

Watergate in the 1970s was a watershed event that turned attention to the ethics of the legal profession (Jones 1978). Similarly, the practices of banking institutions and major corporations that contributed to the global recession of the early 2000s turned attention to the ethics of the accounting and auditing professions (Jennings 2004; Earley and Kelly 2004). Who should receive similar scrutiny in considering the ethics of advocacy at this moment in time?

Couldry (2010 and 2013) has argued that media and information circulation are being decentered away from media professionals because of the internet and other electronic technologies. He “develops a framework for a media ethics from the point of view of all citizens Media ethics, Couldry emphasizes, needs to be recast for an era when all of us have a stake in responsible media” (Ward and Wasserman 2010: 3).

The same forces that are decentering media production and information dissemination away from professions and toward individuals are working as well to de-center practices of advocacy, persuasion, and partisanship. Discussions about advocacy ethics need to be recast in terms of ethical practices that apply not only to those who operate within defined persuasive professions, but to all citizens, advocates, and partisans. We all are engaged in the practices of advocacy in one way or another, whatever our professional life pursuits. We join advocacy groups, write or forward partisan and sponsored blogs, emails and tweets, in hopes of persuading others to agree with or support our causes, and press friends and family with our views.

I have written before about the ethics of persuasion and advocacy,⁵ but have in the past approached the topic primarily as a matter of applied ethics in the professional practices of public relations, advertising, and marketing. Here I want to emphasize, instead, that while the archetype of The Principled Advocate discussed in this chapter does apply to professional advocates, the model applies as well to anyone who engages in advocacy for any product, service, issue, cause, institution, agenda, proposal, ideology, religion, political position, or candidate.⁶ Recognizing the impact and pervasiveness of advocacy

⁴ As I write this, the campaign for the presidency of the United States is raging (Clinton vs. Trump), with strong partisanship on all sides. Issues relating to advocacy in the form of endorsements (or failures to endorse) are central to much of the political discourse around the election, and are being framed as ethical decisions (or matters of conscience) for voters and supporters.

⁵ Baker 1999a and 1999b, 2002, 2008, 2009; Baker and Martinson 2001.

⁶ This chapter is not intended to address the practices of advocacy in the legal profession., While there are some similarities that are shared with societal and commercial advocacy, the practice of

by citizens and professionals, this chapter discusses the characteristics that are at the core of principled advocacy, the virtues that are embodied by principled advocates, and the ethical standards by which advocacy should be evaluated.

A person's virtues do not exist and are not enacted in a vacuum, but rather in their relationships and interactions with others – in their roles and practices (Johannesen 1996: 300; Abram 2005: 78). MacIntyre (1984) wrote that *practices* provide “the arena in which the virtues are exhibited” (187). This often has been interpreted to relate to the practices of specific professions (Oakley and Cocking 2001; Baker 2008; Borden 2007; Plaisance 2007, 2015 and 2016). However, I am taking in this chapter the broader view of the concept of practices suggested by MacIntyre (2002) when he wrote that “a good human being is one who benefits her or himself and others ... both *qua* human being and also characteristically *qua* the exemplary discharge of particular roles or functions within the context of particular kinds of practice” (MacIntyre 2002: 65). I am assuming here that advocacy is a particular kind of practice, that the virtues proposed in the archetype of The Principled Advocate model discussed in this chapter apply to the practices of advocacy engaged in by any human being – not only professional advocates; that it is incumbent on anyone engaged in advocacy to recognize the social and moral consequences and implications of advocacy, and to embrace and embody ethical virtues and moral principles in doing so.

2 Virtue ethics

It matters, not just what people do, but what they are. (Foot 2001: 48)

... the current renewal of philosophical interest in the virtues is one of the most noteworthy developments in contemporary ethical theory (Oakley and Cocking 2001: 7).

Virtue theory “is the oldest normative tradition in Western Philosophy” having its roots in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, “the earliest and most influential systematic account of virtue theory” (Arjoon 2000: 161).⁷ Interest in virtue ethics declined until the twentieth century when it began to be revived by philosophers and ethicists, such as Alastair MacIntyre (1984), who thought that rule-, duty-, and consequences-based systems (while certainly valuable) did not fully satisfy as an account of the moral

advocacy in the law, which relates to systems of justice, has its own separate and distinct sets of responsibilities, principles, virtues and vices which are not discussed here. (See Baker 1999a; Fitzpatrick and Gauthier 2001, that make this distinction.) A major difference is that “with the legal model as a guideline, the advocate’s loyalties must be with the client, regardless of the perceived rightness or wrongness of the cause” (Edgett 2002: 9, citing Goldman 1980).

⁷ Much of what follows in this chapter relies heavily on my article: Baker, S. (2008). However, there have been substantial changes in the present chapter.

life. These theories overemphasized autonomy, overlooked the communal context of ethics (Pojman 2006: 159), and neglected “spiritual qualities” such as self-respect, sympathy, and aspiring to become a certain kind of person (Pojman 2005: 170). Consequently, “virtue ethics has reasserted itself as offering something that captures the essence of the moral point of view” (Pojman 2006: 160), and there has in recent decades been a rising tide of calls appealing for an embrace of virtue ethics theory in moral philosophy (Foot 1997 and 2001; Hursthouse 2001; MacIntyre 1984; Slote 2000). More recently, there also has been a call to virtue ethics specifically to inform ethical practices in media, communications, and advocacy (Baker 2008 and 2009; Borden 2007; Couldry 2010 and 2013; Fawkes 2015; Plaisance 2015 and 2016).⁸

2.1 Elements of contemporary (Neo-Aristotelian) virtue ethics

It is in the concept of a virtue that in so far as someone possesses it, his actions are good; which is to say that he acts well. Virtues bring it about that one who has them acts well ... (Foot 2001: 12).

No interesting version of virtue ethics holds that doing the right thing is all that matters; we should want to be the kind of person who does the right thing for the right reasons Virtue ethics grasps something important – that being and doing both matter to human life ... (Appiah 2008, pp. 47; 64).

Several basic concepts in contemporary virtue ethics⁹ that are central to the ethics of advocacy are briefly discussed below: good will, character, virtue and vice, being and becoming virtuous, humility, and care and concern for fellow humans and the common good. These elements are then applied to advocacy ethics.

2.1.1 Good will

The underlying basis of virtue ethics is good will. Foot (1997) wrote that “... it is the will that is good in a man of virtue ... the disposition of the heart is part of virtue” (Foot

⁸ Several scholars recently also have discussed the relationship between virtue ethics and other ways of knowing. Fawkes (2015) invokes a Jungian perspective in understanding the complexity of ethical decision-making in the practices of PR; (Appiah 2008) discusses the findings of experimental psychology; similarly Abram (2005) and Plaisance (2015 and 2016) emphasize moral psychology and moral development. These authors suggest that these other perspectives complement virtue ethics because science is now able to tell us more about the ways in which people actually think, make decisions, and develop morally; or conversely, that virtue ethics supplement the deficiencies in these other views (Abram 2005: 77). ⁹ It is outside of the scope of this paper to make distinctions between Aristotelian virtue ethics, and contemporary virtue or neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. Hursthouse (2001) wrote that “it must be emphasized that those who espouse virtue ethics nowadays do not regard themselves as committed to any of the lamentable, parochial details of Aristotle’s moral philosophy ” (2).

1997, 165–166). “The root notion is that of the goodness of human beings in respect of their actions; ... Kant was perfectly right in saying that moral goodness was goodness of the will” (Foot 2001: 14).

2.1.2 Character

Virtue ethics also is known as character ethics. For virtue ethics, the central question is “What sort of person should I become?” (Pojman 2006: 156). Virtue ethics emphasizes spiritual qualities as the basis of action; qualities such as “gratitude, self-respect, sympathy, having one’s emotions in proper order, and aspiring to become a certain kind of person” (158). It emphasizes “good habits, self-control, courage, and character, without which the ethical life is impossible” (p. 160). In virtue ethics, then, while it is important to do the right thing – it also is important to have the right dispositions, motivations, and emotions (Pojman 2006: 160).

2.1.3 Virtue and vice

Virtue ethics is the arena of the virtues and the vices (MacIntyre 1984: 168). “No account of morality is complete without an account of virtue and vice” (Gert 1998: 277). Virtues and vices are traits of character that we seek either to develop or to discourage (Meilander 1984: xi). Virtues are beneficial in that “human beings do not get on well without them” (Foot 1978: 2). They benefit both those who have them and other people as well. Vices, or moral failings, harm both those who have them, and others (Foot 1978: 2–3). Hursthouse (2001) argued that the virtues are more than character traits; they are excellences of character (12). By extension, a vice is a weakness, inferiority, or lack of nobility of character. The dichotomy or contrast between virtue and vice is a central concept in virtue ethics. Gert (1998) noted that a moral virtue is “any character trait that involves justifiably obeying the moral rules or justifiably following the moral ideals”; and a moral vice is “any character trait that involves unjustifiably violating the moral rules or that involves failing to follow the moral ideals when this can be done justifiably” (285). The moral virtues and vices lie on a single scale; as “a person moves away from one end of the scale, she necessarily moves toward the other” (Gert 1998: 284).

2.1.4 Being and becoming virtuous

“Virtue ethics focuses on the individual virtues ... that are essential for moral growth which characterize a well-developed human being” (Abram 2005: 78). Virtue ethics emphasizes both *being* a person who embodies and enacts the virtues, but also

becoming that person. “We can’t be content with knowing what kind of people we are; it matters, too, what kind of people we hope to be” (Appiah 2008: 72). Both virtues and vices gradually may be learned and developed through habits of behavior or repetitive practice (Arjoon 2000: 162; Fitzpatrick and Gauthier 2001: 208). There is a circular, reciprocal relationship between development of the virtues and moral behavior in that one must act morally in order to have the moral virtues (Gert 1998: 347); while at the same time the moral virtues or “trained behavioral dispositions result in habitual acts” (Pojman 2006: 160). However, “virtue is not a habit” (Pinckaers and Gilligan 1962: 66) in the sense of tedious routine that would weaken and destroy the moral and spiritual value of the human act (81). Rather, virtue gives one “the ability to create the best possible human acts in the moral sphere [Virtue] “is a power for innovation and renewal” (Pinckaers and Gilligan 1962: 81).

The same relationship exists between vices and habitual actions. Once acquired, the virtues and vices are “strongly entrenched” (Hursthouse 2001: 12). “To make a moral mistake too often, even to do it deliberately ... may gradually engage the will” (Meilander 1984: 9).

Abram (2005) wrote: “The process of moral development starts at the point of ‘who we are’ and leads to the point of ‘who we ought to become’”: “Virtue ethics is ... concerned with self-transcendence ... with the movement from the self as at present to the self in the future A person is able to shape his or her future by becoming the kind of person he or she wants to become, because he or she has worked out his or her ideal moral self (who he or she ought to become). Virtue ethics concentrates primarily on the future of the moral agent (Abram 2005: 84).

2.1.5 Humility

The virtues and the vices both are related to perspective on life, and to our assumptions about our relationships with and obligations to others. Gert (1998) wrote that humility “is the ground of moral impartiality and as such may be the foundation of all the moral virtues” (Gert 1998: 306). Arrogance, the opposite of humility, is the view that one is exempt from the moral requirements to which others are subject (306). The vice of arrogance or hubris results in treating others with impropriety, incivility, and disrespect. Plaisance (2015) wrote about the “recurring humility-hubris dichotomy” (146), noting that to the “classical Greek philosophers” ... humility’s role in human affairs was so obvious that it was considered to be a starting point for the virtuous life, not an end in itself.” (Plaisance 2015: 146)

2.1.6 Care and concern for fellow humans and the common good

Slote (2000) wrote that “an agent-based ethic of caring is the most promising form of contemporary virtue ethics” (331–332). It “mandates a ground floor of humane concern for

all of one's fellow humans" (345).¹⁰ Arjoon (2000) wrote that "one cannot properly talk about the theory of virtue without reference to ... the common good" (166). While there seems to be a tension between one's own self-interest and a concern for the common good, MacIntyre (2002) discussed the "inadequacy of any simple classification of desires as either egoistic or altruistic" (119), and that "the achievement of one's individual good is understood to be inseparable from the achievement of the common good" (113). As he explained, "the virtues enable us to view ourselves and others and our relationship to others, as actual or potential members of some network of giving and receiving" (MacIntyre 2002: 160). "To call an action 'wrong' outside some technical context is to imply that it is unjust, or perhaps uncharitable; that it has to do with conduct whose defect lies in what is done against other individuals or against the public good" (Foot 2001: 69).

3 Why we need the virtues

Foot (1997) wrote that "virtues are in general beneficial characteristics, and indeed ones that a human being needs to have, for his own sake and that of his fellows" (165). "Anyone who thinks about it can see that for human beings the teaching and following of morality is something necessary. We can't get on without it" (Foot 2001: 16–17). Virtues are motivationally indispensable in providing the dispositions that generate right action (Pojman 2006: 168). They also are "constitutive of what human flourishing is" (Pojman 2006: 172). The virtues make life worth living, help human beings achieve happiness and fare better in life, and allow them to thrive and attain their highest potentialities (Meilaender 1984: 11; Rachels 1998: 675; Neher and Sandin 2007: 18). Virtues allow humans to treat others with care and respect and to prevent causing harm to others (Gert 1998: 344–348).

3.1 Virtue-based decision making

Hursthouse (2001) approached the ways in which the virtues are action-guiding by discussing two concepts – "v-rules," and appeals to moral exemplars.¹¹ With regard

10 While this account of Virtue Ethics (VE) embraces the concerns of Care Ethics (CE), care ethicists do not necessarily agree that the two theories should be conflated. (See Noddings 1984: 96–97; Tong 1998; and Sander-Staudt 2006, as a portal to this literature.) It is beyond the scope of this chapter, which is based in contemporary VE, to consider this issue. The point here is that the virtue of care is recognized by contemporary virtue ethicists as fundamental to the virtue ethics perspective. The virtue of care is therefore incorporated into the profile of The Principled Advocate discussed in this chapter, but the model does not claim to simultaneously incorporate the full theory of Care Ethics.

11 To embrace virtue ethics is not to discard a concern for rules, duties, or consequences See Pojman (2006: 157–176) and MacIntyre (2002: 93–111).

to v-rules, Hursthouse (1999) noted that the virtue approach can be action-guiding in that each virtue generates a prescription (“do what is honest, charitable, generous”) and that each vice generates a prohibition (“do not do what is dishonest, uncharitable, mean”) (Hursthouse 1999: 36–37).¹² With regard to moral exemplars as action guides, Hursthouse wrote that if we are unclear about what a virtuous agent would do in a particular circumstance, “the obvious thing is to go and ask one” (35).¹³ This is far from being a trivial point, for it gives a straightforward explanation of an important aspect of our moral life: namely, the fact that we do not always act as autonomous, utterly self-determining agents, but quite often seek moral guidance from people we think are morally better than ourselves. The notion of “becoming” and of creating a narrative unity or coherence in one’s life is another tool by which the virtue perspective provides guidance for action. We would ask ourselves how a contemplated action fits our life story; “Does it lend integrity to us, or does it threaten our integrity?” (Lebacqz 1985: 85); does it help us become a person we would want to emulate? “When confronted with a difficult ethical dilemma, we can ask not merely, Is this the right thing to do? But, which act has the most integrity in terms of the kind of person I want to become?” (85–86).¹⁴

3.2 Ideal types and moral exemplars

As indicated above, inherent in the virtue ethics perspective is the concept of persons who represent the embodiment of the virtues: ideal persons, ideal types, moral exemplars, or moral heroes. “Most of us learn by watching others and imitating them; this is a hallmark of virtue ethics These are role models, who teach us all what it is to be moral by example, not by precept. Their lives inspire us to live better lives, to be better people” (Pojman 2005: 163 166). An ethical course of action in any given situation may be decided by asking questions such as, “What would the person of exemplary character do in this circumstance?” (Neher and Sandin 2007: 17); or “I feel inclined to do X, but would (my conception of) the ideal ... do X?” (Quinn 2007: 181). Moral exemplars or role models do not need to be living persons. One might appeal, instead, to moral exemplars from the past, from literature, or from popular culture. One might also appeal to one’s conception of an ideal type, or an archetype, that represents the commendable virtues in particular roles or facets of life. The profile of *The Principled Advocate* (discussed below) is intended to represent such an ideal type in the virtues and practices of advocacy.

¹² See Appiah 2008: 63 on Hursthouse’s discussion of moral rules and principles as action guides.

¹³ See Plaisance 2015, in which living exemplars in professional communications are identified.

¹⁴ MacIntyre (1984) also wrote about the ways in which a virtue perspective can be action-guiding. He held that we are the authors of the narratives of our own lives (215; 222–223), and that the virtues are components of the narrative unity of life (205).

(Practices of advocacy also can be checked against the negative cautionary profile – the anti-exemplar--the archetype of The Pathological Partisan, discussed below.)

4 Virtues and vices in advocacy

The morality of persuasive acts should be judged on the end sought by the message and [by] the means used to achieve that persuasion (Edgett 2002: 7, citing Miller 1989).

The discussion turns now, at last, to identifying the virtues and vices in advocates and in the practices of advocacy. Many scholars and philosophers have addressed this issue from the viewpoint of moral philosophy, and have compiled and discussed lists of the virtues, dispositions, and behaviors necessary for ethical persuasion.¹⁵ Rather than repeating those accounts, however, I will employ here a different method by which to gain insight into the characteristics and dispositions of principled advocates and advocacy – that of contemplating the lived human experience with advocacy. Foot wrote that “... human understanding is not anything hard to come by. We all know enough to say, ‘How could we get on without justice?’, ‘Where would we be if no one helped anyone else?’” (Foot 2001: 16). One might say, as well, that anyone who has experienced the virtues and/or vices of advocacy can rely on their own human understanding to recognize and identify them. Foot, who sees “vice as a form of natural defect” (Foot 2001: 17), has written that “the virtues ... are *corrective*, each one standing at a point at which there is some temptation to be resisted or deficiency to motivation to be made good. As Aristotle put it, virtues are about what is difficult for men ...” (Foot 1997: 169):

[O]ne may say that it is only because fear and the desire for pleasure often operate as temptations that courage and temperance exist as virtues at all As with courage and temperance so with many other virtues: there is, for instance, a virtue of industriousness only because idleness is a temptation; and of humility only because men tend to think too well of themselves (Foot 1997: 170).

Using Foot’s insights that virtues should be seen as “correctives,” and that virtue “rectifies, that is, *makes good*” the vices (Foot 2001: 12, emphasis added), perhaps the best way to identify the *virtues* in advocacy is to apply the time-honored test of reversibility (or the Golden Rule) (Edgett 2002: 17);¹⁶ to look to our own experience on the receiving end of

¹⁵ See, for example: Plaisance 2015; Baker 2008; Edgett 2002; Fitzpatrick and Gauthier 2001; Martinson 1996; and all of the others cited in these works who have given thought to this issue.

¹⁶ “The principle of reversibility may be stated many ways, but at its most succinct, it follows the adage, ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you ... communicate with others as you would have them communicate with you.’ The concept of treating others as one would one’s self is not restricted to religious teachings. It also has foundation in classical philosophy, such as the writings of Immanuel Kant. This eighteenth century philosopher argued that individuals should be treated as

advocacy, and to ask ourselves – what are the *vices* in advocates and in the practices of advocacy that need correctives? (What do we perceive to be vices when advocates set out to persuade us personally? What vices do we *not* want advocates to embody or enact in their communications to us? What advocacy practices seem to violate us?) Most probably would agree that we do not want advocates to treat us with disrespect or disregard in the process of persuading us. As Foot has written, “... disrespect and untrustworthiness are bad human dispositions. It matters in a human community that people can trust each other, and matters even more that at some basic level humans should have mutual respect” (Foot 2001: 48). We do not want to be lied to, or to have information withheld from us that we genuinely need to inform our correct understanding of the truth, and by which to make important decisions about our lives. We do not want advocates to persuade us to actions, viewpoints, or proposals in which they themselves do not genuinely believe – that they would not sincerely recommend to their own family or friends. We do not want advocates to deliver persuasive messages that are untrue, unfair, or misleading in their content, or unfair in the methods by which they are delivered. We do not want advocates’ loyalties to *their* particular favorite causes, or to *their* desires to achieve particular outcomes, to be considered a justification for using artifice to manipulate *us* – *our* thoughts, decisions, and actions. We do not want to be influenced, personally or collectively, by advocates who act only in their own raw self-interest,¹⁷ who fail to consider the legitimate needs of ourselves and others, and who exempt themselves from moral responsibility to the common good, and to the betterment of society.

Now, having identified the vices, we must consider the virtue side of the human disposition as represented in advocacy, inasmuch as the virtues, according to Foot (2001) “rectify[y]” and “*make good*” the vices, and are necessary to keep the vices in “check” (Foot 1997: 170). Applying the test of reversibility as the method by which to identify advocacy virtues, as we did with the vices, we might ask ourselves, based upon our own experience – what are the characteristics, dispositions, and practices that we have observed in the ethical and principled advocates that we admire and find trustworthy? Most would probably agree that principled advocates treat us with respect in the

‘ends,’ not simply as means toward someone else’s ends (Kant 1785/1976: 47, 429). This principle was encapsulated in Kant’s ‘practical imperative’: ‘Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only’ (Kant 1785/1976: 47, 429). This type of respect for individuals would naturally lead to treatment of others as one would like to be treated this imperative would translate into taking only those actions of which practitioners [or advocates] would be willing to be on the receiving end.” (Edgett 2002: 17)

17 Note that this vice emphasizes “raw” self-interest. As I have noted elsewhere (Baker 2009), raw self-interest (or unfettered egoism) that is achieved with disregard for the interests of others is not an injunction against legitimate self-interest. As Foot noted in her book *Natural Goodness* (2001), “... if the virtues nowadays thought of especially worthy to be called moral virtues ... are ‘Aristotelian necessities’ for human beings, so too is a reasonable modicum of self-interest, if only because, once grown, we can look out for ourselves much better than anyone else can do it for us” (17).

process of their efforts to persuade us. They provide truthful information, and are open and transparent in providing the information we reasonably need, and in identifying the sources and sponsors of their advocacy messages. They deliver persuasive messages that are fair, just, and equitable in content and in the methods by which they are delivered. Virtuous advocates attempt to persuade us only to actions, viewpoints, or proposals in which they themselves genuinely believe – that they would sincerely recommend to their own family or friends. Principled advocates care about us to the extent that they recognize their basic moral responsibilities to us, to others, and to the common good; and they recognize and respond to our rights to self-determination free of manipulation.

5 The model of the principled advocate and the pathological partisan

With the above overview of the basic elements of contemporary virtue ethics as a background and context, Table 1 represents a binary model of oppositional traits of virtues and vices in advocacy. It is a virtue/vice-based construct of conflicting or diametrically opposed archetypes of advocates and advocacy called The Model of The Principled Advocate and The Pathological Partisan – the former representing the embodiment of advocacy virtues, and the latter representing the embodiment of opposing vices.¹⁸ The critical and significant essence of this model is its graphic opposition of the antithetical virtues and vices, and its thesis that by enacting or living habitually in accordance with the virtues or the vices, one moves toward becoming either a Principled Advocate or a Pathological Partisan. While the model has strong poles or extremes, it also is designed as a continuum, acknowledging that there may be stages between the virtues and vices in practice and that individual advocates may not be fully characterized by one end of the pole or the other.

5.1 The principled advocate

The model states that a Principled Advocate advocates for noble (or morally justifiable) causes with moral virtue, and with principled motives and means.¹⁹ He or she

18 The model of the archetypes of principled advocates and pathological partisans discussed in this chapter was first introduced in Baker 2008. It is reintroduced here, together with the discussion that originally accompanied and explained it, with changes and literature updates.

19 This definition takes the position (not discussed further in this article) that one cannot be a Principled Advocate in promoting a cause that is not morally justifiable. (See Baker 1999a and 1999b for a critique of the idea that all causes, however venal, deserve advocacy in the marketplace of ideas.)

Table 1: The model of the Principled Advocate and the Pathological Partisan¹: A virtue ethics construct of opposing archetypes of advocates and advocacy

Principled Advocate	Pathological Partisan
Advocates for noble (morally justifiable) causes with moral vision and virtue, principled motives and means. As one habitually enacts the virtues in practice, one <i>becomes</i> a Principled Advocate.	Abandons moral vision, virtues, principles, and values in support of a cause. As one habitually enacts the vices in practice, one <i>becomes</i> a Pathological Partisan.
Virtues ← -----	----- → Vices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Humility (acknowledges one’s moral responsibility) – Truthfulness – Transparency (openness) – Respect (for others’ right to self-determination) – Care and concern (for fellow humans) – Authenticity – Equity (messages or means of delivery in advocacy are fair) – Social Responsibility (for the common good) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Arrogance (exempts oneself from moral responsibility) – Deceitfulness – Secrecy (opacity) – Manipulation (of others for one’s own ends) – Disregard (for others and for harm to others) – Artifice – Injustice (messages or means of delivery in advocacy are unfair) – Raw Self-Interest (to the detriment of others)

Note: ¹The model is a continuum. “The virtues and the vices are such that as a person moves away from one end of the scale, she necessarily moves toward the other” (Gert 1998: 284). The virtues and vices generate “v-rules.” Each virtue generates a prescription (“be truthful”); each vice generates a prohibition (“do not deceive”) (Hursthouse 1999: 36.) One should ask oneself: “What kind of person will I become if I do this?” or “How will this action affect and reflect my character?”

embodies and enacts the virtues of humility, truth, transparency, respect, and concern for others, authenticity, equity, and social responsibility. The model asserts that one who embodies the virtues and enacts them in one’s roles and practices of advocacy not only deals with others ethically, but also becomes a Principled Advocate.

5.2 The pathological partisan

The term “pathological partisan” is adopted from the philosopher Sissela Bok (1988). In a televised interview with Bill Moyers, Bok asserted that the noble virtue of loyalty, taken to an extreme, becomes the vice of pathological partisanship. She explained that partisanship can mean two things – admirable loyalty to a cause, or the abandonment of judgment for the sake of a cause. She said the first can turn very easily into the second (Bok 1988). Bok talked about the tendency we have when we are deeply involved in a cause to think that it is acceptable to lie to those who are not members of our cause – and to do whatever else it takes to achieve our objectives. This is when a loyalist’s zeal causes him to abandon moral judgment, to set aside his values and

principles, and to become a Pathological Partisan who uses his loyalty as a justification to condone abuses in the name of his cause. Bok emphasized that we must hold to moral principles, even when we are dealing with people outside of our group or our particular loyalty. She said Pathological Partisans “blind themselves to the kind of harm they are doing to those on the outside” of their cause (Bok 1988).

The model (Table 1) asserts that one who embodies the vices and enacts them in one’s roles and practices of advocacy not only causes harm to others, but also becomes a Pathological Partisan. This polar opposite of The Principled Advocate embodies vices that are antithetical to the virtues of The Principled Advocate; the vices of arrogance, deceit, secrecy, manipulation, disregard for others, artifice, injustice, and raw self-interest, even to the detriment of others. Pathological Partisans embodying these vices would advocate for causes that they did not necessarily admire or believe in – and perhaps even for a cause that they genuinely opposed. Their basic guiding principles would be simple utility or effectiveness in achieving desired ends, thus leading to the mentality that the ends justify the means, however venal.

6 The principled advocate archetype as heuristic, moral exemplar, and character check

Appiah (2008) discussed moral heuristics that provide “fast and frugal” ways of getting an answer to what we should do (p. 53). “We imperfect creatures should follow rules that we can actually live by and that will lead us to do as often as possible what someone who was ... perfect would do” (p. 53). The Model of The Principled Advocate and The Pathological Partisan – with its clear delineation of virtues to be embraced, and vices to be shunned – can function as such a heuristic. These virtue-vice profiles can serve as “regulative ideals” (Quinn 2007),²⁰ or as ready tools for self-evaluation and self-correction. The model represents an ideal type or moral exemplar, thus serving as a reference point to which one can appeal mentally when making an ethical decision (as in asking oneself “What would a Principled Advocate do?”). The model suggests, as well, that advocates should ask themselves questions that go directly to the heart of the virtue ethics perspective with its focus on

²⁰ Quinn (2007) discusses this process through the concept of the “regulative ideal” (179–181) with relation to journalists. But it can be applied as well to advocates using the Model of The Principled Advocate and The Pathological Partisan. He wrote: “Again, any reference to the ideal journalist – whether real or imagined – does not imply a perfect journalist, free of flaws or error, but rather a journalist one would consider excellent because of a range of realistic professional qualities that person possesses ... that is, he might think to himself: ‘I feel inclined to do X, but would (my conception of) the ideal journalist do X?’ By no means does this guarantee one will act rightly, but it is, in essence, an activity that promotes moral growth through reflection and experience” (180–181).

“being” rather than “doing,” as in: “What kind of person will I *become* if I do this?” or “How will this action affect and reflect my character?” It represents the virtue ethics perspective that “despite the limits of the world in which one lives, one is still able to shape responsibly the image of the person one ought to become” (Abram 2005: 78).²¹

7 Conclusion

We all are advocates and communicators, and as such we need to be aware of and responsible with our influence and power. The information we disseminate (or withhold), and the views we promote, “have the power to inform (or misinform) individuals and the public, to shape their assumptions about truth and reality, and to influence their decision-making, spending, attitudes, votes, choices, behaviors, and life-styles” (Baker 2009: 127). Indeed, advocacy can change the world, for better or for worse. “Virtue ethics tells us that, if we want to live in a morally right way, we not only need to develop our reasoning skills, shape our identity and realize relational nature. We, also, and most of all, need to act intelligibly and promote the moral good” (Abram 2005: 78).

Further reading

The chapter asserts that we live in an age of advocacy that is characterized by an omnipresent and persistent environment of persuasion, partisanship, sponsorship, and endorsement, and that all members of society are engaged in these practices of advocacy in one way or another (professionally, socially, and via social media). Recognizing that advocacy has real and significant consequences (good and bad) for individuals, and for every aspect of civic life, the chapter (based in an applied neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics perspective) focuses on the moral virtues that are required for the practice of principled advocacy, and the vices that are antithetical to it. It asserts that it is incumbent on anyone engaged in advocacy and persuasion (i.e. all of

²¹ “People around us are disposed to respond to those who disobey ... moral norms [such as truth-telling and keeping promises] with resentment and criticism; we ourselves are disposed to respond to their assessments with embarrassment and shame. We are equipped with a psychology apt for friendship and with the desire to be well thought of by our friends. These facts about us and about our environment, banal and familiar as they are, seem to be exactly the sorts of things that might guide us in constructing rules for proceeding, even if we cannot do what the virtuous person would do simply by making ourselves virtuous.” (Appiah 2008: 56–57)

us) to recognize the social and moral consequences of advocacy, and to embrace and embody ethical virtues and moral principles in doing so.

For discussions relating to the societal functions of advocacy, see Andersen (1978), Martinson (1996), Pearson (1989), Sullivan (1965 a&b). For the concept that all citizens are advocates, see Bohman (2000), Couldry (2010, 2013), and Ward & Wasserman (2010).

For discussions about virtue and vice, see Abram (2005), Appiah (2008), Arjoon (2000), Baker (2008, 2009), Borden (2007), Couldry (2010, 2013), Edgett (2002), Fawkes (2015), Fitzpatrick & Gauthier (2001), Foot (1978, 1997, 2001), Gert (1998), Hursthouse (1999, 2001), Johannesen (1996), MacIntyre (1984, 2002), Meilander (1984), Neher & Sandin (2007), Oakley & Cocking (2001), Pinckaers & Gilligan (1962), Plaisance (2015, 2016), Pojman (2005, 2006), Rachels (1998), and Slote (2000).

For the ways in which the virtues inform decision-making and are clearly action-guiding, see Abram (2005), Hursthouse (1999, 2001), Lebacqz (1985), Neher & Sandin (2007), Pojman (2005), and Quinn (2007).

For virtues and vices specific to advocacy and persuasion, see Baker (1999 a&b, 2002, 2008, 2009), Baker and Martinson (2001), Bok (1988), and Edgett (2002).

The works suggested here relating to principled advocacy all provide extensive citations of their own that will direct readers to an extensive body of literature on this topic.

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18 Morality in Entertainment

Abstract: Media entertainment, while often staged, artificial, unrealistic, fictional, or distant from everyday life, generates and perpetuates moral configurations. How good and bad conduct is portrayed in media, constitutes the “moral imaginary” of entertainment and matters for potential effects on audiences. This chapter reviews research on the moral content of entertainment media, with a specific focus on narratives and television. Stories are often not intended to be moral educators; nonetheless, they show good and bad behavior and characters as well as the enforcement and sanction of norms. The chapter synthesizes studies that explore values, prosocial behaviors and ethical discourse in entertainment and reports research about norm violations and moral transgressions in television content and their narrative context (such as motivation, justification and punishment). The potential for effects on moral thinking and ethical reflection are discussed as well as the recent development in television entertainment that characters and plots become morally ambivalent and complex.

Keywords: media entertainment, moral content, norms, values, moral transgressions, norm violations, narrative context, content analysis.

On the surface, media entertainment is a space clearly set apart from actual life. Often, its characters, plots and situations are staged, artificial, unrealistic, fictional, or simply distant from everyday life. Nonetheless, entertainment generates and perpetuates moral configurations. This is especially true for entertainment that contains some form of story (defined as representations of events and inner states of characters, see Bilandzic and Busselle 2017). While music, sports and games are popular, stories, the “undisputed ‘main course’ of media entertainment” (Zillmann and Vorderer 2000: 1), have the most obvious and urgent moral weight, as they show and simulate social situations. Stories are often not intended to be moral educators; nonetheless, they show good and bad behavior and characters as well as the enforcement and sanction of norms. Stories have long served as vehicles of moral display and education, for example in tales, myths or religious books (e.g., Gottschall 2012). It is in this sense that – despite all differences to the actual world – entertainment is intertwined with everyday life (cf. for media in general: Silverstone 2007).

This chapter reviews research on the moral content of entertainment media. Morality is defined as a system of beliefs, values and underlying judgments about the rightness and wrongness of human behavior (Gert 2004). It is composed of social norms and rules of behavior negotiated in interaction with others, and shaped and

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-018>

upheld by mutual expectations – ultimately the “building blocks of social order” (Young 2015: 359). Based on this terminology, moral content or moral messages in media entertainment are implications of media portrayals about right and wrong behavior.

This chapter specifically focuses on television as the “narrative medium” (Krijnen and Verboord 2016: 2) or “primary storyteller” (Morgan, Shanahan and Signorielli, 2009: 41). According to Dant (2012), television can be considered “the prime medium for sharing morality and dispersing the mores,” creating “a ‘moral imaginary’, a repository of ideas about the possible ways of living in the world” (Dant 2012: 2).

1 Perspectives on morality in entertainment

From the very beginning of the discussion about the morality of entertainment, the quintessential question has been whether portrayals of moral behavior and their social implications are functional or dysfunctional for individuals and society. The tension between these two options is reflected in the discussion of moral panics. Moral panics are social constructions, in which an existing threat is exaggerated and blown up in its perception and articulation (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts 1978) and “rhetorically framed and circulated by a media that has the power to portray events” (Tavener 2000: 68). Moral threats disrupt and challenge social order; through the subsequent orchestration of the moral panic, moral equilibrium and order are restored (Tavener 2000). Moral panics function in a similar way as scandals, which Jacobsson and Lofmarck (2008) describe as motors of moral positioning and re-calibration of moral order. Essentially, this means that moral order *needs* the moral disruption to maintain itself. Mirroring this tension between disruption and confirmation, the investigation of moral content in entertainment is driven forward on two separate levels, which may often have dramatically different implications for the audience’s perceptions and reactions. On the first level, researchers have looked at *positive expressions of morality*, that is, plots and characters that show virtuous behavior, represent moral values and display a morally good personality. On the other hand, researchers have investigated *negative expressions of morality*, that is, norm violations and social transgressions (e.g., violence and aggression). While transgressions as such demonstrate violations of moral order, their presentation in entertainment media is sometimes functional in the way that moral panics and scandals are, when transgressions are ultimately punished. These two levels – positive and negative expressions of morality – are interdependent in media entertainment; however, research on morality has either taken one path or the other, and this chapter will adopt this structure to review the relevant research.

2 Positive expressions of morality in entertainment

2.1 Values

Positive expressions of morality are most clearly and directly indicated by studies that investigate values contained in media entertainment. Values, in a common definition by Rokeach (1970: 124), are conceptualized as “a type of belief [...] about how one ought or ought not to behave [...]. Values are thus abstract ideals, positive or negative, not tied to any specific attitude, object or situation, representing a person’s belief about ideal modes of conduct and ideal terminal goals.” Selnow (1990) investigated values in a sample of prime-time American television addressed in events, behaviors or verbal references. The author used a list of values representing core beliefs about good character and citizenship in a pluralistic society. The values are divided into personal values (such as personal integrity, sense of justice, pride and respect) and citizenship values (patriotism, respect for legal authority, independent courts). In all, personal values make up the vast majority of all values on television, while citizenship values only account for only 3.5%. Among personal values, compassion for others is most frequently portrayed, followed by courage to express one’s conviction, sense of duty and pride and respect.

Values can be aggregated to maxims about how one should behave. Selnow (1986) investigated the resolutions of subplots in prime time serial fiction and found that 85% of the subplots were ended with one of the following resolutions: “Truth wins out/honesty is the best policy,” “Hard work yields rewards,” “Ingenuity finds a solution” and “Good wins out over evil.”

Mastro, Enriquez, Bowman, Prabhu, and Tamborini (2013) report two unpublished studies (Tamborini, Enriquez, Lewis, Grizzard and Mastro 2011 and Mastro et al. 2011, both cited in Mastro et al. 2013) that examine five universal moral domains (adapted from the social intuitionist approach by Haidt and Joseph 2008) in a sample of afternoon soap operas and telenovelas for English and Spanish speaking audiences. Results show that the moral domains of *care/harm* and *ingroup/loyalty* were more salient in the English-speaking program, while *fairness/reciprocity*, *purity/sanctity* and *authority/respect* were more common in the Spanish-speaking shows. Characters in Spanish-speaking shows were portrayed as more moral, and were shown more often to obey to authority and respect fairness rules. The authors conclude that possibly “Spanish-language telenovelas reflect a subset of Latino cultural values that place importance on formality, deference and pioussness” (Mastro et al. 2013: 83).

To develop a comprehensive, empirically grounded map of (positive) television morality, Daalmans, Hijmans, and Wester (2014) analyzed one night of prime time Dutch television. Morality is understood as “(societal) guideline for action based on principles of good, bad and desirable. [...] It is visible and recognizable in the actions of individuals, and more specifically the following evaluations and judgments about this

conduct by others as part of a moral community” (p. 188). With a qualitative analysis, the authors identify distinct moral profiles in three content clusters. In the *news/information cluster*, moral issues revolve around the common good and highlight transgressions in the public sphere. Here, moral themes are: “Honor should be cherished and defended” and “Informed citizenship is the key to democracy.” In the *entertainment and reality cluster* (composed of programs like documentaries, talk shows, quizzes, make-over-programs) morality issues range from public safety, justice, consumer trust to socially deviant behavior and traditional family values. Moral themes for this cluster are “Consumption leads to the good life,” “Kindness, solidarity and civility are the glue that holds society together” and “you should play by the rules of the game.” The *fictional program cluster* focuses on individuals, their actions as well as their justifications and evaluations. The sole moral theme was “Friends form your chosen family.” Cutting across genre clusters, three moral themes are placed on a meta-level: “The family is the cornerstone of society,” “Safety, order and justice form the basis of a structured and well-functioning society” and “Health is wealth.” This study concludes that television reinforces existing prosocial values; the repetition of these values of family, health and safety within and across genres constitute an “omnipresent moral core” (Daalmans, Hijmans, and Wester 2014: 195) that regular viewers cannot escape.

2.2 Prosocial behaviors

Closely connected to values are prosocial behaviors that represent manifestations of values and put them into visible practice. An early study by Poulos, Harvey, and Liebert (1976) found only two positive social behaviors to appear with some frequency: altruism (acts of sharing, helping and cooperation) and sympathy/explaining feelings (expressing concern for others, describing the feelings or actions of oneself or others to bring forward positive outcomes). Building on this research, a study by Greenberg, Edison, Korzenny, Fernandez-Collado, and Atkin (1980) examined the type and frequency of prosocial acts (“appropriate, redeeming, and legal by society,” Greenberg et al 1980: 109) in general prime-time television programming. Overall, altruism was the most frequent prosocial act, followed by explaining feelings of self.

Potter and Ware (1989) base their content analysis of drama programming on social cognitive theory and assume that contextual factors such as reward or punishment, motivation, and justification matter for the prosocial acts to have an effect on viewers. Specifically, acts that are rewarded by success or pleasure to the prosocial actor are more likely to be adopted. Similarly, being internally motivated increases the value of the behavior; acts that are justified from the perspective of the actor are also positively reinforced. Potter and Ware (1989: 363) define prosocial act as “any attempt by one character to help another character” and distinguish between physical prosocial acts (e.g., physical aid out of altruism, physical reward in return for

something) and symbolic prosocial acts (e.g., verbal support, providing information to help another, providing a compliment directly to another, and providing a compliment about another character). The authors conclude that prosocial acts are generally portrayed in a constructive way: Almost all prosocial acts were rewarded and justified, and a majority was internally motivated.

Smith and colleagues (2006) also investigated altruistic acts of helping and sharing. In their content analysis of American television, they found that 73% of the programs showed altruistic acts; about a third of these were rewarded and only 14% punished. More than half of the altruistic acts resulted in some (emotional, physical or material) costs for the actor.

Padilla-Walker and colleagues (2013) explore the prosocial implications of animated Disney films. Here, prosocial behavior was considered to be any voluntary behavior that was directed at someone else's benefit. The authors analyzed physical and verbal types of prosocial behavior, physical (e.g., sharing, helping) and verbal (e.g., complimenting, encouraging); they found the two types to be roughly equally distributed across the films. Regarding motivations for prosocial behavior, "altruism" (directed at the needs and welfare of others) was by far the most common motivator of prosocial acts, followed by "dire" (helping because someone is in a crisis situation).

In television content for young audiences, Lewis and Mitchell (2014) investigated the prevalence of moral dilemmas, in which characters need to choose between different competing courses of action implied by competing egoistic (such as physiological needs, affiliation, status) and altruistic (such as care or fairness) motivations. Only 8% of all scenes analyzed in the sample showed motivational incongruity; incongruities were more frequent in content for more mature target audiences.

Some studies also focused on more limited prosocial domains. For example, Anderegg, Dale, and Fox (2014) examined the frequency of relationship maintenance behaviors (e.g., positivity, understanding, self-disclosure, assurances, relationship talks, tasks, and networks). They found that comedies presented more positive maintenance behaviors than dramas, but also more negative ones.

2.3 Connections between entertainment morality and ethical discourse

To some extent, media entertainment reflects part of established ethical discourse. For example, Dant (2012: 4) identifies three themes that connect longstanding discussions in moral philosophy to common television content. First, building on Aristotelian ethics and the notion of the virtuous character, Dant identifies "virtue" as integral part of television content. Virtue is seen as choosing the morally right action in a voluntary and motivated way; television reflects virtuous behavior and especially virtuous characters (e.g., in the form of heroes) in many instances of fiction (Dant 2012:

25–26). Second, “duty” is a theme that reflects the basis of deontological ethics, which evaluates actions according to their adherence to rules. Dant refers to documentaries and reality shows that demonstrate “proper” ways of living in matters of child-rearing, diet, or exercise. Other examples are shows such as “The Sopranos,” which lay out a moral order completely different from the actual world, but consistent and plausible within the fictional world. “The Sopranos” elaborates the moral order of a mobster world, and to understand the actions and motivations of characters, viewers need to buy into this unfamiliar moral world. Other shows exhibit a similar mechanism of estranging viewers from familiar moral patterns and build a world that implies a different set of duties: for example, the television series “Dexter” presents the anti-hero protagonist Dexter Morgan who works with the police by day, and kills criminals who escaped the system by night; in the series “Breaking Bad,” the protagonist Walter White, a chemistry teacher who suffers from lung cancer, opens a meth lab to finance his expensive medical treatment and set aside some money for his family. In all of these examples, the fictional world establishes a moral order, which needs to be accepted by the viewers to follow the show. Dant (2012: 32) explains that once “used to the dramatic conceit of the show, the viewer can suspend the moral order of their own life and enter the moral order of the diegesis”. Finally, the third moral theme is fairness, understood as the utilitarian principle of judging actions as to their ability to minimize negative consequences and maximize positive ones; ideally, actions should result in benefits for the greater good. Dant (2012: 34) states that fairness in this sense is found in “genres of actuality” such as news or documentaries. Often, topics are financial profit or power plays of the few pitted against environmental consequences or poverty of the people.

A second study looked at the resonance between entertainment and ethical discourse. Krijnen and Meijer (2005) identified relevant moral themes in Dutch prime-time television. Three themes were found to be dominant: good family, civility and civilization; the other themes were love, friendship, legitimate authority, legitimate violence, meaningful death, legitimate conviction, heroism, the good life, and fairness. Krijnen and Meijer also investigated verbal expressions on moral themes, which were recognized by the use of “ought” or “should,” which evaluate a specific conduct. They identified the majority of moral statements (78%) to be rule-governed or based on the ethics of justice, which means that moral decisions are made and judged according to invariant rules and principles. In contrast, only 16% of moral statements were sensibility-guided or based on the ethics of care; that is, moral decisions are made and judged in the context of social interaction, with the welfare of others being the major concern. In general, the authors conclude that the moral messages portrayed reinforce moral values rather than weaken them; for example, through family-related statements such as “family should never be let down” and civility-related statements such as “arguing is done verbally, not physically” (Krijnen and Meijer 2005: 370). The evidence “suggests that the moral panic around the content of prime-time television is unwarranted” (Krijnen and Meijer 2005: 370).

3 Negative expressions of morality in entertainment

The alternative approach to studying morality in media entertainment is to start from the violations of norms and values rather than their affirmation. The reason is that positive morality cannot reveal all types of moral content: In many instances, positive affirmations of values and norms go unnoticed. Social interactions in real life as well as mediated social interactions are full of examples, in which following the norm is “invisible”: When someone pays for her coffee, she follows the norm of paying her consumption, when she says “Thank you” and holds the door for the person after her, she follows the rules of polite behavior, all of which are not mentioned or enacted explicitly. The appeal of exploring norm violations in media entertainment is that they indicate friction and irritation in social interaction (Jacobsson and Lofmarck 2008), and thus reveal moral rules and conventions that are otherwise hidden. Gerbner and Gross (1976) express a similar position regarding the basic moral patterns of television that can be detected in norm violations: “The rules of the game and the morality of its goals can best be demonstrated by dramatic stories of their symbolic violations” (Gerbner and Gross 1976: 177).

3.1 Depictions of norm violations and moral transgressions

Historically, the overwhelming research interest regarding norm violations was directed at violence and physical aggression. The Cultural Indicators Project monitored television violence from 1967 to 1993, focusing on the amount and type of aggression as well as the properties of victims and perpetrators present in prime-time television (Gerbner et al. 2002; Gerbner, Morgan and Signorielli 1993). Violence is defined as “the overt expression of physical force against self or other, compelling action against one’s will on pain of being hurt or killed, or actually hurting or killing” (Gerbner and Gross 1976: 184). In a summary report, Gerbner and Signorielli (1990) concluded that violence on television showed remarkable stability from 1967 to 1989, with an average of 7 out of 10 prime-time programs containing violence, and with the rate of violent acts being between 5 and 6 per hour. Signorielli (2003) confirmed this rate for a later sample of television prime time (1993 to 2001) and found violence in 6 out of 10 shows and a rate of 4.5 acts per program. The amount of violence in television certainly fluctuates across the years, as Hetsroni (2007) has demonstrated in a longitudinal meta-analytic review.

Another rich source of data about television’s regular depiction of violence is the extensive National Television Violence Study (1996, 1997, 1998). In general, the results on the amount of violence were in line with the results obtained from the Cultural Indicators Project: About 2 out of 3 programs of general television in the years 1996/97 contained violence (S. L. Smith, Nathanson and Wilson 2002). Apart from the amount of violence, these analyses put a particular focus on the context of violence (such as punishment or consequences; see section “Context” below).

While physical violence was certainly the focus of attention, the range of norm violations gradually expanded to include low-threshold aggressive acts such as verbal, indirect or symbolic aggression. Considering that the threshold for adapting these types of aggression in real life is lower than for serious physical violence, this addition is fairly important. For example, Greenberg and colleagues (1980) investigated verbal aggression (rejection, verbal threats, hostility), deceit and theft as non-physical antisocial acts. They found that verbal aggression constituted about half of all antisocial acts in prime-time television shows (compared to about a third that included physical violence), and to a much lesser degree followed by deceit (about 10%) and theft (about 2%). In a sample of British shows popular with adolescents, Coyne and Archer (2004) found that either indirect aggression (causing “harm through using others, by spreading rumors, by gossiping, excluding the victim from the group, or ignoring others,” Coyne and Archer 2004: 255) or physical aggression can be found in virtually all programs (97%), with indirect aggression having by far the greatest prevalence in 92% of the shows, followed by verbal aggression in 86%, and physical aggression in 55%. Within indirect aggression, most acts represented a form of social exclusion (e.g., gossiping, spreading rumors, breaking confidences, 72%), about 10% were malicious humor (e.g., intentionally embarrass others, imitate behind back, criticize clothes/personality to face) and indirect-physical aggression (e.g., destroying property behind back, getting others to help be mean, blackmail), while only 7% were guilt-induction (e.g., threaten to end friendship/relationship unless they do something, try to influence by making feel guilty, pretend to be hurt/angry to make them feel bad). Other studies confirmed that symbolic aggressive acts (e.g., coercion, threats, rejection), were more widespread than physical aggression (Bilandzic, Hastall and Sukalla 2017; Potter et al. 1995; Potter and Ware 1987). This is also true for social aggression in children’s programs, e.g. insults, teasing, or disgusted face (Martins and Wilson 2012). However, the number of violent acts is strongly dependent on the operational definition of violence and the cultural context (for a lower number of psychological acts in Finnish television, see Mustonen and Pulkkinen 1997).

There are also gender differences for violent acts. In dramas and sitcoms popular with young adults and adolescents, Feshbach (2005) found that while 50% of the female characters acted out indirect aggression (portrayals of excluding, ignoring, or rejecting another character) in dramas (versus 32% of males), 93% exhibited some form of indirect aggression in comedies (compared to 40% of the males). The comic frame “allowed” women to be more aggressive.

Moral transgressions that are not violent, but only represent breaches of propriety or aversive social behavior, are even more common. This is particularly obvious in the study by Kaye and Sapolsky (2009) that investigated offensive language and revealed that in 9 out of 10 programs viewers were confronted with at least one incident of profanity, or 13 cuss words per hour. In an analysis of norm violations in popular television series, Bilandzic and colleagues (2017) found that the non-violent norm violations involving swearing/use of vulgar language, disrespectful behavior, friend-

ship-related violations and lying/deception, together accounted for almost 40% of all norm violations.

3.2 Context of norm violations

Potter and Ware (1989) argue that according to social cognitive theory (Bandura 2001), it is not the mere frequency of an event that should evoke effects, but rather the context of the act; more specifically, whether a particular act is punished or rewarded. Acts that are rewarded are more likely to find their way into a person's cognitive and behavioral repertoire than acts that are punished. Similarly, justifications and motivations are able to endorse a norm violation in a specific context and allow the use of violence and other antisocial behavior in the overall narrative message.

3.2.1 Motivation and justification

Two studies found that between 20% and 28% of all aggressive acts were justified within the narrative; that is, portrayed as “morally correct,” “right,” or “just” (Martins and Wilson 2012; S. L. Smith et al. 2002). Potter and Smith (2000) concluded that more than a third of violent acts in television are justified by some motivation (such as protecting one's life, personal gain, retaliation). While personal gain was relatively frequent (Boyle et al. 2004; Potter et al. 1995), prosocial motives were rare (7% in Potter et al. 1995). Confirming this, Bilandzic and colleagues (2017) found that egoism (rather than altruism) motivated most norm violations. Relatively harmless, non-physical forms of aggression are more often justified in television stories than physical aggression (Coyne and Archer 2004; Martins and Wilson 2012).

Another type of justification is that violent acts are a reaction to some external cause (e.g., a retort or self-defense) or an active and offensive act (without provocation or reason). Mustonen and Pulkkinen (1997) found that over two thirds of the aggressive acts are offensive, and only 5% defensive. Potter and Ware (1987) explored differences between external reasons for committing violence (lack of control or being forced) and internal reasons (free will of the perpetrator). Their data show that 39% of antisocial acts in fiction programs were motivated internally compared to 60% external motivations.

A special case of justification may be found in crime genres, where a common justification for law enforcement representatives to violate legal boundaries lies in their goal to catch criminals (Dirikx, Van den Bulck and Parmentier 2012); similarly, in superhero fiction, Kort-Butler (2013) found that superheroes in children's cartoons justify their use of force by helping ineffective law enforcement institutions catch

criminals. The heroes have an obligation to step in and save the innocent victims. They do so by using their physical and mental capabilities, against the backdrop of a clear moral understanding of the world.

3.2.2 Punishment

While motivations make an antisocial act or norm violation more socially acceptable, reward or punishment of the act gives an indication of how successful this type of behavior is. Punishment in the context of a narrative includes, for example, self-condemnation, condemnation from others, being stopped by violent or non-violent means; reward includes self-praise, praise from others, or material reward (Potter and Smith 2000).

Studies conclude that between 17% and 29% of violent acts were punished in some way (Potter and Smith 2000; Potter et al. 1995; S. L. Smith et al. 2002). It seems to be easier for good characters to get away with violence: In a study by S. L. Smith and colleagues (2002), bad characters were never punished in 45% of the television programs, while the good characters were never punished in 82%. In soap operas, moral violations are met by resistance of others in two-thirds of the cases, for example when the perpetrator received social/economic penalties, or negative emotional reactions (Sutherland and Siniawsky 1982).

Rewards were present, again depending on the definition and the sample analyzed, in 26% to 35% of violent acts (Potter et al. 1995; S. L. Smith et al. 2002). In soap operas, moral violations received social or financial support in less than a sixth of the cases (Sutherland and Siniawsky 1982). If reward is understood in a wider sense, reward rates may be higher. Mustonen and Pulkkinen (1997) coded the achievement of goals by violent perpetrators and found that in 67% at least a little gratification resulted from the violence.

Coyne and Archer (2004) analyzed differences in reward and punishment according to the type of violence. Indirect aggression was most often rewarded by peer approval and watching the victims suffer. For physical aggression, the perpetrator was rewarded by reducing annoyance, seeing the victim suffer and receiving tangible rewards. Verbal aggression was mostly rewarded by seeing the victim suffer and a reduction of annoyance. With regard to punishment, Coyne and Archer (2004) found that indirect aggression was most often punished by peer disapproval and an increase in annoyance; for physical and verbal aggression tangible punishment was the most common form of negative consequence for the perpetrator. For serial fiction, Bilandzic and colleagues (2017) also concluded that punishment depended strongly on the type of norm violation; for example, about half of the violations of professional and friendship-related norms and property damage were punished; only 3% of the instances of swearing and vulgar language received some punishment. This study also showed that the majority of norm violations were not forgiven by the victims and not reflected on by the characters.

3.3 Confirming moral standards through norm violations

While most violent acts are not punished immediately after the act was committed, the narrative structure often dictates that evildoers get their deserved punishment at the end, whether they fail in their goals, receive contempt from others, are killed or injured, or end up in jail. Crime fiction, for example, formulaically integrates the sequence of crime and punishment in the genre pattern. Following this idea, Sutherland and Siniawsky (1982) found that the resolution of soap operas was consistent with moral standards in 53%, and inconsistent in 18% of the cases.

In a later study, Potter and Smith (1999) investigated the consistency of violence context on the micro and macro level; in particular, they explored whether violent acts that are punished at the level of the violent incident are also punished at the level of the program (consistent context), or rewarded at both levels (also consistent context). A prosocial pattern of inconsistency was coded when violent acts were not punished immediately (that is, on the micro level), but at the level of the program (at the end of the show) – the overall message would be that crime does not pay off; an antisocial pattern of inconsistency emerges when violence was punished on the micro level, but rewarded on the macro level by achieving a major goal – the ultimate message here would be that violence pays off in the end, even if you are punished in between. Viewers notice whether a violent act is punished or rewarded and, based on this observation, evaluate how acceptable this behavior is. The authors found that almost half of the violent incidents were consistent antisocial, that is, punished at neither micro nor macro level. In contrast, only 12% were consistent-prosocial. Inconsistent-prosocial were about a third of the violent acts, which means that unpunished individual acts were eventually punished at the end. Only 7% of the acts were coded as inconsistent-antisocial (individual acts are punished, but rewarded at the end).

In a similar way, Sutherland and Siniawsky (1982) looked at the moral standards implied in the content of soap operas as well as their moral lessons in the resolution. A list of moral issues was generated, containing, for example, deceit, murder, premarital and extramarital sex, and for each instance of a moral issue the moral standard connected to it was coded (for example, moral issue: extramarital sex; moral standard: it is wrong). If the “perpetrator” was punished, the resolution was coded as consistent with the moral standard, if not, the resolution was coded as inconsistent. The researchers found that a third of moral issues was consistent with the moral standard, 10% were inconsistent.

Also pursuing the idea of a macro-level message, Grabe (1999) explored evaluations of norm violations, arguing that while presentations of crime have garnered concerns about noxious effects among the audience (e.g., by increasing fear), they have higher-level functions: They establish moral boundaries, promote social cohesion among those judging the crimes, and the criminals and presentations of crime punishment by submitting the criminals to society’s rules imposes social order. In a content analysis of news stories, Grabe (1999) found that law enforcement officers

were presented as the good force fighting against evil criminals, with the victim being the helpless good person, thus making the moral boundaries very clear. Second, social cohesion is emphasized in the shows by portraying most accused as guilty, even if only a minority was already sentenced; also, the news shows presented individual (e.g., psychological instability, revenge, greed) rather than structural reasons (e.g. poverty) for the crimes, making it a matter of personal decision to become a criminal. Third, the swift and effective law enforcement system makes sure that criminals are caught and punished, sending the message that crime does not pay and displaying society's victory over those who threaten it.

This type of “functional” argument is also applicable to other forms of TV content. Grabe (2002) conducted a functional analysis of the Jerry Springer Show, a talk show deliberately exploring the borders of bad taste and moral destruction. Again, in a functional perspective, Grabe asserts that accounts of moral misbehavior stabilize society rather than undermine it. Moral violations such as cheating deviance, vanity or dishonesty were accompanied by strong negative utterances or jeers by the live audience, making the supported values seem to be in line with “what outspoken politicians, media executives, clergy, and media critics would prescribe as good for America” (Grabe 2002: 323). Audience reactions are echoed by individual audience questions and comments and the talk host's own closing monologue.

4 Conclusion

The implications of morality in entertainment are multifaceted. The most obvious point is that we should be interested in the type of moral message that is presented because we need to assess potential harm and benefits of exposure to entertainment. There is firm meta-analytic evidence suggesting that media violence increases aggression (Anderson et al. 2003) and hostile world-views (Bushman 2016). Similar evidence exists for the prosocial side: Prosocial media content increases prosocial behavior (e.g., Greitemeyer 2011). However, morality cuts across all aspects of media use and effects, and, apart from direct effects on anti- and prosocial behaviors, may also affect how people evaluate media content and how they think about moral issues.

Regarding evaluations of media content, viewers and readers come to positive appraisals of content by the underlying morality of the narrative. The most prominent approach that links enjoyment and morality is affective disposition theory (e.g., Raney and Bryant 2002); it states that moral judgments of characters form the basis for character liking – characters who do good things are liked, while characters who do bad things are disliked. Punishment of the bad characters at the end of a story creates pleasure and enjoyment of the story (Raney and Bryant 2002). Another field of research concerns depictions of exemplary moral actions and character, which inspire feelings of elevation in audiences (Oliver, Ash and Woolley 2013; Oliver, Hartmann and Woolley 2012).

Regarding effects on moral thinking, entertainment serves as a safe place for rehearsing moral decisions, a moral laboratory, which shapes moral positions and values (cf. literature: Hakemulder 2000). Specifically, narratives have the potential for these effects, as they enable the audience to experience morally relevant actions as if they were performing them themselves. In order to understand a story, audience members need to assume a (temporal, spatial, psychological) position within the story world (Busselle and Bilandzic 2008). Thus, audience members “simulate” actions, motivations and emotions of the characters on their own cognitive and emotional system (Mar and Oatley 2008). The exposure to entertainment has been linked to moral and ethical reflection (Glover, Garmon and Hull 2011; Krijnen and Meijer 2005; Krijnen and Verboord 2016; Scarborough and McCoy 2016) as well as moral reasoning (Krcmar and Cingel 2016; Schnell and Bilandzic 2017). Also, moral schemata can be activated by media content and influence social judgments, for example resulting in the salience of moral intuitions (Eden et al. 2014).

The discussion of morality in entertainment is dominated by a discourse that emphasizes simple narratives and clear moral messages. Indeed, much of entertainment fare is formulaic – its moral message is easily determined from the text and accessible through standardized procedures such as content analysis. In this vein, Silverstone (2007) describes the dominance and omnipresence of a type of master-narrative of evil, which shapes individual story plots and characters, as well as the conventions of storytelling and metaphors. The boundaries between the factual and the fictional are blurred, as these master-narratives shape both. Silverstone (2007: 73) argues that dichotomizing and polarizing judgments into good or evil, benevolent or malevolent, is the “bread and butter of contemporary US cinema”, which of course includes many globally distributed films. While mainstream genres used to mirror this dichotomy of good and evil (and still do), new types of entertainment arose that somewhat mask a clear distinction and thus make the moral evaluation of the content more difficult – for audiences and researchers alike: Recent antihero series have been booming on television and streaming services – for example, “House of Cards,” “Dexter,” “Breaking Bad,” or “Lucifer.” An antihero is a morally complex character that shows similar exceptional agency and passion as does the hero; but while the hero is guided by moral principles, is honored and admired for his or her achievement and makes sacrifices to achieve what must be achieved, the antihero negates one or more of these aspects (Bröckling 2015). More than morally formulaic fiction, antihero formats can be considered more open to different readings and idio-syncretic moral sense making; the message is not easily visible, which may invite more moral interpretation on the side of the audience than formulaic fiction. While there is no direct evidence for this assumption, research suggests there is no simple engagement with antiheroes. Morally ambiguous characters are shown to be equally transporting, suspenseful, cognitively engaging and enjoyable as good characters, albeit less liked (Krakowiak and Oliver 2012). Interpretations of antiheroes depend

on one's own momentary moral mind: Krakowiak and Tsay-Vogel (2015) demonstrate that priming one's own vices improves positive affect and enjoyment of a morally ambiguous character compared to a purely bad character. Finally, moral judgment is less important for the enjoyment of antiheroes (Shafer and Raney 2012), and viewers might even need to *morally disengage* to enjoy the shows (Janicke and Raney 2015). This research implies that the moral ambiguity somewhat disrupts simple patterns of moral interpretation and character liking; we do not yet know the influences of these shows on moral thinking.

While content and interpretations of the audience are clearly distinct constructs and can be investigated separately, the evaluation of the moral content in more open texts is only complete when audience interpretations are considered. More ambiguous formats may be affirmative of social norms when audiences condemn the actions of the morally ambiguous character and oppositional when audiences approve of their actions. Thus, a more provocative, deviant or ambiguous moral message needs to be complemented by audience reactions – and thus presents a future challenge for investigations into the morality of entertainment.

Further reading

Morality in entertainment has many expressions, and research on it is scattered across different topics (e.g., violence, prosocial behavior, values, norms) and academic traditions (e.g., social learning, cultivation, cultural studies, qualitative and quantitative methods). To go beyond single studies for further reading, three books are recommendable. First, Roger Silverstone (2007) offers an integrative reflexion about the significance of media for the moral glue of a society, arguing that media define a moral space in which audiences and citizens perform their own moral thinking. Second, Tim Dant's (2012) theoretically rich analysis of television as the "prime medium for sharing morality and dispersing the mores" (p. 2) resonates with ideas from cultivation and social cognitive theory, but is written from a sociological and philosophical perspective. Dant argues that television as an entertainment medium is able to convey moral messages in a subtle, unobtrusive way, showing morals rather than preaching about morals. Television feeds the "moral imaginary" of the audience by representing a multitude of morally relevant situations, actions, personalities and systems, extending an audience member's possible experiences considerably. Third, Ron Tamborini (2012) has edited a very useful volume on current knowledge about effects of moral media content and the audience's selection, usage and perception of morality in media. Mainly from a media psychological perspective, the book offers several overviews of the application of Haidt's social intuitionist theory in media effects, as well as other topics such as moral elevation, enjoyment of moral content and moral disengagement.

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19 Popular Culture and Media

Abstract: This chapter integrates two strains of scholarship: a moral-developmental perspective focusing on the conduct of both individuals and institutions; and a critical political-economic perspective highlighting media systems' impact on the production and reception of content. Virtue ethics, especially the concepts of authenticity and integrity, are central to this chapter's analysis. When media scholarship engages virtue ethics, it usually focuses on professional conduct in journalism, public relations, and non-artistic professions, sidelining questions about the relationship between capitalism and democracy. This chapter extends such research by including analysis of content and political-economic systems as well. Through an evaluation of exemplary research studies, the chapter outlines several best practices for ethics scholarship in popular culture. The chapter concludes with a discussion of strategies for steering the emerging digital economy toward the goal of human flourishing.

Keywords: popular media, virtue ethics, art, entertainment, counter-narratives, fan culture, audiences, authenticity, integrity

1 Introduction

In the fall of 2013, singer-songwriter Sinéad O'Connor penned an open letter to Miley Cyrus. The younger pop star, who had spent years transforming herself from Disney's family-friendly Hannah Montana persona to a transgressive sex symbol, had told the press that O'Connor's iconic "Nothing Compares 2 U" music video inspired her provocative "Wrecking Ball" video. In the latter Cyrus appears brightly-lipsticked, licking a sledgehammer and – in a climactic scene – fully nude while riding a swinging wrecking ball. O'Connor, who had famously shaved her head to ensure that fans and critics would focus on her music rather than her appearance, expressed her dismay in no uncertain terms. "You have enough talent that you don't need to let the music business make a prostitute of you," she wrote, adding that she expressed this sentiment "in the spirit of motherliness and with love" (O'Connor 2013).

For better or worse, fans rally around popular artists who embody the virtues (real or perceived) with which they identify most intimately. Artists, in turn, fashion themselves as exemplars. Cyrus, for example, sees her self-transformation as part of a quest for authentic self-expression. Of course, one artist's virtue is another's vice. In the context of a profit-hungry industry, O'Connor suggests, nudity and brazen sexuality is foolishness – a threat to authenticity, not its source. In addressing her younger counterpart, O'Connor thus aims to embody the wisdom of age and experience. Yet O'Connor is not without flaws of her own, and Cyrus quickly re-cast the self-styled mother-figure as

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-019>

arrogant and possibly unhinged. We need not take sides to appreciate the overarching insight arising from this debate: artists' and fans' conflicted struggles for virtue unfold within an institutional context that simultaneously reflects and shapes them.

For media scholars who aim to encourage moral behavior on the part of artists and professionals, fans and citizens, this insight serves as an important reminder: while attending to the conduct of individuals, we must attend as well to the virtues and vices embodied in the broader political economy in which media institutions, technologies, and content emerge. The goal of catalyzing virtue among media professionals is undermined insofar as the institutions in which they operate actively cultivate and exploit the vices of greed, aggression, or delusion. This chapter thus seeks to integrate two strains of media scholarship. Drawing from media ethics scholarship, it focuses on virtuous conduct as understood from a moral-developmental perspective, extending this analysis to institutions and economic systems. Drawing from critical political-economic research, it highlights how the dynamics of media systems impact the production and reception of creative content, with an eye toward policy initiatives that may yield more virtuous behavior by individuals and institutions alike. Central to this approach is a focus on authenticity and integrity as related yet distinct virtue concepts. The guiding questions for the discussion that follows include the following: To the extent that authenticity is an axial value in today's popular culture, how do artists and fans think about this value? How do content producers think about artistic integrity, and what obstacles do they perceive in its pursuit? What policy reforms, technical developments, or other strategies might bring greater integrity to the institutions we rely upon to support artists' authentic self-expression?

The following discussion begins with an overview of media scholarship that engages virtue ethics. Such scholarship is usually focused on the conduct of employees in journalism, public relations, and other non-artistic professions. It also tends to sideline critical questions about the relationship between capitalism and democracy. This discussion therefore provides a rationale for extending existing virtue ethics research to include an analysis of popular culture in both its content and its political-economic dimensions. The next section describes and evaluates several exemplary research studies according to this proposed framework. Though all of these studies fall short in some respect, they point toward several best practices for ethics scholarship in popular culture. The chapter then returns to the introductory example of O'Connor and Cyrus' public spat to tease out the nuances of these issues and to illustrate the application of these best practices. The chapter concludes with a discussion of strategies for steering the ship of the emerging digital economy toward the goal of human flourishing.

2 Beyond the virtuous professional

Plaisance (2015) provides a rationale for the examination of moral exemplars in media, and offers several original case studies. This work helpfully extends previous

research in media ethics by offering an empirical methodology for constructing ideal-typical models of virtuous behavior in professional contexts. However this area of research focusing on media professionals such as journalists and PR experts tends to neglect the cultural and political importance of popular artists such as musicians. At the same time, research that addresses ethics in popular media tends to focus on the content of movies and television while neglecting the lived experience of artists and producers within their chosen industries. This tendency may be a legacy of the media effects research paradigm that dominated the early development of electronic mass media. The study of popular culture presents a unique opportunity since, unlike journalists or PR professionals, popular artists can – and often do – produce content that directly challenges the limitations they face from the industries in which they operate. In areas such as music, devoid of any parallel to journalism’s norms of objectivity, audiences expect popular artists to voice their own perspectives and opinions without reservation.

Second, media ethics research tends to have an individualistic focus that brackets systemic questions. Couldry (2013) argues that in applying neo-Aristotelian ethics to media, we might ask “what virtuous dispositions can be expected to contribute to our living well together with and through media” (47; quoted in Plaisance 2015: 202). For example Huff, Barnard and Frey (2008) examine virtue among computer professionals with the goal of fostering professions who are “trained to be more active, ethically, committed, and ethically effective” in their work (253; quoted by Plaisance 2015: 206). Plaisance (2015) builds on this premise to ask how we might build “a more ethical media system” (9). Citing Koehn (1994: 172–173), he argues that if individual practitioners embrace the notion of the public good, the ethical tensions within professional industries “should be reduced” (Plaisance 2015: 105). One PR veteran, for example, claims success in convincing clients to embrace corporate social responsibility programs (105–106).

Yet critics question this type of “Trojan horse” argument. As Ng (2016) explains with regard to corporate mindfulness programs like Google’s Search Inside Yourself, proponents often claim that “an individualistic, therapeutic mindfulness can act as a disruptive technology that would in time generate change from within even the most dysfunctional systems” (10–11). On the contrary, Ng and Purser (2015: 24) argue that because of their individualist focus, such programs strip contemplative practices of the ethical components that might otherwise address the systemic causes of human suffering. Einstein (2012) argues similarly that corporate social responsibility programs (such as Bono’s Red campaign) often enhance brand image while neglecting the root causes of social problems. With regard to journalism, McChesney (2004) argues that the burgeoning PR industry began early on to produce corporate-friendly “filler” that now accounts for a large percentage of news content (71–72). As ad revenues dwindle, such content subsidizes a struggling industry, creating a downward spiral that undermines the capacity of journalism to serve the public interest – despite the best intentions of individual reporters. From the critical perspective of these authors,

an over-emphasis on individual actors ignores the systemic issues that give rise to workplace pressures in the first place, while placing the moral burden on a workforce that is fragmented and overworked by neoliberal economic policies.

None of these concerns amount to an argument against research on individual exemplars. But they do argue on behalf of a more integrated approach that includes both individual and systemic concerns, situating exemplars within broader systems of power that both reflect and shape their values and behavior. In the following section I argue that entertainment media, understood as popular art, are uniquely valuable as media ethics researchers seek to forge such theoretical connections between individual and systemic concerns.

3 The virtue of popular media

Research in entertainment ethics tends to focus on issues of duty, harm, and respect, especially with regard to the psychological effects of sex and violence in the media. O'Connor (2013) echoes these concerns in her letter to Miley Cyrus, warning the young star that “the message you keep sending” – namely that “it’s somehow cool to be prostituted” – is “dangerous” to other young women. At the same time, though, she implies that we cannot simply critique artists as individual actors, given that the industry actively selects and cultivates stars to suit its own ends. In painting Cyrus as “an innocent heart” who is “blind to the evils of show business,” O'Connor suggests that it is misguided to condemn the artist without condemning the system that undermines and exploits her quest for authentic self-expression. Yet O'Connor is clearly not without hope. The artist and the industry can be redeemed.

Every media system has a moral center of gravity – a point on the continuum between vice and virtue where content clusters. To the extent that greed drives media economics, the moral quality of its content suffers. As Plaisance (2015) notes, we must understand how media environments “help or hinder moral action” (xii). Research on popular culture is uniquely poised to address this question since, unlike journalists or PR professionals, audiences expect creative artists to cultivate and express an original perspective on the world – including the industries in which they operate. As noted, songwriters have long voiced frustration in their efforts to maintain artistic integrity amid commercial pressures. Of course, some artists and fans articulate those concerns more insightfully than others. With a discerning eye, media scholars may discover emergent patterns, revealing the deep aspirations not just of fans and artists, but of the culture itself. This is what Tillich (1964) called the theology of culture, which Emmons (1999) reframed in secular terms as “the psychology of ultimate concerns.” From this perspective we can think about virtue in systemic terms, situating exemplars within a broader system with its own moral center of gravity.

The practical goal of media ethics scholarship is to articulate an institutional context in which artists might achieve a level of excellence in their art and in their professional conduct as artists. To this end, we must understand the virtues of authenticity and integrity in both their personal and collective dimensions. Apropos O'Connor's critique of Cyrus, authenticity does not consist merely in being willfully transgressive of prevailing social norms (Taylor 1991: 23). Instead it consists of "becoming what you are" (Guignon 2000: 73). The proverbial acorn finds authentic self-expression not in a willful refusal to sprout roots, but in a persistent courage to become a fully-formed oak – however flawed. Integrity, meanwhile, consists in the steady pursuit of authentic self-expression even in the face of adversity, temptation to vice, and existential risk (McFall 1987: 9–10). Exemplary artists manage this struggle in a way that transforms the institutional context of their work, catalyzing other artists' pursuits toward the same end. They cannot do so alone, however. Scholars, industry leaders, and legislators must be willing to intervene on behalf of policies and institutional reforms that yield greater integrity for systems of creative production. System integrity in this sense consists of coherence between the diverse goal-strivings of artists, industry professionals, and other cultural stakeholders (Emmons 1999: 113).

It is worthwhile to revisit the distinction between art and entertainment. The latter diverts, delights, soothes, and enlivens while the former uplifts, informs, guides, and inspires (Campbell et al. 2014: 202). Art can, in the words of Hannah Arendt, "grasp and move us across the ages" (1971: 95; quoted in Campbell et al. 2014: 202). Composer John Cage argued that art can "sober the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences" (quoted in Macaulay 2016). The extension of our nervous systems through electronic media gives art an even greater revolutionary potential. The problem, as Arendt (1971) rightly noted, is that when mass media transforms art into mere entertainment, art can no longer perform this function (98).

It is neither necessary nor desirable to confine art and entertainment to separate realms as Arendt advised (1971: 93). In fact, the false distinction between high and low art arose as a means to "maintain social hierarchy, protect class distinctions, and contain the influence of new technologies" (Campbell et al. 2014: 200). Both exist on a continuum, and scholars do well to understand entertainment as a particular form of popular art (Campbell et al. 2014: 217). Not every artist is a social activist; nor is each entertaining enough to garner a wide fan base. Most tack between art and entertainment over the course of their careers – and often in the course of one concert or performance. A robust media environment allows for a dynamic interplay between art and entertainment while maintaining a high moral center of gravity. Such an environment can cultivate an ethos of pluralism and cosmopolitanism among citizens. Its potential to elevate, inspire, and expand worldviews in this way is perhaps the most important virtue of popular culture. Internet technologies may amplify this potential, provided that we do not allow "subversive, alternative forms of culture" to become "co-opted and commercialized" through market pressures (Campbell et al. 2014: 217).

4 Studying ethics in popular culture: Best practices

Unlocking this potential requires scholarship that examines not only the content of popular media, but the systemic tensions that artists and audiences face in the struggle for artistic integrity and authentic self-expression. This section provides an assessment of several exemplary studies in the ethics of popular media, identifying important shortcomings and strengths of each. Through this assessment I distill five best practices that I recommend for scholars of media ethics, namely: place content in context; look for counter-narratives; recover the socially transformative potential of art; attend to the civic uses of content; and avoid digital determinism.

4.1 Placing content in context

While the question of how media content influences moral behavior is important, a too-narrow focus on content typically yields narrowly-focused strategies for reform which fail to address underlying institutional problems. Much research suggests that content undermines good moral judgment because it shows few consequences (i.e. punishments) for violations of social norms (Daalmans, Hijmans, and Wester 2014: 186; Hastall, Bilandzic, and Sukalla 2013). Along these lines, some scholars suggest that producers should introduce more, or more explicit, consequences in narrative plot lines. This approach tends to bracket critical systemic questions that industries might find too disruptive, in part because scholars conducting such research often serve as consultants for commercial organizations. For example, Barbara Wilson has produced insightful media effects research while serving as a consultant for commercial organizations like Nickelodeon, the National Association of Television Program Executives, and Discovery Channel Pictures (see for example Strasburger, Wilson and Jordan 2009; Wilson and Drogos 2009). This type of research trajectory certainly has an internal coherence and integrity as far as it goes – but it only goes so far. As Einstein (2012) notes, commercial organizations may engage questions of ethics primarily as a means of enhancing brand image, soliciting research whose scope falls within limited, self-serving parameters. Daalmans, Hijmans, and Wester’s (2014) study of prime time programming in the Netherlands demonstrates how research might unwittingly reinforce status-quo norms. The authors argue that, in fact, content that appears at face value to lack moral value (e.g. *the Jerry Springer Show*) might unwittingly reinforce widely-accepted social norms. They conclude that television ultimately “acts as an echo of what is important in society” and that “viewers cannot escape its omnipresent moral core” (195–196). By sheer repetition of morally-imbued content, they suggest, television programming “should and does foster the common good” as “the moral compass of viewers [is] sharpened” over time (197). This is an argument on behalf of the industry status quo, since television’s purported “self-cleansing capacity” would appear to undercut any calls for intervention – even of the minor variety described above (196).

It may be true that commercial content reinforces prevalent social norms. However, this observation raises a number of secondary questions: Which social norms does such content reinforce, and which does it neglect? Who benefits from such reinforcement or neglect? To the extent that such research brackets these critical questions, it may perpetuate conventional social norms in a way that reinforces existing systems of privilege and inequality. For example, while Daalmans et al. (2014) recognize the limitations of looking at the Netherlands (197), they ignore questions of cultural imperialism raised by the increasing influence of U.S.-based media. Furthermore, their study of Dutch prime time television compares genres but does not compare across platforms. This overlooks how the distinct political-economic context of cable programming allows for an exploration of substantively different moral issues in greater depth. For example, McMickle (2013) argues that the Hollywood film industry has much to learn from the more nuanced portrayals of black characters on HBO (86–88). Jenni Konner, producer of the series *Girls*, likewise argues that HBO gives its writers more freedom because it is less concerned with ratings than conventional broadcasters (Hardwick 2014).

Of course, cable is not immune from commercial pressures. Ault's (2012) analysis of the HBO series *The Wire*, for example, shows how the otherwise complex moral content of cable shows is nevertheless constrained by the preferences of economically privileged audiences. Set in Baltimore, *The Wire* is unique in its exploration of social and political issues, focusing on "institutions and structures as opposed to individuals" (387). While Ault praises this aspect of the series, she argues that the show nevertheless props up stereotypes of black mothers as "irresponsible, irrational, and emasculating" (388). By doing so, the show's writers (including chief writer David Simon) extend the neoliberal ideology they ostensibly intend to critique – an ideology that places the burden of responsibility on individuals while neglecting the role of structural forces (388). Ault concludes that the "institutional context of Time/Warner-owned HBO" pressured writers to make "some compromises" to cater to its "quality audiences" (398). Specifically, the writers sacrifice "black mothers' sexualities, their subjectivities, their desires, and therefore their fitness as parents" (398) to position them as "signifiers of authenticity" that white audiences would appreciate.

4.2 Looking for counter-narratives

Long-term changes in the Batman comics and films further demonstrate how fans, and the culture at large, impact producers' representations of moral themes in popular media. Giddens (2015) explains that, as exemplified in key texts from the late 1980s through the early 2000s, the Batman comic series represents a discourse on jurisprudence. In this series, Bruce Wayne (Batman) negotiates the tension between vengeance and justice; corruption and purity; despair and hope (Giddens 2015: 774).

In earlier comics, he operates “beyond the rules and limits of law, beyond the confines of the civilized state” (775), as demonstrated by his intentional use of violence.¹ Giddens describes Batman as a “counter-sovereign” who draws attention to “the deficiencies in the existing justice system” and steps in to protect the innocent when the corrupt state fails to do so itself (783). In more recent comics (since 2011), however, Batman “realizes that to remain legitimate – to be a force for justice – he needs to be able to dish out the appropriate punishment, and that means handing the villains over to the state police for arrest, trial and sentencing” (777). The series’ understanding of jurisprudence has thus grown more nuanced over time.

In his discussion of justice and vengeance, Giddens may have unwittingly uncovered latent theological themes in the Batman series. For example, his discussion of counter-sovereignty in Batman echoes theologian Walter Brueggemann’s (2006) explication of a radical counter-obedience in the texts of the Old Testament prophets. Brueggemann argues that the principle of “no vengeance” forms the foundation of a counter-obedience that directly challenges the authority of a corrupt state. Indeed, he positions this reading of the Hebrew prophets as a challenge to the materialism and commercialism of today’s consumer economy. These similarities suggest that moral narratives within popular media often contain the seeds for a radical critique of the very institutions that produce such content – if only we can discern them and distill their implications. This approach is quite different from the type of corporate-friendly analysis described above. Nevertheless, Giddens’ approach still lacks direct engagement with the political-economic context of the Batman comics’ production.

Joye and Van De Walle (2015) incorporate such concerns in their analysis of Batman fans’ response to representations of character virtues. As comics are adapted to film, fans are less concerned about the accuracy of a character’s outward appearance, and more concerned about whether adaptations remain true to his or her “essence” (37). In other words, they are concerned about “faithfulness towards the psyche or personality of the character” (47). The failure of *Batman & Robin* (1997), due largely to a perception of the film’s egregious commercial tie-ins, demonstrates that fans are “not powerless” (37). One fan criticized that film for its portrayal of Bane, the villain, as “an idiot” rather than a “criminal mastermind” (44). Another lamented that Bane had been “completely stripped of the honour, respect for his enemies, and intelligence he had in the comics” (46). By contrast, fans generally praised director Christopher Nolan’s interpretation of the villain Bane in *The Dark Knight Rises*, which one fan described as a “genius intellect” (45). These results suggest that fans are concerned with how characters serve as models of virtue and vice. Differences arising from adaptation across platforms (i.e. comics to film) underscore that popular

¹ Arguably, this is a discourse not just about jurisprudence but authenticity as well. As noted above, popular discourse typically defines authenticity in terms of an individual’s willingness to transgress social norms.

media does not simply reflect and reinforce existing cultural discourses about virtue. The context of production impacts content, often in ways unfavorable to fans. As the authors suggest, digital media gives fans more power to express their concerns, sometimes in ways that impact subsequent productions (47). Given the tools, fans may push back in a way that makes characters more nuanced, often in ways that challenge prevalent social norms. In studying this give-and-take, scholars can understand more clearly how context shapes content, in ways that alternately reinforce dominant cultural narratives or allow counter-narratives to emerge.

4.3 Recovering the transformative potential of art

In her discussion of drag kings, Escudero-Alias (2011) further demonstrates how commercial pressures tend to neutralize the counter-hegemonic potential of otherwise ground-breaking cable series. Her analysis contrasts the local drag king art performances of the award-winning MilDred Gerestant with representations of drag kings in Showtime's *The L Word* and HBO's *Sex and the City*. MilDred's work is able to "deconstruct hegemonic representations of blackness," offering "a new understanding of the categories of race and sexuality" through deft use of camp, parody, wit, and irony (258–260). By contrast, while *Sex and the City* has been effective in "shattering sexual taboos" (265), it fails to engage drag king performances as strategies for deconstructing masculinity (266). This is clear in an episode where the character Charlotte takes on the role of a drag queen. Unlike MilDred, she does not employ parody or camp. According to Escudero-Alias (2011), Charlotte's drag persona is simply "not believable" (266). Rather than "destabilizing the heterosexual norm," she claims, such subplots function as a form of appropriation, a strategy for increasing audiences rates, and a marketing strategy to attract new queer customers without alienating its mainstream heterosexual audience (267). *The L Word* is similarly problematic due to its "lack of reality in its depiction of the lesbian community" (268). The show's success is premised on its deployment of "beautiful lesbians" adorned with upper-class signifiers (268). In this sense it is "conveniently packaged for heterosexual male consumption with the idea of expanding its audience ratings" (268). In both series, art is used as an excuse to include drag kings, but their representation fails to capture the subversive potential of an artist like MilDred (269–270). Instead, drag kings are employed as plot devices to capture and maintain attention among the shows' twenty- and thirty-something audiences. MilDred's disruptive work "can never reach the same audience" (270), Escudero-Alias argues, and the shows' viewers are left with representations that "lack any ethical stance" and serve overwhelmingly to depoliticize and assimilate the drag king subcultural style (270–271). This case study demonstrates the prescience of Arendt's (1971: 98) concern, noted above, that commercial media can undermine the transformative potential of art.

4.4 Attending to the civic uses of content

Hinck's (2016) analysis of civic action among Harry Potter fans underscores how the institutional context of production influences the political impact of content. In a broad sense, pop culture content has always served as an inspiration, and a resource for, fans' activism on behalf of social causes (12). However, recent developments have created a new phenomenon, especially among the Millennial generation, of hybrid "fan-based citizenship performances" (2). This development places a moral burden on producers not only to embed appropriate values in content, but to explicitly articulate a preferred interpretation and application of those values. Traditionally, Hinck argues, religious and political institutions have guided citizens' understanding of how general ethical principles should be applied in day-to-day life. One's close identification with the Republican Party or the Catholic Church, for example, leads to a particular understanding of how charity or compassion might be expressed through personal action or policy initiatives (10). Postmodern trends toward fluidity of identity, driven in part by the dynamics of commercial media, have disrupted these relationships. Ostensibly non-political sources of ethical frameworks – especially popular media content – are far more consequential today. As civic identity becomes individualized, privatized, and a matter of "radical choice" (7), pop fandom and civic engagement converge.

Yet fan communities differ in how they interpret stories, especially as socio-economic differences expand or restrict the range of choices, and the relative fluidity of identities, among cultural subgroups (13). Hinck suggests that producers therefore have an ethical obligation to steer fans toward a particular interpretation of content (i.e. a film's overarching moral principles), and particular applications of that interpretation (i.e. how such principles translate into civic action) (14). Hinck posits The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA) as a case study. HPA is a group of fans who engage in civic action on behalf of gay rights, fair trade, and related progressive issues (1). They find inspiration in the Harry Potter characters and translate their perceived virtues into fan-based citizenship performances (2). For example, through the Not in Harry's Name campaign, HPA pressured Warner Brothers to change its business practices in the production of chocolate products (11). In such campaigns, HPA received little direction from author J.K. Rowling, who has indicated her belief that the preferred use of Harry Potter is simply for fantasy and entertainment (7). I would suggest that the Not in Harry's Name campaign, and similar fan-focused efforts,² centered rhetorically on the integrity of Warner Brothers as an institution, asking in essence: How can you produce content featuring Harry Potter while putting his name on products that undermine the very values he represents? While Hinck is correct to underscore

² See for example Jenkins' (2006) discussion of the dispute between Warner Brothers and Harry Potter fan fiction websites (169–205).

the responsibility of an author like Rowling in guiding fans' interpretation and application of a book or film's latent moral content, the burden clearly lies also on the shoulders of Warner Brothers, fans and audiences, and indeed on a range of stakeholders, including the legislators tasked with regulating the entertainment industry. In discerning the civic uses of content, scholars can identify latent tensions between the motives of commercial industries and the concerns and values of audiences. In this way, scholarship can examine not only how the character of Harry Potter fulfills his own moral commitments with integrity, but how authors, fans, and the industry itself can embody the virtue of integrity on a collective scale.

4.5 Avoiding digital determinism

The trend toward fluidity that Hinck (2016) describes has also blurred the boundary between producers and consumers. Social media platforms such as Facebook rely on users to produce original content and curate content from third parties. The emergence of so-called *prod-users* impacts how traditional content writers (e.g. newspaper reporters or magazine columnists) think about their work. At the same time, it generates new editorial gatekeepers as engineers craft and tweak News Feed algorithms. In this context, what are the obligations of companies like Facebook and their user-producers – to each other and to other stakeholders? Marxist-oriented scholars often frame users as exploited sources of free content for monopolistic platforms such as Facebook or YouTube. Fuchs (2012: 188) describes most, if not all, participation in commercial digital media as a form of exploitation. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned case of HPA, Andrejevic (2009) argues similarly that fan participation can “divert the threat of activism ... into marketing and market research” (quoted in Campbell et al. 2014: 211; see also Andrejevic 2010).

Caraway (2016) offers an important counter-argument, arguing that such applications of free labor theory are inaccurate, misleading, or oversimplified (70). Andrejevic and Fuchs fail to note that unwaged workers are not exploited in the same way as waged workers. Citing the earlier work of Hesmondalgh (2010), Caraway argues that not all leisure activity is productive labor (77). He adds that users have at their disposal a range of tools (TOR, DuckDuckGo, Ghostery, Ad Nauseum, the use of multiple user profiles, etc.) that disrupt the ability of commercial platforms to track and monetize online activity (72–73). In this sense, new media are “terrains for class struggle,” where activists leverage emergent platforms to actively resist exploitation (78). To be sure, digital media also provides unprecedented opportunities for artists and content producers. Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) celebrate this potential, describing how comic illustrators, musicians, and filmmakers cultivate niche audiences without traditional industry support. More recently, Rob Thomas, creator of the *Veronica Mars* television series, describes how he turned to Kickstarter to fundraise for a movie version of the series. He claims that the crowdfunding platforms afforded

greater freedom than if he had worked directly with Warner Brothers (Hardwick 2013). Despite such achievements, artists and developers have engaged in heated debates about the merits of emergent platforms. For example, musician David Byrne (2013) loudly decried the emergence of streaming music services such as Spotify, arguing that they fail to provide adequate support for upcoming artists. Without immediate change, Byrne predicted that “the internet will suck all creative content out of the world.”

While the economics of streaming music justify his concerns, Byrne’s provocative comment underscores a common mistake made by artists and scholars alike: in describing “the Internet” in sweeping, abstract terms, we fail to recognize its technical complexity. More importantly, we assume that its positive or negative impacts are inherent to the technology itself – an assumption which sidelines the role of politics (e.g. debates about regulation and policy) and thereby renders invisible the increasing power of technologists. As McChesney argues (2013), we must set aside the simplistic pronouncements of celebrants and skeptics alike, focusing instead on how we might steer the digital economy toward democratic ends.

5 Virtue in pop culture: The case of Sinead O’Connor and Miley Cyrus

As noted above, the study of popular culture provides a unique opportunity for media ethics scholars. Artists give voice to a range of personal and social concerns, including concerns about the industries in which they create art and inspire fans. As they and their fans struggle for authentic self-expression and artistic integrity, their creative work reveals tensions in the surrounding culture. By studying the implicit and explicit discourses of virtue in popular content – including artists’ work, interviews with artists and industry professionals, fans’ musings, and more – media scholars can understand the dynamics of culture as a whole. In this way ethical analyses of popular culture provide insights applicable to a range of other political and social issues. In this vein, the current section returns to the introductory example of Sinead O’Connor and Miley Cyrus to expand on the best practices for such research as described above.

Long before the public spat between O’Connor and Cyrus, pop musicians voiced concern about the impact of commercial pressures on artists’ ability to fulfill their role as agents of social change. Pink Floyd’s 1975 concept album *Wish You Were Here* opens with an ominous voice from the depths of the music industry. “Welcome to the machine,” the voice croons in an ominous message to a naïve young musician – the album’s semi-fictional protagonist. The voice asks, “What did you dream?” before answering: “It’s alright, we told you what to dream.” That is the same unflattering picture of an exploitative industry that O’Connor would paint decades later. In both cases, the artists express an understanding of authenticity best summarized in an old

saying popularized by Harley Davidson: “When writing the story of your life, don’t let anyone else hold the pen.” If industry elites held the pen in Pink Floyd’s vision of 1975, they continue to do so today, in O’Connor’s view. Decades apart, these artists position greed as the driving industry vice. “We’re so happy we can hardly count,” cries one industry executive as Pink Floyd’s fictional star reaches a milestone of success. For her part, O’Connor (2013) warns Cyrus that the same executives who have turned her into a “prostitute” will soon be “sunning themselves on their yachts in Antigua.” These broadsides against institutionalized greed paint a picture of corrupt elites who coerce the innocent to enjoy their own exploitation.

Since the virtues of authenticity and integrity are interrelated, it is not surprising that struggles for artistic integrity have also featured prominently in popular music over the decades. In 1980, when commercial broadcasting was still the paramount media regime, the progressive rock band Rush offered an homage to the possibility of artistic integrity. Radio is like “magic at your fingers,” Geddy Lee sings wistfully, before lamenting that “glittering prizes and endless compromises shatter the illusion of integrity.” He concludes in hopeful tones, though, reassuring listeners that “all this machinery making modern music can still be open-hearted ... It’s really just a question of your honesty.” Elvis Costello may have inspired Lee’s hopeful musings when, three years earlier, he and The Attractions performed “Radio, Radio” on Saturday Night Live. The show’s producers had expressly forbidden Costello from performing the song, which portrays radio executives as “fools trying to anaesthetize the way that you feel.” These are the same elites against whom Costello struggled in his own career, and in the song he confesses: “I wanna bite the hand that feeds me ... I wanna make them wish they’d never seen me.” As if to fulfill on this threat, the band began their SNL appearance with a different song but stopped abruptly before launching into a defiant performance of “Radio, Radio.” Though banned from SNL for the next twenty-five years, Costello had left with his integrity intact.

Arguably, O’Connor’s letter to Cyrus is a plea for the younger artist to bite the hand that feeds her, to borrow Costello’s metaphor. She asks Cyrus not to “obscure your obvious talent” by indulging the industry’s cynical exploitation of her sex appeal. Early in her career, she recalls, O’Connor had shaved her head to ensure listeners’ focus on the substance of her music rather than her appearance. In refusing the industry’s invitation to self-exploitation, Cyrus “can be REALLY [sic] in control” while demonstrating to her female fans what “real empowerment” looks like, she explains.

On one hand, scholars have lent support to O’Connor’s critique of the industry’s subversion of artistic integrity. For example, in her analysis of the social construction of female celebrity musicians, Kristen Lieb (2013) argues that industry’s control over female artists reduces some to mere “person brands” – commodities to be developed and marketed to suit the taste of fickle audiences. On the other hand, it is simplistic to assume that an artist’s work is devoid of virtue, or that fans are complicit in her commercial exploitation, simply because she enjoys commercial success. As scholars we need to appreciate how artists reflect the ideas, values, and politics of widely

different “taste publics” (Campbell et al. 2014: 206–207). As Campbell and colleagues (2014) note, “cultural forms that seem (to outsiders) to be formulaic and simplistic and a waste of time are experienced by insiders as interesting and meaningful and worthwhile” (208). Indeed, in response to O’Connor’s letter, some fans and feminist commentators suggested that one woman’s self-exploitation is another’s authentic transgressive resistance. For example, *Elle* magazine’s Tavi Gevinson (2014) offers the following rebuke to critics:

Cyrus is neither a lost train wreck nor completely sure of her place in the world. She’s just searching for it on an extreme scale, and, actually, in a much more unique, unprecedented way than her critics might think. She didn’t become a sex kitten or a bombshell but instead a stoner with an androgynous haircut and a proudly boyish frame. She didn’t follow in the footsteps of young female stars who play sexy for the benefit of the audience but have no sex life of their own (at least not that they’d admit to); instead, her performance of sex is goofy and inaccessible, intended only for her own pleasure and fun.

Furthermore, while some of her behavior seems self-indulgent, Cyrus is politically engaged, working to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS, and to end poverty among disadvantaged LGBT youth through her Happy Hippie Foundation. In fact, one might say that her performance at the Video Music Awards (VMA) in 2015 was her Elvis Costello SNL moment. Speaking to *Out* magazine, Cyrus recalled, “I just thought, it’s such this opportunity ... if I’m going to have all that attention, what do I actually want to say? What do people need to hear?” (Krochmal 2015). Reflecting on the “tragic stories of young transgendered people” who had faced bullying, or had committed suicide in the past year, she realized that LGBT issues are “woven into homelessness” (Krochmal 2015). She claims that she used the VMA stage as a platform for a social message – namely that “you have to treat people with respect and love. That’s our greatest responsibility as people” (Alexis 2015).

While the general public find it easy to take sides in the spat between Cyrus and O’Connor, framing one as the true model of authentic self-expression, the best practices outlined above demand a more nuanced analysis. The activism and songwriting for which O’Connor is best known reflect the dynamics of an earlier era in the commercial music industry. As evidenced by her Twitter-based response to O’Connor, Cyrus came of age – and now lives and sings – in manifestly different technical and socio-economic landscape. While Cyrus may reinforce some troubling dynamics within contemporary gender politics (e.g. the sexualization of young women), her work also contains subtle counter-narratives with transformative potential (e.g. an androgynous subversion of conventional gender binaries). Each artist has produced work that is both commercially successful and capable of inspiring civic action among fans.

These two artists’ intergenerational dispute thus provides insight into the rapidly shifting dynamics of gender and sexuality in the emerging digital economy. Artists can challenge the environment in which they find themselves, but they cannot escape

it entirely. Meanwhile, industry and technology can shape the work of artists, but cannot entirely constrain its transformative potential. In this sense media scholars are in the same moral position as industry leaders and artists – obliged not simply to observe or buttress the status quo, but to actively participate in shaping the future of popular media. Regulatory policy and technical design are as much a part of this process of intervention as media content and personal conduct. Crowdsourcing platforms and streaming services may provide new sources of funding and distribution, but they may also serve to consolidate industries, propping up monopoly organizations at the expense of emerging artists. Carefully crafted media policies can avoid these pitfalls by enhancing the transparency of platform architectures and business practices, and by ensuring that robust non-profit avenues for artistic creation supplement the content of commercial markets.

6 Conclusion: Steering the ship

As Plaisance (2015) demonstrates, media professionals – even, and perhaps especially, those who serve as moral exemplars – are complex creatures. Those who embody the most valued characteristics within a given professional field tend to exhibit “a shared notion of reformative justice, a personal ethos of humility that nonetheless features patterns of moral courage and significant hubris, a sense of moral development forged by pivotal experiences” (5). This observation is consistent with the paradoxical notion that those voices in popular media best poised to transform culture for the better – the “prophetic” voices among us – often do so in ways that are shocking, jarring, and provocative rather than soothing or reassuring (Healey 2010: 122–123). In fact, in exposing the hypocrisy and hubris of others, such voices may themselves exhibit the vice of pride.

The charge of media ethics scholarship is to discern such voices amid the din of self-indulgent commercialism, and cultivate an institutional context in which they might emerge and perform their transformative work. This institutional context is important since, as the fictional character of Bruce Wayne (Batman) eventually realizes, the lone prophetic voice must be willing to hand over captured villains – and indeed his own temptation to vengeance – to systems of justice better equipped to exercise prudent judgment. However wise, and however committed to authentic self-expression and social justice, real-world artists like O’Connor and Cyrus do not – and cannot – act alone. They need a platform to amplify their voice, even as they critique that platform as inadequate and flawed. And more likely than not, their critique – however impassioned and sincere – will likely be flawed as well.

When asked about the criticism that his fellow singer had received, hip-hop artist Pharrell Williams (known as Pharrell) spoke to Miley Cyrus in reassuring tones. “You are not a train wreck,” he said in a long text message, “you’re the train pulling

everyone else along” (quoted in Eells 2013). But he issued a warning as well: “Your performances are nothing more than God or the Universe showing you how powerful anything you do is. It’s like uranium – it has the power to take over lives or power entire countries. Now that you’ve seen your power, master it.” As complex creatures who mix virtue and vice, artists wield enormous cultural power, buttressed by technologies and industries that are equally flawed – if not more so. Scholars of media ethics will do well to heed Pharrell’s advice, and indeed to go a step further. At this critical juncture in the history of mass media – in the nascent stages of a digital economy – it is not enough for individual artists to master their own power. Collectively, citizens must master the power of digital technologies and the markets that give rise to them, steering the ship – or, to follow Pharrell’s metaphor, the train – away from self-indulgent vice toward our highest virtues. In this way scholars, artists, industry leaders, and legislators may work together to create a media environment that catalyzes human flourishing – even as it entertains.

Further reading

In this chapter I have aimed to integrate several strands of research in the ethics of popular media. My overarching concern is to put individual and collective concerns on the same map, so that we may see how questions of individual ethics arise in a broader historical and institutional context. Some of the above-mentioned studies are laudable in their articulation of these connections (see Ault 2012; Escudero-Alias 2011; Hinck 2016; Joye and Van De Walle 2015; and McMickle 2013). For similarly nuanced analyses, I recommend some recent work on hip hop culture. In their analyses of Kanye West, Tupac Shakur, Jay-Z, and others, Rose (2008) and Miller (2013; 2015) highlight the political-economic context such icons critique and transform through their work as artists, producers, and entrepreneurs. Similar to the “best practices” I have offered in this chapter, Rose (2008) helpfully provides guiding principles for artists and fan communities to enhance the “progressive creativity” of hip hop and other taste subcultures (261–273). Miller’s (2013; 2015) discussion of hip hop’s religious dimensions underscores the benefit of scholarly bridge-building between media analysis, theology, and the psychology of spirituality. My recent study of Goth music subculture strengthens these bridges, showing how Goth fans’ “spirituality on the dance floor” serves as a form of ritualized resistance to established norms of gender and sexuality (Healey and Fraser 2017: 2). I have also proposed a framework for integrating insights from the emerging subfield of contemplative studies into media ethics scholarship (Healey 2015). In this vein, my article on avante-garde composer John Cage and jazz musician John Coltrane may be helpful, as it draws explicit connections between individual contemplative practices and broader concerns for social justice (Healey 2017).

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20 Communication Ethics and Globalization

Abstract: This chapter explores the global ramifications of media ethics and various moral conditions of globalization regarding information and communication. Globalization is considered in economic, political, social and cultural terms. All four dimensions manifest profound recent changes in forms and modes of communication, through electronic and digital media and archives, increasingly important economies of scale, concentration of ownership and control, spread of nation-state democracy amid trans- and de-nationalizations of power (with a concomitant net loss of democracy worldwide), old and new imperial expansions, as well as enhanced knowledge, research, connectivity, cooperation, cosmopolitanism and cultural diversity potential. The actual trend in cultural diversity, however, is bleak. Unless communications become more inclusive, the vast majority of languages and cultures will soon become extinct. A concrete realization of global citizenship could reverse current destructive developments, especially by means of global media ethics values, such as the maximization of communicative self-regulation upholding freedoms of expression and information (about public affairs), the equality of individual communicators, net neutrality, and a principled commitment to human rights, bio- and cultural diversity. However, these “proto-norms” only marginally overlap with – and sometimes contradict – the currently dominant, capitalistic regulatory framework for the global markets.

Keywords: globalization, commercialization, concentration of ownership, cultural imperialism, global media ethics, cultural diversity, cosmopolitanism, global citizenship

1 Globalization challenges

Globalization is often considered to be a recent phenomenon, but, as we shall see, it may also usefully be said to have started more than 4,000 years ago with ethical universalism and cosmopolitanism – or more than 100,000 years ago, with the relentless spread of our species across all continents. Recent economic developments, however, have become the primary or even defining parameters of the term. Political aspects arguably have been a distant second. Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and jurisdictions are accumulating in numbers and growing in influence and power. They may be pointing toward new forms of governance in the future. The entire globalization debate may therefore be shifting toward politics, and with it, norms and values could become more central than they have been so far. Cultural and social dimensions have often come in third and fourth, considered less important or

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-020>

urgent. Yet, as we shall see, these dimensions are also essential and should be considered whenever globalization is addressed.

Networks of finance, ownership, trade, political influence, regulation and communication have achieved blanket presence and near-total penetration of all areas and aspects of human life, reaching and surpassing the most extreme biospheric frontiers, now largely defined by humans themselves rather than by natural limitations. Furthermore, the rapidly growing human population has doubled during the last four decades alone, and an unprecedented degree of integration has taken place. Globalization, a catch-phrase of the 1990s, is not only still happening. It is still accelerating (Eriksen 2016; Gills and Thompson 2006: 1–5; Castells 2009–2010).

So far, the driving forces behind globalization may seem to have been mainly economic in kind, centered on banking and trade. Like rivers and lakes joining a continually rising sea, more or less isolated markets, small and big, have connected and seemingly irreversibly merged into one. Furthermore, largely due to the massive floating of currencies during the 1970s, trade in services, measured in exchange value, outgrew the trade in goods for the first time.

The takeover of the global economic content from goods by services is an indication of an increasing role for communications in the economy. Newspapers, books, phones, etc., are communication goods that still cost money, but prices of communication services such as those by stock exchange and currency traders, telecomm directors, software developers, managers, consultants, lawyers, technologists, publishers, agents, actors, and other top echelon or over-the-line earners are increasingly overshadowing communication goods, now characterized by plunging prices. Moreover, through digitization, media products such as newspapers, books, films, sound recordings, and telecommunications connections are losing their material limitations and ramifications and are themselves increasingly providing or becoming software services, rather than being hardware goods.

Overall wealth is accumulating. Global average life expectancy keeps rising since the mid-twentieth century (also due to progress in science and medicine), but most analysts agree economic inequality is also increasing since the 1970s, within as well as between countries. Half the global wealth is currently in the hands of less than one thousandth of a percent of the global population. This is probably unprecedented (Berger 2014; Birdsong 2015; Savio 2015; Ziegler 2016). Some of the “particularly rapid” rates of mergers, consolidation, and concentration of ownership over the past few decades have been in communications industries. Ownership has thus become a much-debated issue with regard to globalization and media ethics (Ellwood 2010: 67–68; Herman & McChesney 1997; McChesney 2013).

Globalization is also transforming politics. There are steadily rising numbers and a mounting influence of transgovernmental, nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations, protocols, rules, laws, jurisdictions, and practices. Nation-states are among the many losers in the globalization process, both by losing power

“upward” to supranational entities, but also by delegating and losing power “downward” through localization and devolution (Castells 2009–2010; Giddens 2000: 85–100). Departments and other governmental agencies that dealt with social and economic rights and needs have shrunk, or disappeared altogether, as a result. In some places, such as Somalia, Afghanistan, or the Democratic Republic of Congo, states have failed entirely (Ellwood 2010: 72–89).

Recent political and social turmoil associated with a global so-called ‘war on terror’ (Wolfowitz 2004), on the other hand, has reinvigorated the executive branches of many nation-state governments. There could be a long-term revival of the nation-state underway, further exemplified by Britain’s exit from the European Union, U.S. unilateralism in the Trump era, spreading state protectionism, and surging populist movements calling for further strengthening of the executive powers of the nation-state. At least politically, and perhaps also socially and culturally, there are mighty forces intending and mobilizing to prevent or reverse globalization. Closely connected with this, there is a myth of media globalization that often makes us forget that certain nation-states are still the top ten (or so) most powerful entities in the world, and that they influence and steer the media continuously in old and new ways (Hafez 2007; Malcolmson 2016). The most insidious aspects of state power are therefore often happy to see suspicions of foul play being directed toward the media and corporations rather than governments, militaries or states.

Nevertheless, these developments could just as well be interpreted as parts of a desperate backlash or even of a hiccup in a relentless development of globalization and de-nationalization. There is a fast-growing perception (or awareness) that the most pressing problems of humankind are best – or only – to be solved or tackled on a global level. These include pollution, climate change, infectious disease and armed conflict. There are also demands for global solutions to problematic issues such as food security, wealth distribution, taxation and tax evasion, criminal justice, human rights, democratic rule, intercultural communication, and media ethics. In combination, this is perhaps the most important overall ethical aspect of globalization: the emergence of a tight-knit, cosmopolitan and planetary community, consisting of or representing all or nearly all people, that seeks to establish a better life, long-term health, justice, and peace for all, as well as cultural diversity and biodiversity for humankind and the biosphere (Held and McGrew 2002: 11–14; Küng 1996; Volkmer 2014: 11–14; Ziegler 2016).

But what are the values we could agree upon with regard to communication? The rapid transformation of the global media landscape has revealed a patchwork of culturally and politically based media ethics standards and has prompted calls for a robust pluralistic approach. Conflicting legal and ethical standards, disparate levels of regulation and forces such as deregulation have left the notion of a “global” media system in question. Things fall apart. In addition, what should the relationship be between media entities and governmental structures? Such questions confront global communications ethics theorizing. It seems that “the media” must avoid dependent

relationships with governmental structures, but some forms of external regulations may be required, some argue, if global media ethics standards are to become a reality.

Previously central aspects – perhaps even the most central aspects – of regulatory media practices are shifting location and nature from governmental to privately-owned, profit-seeking corporate responsibilities, such as social media sites, search engines, and cybersecurity companies. This shift includes censorship of hate speech and incitement to violence in particular, but also copyright enforcement, prevention of defamation, vandalism, political and terrorist hacking, and even protection of privacy, the latter being a basic human right that these same companies are sometimes accused of violating in their pursuits of profit (Benner 2016; DeNardis 2015: 10–15, 157–162; Jan & Dwoskin 2017; Oltermann 2016).

The changing character and occasional failure of the nation-state sometimes produce paradoxical situations for communication ethics as we head into an unprecedented era of global communication, with global society like a toddler, struggling to get up on its feet. It is important to keep in mind that a small number of nation-states are still the main political players, but maybe not for long.

Comparing the largest 200 economies in the world, profit-seeking corporations became wealthier and arguably more powerful than states already at the turn of the twentieth century. 133 were for-profit corporations, 67 were countries (Ellwood 2010: 66–69; Khanna 2016). This circumstance has arguably posed a range of challenges to democracy, cultural diversity, biodiversity and human rights. As nation-states and their sovereignty weaken or deteriorate, social and economic rights in particular, but also civil and political rights, are rapidly becoming dependent on standards of corporate social responsibility.

As globalization marches on, both wealth and power are being concentrated into fewer hands. The elites are narrowing in proportion to the rest of the population; the people are less in control than under pre-globalized democratic conditions. These changes appear to be compelling, taking place under structurally-determined conditions, about which people can do little, if anything at all. Increased mobility, for example, also leads to a hollowing-out process with regard to democracy. In so-called “global cities” such as New York, London, Geneva, or Vienna, many or most of the people (especially the proletariat and the elites, but increasingly also the middle classes) actually living there cannot elect their city governments (recently empowered by the globalization crisis of the nation-state), because they only have voting rights elsewhere, for example in different countries of origin, or not at all. (Monbiot 2016; Sassen 1998)

Along with other forms of social organization media regulation is being de-democratized as globalization progresses along its present three tracks: decreasing representation due to increased corporate power as well as increased migration with democracy being increasingly undermined by an impotent nation-state mold (with a concomitant loss of popular support for democracy in general); the outsourcing of censorship and other regulatory tasks to ultimately self-appointed

experts, i.e. the biggest media corporations; and, finally, a Machiavellian scenario of might being right in the practices of global jurisdiction and transnational criminal justice. Yet, it does not have to be so. A new, decentralized, perhaps inherently democratic communications infrastructure exists in the form of the Internet. The persistent digital divide (the number of people who still have never been online is still larger than the number that has (ITU 2017), though rapidly shrinking, has so far prevented a global democratic take-off on this platform. The potential is there, however, which makes the Internet a politically and socially explosive new medium, especially on local levels. For example, it has played contributing and important, revolutionary democratic roles in the Arab Spring uprisings from 2011 onward, and elsewhere (Burriss 2011; Howard and Hussain 2013: 22–31, see also Dabashi 2012; Haifawi 2015).

The two perhaps most basic structural prior conditions of the globalization of communication ethics are that transnational phenomena such as communication are still being publicly regulated mainly in national terms, yet privately regulated globally, especially in terms of profitability. These conditions may change, however, as globalization progresses further. In particular, the term “culture” often comes up when global or transnational media regulation is discussed.

2 Globalization, culture, and language

There are two dimensions in which the globalization of culture appears to be a global threat to cultural diversity so far, the first being the uniform, single, global, capitalist culture that emerges whilst lessening or obliterating cultural diversity and variety, the second the increasing tension and conflicts between cultures that are being more or less forced into the very restrictive mold of a superficial, and almost completely commercialized and commodified, single-culture world, or into the suffocating embraces of dominant imperialist cultures.

Languages of countries with military, political, economic, and cultural (including religious) power, such as English, Mandarin, Spanish, French, Russian, and Arabic, are replacing languages of small and weak communities at an unprecedented rate. Scripted languages, in particular, are rapidly replacing languages that are oral only. A few hundred out of the seven (or so) thousand still existing (spoken) languages are expected to survive the twentieth century (Austin & Sallabank 2011: 1–2). Only 78 of the many languages still spoken today have (written) literature. They are the ones most likely to make it alive into the next century. Only 106 out of the many tens of thousands of languages that ever existed “...have been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature” (Ong 2002: 7). Walter Ong therefore calls writing (in the sense of phonographic writing: combining visual or tactile symbols of sound to produce meaning) “a particularly...imperialist activity” (Ong 2002: 12). The perhaps most important ethical aspect of globalization of communication is the

unnatural selection of languages that is taking place and will continue to take place over the next eight or nine decades, in which between 50 and 95% of all currently living languages will become dead languages (Austin & Sallabank 2011: 2). The selection mechanism at work may appear at first glance as natural, but it is in essence a thoroughly artificial form of selection, a deadly mix of commercialism and cultural imperialisms. Globalization and commercialism are usually mentioned first as the driving forces behind these massive planetary linguistic and cultural extinction events – not necessarily the USA, not English: it could have been China or Arabic, the results in this regard would have been the same. (Austin and Sallabank 2011; Löwstedt 2007: 2–4; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000: ix)

A second dimension in the globalization of culture is characterized by anti-hegemonic resistance and reassertion by local cultural identity. This may sometimes be experienced as nationalism, patriarchy, terrorism, religious conservatism or fundamentalism, and often as collective self-defense and anti-imperialism. There are numerous legitimacy and ethical problems on this axis of global change, as on the hegemonic one. As soon as victories are won against the hegemonic power, there is a tendency toward the formation of a new hegemony. Old power differentials, such as racism, classism, or patriarchy, are sometimes carried into and out of the struggle from the past local cultural identity. Therefore, this is the side of the relatively weak, sometimes fighting heroically against overwhelming odds, but at other times victimizing the innocent and the relatively innocent. (Johnstone 2015; Löwstedt 2015; Giddens 2000).

3 Global regulation and freedom of communication in a post-national-security world

To provide any kind of countervailing force to economic power at this stage, some have argued that politics needs to catch up and must organize and globalize like the market (e.g. Giddens & Hutton 2000). The market already regulates the media globally, but it is a system that rewards especially those who already have investment capital and use it to accumulate more capital. Profit orientation and accountability to shareholders, but not to stakeholders, are the main principles of global market regulation. An additional discriminatory principle is that corporations are legal persons and can sue for defamation, something that, for example, ethnic, national, religious or cultural groups, including families, cannot.

The individual human customer is supposedly king in the market economy, yet nobody elected Murdoch, Turner, Gates, Brin, Page, or Zuckerberg into their current positions of global power: at best only very indirectly through our purchasing powers. As customers, we can really only vote negatively, against what we do not like. The customers (of Microsoft, etc.) but not the people, the product sold to the advertisers

(by Facebook, Google, Fox, CNN, etc.) but not the citizenry, only have the ability to boycott what we consider to be unethical products, owners or sellers, but we very seldom or never do. The oligopolies of the world are not necessarily providing consumers with high quality products although they are capable of doing so; and the prevailing attitude among global customers is likely to remain that it is better to have a bad product (one that has to be completely discarded and replaced after only a few years of use) than no product at all (Kalia 2016; McChesney 2013).

Global democratic media regulation, on the other hand, can at least be imagined as legislated and administered by a kind of super-state, though one without defense and foreign ministries or departments. Therefore, the term ‘state’ is actually inappropriate for a planetary level of jurisdiction and sovereignty. Moreover, unlike all territorially bordered polities, this kind of political entity, a democratically-elected and -controlled global regulator, could be entirely transparent, with only a single exception. When it comes to law enforcement, in particular ongoing investigations into criminal wrongdoings, secrecy may be essential for success. But even there, full transparency could be guaranteed after as short a time of state-like secrecy as possible.

Freedom of information (about all public affairs) will accompany freedom of expression in any democracy worth the name (Trager, Ross and Reynolds 2016: 330–342). As Wikileaks, Edward Snowden’s and other revelations in the United States seem to have shown since then, state secrets are largely, perhaps mostly, related to foreign affairs and “defense” matters (Deibert 2013; DeNardis 2015). Since these matters would not apply on a global level, the transparency of public affairs or the open access to information about public matters would be more likely to occur in the world ‘post-state’ than in any nation-state, be it the United States or Iceland or Afghanistan, or in any less-than-global intergovernmental entity, such as the European or the African Unions.

Bertrand (2004; 2008) and Ettema (2009) argue that maximizing self-regulation while minimizing legislation should be the principle of approach for all aspects of media regulation, encompassing audiences as well as creators, producers and disseminators of contents within the very concept of media, thereby equalizing each media user. The thorny issues of privacy, obscenity, vulnerable audiences (mainly children), and of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., as well as defamation in the media, are already tackled successfully by self-regulatory means, without the interference of either civil or criminal law or law enforcement. This is carried out in particular by independent media councils made up of representatives from the media, media employees and audience or public representatives. For decades they have adjudicated cases, chiefly in national, but also in regional and transnational contexts, mainly by applying and developing media ethics codes and principles (Bertrand 2004, 2008; Ettema, 2009; AIPCE n.d.).

Through effective and consistently self-critical self-regulation, also including (corporate as well as public) media ombudspersons and other mechanisms,

eventually perhaps also with a new institution on the global level, media content producers and organizations can keep destructive legal measures at arm's length and thus enjoy the freedoms that enable progress, creativity and profit. This appears to be a promising way of ensuring grassroots user participation in future global media regulation, by starting outside and without the state, the post-state, or anything else at all state-like.

The now-defunct World Association of Press Councils (WAPC) was an attempt in that direction, though only valid for the print news media. Its permissive stance on allowing state employees on to its member councils, among other contentious issues, led to a mass exodus of Western country members from this umbrella organization of mainly nationally organized self-regulatory print communications authorities during the 1990s. (As soon as the Cold War came to a close, cultural wars started raging, even in transnational fora.) In 1999, the Westerners then formed the Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe, meaning independent of states (AIPCE n.d.). One necessary but insufficient understanding of democracy, (indirect) accountability to the electorate, clashed with another, namely freedom from state abuse.

Meanwhile, since its inception in 2006, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), a UN-sponsored and -affiliated multi-stakeholder platform, seeks to globally widen and improve meaningful Internet access, enable horizontal development and prevent or limit online abuses. It is more concerned about state influence than the WAPC was. Various IGF 'best practice forums' address gender issues, improving access, cybersecurity, anti-corruption and other ethical concerns. The IGF Code of Ethics for (global) in-house use prioritizes *equality*: Regardless of nationality, gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, disability, age, or sexual orientation, each stakeholder should be given equal participatory status and respect. The concepts of reason, tolerance, transparency and responsibility are also highlighted. (IGF n.d.)

The IGF system of values appears to contradict one of the central tenets of liberalism in this regard. As Friedman noted, "The society that puts equality before freedom will end up with neither. The society that puts freedom before equality will end up with a great measure of both" (1980).

"Freedom" is a label often attached to the self-regulated as well as the unregulated media, and it is sometimes even usefully measured with regard to the media (Reporters Without Borders 2016; Freedom House 2016). It is also sometimes used in what could be described as capitalist or technocratic propaganda surrounding the commercial penetration of society with new media, including the Internet and the digital electronic media, hailing the "liberating" and "empowering" effects of the new media technologies (Potter 2013: 87–88; Chakravarty & Sarikakis 2006: 12–16; Mosco 2004: 45–46).

There are currently several tens of millions of people working, living and dying under slavery-like conditions around the world, many in businesses directly involved with media and communications, such as the many thousands of child and adult workers in the coltan mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Lavery 2008),

coltan being a necessary prerequisite of mobile telephony and Internet usage, or the millions of people in Chinese factory towns manufacturing phones and computers (Arthur and agencies 2012). Any serious global media ethics theorizing must take into account these areas of media production in its most basic, concrete and material sense, where the raw materials, computers, phones, parts, accessories, screens and backdrops are extracted, produced, assembled, packaged and distributed. For example, the United Nations Security Council Resolution No. 1952 (2010: §19), mentions the atrocious conditions in Congolese coltan mines as a global human rights and security concern and “recommends that all States, particularly those in the region, regularly publish full import and export statistics for natural resources including gold, cassiterite, coltan, wolframite...and enhance information sharing and joint action at the regional level to investigate and combat regional criminal networks and armed groups involved in the illegal exploitation of natural resources.” However, even these preliminary measures are unlikely to make a significant difference. Legally, you can own anything but people; in practice, you can own anything. The demand for these minerals currently seems insatiable and simply too strong for globalization to reverse its course for any humanitarian reasons.

Related to its material reality, ever since its pictographic beginnings, media production is a productive force, simultaneously enabled and restricted by relations of production, especially by ownership, but also, increasingly, by sponsorship (especially by advertising), and by censorship. It may be argued that state censorship is in fact decreasing on a global level, especially in legal and constitutional contexts, since the end of the Cold War, but corporate and other less formal varieties of censorship, as indicated above, are on the rise. Since so much censorship is private (self-censorship) or secret (subterfuge) or gradual (e.g. “de-ranking”), it is impossible to say whether it is actually on the increase or not.

Although commercialization is catapulting sponsorship into prominence, ownership, the first filter in Herman and Chomsky’s acclaimed Propaganda Model, is (still) the main relation of production in capitalist society, whether local or global (Herman & Chomsky [1995] 1988: 3–14), and capitalism is still expanding. Alongside the prevention and the definitions of incitement to violence and hate speech, the prevention of the concentration of media ownership could therefore become a priority for future global media politics. Defamation issues, however, may remain the most expensive threats from the commercial media perspective on civil law worldwide.

Media ownership certainly could be much more diverse than it is today. If too concentrated, it is against the public interest. We cannot elect good leaders unless the media report objectively about the candidates, or at least from a plurality of perspectives. If we are not well informed, the public interest will suffer, progress will be delayed, stopped or reversed, and ignorance will rule. Yet, all industrial and postindustrial societies so far suffer from concentrated media ownership, including state, national public, intergovernmental ownership, and especially private ownership, since it is already the biggest for most sectors, including print, news agency,

entertainment, sport, advertisement, advertisers, and public relations. Only broadcasting is still not very privatized (except in the United States and in many other developing countries), but it is rapidly becoming a less important media species. Public and state ownership of media are currently looking to become the biggest losers in the media ownership globalization process, although especially public media are fighting back, basing their arguments especially on ethical grounds, on media diversity, public interest, and lack of market dependencies and bias, but also on a vibrant, multi-faceted and healthy public sphere as an intrinsic good (MacPhail 2014; McChesney 2013; Wrabetz 2017).

As an antidote to the deleterious effects of the ongoing rapid privatization of the entire global media landscape, Giddens and Hutton in *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism* suggest a remodeled World Trade Organization and a World Competition Authority, which must aggressively tackle media ownership concentration. Giddens and Hutton argue that the regulation of global media ownership must become the priority among a host of urgent and radical global policy measures, because without it, democracy and justice are at serious risk (Giddens & Hutton 2000: 213–219).

To serve the global public in an ethical way, however, the media must not only have many diverse owners. Giddens and Hutton are keenly aware that the media also need to fulfill central ethical demands, including truthfulness, fairness, balance, relevance, and the protection of vulnerable audiences from directly or indirectly harmful media content. The privately-owned media are not doing very well at any of these, but neither are state-owned media, and public media, too, are frequently open to abuse by governments, political parties, and others. Media ownership first needs to be diversified and all media organizations, whether under state, public or private ownership and influence, also need to be controlled, just like other businesses, regarding labor rights and slavery, on all production industry levels. Otherwise, the principal equality of each human participant on each level of the media communication process cannot be said to apply, and then freedom could only mean absence of slavery, nothing less and nothing more. In the end, freedom must not always come either before or after equality but both of them can also come together, a scenario that Friedman may have underestimated. At least some of the conflict between liberalism (Friedman) and socialism or egalitarianism (the IGF Code of Ethics) could be defused in this way: When liberation occurs, equalization sometimes does too.

Transnational phenomena such as communication are still mainly being regulated in national terms. If we extrapolate from current national regulatory issues to global ones, ownership and freedom of information and expression will continue to be constitutional issues at a global level of communication ethics.

When the Non-Aligned Movement of UN countries, representing the majority of the global population, suggested the establishment of a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) through UNESCO in the 1970s, it was opposed by the United States, the UK, and other Western countries and organizations that stood to lose the most from such an agreement. NWICO was proposed as a way to ensure a

more equitable distribution and change of the flow of information in the world, something that the less industrialized and post-colonial countries, strong in population numbers but weak in political, military, economic and media power, were promoting. It would have meant, for instance, the siphoning of international tax money to strengthen news agencies and outlets in less industrialized countries, because economies of scale seemed to prevent these from ever gaining a foothold in the transnational markets. The United States was NWICO's main opposition, but it was buttressed by strong lobbies such as the World Press Freedom Committee and the largest private media companies themselves, as well as by many allied countries' governments. They argued that media freedom would suffer as a result of it. The United States and the UK then cancelled their membership of UNESCO over NWICO, which led to the slow burial of the initiative during the 1980s and -90s (MacBride & Roach 1993: 3–10; Ó Siochrú et al. 2002: 76–78). Since then, UNESCO has focused its efforts toward structural reform in the media realm on cultural diversity, rather than economic justice.

4 Cultural globalization and cultural diversity

From an anthropological point of view, there are two distinct perspectives on how further cultural globalization could take place while employing communications ethics in a constitutive manner: intercultural communication and cultural monism.

An intercultural communication paradigm that provides a critical social justice approach to communication is necessary to counter cultural imperialism. In the latter, by definition, the stronger culture wins in competition with other cultures because of its military, political, demographic, or economic strength. The development of the intercultural (or anti-imperialist) form of communication on a planetary scale is taking place and has taken place on countless platforms and in numerous institutions, e.g. in intergovernmental bodies, research associations, world music festivals, or sports events. In its simplest, intuitively most accessible form, it is and should arguably remain the norm in human communicative interaction: i.e. with a premise or prerequisite of respect, tolerance, inclusivity, and the principal equality of all participants. Like the academic discipline of cultural anthropology, this paradigm is based on a premise of cultural relativism, but not necessarily on moral or epistemological relativism, since all cultures are connected and separated with and by transcendental ideals such as truth, beauty, goodness and redemption that are, at least to some extent, translatable and mutually compatible. (Habermas 1984; Ingold 1986: 146–153; Küng 2003; Nanda & Warms 2014: 12f; Siapera 2010: 46–54; Sorrells 2016; Wimmer 2004).

However, the assumption that interculturality is at the root of ethical communication presupposes that culture must be essentially pluralized, i.e. that culture is ontologically best or only spoken of in plural. Yet, culture is notoriously difficult, perhaps even impossible, to define (Nanda and Warms 2014: 52–54). There is no agreed-upon

definition of cultures (or of culture), not even a minimal agreement that would enable us to state with certainty that there are many cultures, in any event not in the same way as that in which we say there are many molecules, or many human beings. By investing too much in *cultures*, we may be overlooking the importance of culture, as well as of human individuality and how individual persons continuously create and recreate culture. If we make that basic assumption of plurality, in particular, we easily fall into the traps of “theme-parking” cultural expressions, closing them up, thinking of them as static and fragmenting them into mutual atoms or monads, perfectly isolated from each other.

It might be useful to sometimes take the opposite perspective: that there is actually only one culture, certainly multifaceted and perpetually changing on the surface, but with a deep, underlying, and shared structure. For instance, there is Chomsky’s universal transformational grammar, a theory of basic principles and programs shared by all human languages. If all languages share the same deep structure, perhaps based on a shared human biology, then all forms of thought may be available to all people (Chomsky 1965; Berwick & Chomsky 2016). There are also several anthropological and philosophical theoretical attempts to take this idea further and seek to identify a common structure underlying all manifestations of culture (Cassirer 1944: 87–96; Löwstedt 1995: 65–70).

From the monistic perspective on culture, globalization consists mainly of the physical spread of humans, their artefacts and all of their mutual interactions across the planet, a process that started before *homo sapiens*. If and only if it is now accompanied by a basic principle of increasing or maximizing cultural diversity, in surface manifestations as well as structural constellations next to the ones held in common, then global or universal cultural monism is also an ethics of communication that matches that of intercultural communications ethics in all essential regards, i.e., respect, tolerance, inclusivity and equality. Otherwise, it is, of course, only another form of cultural imperialism.

In recent decades, a perception that cultural diversity and biodiversity are crucial to human well-being has emerged, and there is now a widespread view that human rights (or human rights and duties) are not enough to conceptualize and start bringing about that well-being on a global level. In 2001, the member states of UNESCO responded to the ongoing mass linguistic and cultural extinction event referred to above by unanimously passing the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, explicitly to “humanize globalization”. It is now a new cornerstone of international law that complements and to some degree also rivals the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization 2002: 2; Anderson 2014). This could be seen as part of a wider common human strategy and adaptation to a new environment, the globalized world, different from the post-WWII world. It certainly allows and perhaps requires new formations and formulations of value.

The Media Diversity Institute (MDI) is a non-governmental human rights organization dependent on funding from western governments, intergovernmental

organizations and private trusts, with a parallel mission: “promoting an inclusive and accurate media” (Media Diversity Institute 2016). By increasing the number of perspectives on reality, media diversity will (or should) promote accuracy and enhance the truth. Media inclusivity and accuracy thus go hand in hand.

Cultural diversity indices, largely based on linguistic (but also on religious and ethnic ‘fractionalization’) diversity assessments, have been developed by researchers paying close attention to the biodiversity indices that biologists and ecologists have also been launching and perfecting in recent decades. They appear to point toward the development of useful and reliable forms of quantification of cultural diversity, quite possibly as reliable as the measures of freedom referred to above. This is also something that could, for example, lead to a form of wealth index that may complement or contradict traditional indices of wealth, such as the gross domestic product. Out of the top 16 countries in terms of cultural diversity in Fearon’s index (2003), for example, all are African except for the number one, Papua New Guinea. Out of the top 18 countries in terms of linguistic diversity in the index of Alesina et al. (2003), for another example, all are African except for the number twelve, the Philippines. In terms of the gross domestic product at the same time, each one of these countries scored badly compared to most others, but in terms of cultures and in terms of living languages, these were the richest countries in the world around the turn of the millennium; they also included areas with some of the highest rates of biodiversity (Maffi & Woodley 2010; Patsiurko et al. 2012). Cultural diversities may seem to make communication more bothersome and difficult on the whole. (‘Could we not all just speak English?’) Yet, through the circumstance that human creativity and productivity are provided with a wider range of cultural raw materials and perspectives, there is also a greater potential for more meaningful communication, for wider expressive ranges, more factual precision and accuracy, and for more inclusive communication. Either in this way, or else, in the form of cultural imperialism and oppression, culture could influence the direction of globalization just as the economy or politics do currently.

5 Global media ethics and the virtue of listening

In recent years, the development of global media ethics and global journalism projects promise to make a considerable difference in communication standards and practices. In the spirit of Bertrand (2004, 2008) and Ettema (2009), Ward and Wasserman (2010) demand an ‘open media ethics’ that is entirely inclusive, as opposed to, for example, the many exclusive ethics codes that have been developed for media professionals, codes that exclude audiences and focus on the active participation in communication of only professionals, often degrading – sometimes condemning – the audience (or recipients or consumers) to passivity, powerlessness, or irrelevance.

Instead, inspired and buoyed by recovered human communicative interactivity through new media technologies, global media ethics wants to raise all media users,

at least potentially all human communicators, to the same level: I communicate, therefore I am – and therefore I am also only human through other humans (Christians 2015). No individual who is able to communicate in a specifically human way, whether rationally, emotionally, even angrily, should be excluded (Ward and Wasserman 2010: 834f.). “Global” can thus only mean “inclusive”; anything else may be international or transnational, but not global.

A proposed basis for global media ethics is a system of transnational “proto-norms” that may escape becoming excuses for cultural imperialism and instead could be universal to humanity as ‘pre-theoretical’ values: the sacredness of life, truth, and non-violence. This is not an unreflected or uncritical or naïve universalism – cyclopically based on Eurocentric or otherwise imperialist paradigms – but very consciously founded on postimperialist and postcolonial cosmopolitanism and the experience of intercultural and international conflict (Christians et al. 2008; Hamelink 2015: 252–255).

The argument for global media ethics in one sentence is that “global power entails global responsibilities” (Ward & Wasserman 2010: 836). Global journalists consciously eschew all parochial values, all forms of narrow nationalism, regionalism, patriotism or factionalism to embrace a global audience, or interlocutor, without discrimination. Aside from marginalizing non-media professionals, almost all existing codes of journalistic ethics are still either nation-wide or corporation-wide. They represent a two-dimensional approach. Global media ethics and global journalism, on the other hand, are three-dimensional. They attempt to reconstitute classical ethical positions such as deontological, consequentialist, and virtue ethics in a new, borderless, humanity-wide and planetary context of cooperation first, competition second. It is particularly through the idea of listening (rather than speaking) as an ethical concept and activity, but also through a right to be understood, and through the rights to free expression and free information about public matters, that inequality and conflict can then be overcome. The road from truce to truth, to peace, and, finally, to reconciliation, can only be achieved by means of equality, listening, and crossing borders (Ward 2011; Ward & Wasserman 2015). There are still disagreements, however, on whether relativism or universalism with regard to values will carry the day (Black and Barney 2002: 261–262; Ward 2005). For a global media ethic, they will probably somehow have to do it together, perhaps as universalistic regarding morals and knowledge (at least in the realms of protonorms and the regulative aspects of epistemology), but more relativistic regarding culture.

6 Ethical globalization: Breaking through boundaries

Philosophers have long argued for the equality of humans, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, religion, and other cultural identities. With the communication ethics in *The Teachings of Ptahhotep* (around 2000 BCE) and the religious ethics of *Coffin Text 1130* (around 1875 BCE), moral universalism or inclusive ethical globalization

appeared in ancient Egypt. Ptahhotep argued in favor of freedom of expression, particularly for political speech. He also set limits regarding this freedom, namely, for hate speech, incitement to violence, defamation, false information, invasion of privacy, and he condemned excessive concentration of ownership in general. (These are still the main exceptions made for the freedom of communication in legal systems as well as ethics codes today.) Women, children, all social classes, foreigners, and (passively) even animals were included by ancient Egyptian thinkers in a system of ‘connective justice’ (Assmann 1996: 150; Graness 2016: 137) that permeated a moral universe, in which all moral acts were causally related to each other, and in which greed was seen as a supreme vice. Similar ideas were later found in all of the great religions and ethical systems – in the Abrahamic and Indian religions and in ancient Chinese spirituality, in particular. (Assmann 1996: 150–153, 174, 221, 243; Karenga 2004: 349, 362–373; Löwstedt 2018 (forthcoming).

The pre-Socratic Greek philosophers, Diogenes and Antiphon, took explicit stands for world citizenship and against ethnocentrism during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. A further development of ethical globalization took place when Zeno of Citium (early third century BCE), the founder of the Stoic school of philosophy, argued for world citizenship, for laws that should apply to all human beings, and for an end to slavery. One of the arguments for accepting egalitarianism globally through world citizenship, according to Zeno, is that we all ‘have access’ to reason (Brown, E. 2009: 549–552).

Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor of the late second century CE, became the most famous Stoic. Following Zeno, he was also in favor of world citizenship and believed in every human being’s capacity to reason. But his militaristic and undemocratic empire soon started to dwindle in size and population, and then there was little mention of cosmopolitanism until over a millennium and a half later. In the late eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant would again argue for world citizenship, for a federal world government dedicated to peace, and for global freedom of movement. He emphasized the ultimate need for a “world-republic”, i.e. a transparent structure in which all citizens have equal rights (Kant [1795] 1903: 16). Kant provided not merely a Utopian vision, but also a first roadmap to a global political unity through a world federation of existing states ensuring the enjoyment of basic rights of individuals as well as the avoidance of mutual destruction of nations by militarized powers. This is still the current stage of development. The United Nations can be perceived as an important point, possibly a half-way point, on the very long road to world citizenship (Brown, G.W. 2006). Jürgen Habermas has since concentrated on Europe as a form of cosmopolitanism or proto-cosmopolitanism, underlining the dimensions of human rights and human dignity. The European Court of Human Rights, in particular, overturns the sovereignty of Council of Europe (larger than the European Union) member states by legitimately overruling their supreme and high courts, which may be seen as a victory for universal human rights and justice against the particularistic and biased interests of nation-states and of conglomerates of the latter (Habermas 2012).

Ethical media globalization has more recently emphasized care about all people, including very different people and people in faraway places (Christians 2005: 5; Thomas 2011; Thörn 2009). It is especially with those people who are most unlike us that our global solidarity must be tested and developed. The same cosmopolitanism has surfaced, as previously mentioned, in global media ethics. Finally, there is an even wider perspective than the anthropological one mentioned at the beginning of the previous section (cultural pluralism versus monism). There is a possibility of an evolutionary ethics, also involving other life forms, that would demand a maximization of variation and biodiversity, and a minimization of selection (whether artificial or natural) and of elimination. It is a strict, global or biospheric ethics of shared life that promotes justice and communication across species lines while opposing all forms of speciesism and many forms of anthropocentrism (Weitzenfeld & Joy 2014; Löwstedt 1995: 19f). From the point of view of ethical globalization, minimizing harm, at least fatal harm, emerges as a principle tied to all aspects of communication, including the basis of co-existence of life forms in the biosphere.

7 Conclusion

At the time of writing there are four salient circumstances that may yet prevent media ethics in an era of globalization. First of all, more than half the world's population is not – and has never been – connected to the Internet. Privilege due to several media exclusivities ranges from access to knowledge, skills, technologies, devices, software, and contents. There is a popular, superficial notion that the world is “flattening” (Friedman 2005), that all information is increasingly becoming available to everybody, and that equality is spreading as a result. Yet, we may not even be able to talk usefully about media ethics and globalization until there is full or at least nearly full participation, which might never happen. In this sense, we may never achieve ethical globalization, because substantial parts of humanity were never part of the conversation. Connectivity is increasingly being treated as a citizens' right in affluent countries; it may have to be treated and count as a *human* right for global media ethics to apply at all.

Second, the deep web (or hidden web), which is neither routinely indexed by nor accessible through search engines and estimated to be many orders of magnitude larger than the surface web, is growing faster than the surface web. The growth of the deep web, which includes all firewalled cyberspaces, and the specter of the end of network neutrality herald the development of two basically different world wide webs, one often free-of-charge, but cluttered, commercialized, frequently interrupted, poor in quality, insufficient and slow, transparent for those who have the resources to analyze it but for the rest of us often misleading or deceptive, and one much better one, for the privileged (rich and powerful) people and institutions, with built-in provisions for privacy, discreetness, bigger data access, data defense, and secrecy (Deibert 2013; Wright 2009).

Third, the digital electronic media system places machines, screens, cords, ear-phones, cables and other hardware and software between humans, and between humans and their environment, disabling direct contact and person-to-person communications. In many crucial contexts, this excludes people from the social equation, from society, also resulting in further distorted, sometimes disturbed, communication.

Finally, the Internet and the wider global media system are being increasingly utilized as parts of new powerful surveillance-weapons systems, such as military drones. The vastly facilitated surveillance functions also allow exclusivist powers – state, corporate, business, and hacker powers, for example – to constantly, comprehensively, and surreptitiously transgress the basic human right to privacy (Benjamin 2013; Deibert 2013: 14).

All four of these circumstances could be used to argue that we have no need for a globalized media ethics, because it cannot be fair. It would be the most unfairly controlled and managed and the most unequal media community that ever existed, and therefore we must prevent the media system from becoming (more) globalized.

Although globalization may appear to be a chaotic lack of principles and values, it is an inescapable fact that capitalistic values, especially property, freedom of trade, profitability, and accountability to proprietors and shareholders, accompany international competition and cooperation to make up a first regulatory frame for communication worldwide. The limits of capitalist and imperialist expansion have not yet been reached, but they are becoming increasingly visible.

In the end, as Clifford Christians (2005: 3) points out, individual autonomy as the axis of classical media ethics theory – anchored by the pivotal importance of individual autonomy and freedom for media law, such as through the First Amendment of the US Constitution or §19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or §10 in the European Convention on Human Rights – will have to be complemented and partly replaced with universal human solidarity. Individual authenticity and the freedoms of expression and information must somehow be contained in the end result, but entire dimensions of communication appear to have been left out as communication norms were restricted to (national, but not global) citizens, especially elite citizens, rather than also encompassing cultural entities or humanity. Postmodernists and neoliberals might object, maintaining that universalism threatens diversity. But if diversity – cultural diversity in general as well as media diversity in particular – is the centerpiece of this particular universalism, i.e., if and only if it is a universalism that not only embraces and safeguards but also consistently promotes diversity, then the postmodern objections (valuable as they may be against cultural imperialism) can be overcome at this higher level (see Callahan 2003; Löwstedt & Al-Wahid 2013; Löwstedt & Mboti 2017). As we have seen, this also appears to be the direction in which global media ethics, global journalism, and the Internet Governance Forum code of ethics are developing.

The media system is now at least potentially a single, global entity – due to the planetary, virtual immediacy of digital electronic communications as well as its inexorably growing maximum-coverage network character – and this fact alone makes global citizenship central to media ethics (Christians 2005: 7; Plaisance 2014: 237–238). Unlike any earlier kind of citizenship, it will not and cannot be exclusive or restrictive or revocable (otherwise it would not be truly global); nor can it be a citizenship of more than one class; but like any earlier kind of citizenship, it will best consist of a balance between legitimate and just rights and duties. None of the basic human duties or rights need to be reinvented on the global level, except perhaps with regard to improving interspecies relationships and interactions, although many non-Abrahamic religions have already weighed in profoundly on this issue.

Habermas (1984), following Kant (1784), understood the basic duties within the field of communication, i.e., in the public sphere, as tolerance, using reason, speaking the truth, and observation of the universal equality of beings endowed with reason. According to Piaget's progression of stages of intelligence, we may assume that most people reach the highest stage, formal-operational intelligence, around the age of twelve (Piaget 2013). One might counter the utopia of full or nearly full inclusion into the public sphere with the view that power precedes reason and necessarily makes that equality fiction, or that any large-scale inter-human consensus sometimes or always marginalizes someone. But with the use of their linguistic and pictographic skills children as young as two years old are now drawn into and contributing somewhat intentionally to the really existing public sphere. This media system, the global prographic media system, is one that engages a much larger public than the public spheres of, say, Kant's time, in which only those who were highly (phonographically) literate, educated, mainly white, adult, male and prosperous were contributing to the public spheres of countries separated by the use of different scripts and without *linguae franca* such as English and Mandarin that now connect hundreds of millions, sometimes even billions of people. This means consensus can now be so much more powerful. There is much at stake, and communication ethics and media regulation, especially media ethics it seems, are at the heart of what is necessary for world citizenship to also emerge as more than just a pleasant fiction, namely, as a really existing part of the biosphere.

Further reading

Media ethics and globalization scholarship is already wide and deep, and the following selection is far from comprehensive. The nuts and bolts of global communication are explained in-depth in Hamelink (2015), who emphasizes economy, politics, conflict and culture, and ends with a short but profound section on ethics. Black and Barney (eds., 2002) contribute with mainly negative, but useful and necessary, critiques of

global media ethics projects. The emergence of a global public sphere maturing into a state and process of “reflective interdependence” is outlined in Volkmer (2014). The mediation and mediatization of cultural difference in global media is the central theme of Siapera (2010), who weighs in especially on racism and anti-racism. Von Krogh (ed., 2008) takes a chiefly northern European, but also refreshingly global, perspectives on media accountability structures and mechanisms. Sorrells (2016) combines the issues of intercultural communication, globalization and social justice in a way that is essential for studies in this field and beyond. DeNardis (2015) identifies some of the central conflicts and competing powers and positions in the nascent global digital media system. Ó Siochrú, Girard and Mahan (2002) is still the central text on global media regulation, Chakravartty and Sarikakis (2006) on global media policy. Christians et al. (2008) is fast becoming the canonical text on the subject of global media ethics. Ward (2005; 2010; 2011), Ward & Wasserman (2010; 2015), and Ward (ed., 2013), offer focused and foundational texts, balanced well between concrete and abstract, between practical and philosophical, and provide road signs and roadmaps for future research.

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Ronald C. Arnett

21 Communication Ethics Research: Evolution and Thoughtful Response

Abstract: This chapter acknowledges and renders yet another interpretation of communication ethics within the West centered on the *polis*, church, self, fragmentation and *petite* narratives, ending with discussion of nonstop learning as a pragmatic, tenacious communication ethics sense of hope. Communication ethics is fundamentally an interpretive task of understanding and often meets multiple questions situated within different eras co-present in a given particular moment of concern. This “hypertextuality”, aligned with the term postmodernity, suggests that we live in a moment in which all historical periods dwell in contentious interaction.

Keywords: communication ethics, hypertextuality, Umberto Eco, narrative, practices, tenacious hope, historical moment.

Communication ethics research embodies a centuries – old continuing story. It has taken multiple forms with no one perspective offering the definitive storyline. For example, the summary article by Ronald C. Arnett, Pat Arneson, and Leeanne M. Bell (2007) outlines the findings of a number of previous research summaries, which provide insight into communication ethics within the field of communication. This chapter acknowledges that work and renders yet another interpretation of communication ethics within the West centered on the *polis*, church, self, fragmentation and *petite* narratives, ending with discussion of nonstop learning as a pragmatic, tenacious communication ethics sense of hope. This examination of communication ethics illustrates Umberto Eco’s (2005) emphasis on “hypertextuality,” which he articulated as a historically layered understanding of sign systems. Practically, this notion suggests that multiple defining questions of differing historical eras are often co-present. Hypertextuality, aligned with the term postmodernity, suggests that we live in a moment in which all historical periods dwell in contentious interaction. Eco framed issues within a medieval period, while simultaneously announcing contemporary concern. Hypertextuality suggests that eras of antiquity, medieval life, modernity, and postmodernity are co-present in this current historical moment that Alasdair MacIntyre ([1981] 2007) termed an epoch of narrative and virtue contention. There is no one correct linear tale about communication ethics research; there are, however, crooked lines of difference that texture the study and the practice of what we term communication ethics. The adage that life transpires through crooked lines fits communication ethics. The historical moment and questions that define a given time shape an ethic that seeks to communicate a sense of a particular good. As a given historical moment shifts, the process of communicating a particular good adjusts,

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-021>

at times, finding its way back to that which was before. Crooked lines, not precise drawings of modernity's love of progress, center a vibrant and unending story about communication ethics.

1 Introduction

Historical epochs contrast with linear history; such moments find identity through questions that constitute a given era, permitting us to find commonality with persons who lived centuries before us – attending to questions with which they grappled that are now similar to our own. Hans-Georg Gadamer ([1960] 2013) outlines the power of questions tied to historical eras and their centrality in understanding. Communication ethics is fundamentally an interpretive task of understanding. Even external codes require interpretive responses to a public standard. Communication ethics often meets multiple questions situated within different eras co-present in a given particular moment of concern. Hypertextuality lends insight into interpretation guided by differing and, at times, contradictory versions of the good.

Communication ethics as a story about crooked lines moves through commonplace metaphors tied to historical eras within the West: *polis*, church, self, fragmentation and petite narratives, and finally learning as tenacious hope. These markers announce places and spaces of communication ethics interpretation. Communication ethics dwells within hypertextuality of multiple questions, historical eras, and persons.

Communication ethics does not reside in abstraction; one walks in the midst, not above, the human condition, within a biosphere that requires our attention. Modifying the words of Emmanuel Levinas (1990), “elemental evil” reigns in abstraction that does not respond to a human face (63). Critics of Levinas contend that his ethics do not go far enough, failing to respond to the environment inclusive of other animals (Davis 2010; Gehrke 2006). Increasingly, communication ethics theories seek to address all life forms, as framed by recent work on biosemiotics (Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok 1992) and semioethics (Petrilli and Ponzio 2007).

What Levinas does offer, however, is powerful: ethics requires our active responsibility. Failure to attend to the face of another makes communication ethics irrelevant. In the words of William James ([1892] 2001), “No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof” (46). James announced danger in eclipsing the Other within an environment that demands attentive concern. The face of the Other demands our responsibility. As Seyla Benhabib (1992) suggested, communication ethics begins with the “concrete Other” (10). Communication ethics scholarship labors within the coordinates of

place, self, and *a priori* theories and assumptions. The following story about communication ethics begins with a sense of place, the *polis* as the origin of communication ethics.

2 Ethical practices and place

Ethics related to communication within antiquity commences with crooked lines of insights of Aristotle contrasting with those of the Sophists. For Aristotle, the practices of ethics emerged via the doing of life, as explicated in deeds worthy of recording. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle ([350 BC] 1985) gives conceptual life to ethically worthy deeds described by Homer in the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. Aristotle takes us to a world of practices publically identified with the *polis*; ethical practices become virtues when detailed publically. Aristotle outlined ethical practices that emerged over time that pass public assessment and use.

For Aristotle, virtues defined the Athenian polis as they emerged through the drama and testing of life within the *polis*. For historians as spectators to account for great deeds they chronicled the telling about actions worthy of remembering. Understanding the virtues of the Athenian polis and the practices of significance permits discernment of great deeds in action. History, as the recording of great deeds worthy of remembering, explicates publically acknowledged practices of ethics. Aristotle (1985) understood the “standard bearer” as modeling virtues tied to a given task that facilitated life within the *polis*. The connecting storyline of Athens was virtues that framed a sense of the good life.

Virtues were undisputable within the polis; figuring out how to enact those virtues within a given context was the crucial point of choice. The Aristotelian (1985) “golden mean” is a contextually correct choice between excess and deficiency, demanding *phronesis* or practical wisdom in distinguishing the proper doing of a particular virtue. The right action related to a virtue abides within a distinctive context. Ethics of virtue dwell between excess and deficiency; the virtue of bravery lives between actions contrasted with the extremes of cowardliness and foolhardiness. Each of the following virtues for Aristotle (1985) requires discernment between the extremes of too much and too little: bravery, temperance, generosity, magnificence, magnanimity, concern with small honors, mildness, friendliness, truthfulness, and wit.

The virtue of friendship was central to upholding a *polis*, with the hope of minimizing relational damage. Friendship is key to political life, with Aristotle’s (1985) understanding three basic types of friendship: utility, pleasure, and complete friendship with the latter based on unconditional and reciprocal good will. The doing component of Aristotle’s (1985) good life relegated “pleasure” to the vulgar and

“happiness” to the pursuit of the good through activities worthy of being done. The time, however, to enact such public virtues within the city-state of Athens depended upon women and slaves doing everyday work; classical ethics marshaled life for a privileged class.

Virtue ethics continues to influence the discipline of communication. A comprehensive review of virtue and communication practices is key to Janie Harden Fritz’s (2016) work. Additionally, virtue ethics is central to James Herrick’s (1992) reminder that the *polis* required a commitment to a common set of practices. Today, in our post-modern world of fragmentation and different perspectives, little public agreement on a common set of virtues unites us (MacIntyre 2007). The state of contention is not novel; the Sophists of ancient Greece rejected the assertion of a single set of virtues. The Sophists, as traveling teachers of rhetoric, moved from one *polis* to another and discovered what is now a “new” commonplace – there is no agreement on a single set of practices or virtues. The Sophists understood that ethics dwells within a given *polis* and do not translate/communicate isomorphically from one *polis* to another. In *Sophistic Rhetoric in Classical Greece*, John Poulakos (1995) explicates this position. Poulakos’s work undergirds MacIntyre’s (2007, [1966] 1998) comments on narrative and virtue contention. Just as postmodern scholarship rejects the notion of a universal, the Sophists precluded the assumption that one *polis* could and did provide *the sole* guiding vision of the good life. The complaint of the Sophists against a world of consensus on ethical practices and postmodern sensibility is an outstanding example of hypertextuality; the critique of the universal has historic roots and has yet to fade into obscurity. The impulse to impose a value-orientation defined modernity’s efforts to colonize and enact totalitarianism.

Concern about the tyranny of the universal, the assumption of one set of ethical practices worthy of embracing, dwells within any provincial community. For example, Anthony Gittins (2015) explains in *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis* that increasing globalization has led to the formation of many different communities of faith that require ethical practices to bridge differences between persons. He wants orders within the Catholic Church to avoid dangers announced by Rudy Wiebe’s ([1962] 1972) book, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. Wiebe outlines this problem within a fictional Mennonite community that he places in Canada; the story details imposition of values on persons, which eventually lead to the destruction of community. A similar story about Lutheran and Catholic oppression is a major theme of a German author, Fedor Sommer, ([1911] 1956) in his novel *The Iron Collar: A Novel from the Days of the Counter-Reformation*. This work recounts a religious order (Schwenkfelder) persecuted by both Lutheran and Catholic traditions in the Silesia region of present-day Poland. Józef Zaprucki’s (2014) edited work articulates the ongoing communicative relevance of the Schwenkfelder legacy. Imposition requires resistance; we witness a similar impulse in the shift from Greece to Rome, as ethics continued within practices to enhance and nourish the life of a given place.

The diversity of city-states in Greece gave way to the Roman Empire that required adherence to particular Roman practices to live as a conquered people with rights within the empire. Kathleen Lamp's (2015) "Citizens and Captives: Depictions of the 'Conquered' in the Roman Empire" offers a cryptic summary of such a state, calling it "willing slavery" (8). The uneasy shift from Greece to Rome moved from practices to laws (Youni 2010). Cicero was one of the major explicators of Roman law (Du Plessis 2016). Cicero's career in law led him to create and understand public speeches as he served as a Roman consul, the highest elected political office of the Roman Republic in 63 BC.

In the waning years of the Roman Empire in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the empire failed to maintain control over vast amounts of territory with the eventual sacking of Rome in 410. At that juncture, another unity of ethics as communicated through a sense of place emerges with the writings of Augustine. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354 AD – 430 AD; [426] 2009) moves the conversation to another form of stability with a narrative description of a Christian *polis* in *The City of God*. Hannah Arendt (1996), who wrote her dissertation on Augustine, considers him the first existentialist; Augustine famously positions the self as "a question to himself [*quaestio mihi factus sum*]" in Book X of the *Confessions*, announcing the existential quandary of being in the world without clarity of direction. Augustine's insights propelled much of Arendt's writing with awareness of a "derivative self" that finds identity in the meeting of existence and one's unique call to responsibility (Arnett 2013). Augustine centered conversation within a religious ethic as he met existence on its own terms. Calvin L. Troup (2014) edited, *Augustine for the Philosophers: The Rhetor of Hippo, the Confessions, and the Continentals*, which examined the communication contributions of Augustine through the lens of continental philosophy. In that edited work, authors examined the following scholars who repeatedly reference Augustine: Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976), Hannah Arendt (1906 – 1975), Jean-François Lyotard (1924 – 1998), Albert Camus (1913 – 1960), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 – 2002), Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), Paul Ricoeur (1913 – 2005), and Jacques Ellul (1912 – 1994). The pivotal impact of Augustine emerges in his understanding of life as embedded within existence, responsive to the impossibility of standing above life as one renders judgment. Michael Hyde (2010), in *Perfection: Coming to Terms with Being Human*, articulates Augustine's ethic as a "dwelling place" for human community capable of receiving God's truth (34). As Rome was falling, Augustine detailed a narrative dwelling for ethical practices.

Shifts from Greece to Rome to Augustine have one major connecting web, the power of place in discerning practices that communicate and carry ethical weight. Place communicates habits through practices worthy of sustaining a *polis*, an empire, and a narrative about God's house. In each case, ethics has a place where communication about the how and the why of given practices gather attention and action. Like the *polis* and the empire, Augustine understood the value of a concrete place for communicating ethics. Augustine recognized the importance of a place where one

learns to attend to, meet, and care for practices that assist God's world. Connecting ethical practices in the meeting of existence, God's world, announces a narrative understanding of communicating ethics, which is the center of my understanding of communication ethics (Arnett and Arneson 1999; Arnett, Arneson, and Bell 2007; Arnett 2013). Hypertextuality of narrative situatedness and existential attentiveness makes Augustine relevant to a diverse number of continental theorists and current conversation on communication ethics. Augustine's narrative, however, met with disruption in the words of fifteenth/sixteenth century Friar, Martin Luther, who opens the door to increasing individual ethical discernment.

3 The self and ethical discernment

The Catholic Church upheld ethics within the West, surviving as the oldest institution in the West (Stanford 2011). The challenge to Augustine's Catholic narrative institution came from Luther (1483 – 1546), who called for the individual person of faith to enter conversation with a commitment to read the Word, not relying on an authoritative ethical position. Interestingly, Luther was an Augustinian friar who joined the order as it was calling for religious reform.¹ The Augustinians overtly questioned and Luther became a zealous contributor; he stated that the sinner finds justification by faith alone, and by an act of grace, not by adherence to the Law. He contended with the Church's selling of indulgences, which generated money for the Church while failing to promote a faith propelled by grace. Luther argued that the Church sought to build on the backs of the poor. The heart of the rebellion commenced in 1517 on the door of the Cathedral of Wittenberg where Luther nailed 95 Theses that condemned Church practices. Luther's challenge to indulgencies, understood as an attack on the entire Catholic Church, resulted in a cardinal labeling Luther a heretic, followed by Pope Leo X demanding that Luther suffer discipline at the hands of the Augustinians. Luther refused to recant, following with an even stronger statement that refused to endorse Papal infallibility (Kolb 2009). The response from Pope Leo X was excommunication of Luther from the Catholic Church in 1521.

Luther's rebellion found a communication channel through the advent of the printing press in the 1440s.² The rebellion and the influence of the printing press permitted increasing reliance on individual knowledge and reason in making sense of

¹ For information on the Augustinian Order during the Reformation, see Alister E. McGrath's ([1987] 2004) *The Intellectual Origins of European Reformation*.

² Johannes Gutenberg's printing press allowed for mass printing with the innovation of movable type. Mass printing eased the dissemination, standardization, reorganization, and preservation of print documents. Following his excommunication from the Catholic Church, Martin Luther used the printing press to disseminate his Theses during the Protestant Reformation (Eisenstein 1979: 367).

information and experience. The secular story of reason, associated with Enlightenment, gathers momentum with rejection of external authority embodied in the French Revolution (1789 – 1799), an era of social and political upheaval that overthrew the monarchy, establishing a republic. The French Revolution was the central moment in the West that shifted authority from those in hierarchical charge to individual reason as a basis for ethics and decision-making. The Reformation and the Enlightenment nourished intellectual freedom with the support of the printing press, which made dissemination of protest material possible with the individual person using reason to discern what is ethically important. The influence of Luther on communication ethics continues through the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Arnett 2005) and that of Reinhold Niebuhr (Ferré 1990).

Ethics no longer rested undisputed in place and/or authority. Attention turned to the mythology of a universal metanarrative, which permitted the individual to discern the ethical and that which is worthy of communicating. The central ethicist of the Enlightenment, who represents this position, is Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804); he recognized that place and authority no longer controlled necessary restraints on human conduct. He placed restrictions on behavior within a new location, the individual self. Kant's ([1785] 2012) decision – making structure is attentive to the particular and the universal with the human being mediating between them via “self-legislation” (43). Kant (2012) contended that individual persons must enact restraint of self-legislation and meet a particular problem in accordance with the “categorical imperative” (44), which functions as an external ethical check on whether or not a given action would be appropriate each time a similar situation arises. Self-restraint of the person resides in attentiveness to the particular situation with judgment of a potential action tied to the universal, the categorical imperative.

Within the field of communication, Kant's ethics of self-legislation prominently appear in Scott R. Stroud's (2014) *Kant and the Promise of Rhetoric*. Stroud argues that Kant offers an educational rhetoric with the individual attending to the particular and then discerning action in response compared to an imagined categorical imperative – this action is the embodiment of self-legislation. The person becomes a constant learner, ever attending to the practice of making ethical judgments. The human being, as understood by Stroud on Kant, becomes a walking decision – making school; education happens whenever a self – legislative decision unites the particular and the universal.

Kant, as the Enlightenment philosopher, writes in an epoch in which a secular trinity emerges consisting of individual autonomy, efficiency, and progress (Arnett 2013; Arendt [1982] 1992). These three coordinates constitute the metanarrative of the Enlightenment. Kant works within an era in which judgment about a universal truth is possible. This confidence pushed to an extreme leads to excesses with the French Revolution and makes continuing acts of ethical arrogance, colonialism and totalitarianism possible. Interestingly, Kant, as the principal Enlightenment philosopher, had reservations about such confidence, as he questioned the notion of progress. He

stated that on an individual level a commitment to progress generated melancholy; Kant asserted that individuals found disappointment in the present when their attention constantly tilts toward the future. The primary function of progress for Kant was species – related. Change might assist the species, while offering inconvenience and pain to an individual person in the present (Kant [1764] 2003).

Kant, as the primary player of Enlightenment philosophy, questioned one of its principal coordinates of progress. Just as the metanarrative of universal assurance of reason was taking hold in the West, challenges were underway. The universal was a secular depiction of a God-term, and the Judeo-Christian metanarrative provided an implicit background for understanding a universal metanarrative inclusive of individual autonomy, efficiency, and progress.

Attacks on the Christian metanarrative that undergirded the universal came from two distinct perspectives: Søren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900). Kierkegaard challenged the authority of the author and community to the point of stressing indirect communication that requires independent decision-making. His commitment to autonomy of thought propelled his writing under pseudonyms. The reader, not the author or a given community, must discern the correctness of insights. Kierkegaard disrupted metanarrative assurance delivered from external sources. He functioned as a poet of the faith with an emphasis on ethics, aesthetics, and religion with the latter venturing into the absurd that dwells outside the realm of reason. Kierkegaard was a rebel within the narrative of Christianity, moving from external forces to individual absurd decisions of faith. Kierkegaard contended with Augustine's tying of faith to the institution of the Church and questioned the Enlightenment's love of reason.

Kierkegaard's ([1843] 2006) disruption of assurance brings forth a fear and trembling that demands absurd decisions of faith that do not rely on universal reason. However, he does not abandon the narrative of the faith; Kierkegaard changes, however, from external assurance to the demands of individual decisions. His insights influenced major twentieth century theologians, including Karl Barth (1886 – 1968) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906 – 1945), both of whom were involved in the Confessing Church's opposition to Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich, with Bonhoeffer becoming a martyr in this fight. The importance of individual decision-making permits Bonhoeffer to work with the Confessing Church and explicate a position of individual responsibility in his discussion of a "world-come-of-age" (Arnett 2005).

The challenge to the Christian metanarrative meets a sterner confrontation in the works of Nietzsche. Nietzsche offered a dismissive challenge to the metanarrative of Christianity that went further than the critique of Kierkegaard. Both agreed on the necessity of individual responsibility, but differently. Kierkegaard worked to correct the Christian metanarrative, and Nietzsche sought to unmask the impotence of this worldview. Nietzsche understood the Christian metanarrative as no longer capable of providing an honest picture of the demands placed upon the persons for understanding and action with responsibility. Like Marx's ([1844] 1982) claim that Christianity

was a drug, the “opium of the people” (131), Nietzsche’s ([1882] 2006) famous phrase, “God is dead,” was an attack on the metanarrative of the universal. Additionally, his call for individual responsibility demanded a “slave-revolt” (Nietzsche 1897: 35) against the morals of the master functioning from a corrupt narrative used as a shield. Nietzsche stressed the notion of nihilism as the consequence of a metanarrative no longer offering a foundation for authority related to religious or ethical structures. He considered nihilism the ongoing background of modernity. He applauded, nevertheless, the arrival of nihilism, because it requires reflective consciousness of responsibility; the crisis of nihilism necessitates and demands individual responsibility. Nietzsche expected the individual to be the master of the crisis, not the slave of crisis. Individual strength and responsibility offers tools for meeting nihilism in a forthright fashion. Without a metanarrative, the world experienced a loss of confidence in the universal, metaphysics, and external authority. In response, Nietzsche’s (2006) emphasis on the “will to power” requires the courage to meet existence on its own terms. The will to power, misunderstood as a call to conquer, is the courage to meet existence on its own terms. The power of Nietzsche’s understanding of what we might term communication ethics is thoughtfully explicated by John H. Prellwitz (2011) in “Nietzschean Genealogy and Communication Ethics” in phrases such as: “Nietzsche demands that we judge for ourselves the values and ethics we place upon and enact as an art of living, as authoring a communication ethic” (18). An individual life becomes the carrier of a communication ethic, acting as a form of moral topology.

The collective power of ethical insight from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche resides in resistance to external assurance. For Kierkegaard, life requires acknowledgement of a Christian metanarrative, in which one lives with rebellious responsibility that rests on me alone. Nietzsche extends this critique to the point of denying the validity of a Christian metanarrative, stressing an even greater emphasis on individual responsibility. Nihilism is an admission of a world without universals, clear authority, and moral foundations; a reality Nietzsche did not fear. Nihilism requires the meeting of existence with response that takes ownership of one’s own responsibility. No longer is there a place of morals, an institution housing morals, or persons engaged in self-legislation of discerning morals. Nietzsche’s outline announces a basic collapse in the West, naming the Christian metanarrative as no longer viable as a universal moral background. His critique of modernity centers on the death of God with multiple ongoing implications.

4 Responses to metanarrative collapse

Arnett (2013), in *Communication Ethics in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt’s Rhetoric of Warning and Hope*, describes the corpus of Arendt’s scholarship as a secular contention with modernity. Arnett contends that Arendt renders insight into the secular

trinity of modernity: individual autonomy, efficiency, and progress. These assumptions guide the mythic structure of modernity. Individual autonomy invites individualism, which Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* ([1835 and 1840] 1963) contended was artificial and greatly more problematic action than selfishness. Individualism, according to Arnett (2013), is a social disease that propagates the assumption that one can stand above all social constraints. Family, local context, friends, and relationships cease to restrain actions; selfishness, on the other hand, at least, considers the other, knowing fully well that the good of the other affects “me”. Efficiency assumes that doing things faster and cheaper is an undisputed social good. Efficiency ties one paradigmatically to a given perspective. For instance, one might place all focus on fossil fuels, missing the opportunity to generate renewable energy. Efficiency of practice does not equate with excellence; one major scientific discovery after another emerged from mistakes. For example, German physicist Wilhelm Rontgen discovered X-rays completely by accident in 1895 while experimenting with cathode ray tubes (Thomas and Banerjee 2013). More of the same line of inquiry does not necessarily generate creative outcomes; such action depletes the soil of innovation as depicted by the great dust bowls in the American Great Plains of the 1930s. Progress, as discussed earlier by Kant, carries with it a commitment to the new, ever questioning tradition. Such is the reason Arendt (1968) wrote in *Between Past and Future* that the between or connecting link between the already was and the not yet is tradition. Arendt understood tradition as linked with change, unlike actions that reify into ideology. Tradition offers narrative ground upon which persons can walk. Arendt knew that there is no greater disliked term in modernity than tradition. With individual autonomy, efficiency, and progress the demands of actual existence itself go ignored. Modernity seeks processes and procedures that make the historical demands of existence irrelevant.

The loss of the universal, the Christian metanarrative, and confidence in the secular trinity of modernity leaves one without narrative ground, demanding responsibility from oneself. How the individual discerns insight and responds to this reality in existence is crucial, differentiating ethical differences between hyper-modernity and postmodernity. These two terms too easily conflate in daily speech. Hyper-modernity leaves the communicative agent to discerning action individually. Postmodernity situates the communicative agent within a *petite* narrative that offers moral guidance to and for the individual. Unlike the hope of universal guidance in the Enlightenment, communication ethics within the juncture of postmodernity relies on partial narrative perspectives of the world, no longer making a claim that one can determine the entire moral picture from the standpoint of a single metanarrative.

Within the realm of hyper-modernity one finds the writing of Christopher Lasch as an exemplar. Three of his works, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (1979), *True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (1981), and *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (1984) describe the emergence of a “minimal self” within modernity. Reliance only on oneself invites

exhaustion, as one finds it impossible to depend upon anyone but oneself. A healthy community requires support of others. When someone is in trouble or in need, another person must step up and assist. A minimal self relies on me alone. Even if such a perspective were possible and could generate great success, consider what it would be like to gain a prestigious award and recognize that no one is happy for you. This scene embodies the reality of a minimal self. More poignantly, what might the final days of a minimal self be like with visits coming only from medical professionals and the prospect of a funeral without any attendees. Sadly, I just received news of a cancelled memorial service due to lack of interest from the invited. Lasch's minimal self is not a theory but a reality within hyper-modernity.

Alasdair MacIntyre (2007) describes "emotivism," decision – making by personal preference alone, as key to hyper-modernity. Instead of engaging and discussing public evidence and ideas, one relies upon one's own perspective as the only truth. The universal becomes ironically personalized and subjective; if I do not believe a given assertion, then "it" must be false. Such an orientation unleashes personal passion, making it possible to turn interlocutors of disagreement into enemies. Those I like agree with me or I agree with them; the others earn disrespect for their positions. From a communication ethics perspective, the character of the minimal self and decision-making of emotivism represent the shadow side of hyper-modernity.

MacIntyre's response to emotivism is not a return to the universal, but a description of *petite* narratives at work. In an era of virtue and narrative contention and minimal selves driven by emotivism, there is an ethical alternative: situating oneself within a *petite* narrative capable of guiding, without dictating, decision-making. This perspective does not ensure adherence to the "correct" metanarrative; it embraces the reality of fallibility and the necessity of lifelong learning and questioning. This position contrasts with that of ideological assurance where one refuses to learn and simply asserts the prearranged ideas of a given position. The difference between situatedness within a narrative and an ideology is akin to ongoing learning versus smugness of conviction. In the field of communication, Jason Hannan (2012), Janie Harden Fritz (2013), and Sandra Borden (2007) stressed the importance of MacIntyre's work.

Loss of confidence in a metanarrative propels questions about any communication ethic relying upon the language of a particular narrative. The twentieth and twenty-first century scholar communicating the importance of ethics from a non-narrative position is Emmanuel Levinas (1906 – 1995). Levinas works within a unity of contraries of infinity and finitude, Same and Other, saying and said, ethics and justice, particular and universal, an ethics of optics and an audio ethic. He refused to reify ethics within a single position of certainty. The person most feared by Levinas was the "self-righteous man" who works with unquestioning assurance (Levinas 1985). Instead of relying on a narrative structure, Levinas articulates the interplay between an ethics of optics and an audio ethic that moves one back and forth between the particular and the concrete. This postmodern understanding of communication ethics begins with attentiveness to the face of the Other without attending to the

“color of his eyes” (Levinas 1985); this position unites ethics and the impersonal, which concurs with the work of Kant (Chalier 2002). Acknowledging the Other is fundamental, as articulated by Michael Hyde (2006); an ethics of optics requires that one notice another. Evil emerges when the Other is eclipsed. Acknowledgement of the Other moves one from the sign of a human face to an audio ethic that is more ancient than time – “I am my brother’s keeper” (Levinas [1961] 1969). This call to responsibility moves one back to a particular person who demands one’s assistance. Note: Levinas’s ethic begins with a human face that is impersonal and that shifts one’s phenomenological focus of attention to an audio command of responsibility, which then returns one to a given person. One helps without any assurance of knowing the correct action. No template or code communicates the right ethical action; one must discern what is appropriate for the Other. One proceeds with no knowledge of the approved correct action; one lives with a fundamental conviction that defines human ethics: if not me, then whom. There is no *a priori* answer. “I,” the derivative or called out “I,” is responsible – the derivative I is responsible. The “I” of Levinas’s ethics answers in response to a human face.

Jacques Derrida contended that Levinas worked from a Jewish narrative. The response of Levinas was no – sometimes a religious narrative announces the power of good phenomenological investigation (Levinas 1969; Derrida [1997] 1999). The notion of being one’s brother’s keeper is a basic phenomenological fact: we are social creatures – identity emerges in interaction with others. Failing to assist another simply puts our own identity at risk and has direct implications for the human community. Eclipsing the face of the Other removes the chance to hear a call of responsibility. Failing to see and hear responsibility invites dismissive gestures of evil. The face of the Other begins the performative act of responsibility.

Within the field of communication, Levinas significantly influenced those doing communication ethics. As mentioned above, Levinas is important to the work of Hyde (2001), Amit Pinchevski (2005), and Lisbeth Lipari (2014). Additionally, Arnett’s (2017) *Levinas’s Rhetorical Demand: The Unending Obligation of Communication Ethics* examines a number of ethical dilemmas and investigates them with the insights of Levinas’s communication ethics of performativity.

5 Ongoing challenges

I conclude this framing of major touchstones on communication ethics with two principal figures known for engaging communication ethics in critical and creative response to modernity, Seyla Benhabib (1992) and Arendt. Benhabib offers a critical voice in the meeting of modernity without failing to grasp its continuing influence. As stated earlier, postmodernity is not an era after modernity, but better understood as a juncture that affirms the reality of all eras being co-present, acknowledging that

modernity is still very much vibrant and alive. Ask any professional in education, medicine, law, or anyone losing a job from automation if they deny the power of process and procedure fueled within modernity. Benhabib offers an ongoing critique of modernity without leaving the grounds upon which modernity finds its identity. Her insights have kinship with Jürgen Habermas and with Arendt. Both she and Arendt fight within the confines of modernity as ardent critics. Thus, I conclude this essay by encouraging increased communication ethics attention on the insights of Benhabib and Arendt.

These two scholars initiate the assumption that health in the human condition requires each one of us to give support to the public domain, which is composed of multiple opinions. Benhabib (1992) understands the public domain as a “discursive public space” (89). She rejects the linking of dialogue with neutrality in the public domain (89). Arendt (1968) relies on tradition as the ground under one’s feet, necessary in the battle with modernity. Benhabib, like Habermas, is less kind to tradition and stresses a “radical proceduralism” (Benhabib 1992: 12; Habermas 1991) that permits the hearing of all voices present. Arendt’s stress on tradition includes those not present. Benhabib relies upon dialectic in action, questioning to discern a better option. Both Arendt and Benhabib refuse reliance upon ideology in their commitment to public space and multiple positions. They both facilitate engagement with the Other without reliance upon provinciality. Arendt (1992) discusses the importance of an “enlarged mentality,” and Benhabib (1992) emphasizes the “concrete Other” and “reversal of positions” in decision – making. Benhabib unites feminism and postmodernity as she accepts the general framework of postmodern critique with inclusion. She does not accept the reality of complete fragmentation; Benhabib seeks forms of inclusion for persons and ideas without falling prey to the mythology of progress. Both Arendt and Benhabib are critics of modernity and have postmodern leanings without sliding fully into one camp or another. Their scholarship addresses the human condition and works to address problems before us one at a time. They offer no grand metaphysical solutions.

Communication ethics, for Arendt and Benhabib, resides with a tenacious hope of learning, participating, engaging, and dialectical change of challenge inclusive of increased participation from those within the human community. They do not offer one perspective on ethics; they call for coordinates of inclusion and participation in the public domain along with a tenacious courage to enact communication ethics void of a code. Unlike modernity’s love of process and procedure, and postmodernity’s glorifying of fragmentation, Benhabib and Arendt remind us that each one of us still matters as we search for temporally correct answers. Communication ethics is not a code to follow. It is the performative heart of human identity, as we embrace the responsibility of discerning what matters in a given place for a particular people. Communication ethics dwells in the knowledge that no one final answer exists for all time, ever supported by an assumption of caution about the purity of one’s own convictions.

Further Reading

Communication ethics responds to the demands of the historical moment and its relevant questions. Arnett, Arneson, and Bell (2007) and MacIntyre ([1981] 2007) provide a summary of these shifts, which move in crooked lines rather than a clean and linear path. A direction of texture and twisting movement underscores Umberto Eco's (2005) description of hypertextuality that assumes the co-presence of multiple historical moments. Furthermore, Hans-Georg Gadamer ([1960] 2013) emphasizes historicity as the overlapping of goods across chronological time. Aristotle's virtue ethics ([350 BC] 1985) conceptualizes the classical era's protection and promotion of the polis with Fritz (2016, 2018), Herrick (1992), MacIntyre (2007), Plaisance (2014), and Poulakos (1995) extending the relevance of virtue ethics. Arendt (1996), Arnett (2013), Troup (2014), and Hyde (2010) contextualize the goods of the Middle Ages with an explication of Augustine's contribution ([426] 2009). Scott Stroud (2014) explicates an Enlightenment understanding of Immanuel Kant's ([1785] 2012) stress on self-legislation while Arnett (2013) and Arendt ([1982] 1992) extend Kant's enlarged mentality. Kierkegaard ([1843] 2006) and Nietzsche ([1882] 2006) counter Kant's metanarrative; this disposition on communication ethics resides in the work of Lasch (1979, 1981, 1984), Levinas (1985), Derrida ([1997] 1999), Hyde (2001), Pinchevski (2005), Lipari (2014), Arnett (2017), Benhabib (1992), Arendt (1992), and MacIntyre (2007), which underscores a multiplicity of goods that render a multiplicity of communication ethics.

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Michael Humphrey

22 No Greater Than Who I Actually Am: Virtue Ethics in Digital Life Narratives

Abstract: The events, thoughts and actions we create in digital space form identities in two distinct ways. The purposeful communication of life events is a rough analog to traditional life writing, but the introduction of algorithms creates a new complication. Whether there has been an ethic of autobiography in the past is a debate of its own, but now we have entered a phase of human life which prompts fresh questions: How is a digital life narrative formed in a just way? What are the limits of agentive identity creation, both for the self and the software? G.E.M. Anscombe (1958) provides a useful lens onto these questions, by suggesting the modern moral perspective should guide us toward “flourishing.” In this paper, I argue that individual storytellers (anyone who is presenting the semblance of an authentic self on a digital platform to be consumed by other users), by the nature of the “publicness” of their act are subjecting themselves to a new kind of life identity ethical scrutiny.

Keywords: digital life narrative, identity, virtue ethics, social media, autobiography

Our deepest instincts and our most secret passions will be analyzed, published, and exploited
(Ellul 1964: 427).

1 Who is the author?

In 2006, when Oprah Winfrey sternly stared down memoirist James Frey, we were observing the last gasps of a different media era. Frey entered our public discourse via “A Million Little Pieces,” a memoir about addiction, crime and recovery that Winfrey championed and thus canonized among cash registers of bookstores across America. Now, she was angry.

“I feel really duped,” Oprah said to Frey. “But more importantly, I feel that you betrayed millions of readers.”

Frey had indeed, and he was caught. The Smoking Gun, an early Internet watchdog known for unearthing obscure documents, had found that Frey’s story was riddled with factual holes. Frey confessed to Winfrey that the website had accurately fact-checked his book ... and his story was filled with, as the website’s title proclaimed, “A Million Little Lies.” Winfrey, in the confrontational interview, wasted no time hitting Frey with multiple questions about why he altered facts. And very early on in the interview he explains:

I think one of the coping mechanisms I developed was sort of this image of myself that was greater, probably, than – not probably – that was greater than what I actually was. In order to

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-022>

get through the experience of the addiction, I thought of myself as being tougher than I was and badder than I was – and it helped me cope. When I was writing the book ... instead of being as introspective as I should have been, I clung to that image (Oprah.com 2006).

Regardless of Frey's veracity in that moment, it included an unintended prescient statement about life narrative in the soon-to-emerge social media era, in which performing a self "greater than what I actually was," or at least glossier, is common (Grandt et al., 2016; Bolton, et al. 2013; Leung 2013). In those 10 years, as social media adoption scaled to the billions of people, life narrative emerged as everyday activity. In 2006, Facebook opened its wall to any user over the age 13, Twitter was founded and YouTube became a household name. A year later, Tumblr arrived, followed four years later by Instagram and Pinterest, then a year later by Snapchat. Each of these platforms, in their own particular way, revolutionized how we digitally perform the self (Boyd 2008). Like the rapid ascension of memoir and "reality" entertainment of the 1990s and 2000s, social networking platforms proved that self-mediatization had great economic power. But there are differences. Memoirs such as Frank McCourt's "Angela's Ashes" and shows like MTV's "Real World" might have stretched, and perhaps disfigured, the shape of our understanding about true stories in their respective genres, but they did not erase a general expectation of factuality, as the response to Frey's book demonstrated.

If the philosopher G.E.M. Anscombe (1959) had been able to address the matter of Frey, she might have been interested in parsing the concept of "contract" between writer and reader. Frey's novelistic styling of his life, packaged as memoir to meet a market demand, arguably subverted an obligation between him and his readers, perhaps based on a contract of just a few words – calling his book a "memoir" instead of "novel." Anscombe rejects the notion of contracts in the broad sense of an "emphatic ought," because it would be impossible to imagine all the contracts we implicitly sign to live ethically in the world. Frey and each reader did not sign such a contract, of course, and an emphatic ought is, and has been, debatable for the act of memoir writing. On the other hand, it is not outrageous to argue that the boundaries of his authorship would be significantly different had the book been marketed simply as a semi-autobiographical novel. Calling it "memoir," for marketing purposes, restricted its performative possibilities, limited by the expected dedication to knowable facts, and this is a sort of contract. Here is where virtue ethics can be a useful approach to understanding life narrative in modern times. Anscombe might argue that the issue is more simple – the readers on whole might feel "bilked" for being offered a true story that was consciously non-factual. And the reaction to his systematic misstating of purported facts was broadly negative, because the act was perceived as unjust. If we take the two ideas of virtue that Annas (2011) provides – one, that virtue is a development (like a skill) that grows through mundane repetition; two, that virtue is part of a person's happiness or flourishing – then Frey's own understanding of the incident becomes critical. His own explanation rationalized the subversion,

and his book suffered in reputation (if not sales at first), but he freely admitted in the interview that he did something wrong, and that may be where we see virtue ethics arise. Whether Frey learned and grew from the incident is a question, then, seemingly belongs largely to him.

Those were also easier times. A concession like Frey's might prove harder to extract from the typical social media user, and for good reason. In the early versions of the Internet, the lack of affordances (text only) and non-specificity of location prompted a wide gap between offline and online identity, so as Turkle (1995) puts it, to, "adopt an online persona" is to "cross a boundary into highly-charged territory. Some feel an uncomfortable sense of fragmentation, some a sense of relief. Some sense the possibilities of self-discovery, even self-transformation" (p. 260). Though it was also clear early on, as digital pioneer Kevin Kelly explained in an interview, that the desire to mend the divide between online and offline selves was prevalent. He says, "One of the things that we noticed when we did *The Well* [a text-based social platform] in the mid-'80s was that the first thing people demanded once they started meeting online, was that they wanted to meet face-to-face" (Spiers 2016). So there is a bit of have-cake-eat-too thinking baked into the early Internet that has persisted. Had the Internet remained a niche and static phenomenon, one which fully embraced "second life," our discussions about ethics in such spaces would take on a very different tone. As I will show below, pressures both economic and social have instead created a murky space between offline and online identities.

Another hypothesis for the lack of ethical clarity of digital life narrative is that citizens have taken up the skill of a professional without the requisite training or guidance, à la the citizen journalist. The concept of the "citizen memoirist" is alluring, but it clouds the issue in the same way the term "social media" does. The "media" portion of that term tempts us to graft themes about mass media onto primarily social activities. This tendency was successfully critiqued by Sundar and Limperos (2013) as outdated and non-responsive to the interactivity that the Internet affords. The researchers then attempted to reframe uses and gratifications theory for digital media use, but ultimately fell into another trap. They traded the media themes for technological ones, viewing interactivity largely between user and device, the software, the feed, and the developer but not the culture created within those systems. One reason for examining social media use with themes of media consumption or technological gratification is to promote a measure of theoretical parsimony: As soon as you admit that each site (made up of multiple user interfaces and millions of agentive users) creates its own culture, you have infinite numbers of cultures to study. Conceptualizing technology or media as the primary experience of social media, however, not only marginalizes the digital experience as necessarily secondary to physical life, it also misses the importance of the identities we are creating in those spaces. In this chapter, I will argue that self-performance on digital platforms is primarily driven neither by media nor technological impulses but by a far more basic and latent need: To live life

in community. This is not denying that such platforms are media or technologies, but the exigencies they create are a new kind of life itself – what Floridi (2014) calls an “onlife” in a realm that mixes physical and digital into an “infosphere.”

While I elaborate below, there are three statements that demonstrate my logic: 1) When users of a social platform expect meaningful responses to their presence as a primary gratification, it has become a space to enter rather than simply a conduit of information; 2) When users reasonably experience outcomes of such interactions that have impacts on their social ties, it has become a social setting rather than a pure informational setting; 3) When offline and online experiences blur both in space and time, then life is being lived, rather than merely mediated. Admittedly, this perspective runs counter to an ever-growing discourse that pits “living” against spending time with digital technologies. The critique is natural and, in some ways, healthy. But it has ultimately arrested our development in acclimating to a new way of living. Digital life will progressively integrate with physical existence and will demand its own meta-ethics. Treating digital sociality not as media or technology, but as life itself, inevitably evokes a central question: What is digital *eudaimonia*? How much does it rely on ethical and authentic renderings of a self?

Because digital platforms are media as well as spaces in which to live, life narratives can emerge in two ways: 1) Conscious sharing of narratives, from briefly posting a textual or visual recounting of an experience to using digital tools to craft a whole life story; 2) Algorithmic compositions of online activities, such as mapping the movement of one’s physical location or archiving digital activities (playing a game or have a discussion), can result in the development of a “character” profile. Therefore, living a life in the infosphere means leaving behind a digital narrative. The former scenario, in which we use a platform to shape our narratives, is loosely related to memoir writing or public journaling, and so we can carefully extrapolate some ethical understandings from those activities. The latter scenario, however, is relatively novel to humankind, at least in one way. We are quite used to the perceptions of others playing a significant role in shaping our life narratives, but we are not so savvy about how software does this. So we must ask: How is a digital life narrative formed in a just way? What are the limits of agency, both for the self and the software, in forming such narratives?

These questions lead us back to Anscombe, and the field of virtue ethics, which finds its gravity in the nature of human beings rather than codified rules from on high or the consequences of actions. Because, just as Anscombe spoke about life writ large nearly 60 years ago, we again find “there is a huge gap” in our understanding of life in a digital sphere, which “needs to be filled by an account of human nature, human action, the type of characteristic a virtue is, and above all of human ‘flourishing’” (Anscombe 1959: 18). Understanding, at these early stages, how the affordances of this new connective technology affect human beings’ sense of being and well-being, both within and without the digital sphere, is critical in developing the concept of what is just and unjust within the new sphere. The affordances will continue to change, but for now we know that at the center of digital communities is the human

personality, or at least a persona, which is slowly developed through usage of various platforms. It is time to consider what it means to build a morally motivated digital personality, just as we expect to build one offline. McAdams (2009) asks, “What then is a *moral* personality? It depends on what aspect of personality you are talking about – be it dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, or life stories” (McAdams 2009: 13). McAdams goes on to argue that moral meanings run through a person’s life narrative – in fact, they frame those narratives, and ultimately “[justify] or [condemn] his or her own identity tale in moral terms” (McAdams 2009: 21). Our moral personality is the narratives that we tell ourselves and others, chosen among the normative limits created by culture. The Internet has proven to be a powerful tool for practicing identity-formation, especially among youth (Greenhow and Robelia 2009; Valkenburg and Schouten, 2005). To use the Internet, however, merely as a tool for self-realization is to ignore the possible effects such acts have on others, especially when performed at mass scale. A close look at a narrowed field, such as performance of gender, reveals the effects can be enormous. There are many implications of this reflected in recent research, including gender bias in coverage of soccer on Twitter (Coche 2016); the gendered stereotypes on Instagram that are more common than even magazine advertisements (Doring, Reif, and Poeschl 2016; Tilberry 2016); the fact that teen girls are found to be both resisting and supporting hegemonic discourses about femininity and sexuality (Lamb, et. al 2016; Steeves 2016). So while the personality might be the core of digital sociality, the ultimate end of such interaction is the development of a society itself. As Plaisance (2016) argues, virtue ethics provides a framework for self-realization but also “provides an inherently prosocial agenda; even Aristotle’s framing of moral education is implicitly focused on its broader community value” (Plaisance 2016: 465). McAdams (2008) makes a similar argument in looking at human psychological well-being which should “extend beyond just how *good* one *feels* about the self in a world of others to incorporate how *integratively* one *thinks* [original emphasis] about the self and others” (McAdams 2008: 84). This connection between the self and community in digital connectivity deserves its own theoretical framework. I want to address, however, one key caveat to the concept of real life being lived in digital space. Digital spaces that prompt and govern explicit and purposeful development of fictional characters, for example, likely result in different psychological effects – perhaps effects closer to that produced by a playwright or novelist. That is the not the concern of this chapter. Instead, I am interested in examining the ethical implications of the personality developed online that consciously connects and holds to the identity of a specific person offline, or another “self” in Hermans’ (1996) “dialogical self.” How do we conceive of an ethical digital world, which thus far has proven to create a murky space between online and offline identities?

Eudemonia is, at the root of its word (“good daemon”), about guiding forces for living well. As I stated above, the act of living online naturally generates a digital narrative. But that does not completely abdicate the digital citizen of the responsibilities of the memoirist. Developing virtues for building flourishing mediated spaces must

largely be developed through understanding of the psychological and sociological realities of those spaces. The demands for creating such a better world touches not only the life narrator, which is implicitly most digital citizens, but also the platform developers who shape and develop their algorithms. To better understand this, we must look at the forces that have created such an “onlife,” examine how life narrative plays a role in developing personalities within that realm, what resistance to such life will do to our progress within that space, real-world imperatives for taking digital life narrative seriously and, finally, areas to consider for developing ethical understandings of life narrativity in digital spaces.

2 Technique as social force

The quote that begins this chapter sits in a sea of predictions, near the end of a chapter that culminates by demonstrating humanity’s inevitable and complete integration into *la technique*, propelled into all aspects of life. It might read Orwellian at first glance. But to think so would miss the point of *la technique*. A watchful mechanical eye has been set upon us, from CCTV cameras to governmental digital spying on its citizens to corporate algorithms. This is not Ellul’s *la technique*. He writes, “The term *technique*, as I use it, does not mean machines, technology, or this or that procedure for attaining an end. In our technological society, *technique* is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity” (Ellul, 1964: xxv). The rational method for achieving analysis, publication and exploitation of our deepest instincts and secret passions would not be Big Brother, or even “Little Brother,” that observing eye constituted of millions of digital cameras waiting in our collective pockets. Absolute efficiency would be self-reporting of these deepest instincts and secret passions without concern for their ends. All thoughts are rendered public, all analysis is algorithmic, all exploitation is precise. This is *la technique*. This is also the borderlands of Floridi’s (2014) information society. He writes, “We know that the information society has its distant roots in the invention of writing, printing, and the mass media. However, it became a reality only recently, once the recording and transmitting facilities of ICTs (internet and communication technologies) evolved into processing capabilities” (Floridi 2014: ix). We find ourselves in a fourth revolution as human beings, transferring to an “infosphere,” where “we, as users, are increasingly invited, if not forced, to rely on indicators rather than actual references” (Floridi 2014: 58). *Forced* must be part of Ellul’s *la technique*, but not in a classic authoritarian way. We are forced by the proposition of comparative disadvantage that becomes increasingly intense when we do not adopt technologies. If we want to keep up in work, in sociality, in surveillance of our world, etc., we are eventually forced to adopt new tools for maintaining the pace. This is also the earliest outline of a digital life narrative, individual identities scraped of its content, both

body and metadata, and uploaded – not simply performed, or performative, as we see in contemporary social media sites’ interfaces, nor just tracked by those same sites’ software. Ellul’s single-sentence vision is a digital scan of the self, complete enough to efficiently render both the aggregate and the atomized “person” for all interested parties. It is a hellish vision, and we are nowhere near it yet, but there is an ethical demand to consider the extreme, both socially and individually, because as Floridi reminds us, “The profound and widespread transformations brought about by ICTs have caused a huge conceptual deficit. ... In short, we need a philosophy of information as a philosophy of our time for our time” (Floridi, 2014: ix). Because Ellul’s warning, found in the 1964 introduction of his book, still holds, for now:

... if each one of us – abdicates his (sic) responsibilities with regard to values; if each of us limits himself to leading a trivial existence in a technological civilization, with greater adaptation and increasing success as his sole objectives; if we do not even consider the possibility of making a stand against these determinants, then everything will happen as I have described it, and the determinants will be transformed into inevitabilities (Ellul 1964: xxix).

Of course, abdication is only one concern. Reductive thinking, either about the cause or nature of the challenge, or imprecision in considering the advance of technique and/or the information society, and both Luddite reactionary and techno-solutionist perspectives, also present dangers in Ellul’s “determinants,” specifically as they apply to digital life narratives.

3 The self as story

Anonymity’s virtue was arguably one of the great philosophical questions of the early Internet. While anonymity was still widely prevalent in 2000 (as it is today), partially because of choice and partially because of large numbers of strangers on one platform (McKenna and Bargh 2000), there was still no conclusion that this was predominantly good or bad. McKenna and Bargh conclude: “The anonymity of Internet communication is a special and important difference between it and other forms of social interaction. Although some individuals hide behind it to propagate hate, for many others it is a liberating mode of communication, especially where social or government sanctions exist for the expression of those ideas or beliefs” (McKenna and Bargh 2000: 68). Ethical implications, however, were not a central focus in the shift from predominantly anonymous to nonymous performance online – basic gratifications sought seemed to have driven that. By the middle of 2000s, researchers were finding that presence and community (Lindemann 2005) and the desire to craft a self in digital space as a form of self-empowerment (Hull and Katz 2006) were emerging as gratifications for online use. This emergence lines up nicely with the introduction of a social web seen in platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and more recent iterations, which

prompt us to connect with both offline-based connections as well as online-only. By 2008, Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin were demonstrating that, at least on Facebook, non-anonymous sites were affording, and one might argue prompting, users to shrink the gap between online and offline selves, which they often did by “showing” their identities through preference choices (TV shows, companies) and group allegiances. Boyd (2008), in researching young people on emerging social media sites, found a desire to align offline selves with online selves. She writes:

In unmediated environments, it is easy to take bodies – and the roles that they play – for granted. By locating a person in space and time, a body signals presence by its very being. A body is loaded with cues about a person’s identity; gender, race, and age are written on the body in ways that are often difficult to obscure. Through fashion and mannerisms, bodies can be used to convey a wide variety of attitudes, emotions, affiliations, and identity information. Bodies, in the traditional sense, do not inherently exist online. By default, a person’s digital presence is little more than an IP address. ... How people represent themselves and interact online is fundamentally influenced by their embodied experience (Boyd 2008: 126–127).

The embodied experience is distilled into narratives we tell ourselves and others to shape our identity.

McAdams (1985), who introduced the life-narrative-as-identity concept, was inspired by the personological approach of Murray, which sought to understand human psychology by addressing the whole person (rather than just a pathology or some aspect of personality). That, as well as the influence of Erikson’s stages of development, led McAdams to define identity as a life story. “It is a story which is able to provide unity and purpose. It is a story which specifies a personalized ‘niche’ in the adult world and a sense of continuity and sameness across situations and over time” (McAdams 1985: 18). The continuity of the story is critical (McAdams, et al. 2006) in emerging adulthood to a sense of wellbeing, and this is largely operationalized through *narrative coherence* (McAdams 2006; Adler 2012), or “being understood in a social context” (McAdams 2006: 111) by way of a story that has internal integrity (holds together as a story) as well as external resonance (based on shared understandings). His insights were one of many that saw a life story as highly significant to the way humans identified the self. Polkinghorne (1991) describes the turn this way: “Traditionally, the self has been identified with the type of conceptual structure used to understand substances or agents. Narrative or story structure, which has been the focus of increasing interest ... offers an alternate way to conceptualize the self. Viewing the self as a narrative or story, rather than as a substance, brings to light the temporal and developmental dimension of human existence,” (Polkinghorne 1991: 135). And Bruner (1987), like McAdams, viewed the identity as part of a social construction, with “culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes” structuring our perceptual experiences, its memories and ultimately the self. “In the end, we *become* [original emphasis] the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives” (Bruner 1987: 694). As with any major turn, significant detractors abound. It is not just an incoherence among theories that are the problem

(Peacock and Holland: 1993), and deserve criticism, but the grandness of claims poses the danger “that it may over-privilege the role of narratives in human lives” (Watson 2009: 428). Other critics debated whether a coherent narrative, in fact, does hold in our minds. A blow-by-blow account of what has become known as the “small vs. big story” debate is not useful here, except to say one (big story) argues that a narrative develops in adolescence and stays fairly stable and unified over time, while the other (small story theorists) argues interactions accrue into a sense of personality over time, but does not neatly form into a stable story. Finally, there is also a debate about what is a story and what is a narrative, though both are often used interchangeably. I have adopted Watson’s (2009) definitions: “Stories are temporally sequenced accounts of events which unfold through plots involving the interplay of characters with interests, motives, emotions and moralities,” (Watson 2009: 11) whereas narratives are more general accounts of “events in the world.”

Finally, it is important to note, for the understanding of stories-as-identity, the role that memory plays in these formations. Memories are not formed in leisure; they are formed in moments where specific motivations determine what is perceived. We consolidate long-term memories for a myriad of reasons, with a wide array of capabilities, in multiple levels of specificity, but always in context of goals of the “working self” (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce 2000). More importantly, we retrieve those memories with the same kinds of contextual cues. Each time a memory is reconsolidated in the brain, it is changed by the context of the moment. Autobiographical memories are “transitory dynamic mental constructions generated from an underlying knowledge base” which are “sensitive to cues” (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce 2000: 261). Which is to say that interacting with the world around us, the cultures and we relationships we find ourselves in, shapes our perception of self. For example, Pasupathi and Rich (2005) found that mapping a story onto one’s identity can be affected by how closely a listener of that story is paying attention. This is just one experiment that demonstrates the power of social interaction in forming self-stories. What does this mean for digital life storytelling? If the way we share our in digital spaces, and the way others respond, has an effect on our sense of self, then the connections between our online and offline self are interdependent. For example, Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten (2006) showed that positivity or negativity on a social media site can be directly correlated to raised and lowered self-esteem of the user. Like the physical world around us, then, how we perform our digital life stories becomes a matter of flourishing as people, but the spaces in which we attempt such performances is complex.

4 The self-story as digital

Much literature about digital life storytelling emphasizes a tug-of-war between control (through affordances of presentation) and pressure that stems from

social presence. Working from Bakhtin's metaphor of "voice," defined as the speaking consciousness of an individual, Hull and Katz (2006) argue that individuals (and groups) can fashion identities but through dialogical means with cultural and historical contexts. In each age, individuals and groups use the resources of their time to create agentic (autonomous) voices. They studied an adolescent and a young adult's use of multimedia storytelling at a community technology center and concluded agency and social pressure can run both ways. "These authors have helped us to think about how digital stories, as instances of verbal performance, do not simply reflect social life, but have the capacity to comment critically on it as well" (Hull and Katz 2006: 33).

Floridi also emphasizes agency when talking about crafting identities in the infosphere, even as he problematizes the act in ways I discuss below. He refers to ICTs as "the most powerful technologies of the self to which we have ever been exposed. Clearly, we should handle them carefully, as they are significantly modifying the contexts and the practices through which we shape ourselves" (Floridi 2014: 59). How much that identity stays coherent over time is an important question, however, as digital memory is always fragile and the contexts in which an identity rests can change with a click. "Change the social conditions in which you live, modify the network of relations and the flows of information you enjoy, reshape the nature and scope of the constraints and affordances that regulate your presentation of yourself to the world and indirectly to yourself, and then your social self may be radically updated, feeding back into your self-conception, which ends up shaping your personal identity" (Floridi 2014: 60). This is more troubling than it might seem at first, if you consider the role narrative coherence plays in wellbeing. It is even a departure from Erikson, who saw identity as a fairly stable base on which small iterations are made. On the other hand, it speeds up and de-contextualizes the "knowledge base" of autobiographical memory, which it must be noted, is at least augmented by a digital memory. That, too is a problem, as Floridi notes, because the ability to forget, to filter out, is a critical skill of identity formation.

And then, of course, the "digital gaze," as Floridi calls it, moves as quickly as the identified figure. What once was an affordance for anonymity, is now a digiscape of identity ranges, nonymous meets anonymous, authentic meets inauthentic, human meets algorithm in the infosphere every day. Where this gaze comes from, what it wants, what it is made of, are all mysteries. "Questions about the identity of something may become paradoxical if they are asked without specifying the relevant interface that is required to be able to answer them" (Floridi 2014: 66). Yet this is a system of platforms of increasing importance, different worlds sliding in and out of each other as well as with the globe we have assumed is "real." Where is the need to be authentic here? Gunkel (2007) wonders how we really know who we are addressing in the first place. It is hardly efficiency personified, at least yet, but Ellul's *la technique*, combined with Floridi's infosphere, makes for a lens that clearly demands moral reflection.

5 Ethical implications

Because one's life story is arguably her or his own, the question of an ethical framework of digital life storytelling may seem better suited for information technology ethics (Budinger and Budinger: 2006), especially focusing on privacy but also community-formation and cyberbullying, hacking and hoaxes, equal access to technology, algorithmic compilation, plagiarism and other copyright issues, and censorship. But I argue that individual storytellers (and by this I mean anyone who is presenting the semblance of an authentic self on a digital platform(s) to be consumed by other users), by the nature of the "publicness" of their act are subjecting themselves to a new kind of life identity ethical scrutiny. Gunkel (2007) challenges his reader to look beyond the trite rationale that "the crucial issue is not what transpires within the virtual world per se but the subsequent effect of these activities on one's behavior toward other, real human beings who exist outside of and beyond the computer-generated virtual environment" (Gunkel 2007: 4). Not that he is arguing that a virtual world is a world apart, but are "products of a particular culture, invented at a particular time, and deployed within particular circumstances" (Gunkel 2007: 15). Finally, he is also helpful here through the concept of "thinking otherwise," which means challenging and changing the binary nature of ICT debates. With this framework in mind, I approach the question of how *la technique* and digital life story might face one another, and perhaps combine to resist Ellul's "determinants," while using and accepting the machinery itself. The point of these subtopics is to help frame the ethical questions that the digital life narrative has sparked and will continue to pose moving forward.

5.1 Technological determinism

Earlier, I alluded to forcing people onto digital platforms, thus potentially creating digital narratives that were not intended by the offline person. This line of thinking can quickly slide into a technological deterministic discourse. Any deterministic discussion largely limits the ethical horizon we can consider, which is one of many problems technological determinism creates. Therefore it is an issue I want to address directly. Bimber (1994) shows just how varied the readings of technological determinism might be and argues for what becomes a claustrophobically tight, definition of the phrase. He begins by identifying three concepts that all live under the phrase – normative (a societally driven adoption of technology, where he places Ellul), nomological (in which a natural logic drives toward technology) and unintended consequences (in which social actors are unable to anticipate the effects of technology). The narrow conclusion for Bimber, via Cohen, is that technological determinism must be defined as: 1) history that is determined by laws other than the human will and; 2) technology

plays a necessary part in the determination. He then applies the standard against all three perspectives and determines only the nomological view can hold up to the term as true technological determinism. So, he concludes, technological determinism is the belief that society evolves along a fixed path, created by the “incremental logic of technology and its parent, science” (p. 89). It is a logical point, but obviously not Ellul’s, who makes clear that technology and machinery themselves are byproducts of the larger method of efficiency. Adoption of such technologies is a choice to remain at pace with the efficient culture. This is not determinism.

Introna, writing in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2011), offers a broadening perspective through the phenomenological approach to technology, seeing it in relationship with society, one in which they “co-constitute” the other. As Heidegger famously claimed, “the essence of technology is nothing technological” (1977: 4); Introna, however, suggested it is an outcome of a technological “way of seeing,” which resonates with Ellul quite well. This framing offers an opportunity to ask a question: Is it possible to use technologies for life narrative expression without resorting to a technological solution to make those expressions morally sound?

5.2 Technological neutrality

This question, admittedly, can tempt us to a simplistic insight worth deflecting, that of technological neutrality. This is a practice commonly used to deflect thought, one that organizes critical contingencies as this side or the other, giving neither significant weight. In our realm the argument might be, digital life storytelling could be used for bad, but it could also be used for good. This is not a balance as much as it is a negation of the forces at work. Ellul states it clearly enough when he writes, “(*Technique*) does not merely stand ready to do the bidding of any random doctrine or ideology. It behaves rather with its own specific weight and direction. It is not a mere instrument, but possesses its own force, which urges it into determined paths, sometimes contrary to human wishes” (Ellul 1964: 159). This, too, can be construed to mean that *la technique* is partisan, which Ellul argues it is not, at least not in the sense of a particular system of thought outside of technique. Technique’s direction aims toward more technique, that is all. Regardless, the concept of neutrality is flawed, as Gunkel (2007) argues, at the most important level. “Conceptual oppositions, despite initial appearances, are never neutral” (Gunkel 2007: 42). If neutral is never neutral, technology is never neutral. The oppositions of good/bad, self/other, mind/body, “are always and already hierarchical arrangements that are structurally biased” (Gunkel 2007: 43). One need only look behind the curtain of America’s social/technological complex, Silicon Valley, and you will find unbalanced structures everywhere – based on race, economy, gender and, obviously, a vision for the place of technique in our lives. “There is, then, a moral reason to question the system of binary oppositions and

attempt to think in excess of and outside the usual conceptual arrangement” (Gunkel, 2007: 43). The conceptual arrangement in digital life narrative, mainly seen through self-presentation, is one of authentic or inauthentic, over-sharing or missing, inclusive or divisive and so on. A broader notion is possible.

5.3 Homo economicus

While *la technique* is self-invested, the Western capitalist version of efficiency favors capital. This is evident in such terms as “self-branding” and “the influencer economy.” LinkedIn is the most obvious profile for economic positioning, but YouTube is close behind, along with Twitter and Instagram – all opportunities to turn one’s insights and “voice” into a marketable commodity. But that is just a tiny percentage of the identity economy. All of the acts of self-identification, especially those with a narrow gap between our digital “selves” and the economically viable offline “selves,” feed data into a marketing system that becomes increasingly proficient in targeting customers. “Naturally, the process further fuels the advertisement industry and its new dialectics of virtual materialism. Such proxies may be further used to reidentify us as specific consumers for customizing purposes” (Floridi, 2014: 58). Here we see Ellul’s conceptualization of *homo economicus* in a new bloom. It is not a natural identifier of humankind, but rather a reduction, not from a spiritual and moral being to a machine, but from a moral and spiritual being that becomes subordinate to an economic *technique*, what Ellul calls “the Great Design,” in which, “The whole of man’s life has become a function of economic technique” (Ellul 1964: 226). In that life, humans have become so conditioned, “that the appearance of personal life becomes for him the reality of personal life” (Ellul 1964: 226). This we can see in nearly all culturally significant Internet platforms that trade in the identity economy. For most, the promise is free connectivity to those you know or will come to know. The prompt is to be yourself, meaning a nonymous digital being. The affordances are walls, feeds, streams for content that is textual or verbal or both, which can be edited, filtered, cropped, tagged and stored. The price is your language, your browsing paths, your likes and plays, all aggregated by increasingly intelligent software to create the ultimate *you* for the economy technique: a profile. A profile is not a personality, it’s a signifier about a personality and an increasingly useable one by economic and political forces.

5.4 Hiding from *la technique*

A natural reaction is to hide from these technologies. We now live in a series of generations where that option is commonly played out, at least perceptually. Ellul, of

course, lifts the veil of illusion off this resistance. While he does not entirely deny the agency of individuals, the problem is much more insidious on a social level. In general, the pressure of technique is that of relative advantage, as I mentioned before: As more of life becomes defined by *la technique*, the less of life can be survived without it. As a complementary point, this makes the technological solutionist/idealist/apologist seem either profoundly naïve or a cynical true believer. Later Ellul (1990) is not generous in his estimation of such people. “This encirclement or outflanking of people and society rests on profound bases (e.g., a change in rationality) and the suppression of moral judgment, with the creation of a new ideology of science. But it is affected by the enticement of the individual into permanent socio-technical discourse. This enticement is brought about by deliberate action on the part of those who want absolutely to make the change and by a spontaneous movement on the part of others” (Ellul 1990: 19). In a case of demonstrating both sides, Ellul (1964) points to several examples, but the best for these purposes comes from the American assistance of Bulgarians after World War II. “In 1945 the Americans sent tons of individual military rations to the Bulgarians, who had no desire at all to adapt themselves to a new kind of butter and to other substitutes. But their resistance necessarily yielded to technical adaptation and, very rapidly, to plain abundance. The excessiveness of the means broke down all traditional and individual desires” (Ellul 1964: 118–119). Which is to say the choice to resist technologies becomes exponentially more difficult as abundance entices us to adoption.

But another problem with resistance is far simpler to describe. Those who resist social media as a form of living, or resist digital life narrative on the broadest terms, cannot have a meaningful say in digital *eudaimonia*. All propositions would be mere guessing. To understand human flourishing within a culture, one must know the culture itself. To ignore it is not to resist it.

5.5 Digitally-empowered identities

Perhaps the extension from physical sustenance to digital sociality is absurd at first, but the transition need not be so fast. It can be, and is, generational, as Floridi points out. Who we are in a digital sense does strike many as frivolous, but not necessarily to a generation that has never known life devoid of digital identity. “To them, it seems most natural to wonder about their personal identities online, treat them as a serious work-in-progress, and to toil daily to shape and update them. It is the hyperself-conscious generation, which facebooks, tweets, skypes, and instant-messages its subjective views and personal tastes, its private details and even intimate experiences, in a continuous flow” (Floridi 2014: 61). These are generally young and often vulnerable people, at least at the moment. Calling this empowerment per se is like calling a mirror an instrument for self-esteem. That depends on who is looking in and how.

In this case, however, the mirror is crowdsourced. We have not yet reached Ellul's prediction that began this essay, but the direction is clear. If we cannot hide from the *la technique*, ultimately, can we overthrow the system? This is highly unlikely, especially given Floridi's perspective. He writes:

Is there a unifying perspective from which all these phenomena may be interpreted as aspects of a single, macroscopic trend? Part of the difficulty, in answering this question, is that we are still used to looking at ICTs as tools for interacting with the world and with each other. In fact, they have become environmental, anthropological, social, and interpretative forces. They are creating and shaping our intellectual and physical realities, changing our self-understanding, modifying how we relate to each other and ourselves, and upgrading how we interpret the world, and all this pervasively, profoundly, and relentlessly (Floridi 2014: vi).

Ellul offers little insight into an effective resistance. His *la technique* is not determinism, per se, but that is as comforting as saying an avalanche is not deterministic. The question at hand remains, slightly reordered: Can we use the machine to craft a digital life narrative without fueling the deterministic nature of *la technique*?

6 Conclusion

The first step, as both Gunkel and Floridi advocate, is to accept the digisphere as a place that demands its own ethical framework, but not one completely disconnected from our offline lives. Interestingly, Floridi reaches for narrative as part of the beginning of this work. "It will require a serious reflection on the human project and a critical review of our current narratives, at the individual, social, and political levels. These are all pressing issues that deserve our full and undivided attention" (Floridi 2104: 219). Gunkel's book, which he claims lacks answers, seems to harbor one, if extracted through a summary of Plato's acceptance of the technology of writing: "As long as writing serves the interest of real truth and is used as an instrument to remind someone who already knows the truth of the matter, it is perfectly acceptable and useful. It only becomes a problem when it takes the place of real knowledge of the truth" (Gunkel 2007: 98). Here I return to the concept of narrative coherence, a storytelling that has both internal and external integrity, which is borne by Floridi's reflection, Annas' development and resistance to Ellul's perfect *la technique*. I think of it as agentive storytelling, the purposeful resistance of profiling not by hiding but by adding deep, personal nuance to our and others' lives. Critical to this idea is creating storytelling communities that use digital tools for connection while constantly resisting its desire to summarize us. This is not an efficiency, it is resistance to machines defining truths for us, of extracting what it will from us. If digital life narratives are not to become the subject of Ellul's claim that opened this chapter, storytellers must first strive to be coherent and honest.

To understand how agentive life storytelling might compete against *la technique*, one has to reimagine the story itself, less as a product and more as a community, in which tellability is the driving force. “Be the hero of your own story,” a phrase often memed and posterized, is exactly the problem. It not only does harm to the self-esteem of the ignored, but it warps the normative aim of digital discourse in general. The critical virtues of agentive storytelling might be intentional communication to fully realized “others.” It could also be a resistance to broadcasting a glossed self. Agentive storytelling would offer a full range of revelations about life with a community of trusted peers, active digital “listening,” celebration, empathy and so on. These are tiny, suggestive steps toward a much larger conversation. As Cavarero (2000) defines this kind of storytelling as an act of revealing oneself to others, both in words and actions, that she argues, “grants a plural space and therefore a political space to identity – confirming its exhibitivite, relational and contextual nature” (Cavarero 2000: 20). In the end, the hero of the story is the community formed itself. But a large caveat is needed here. In one sense, this is an ought in the face of highly performative social sharing. In another, it could be a virtue, an act of becoming better at telling whole parts of ourselves to others. It might also be yet another opening for *la technique*, as Bassett (2007) notes when she writes, “If the tale of the protagonist is recited by a narrator, but in a fashion largely organized by another, and organized using digital technology, then whose intentions are being respected: those of the protagonist, intermediate producer, or narrator?” (Bassett 2007: 115). We may find ourselves in such recursive positions going forward, but then, this is a larger problem that just the narrative of humanness. How machines, and others, manipulate attempts at remaining authentically human is a broad question that did not begin with the twenty-first century and will not likely end there, either.

What I posit at this point is this: To fall into the prevalent model of self-telling narrative in digital space very well may be the opposite of agency, and thus, flourishing. To live life in resistance to *la technique* of digital narrative, to resist the prescribed notions of the profiled consumer in big and small ways, to develop digital spaces that are the opposite of “safe,” but rather brave reinventions of possible selves, need not mean going back to anonymous selves. It would mean, however, using established platforms in new ways, and resisting algorithms that would reaffirm what we mean by flourishing in the digital world. It might also mean building new technologies where true communal agency is possible, and overturning the standard drive for scale to replace it with communal loyalty. Doing so would also help individuals develop digital narratives in which *they* are not greater than *we* actually are.

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Nicholas Proferes and Katie Shilton

23 Web Architecture and Values in the Stack: Exploring the Relationship between Internet Infrastructure and Human Values

Abstract: Human activity increasingly takes place online, shaped and constrained by the invisible mechanisms of internet infrastructure. This chapter explores the relationship between Internet infrastructure and human values. It describes the values that today's Internet enables, and how those values emerged during the historical development of the Internet. It then contrasts today's Internet with the values that a future, very different Internet infrastructure might enable. This thought experiment represents only one possible future for Internet infrastructure, but it helps to illustrate how particular values might be more readily supported through new infrastructure designs.

Keywords: Internet ethics, human values, infrastructure studies, Internet Protocol, Named Data Networking

1 Introduction

More and more human activity is taking place online. Online commerce and exchange is occupying a larger part of the global economy than in previous years (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) 2015). E-mail, instant messaging, and social media are central parts of social life in many parts of the world. Cultural forms – from television to games to heritage institutions – are finding themselves in need of larger and larger footholds on the web. Even forms of democratic decision-making and civic life happen on the Internet. However, the types of interaction available for online social life, commerce, cultural exchange, and political participation are built on and are shaped by seemingly “invisible” mechanisms (Star and Ruhleder, 1996) – those of infrastructure.

In this chapter, we explore the relationship between Internet infrastructure and the human values that underlie that infrastructure. We explore scholarship on the values that today's Internet enables, and how those values emerged during the historical development of the Internet. As a thought experiment, we then contrast today's Internet with the values that a future, very different Internet infrastructure might enable. This thought experiment represents only one possible future for Internet infrastructure, but it helps to illustrate how particular values might be more readily supported through new infrastructure designs.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-023>

1.1 Defining infrastructure

“Infrastructure” can be defined in numerous ways (Bowker, Baker, Millerand, and Ribes 2009). Broadly, Bowker et al. (2009) define infrastructure as “as a broad category referring to pervasive enabling resources in network form” (p. 98). However, what counts as infrastructure depends on the level of abstraction one adopts. For example, one might think of the roads of a highway system, a sewer system, the power grid, or other assemblages that bring core utilities into use in daily life. While envisioning infrastructure as purely physical is appealing at first glance, this vantage point backgrounds the vast networks required to make physical infrastructure possible; in other words, it misses the underlying infrastructures that make a given infrastructure possible. For example, only considering the physical roadways making up a highway system misses the federal, state, and local agencies that plan, build, and maintain the roads. It misses the taxes that go into paying for both the asphalt and the labor that goes into pouring and maintaining it. It misses the workers that maintain the roads, and the skills those workers maintain in relation to their craft. It misses the infrastructures’ historical antecedents, such as the horse trails and footpaths worn through the land. This is to say that when we talk about infrastructure, we are also tacitly speaking of *nested* and *networked* resources that make other activities possible.

Orwat and Bless (2016) have called for greater attention to be paid to Internet architecture to understand how values can be realized through technical measures. The Internet, however, is not a single thing: it is full of these nested and networked infrastructures. As a result, when we begin to think about ethics, values, and the Internet, it becomes important to define *whose* values we mean, to understand how a particular set of values has been historically arrived at in an infrastructure, and to contemplate *where* ethics and values today might be challenged or supported within these nested networks. To think about ethics, values, and the Internet effectively, we must pick a slice to examine, but also examine that narrow slice in relation to the others, and in relation to their composite. We have narrowed our focus for this chapter to an analysis of Internet infrastructure as it operates at what network architects refer to as the “narrow waist” of the Internet: the Internet Protocol (IP) that allows for interconnection of all digital network activity. Today, all other layers of the Internet (such as Internet applications, known as the application layer) must “speak” IP and comport with its communication protocols. Our analysis should be read alongside scholarship focused on other slices: for example, scholarship dedicated to analyzing the values of various Internet platforms (see for example: DeNardis and Hackl 2015; Gillespie 2010; Hoffmann 2016) or work that explores inter-domain routing connections (Mathew 2014). Only by moving among these different levels of abstraction can we gain a comprehensive macro-level understanding of the ethical complexity of a massive global system such as the Internet.

2 Literature review

2.1 Values and infrastructure

Friedman (1997) begins her book on the relationship between human values and design of computer technology by first asking if technology, in fact, has values. This question touches on a long-standing debate. Some have argued that technology is a neutral artifact produced by politics (Joerges 1999), while others have argued that technology is politics by other means (Winner 1980). We take the view that technology has values, reflecting a long tradition of values-sensitive design that has argued for the connection between values and technologies.

Gibson (1977) made foundational arguments that technologies make certain fields of action more readily available than others. This structuring of *affordances* (what a technology readily enables) can promote particular values. For example, an American semi-trailer truck (typically 14 feet high) cannot pass under low bridges. In this way, infrastructure can enforce particular values, such as deterring patterns of commercial traffic in particular geographic regions. Similarly, information infrastructures can promote certain kinds of values by making some fields of action easier to realize, and by denying or making others more difficult.

By choosing some affordances or features over others, specific values can be tacitly or explicitly embedded in technology or infrastructure during the design process. As a result, the ability to influence or control the shape of infrastructure during design results in the power to produce inherent bias. For example, designers tacitly inform the values of technology when they take themselves as representative of all users, an action Oudshoorn et. al, refer to as “I-methodology” (2004: 30). While the designers of a technology may be among the future end-users of a product, those designers’ experiences are unlikely to be representative of other all end-users. As a result, a technology may favor the designers’ own preferences, needs, and skillset, and may not serve the needs of others. Friedman and Nissenbaum (1996) argue that when technologies systematically and unfairly discriminate against “certain individuals or groups of individuals in favor of others” (332), these systems exhibit bias. However, just because affordances that support specific values are inscribed in a technology does not mean those values will be fully realized. Users interpret technologies and infrastructures, give them social meaning, finalizing their shape (Pinch and Bijker 1984). All technologies go through stages of socially-determined *interpretive flexibility*, where the meaning and rituals associated with a given technology are subject to the influence of social groups. Once the meanings and uses of a given technology are socially agreed upon through adoption practices, the meaning of the technological artifact becomes stabilized within the social setting. As a result, embedded values must also be enacted (Shilton, Koepfler, and Fleischmann 2013).

This literature suggests that values can be both *inscribed* in a technology, but must also be *enacted* by users and publics. It also suggests that the values of a technology become more firm and obdurate over time, as use patterns stabilize (Bijker and Law 1992: 10). Therefore, to study the values of the Internet, one must study the technology (for inscribed values), its designers (for their intended values) and its users (for their enacted values) (Shilton et al. 2013).

2.2 Internet infrastructure and values

Control over Internet standards and code have manifested as a major point of struggle in conflicts over values and affordances. Lessig (2009) argues that choices about future freedoms on the Internet often come down to control over code. Control over code shapes and determines which values are supported by the Internet. However, some argue that the battle over controlling code is actually a critical part of fostering a thriving Internet that supports a diverse set of values. For example, Clark et al., (2005) write, "... different stakeholders that are part of the Internet milieu have interests that may be adverse to each other, and these parties each vie to favor their particular interests...Our position is that accommodating this tussle is crucial to the evolution of the network's technical architecture" (462).

To frame our analysis of human values and Internet architecture, while incorporating both user-oriented and technology-oriented perspectives on values, we suggest a useful heuristic drawn from the community that builds and maintains Internet protocols: the notion of the *stack*. The stack refers to the Open Systems Interconnection (OSI) reference model, which identifies seven stacked "layers" of the Internet: the physical layer, the data link layer, the network layer, the transport layer, the session layer, the presentation layer, and the application layer (Zimmermann 1980). At the bottom of the stack, the physical layer is the wires and cables that support the movement of bits, reflecting the very material nature of infrastructure. At the top of the stack are the application and presentation layers, which are the user-facing layers that translate between the Internet as we experience it and the underlying communications media. The central layers – the data link, network, transport and session layers – are protocols responsible for transmission of applications to physical media back to applications. Each of these layers – and the assemblages that make them up – can be thought of as a kind of "infrastructure." Yet, at the same time, the layers are interconnected, depending on each other to create the Internet we know and recognize. Importantly, decisions made about infrastructure at one level (whether by engineers laying cable or developers creating applications) can impact the affordances realized at the level above or below.

Just as the potential features and functionality of each level of the Internet "stack," so too do the values questions embedded in Internet protocols. And pulling apart layers of the stack helps us think about the various stakeholders who influence

values throughout the stack: the technology itself, the designers at each layer (whether operators of physical links or architects of data transmission protocols), as well as the developers who make applications at the top of the stack. We explore how other scholars have approached these stacked values questions in the following sections.

2.2.1 History of the Internet and values

To understand the values of the contemporary Internet, it is important to understand a little about the history and goals of the networks that preceded the Internet. The historical context in which the Internet arose shaped the goals developers had for the network, and many of the values of early digital networks, shaped the trajectory of the current Internet.

In 1968, the U.S. Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) issued a procurement call to link four U.S. universities and research institutes for the purposes of computer science research -- a precursor to what we now call the Internet (Braman 2010). While there is a popular tale that the ARPANET was created to enable communications even under the threat of nuclear war,¹ the early goals of the ARPANET focused on developing knowledge and mechanisms for linking computers together over a distance, and reducing computing resource redundancy to create cost savings (Bolt Beranek and Newman Inc. 1981). Computing centers were, at the time, inefficient because of their lack of interconnection. Software and data files were unnecessarily reproduced across multiple centers, wasting (in DARPA's opinion) time, energy, and resources. As a result, "In fiscal year 1969 DARPA estimated that such duplicative efforts more than double the national costs of creating and maintaining the software" (II-3). Sharing information to improve economic efficiency was a major values goal of the ARPANET.

As more and more persons became involved with developing the growing network, the "Request For Comments" (RFC) process emerged as a way for engineers working on the network to track their thoughts and debates. A former early Internet designer reflects on the RFC process, stating:

They [the RFCs] became the formal method of publishing Internet protocol standards, and today there are more than 5,000, all readily available online ... we wrote our visions for the future on paper and sent them around via the postal service. We'd mail each research group one printout and they'd have to photocopy more themselves. The early R.F.C.'s ranged from grand visions to mundane details, although the latter quickly became the most common. Less important than the content of those first documents was that they were available free of charge and anyone could write one (Crocker 2009: A29).

1 In fact, this goal was later considered in the design of the network (Leiner et al. 2009)

Both the content of the early RFCs and the way they were administrated reveals much about the value goals of the early Internet. The standards these engineers developed “inscribed behaviour in complex and non-transparent ways” (Hanseth and Monteiro 1997). And while Kinnaird (2013) argues that as technologies are developed, many designers may not be aware that they are embedding politics and values into their artifacts, in her study of the Internet RFCs, Braman (2011) argues that early Internet engineers were well aware of the fact that the topology they were building was complicated by political and economic questions. Braman writes:

Those responsible for the technical decision making that created the Internet found they had to think through a number of social policy issues, from privacy and intellectual property rights through the definition of common carriage and environmental problems, along the way. Such issues were framed by conceptualizations of the nature of the network, goals to be served by the network, users and uses of the network, and the design criteria that served as policy principles developed during the early years of the design process (2011: 295).

Network engineers found themselves grappling with questions that had legal and policy dimensions and values implications (Braman and Bares 2011). For example, as Braman points out, “Antitrust concerns are highlighted by RFC 1015 and RFC 1192...RFC 4096 explains why a mandate by the US Congress to include particular types of information in email subject lines will not effectively defeat spam. RFC 4869 proposes cryptographic interfaces specifically designed to comply with US National Security Agency specifications...” (Braman 2010: 314). The decisions and decision-making process of the RFCs have had important effects shaping the kinds of communication that could occur in the network, how information is accessed by individuals, and how participation in standards development occurred. For example, RFC 5322 (Resnick 2008) establishes the set of characters and formatting that are considered valid for use within e-mail, RFC 819 (Su and Postel 1982) and RFC 920 (Postel and Reynolds 1984) laid out the basis of the Internet’s DNS system and created the initial list of top-level domains including .gov, .mil, .edu, .com, .org, and various country codes (Liska and Stowe 2016), and RFC 1543 underscores the open nature of the RFC process, specifying “memos proposed to be RFCs may be submitted by anyone” (Postel, 1983).

At the same time that engineers made choices that shaped what users could and could not do on the network, many engineers held on to the notion of keeping the network as values-neutral or agnostic as possible, in hopes of keeping the network flexible and innovative. Initially, many engineers believed that the technical standards of the Internet would remain unchanged once they were put in place, but, “quickly realized that the crux of their design problem was establishing technological structures that not only tolerated but would actually facilitate change” (Braman and Bares 2011: 1). Designing for innovation in the network became a key value. Braman (2010) writes:

The goal of maximizing possible uses of the Internet and the range of possible users by keeping the interface as simple as possible, for example, appears as a guideline followed in development of the protocol under discussion in numerous RFCs. In a second example, the design criterion of encouraging continued innovation, which appears first in RFC 42, is also, simultaneously, a social policy principle (313).

In summary, analysis of the literature on the early Internet reveals values such as economic efficiency, democratic decision making in governance choices, technological neutrality and fairness, and innovativeness as key goals for the early Internet.

2.2.2 Values and today's Internet

As the Internet has globalized, commercialized, and diversified, the values enabled by its architecture have shifted. The increasing modes of interaction between technological protocols, developers at all layers of the stack, and global stakeholders have only complexified the architecture, and there are multiple, sometimes conflicting values that manifest within today's Internet. Here we highlight some of the values that are most controversial, contradictory, troublesome, idealistic, or debated. These include the values of freedom of expression, as well as concern about values such as restricting privacy, facilitating surveillance, centralization and control, and transparency and accountability.

Cath and Floridi (2016) argue that the debate over whether and how the Internet can foster human rights “has become a defining issue of our time” (1). Indeed, there has been greater attention paid to the relationship between human rights and the Internet precisely as more and more social life, commerce, cultural exchange, and political participation takes place online. Article 19 of the 1948 United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (United Nations 1948). Building from this, the UN's Human Rights Council (2012) passed a resolution affirming that the same rights to freedom of expression should also be protected online. Resolution L13, also called the resolution of “Promotion, Protection and Enjoyment of Human Rights on the Internet,” calls upon all signatory states to “promote and facilitate access to the Internet and international cooperation aimed at the development of media and information and communications facilities in all countries” (2). Some have hailed this resolution for positioning online freedom as a basic human right (Souter 2012).

Cath and Floridi (2016) claim that much of the debate over whether the Internet can help achieve human rights and human flourishing has focused on the governance of the Internet rather than the Internet's architecture. The pair argue that the technological arrangements of the Internet also matter to human rights: “The technical decisions made by Internet Standard Developing Organizations (SDOs) that build

and maintain the technical infrastructure of the Internet influences how information flows. They rearrange the shape of the technically mediated public sphere, including which rights it protects and which practices it enables” (1).

At the same time, the ability for the Internet to potentially support human rights through the open flow of information is not universally celebrated. To many states, it can represent an erosion of the ability for a nation to control what information comes in and out of their borders (transborder dataflow) (Braman 2006; DeNardis 2012). As a result, as DeNardis writes: “Battles over the control of information online are often fought at the level of Internet infrastructure... This loss of control over content and the failure of laws and markets to regain this control have redirected political and economic battles into the realm of infrastructure and, in particular, technologies of Internet governance.” (DeNardis 2012: 720). Efforts such as (failed) U.S. legislation to create “blacklists” of censored websites by interfering with the Internet’s domain name system reflect the ways that lawmakers have sought to take information control battles directly to the level of Internet infrastructure (Schatz 2012).

The battle over control is also one over centralization. As DeNardis writes, “Internet infrastructure choke points are also the places to observe how dynamics of censorship, privacy protection and surveillance unfold in unprecedented ways in the contemporary Internet ecosystem” (DeNardis and Musiani 2014: 18). Choke points – points where power can be centralized and control can be established – in IP include the domain name system, in which addresses must be linked to globally-identifiable names; growing corporate control over data storage and processing in the cloud; and the increasing presence of “walled gardens,” such as social media sites in which content presentation is controlled by a few corporations. The technical community engaged in creating, revising, and innovating on Internet protocols has long held a political project of pushing back against points of centralization and control in the infrastructure (Hardy 2016). As DeNardis writes, “...even as protocol design has continuously evolved and adapted to changing political, socioeconomic, and technological contexts, the Internet engineering community has consistently staked out a consensus position pushing back against technologically based indiscriminate government surveillance” (DeNardis 2015: 72).

The choke points that DeNardis identifies are also locations where values such as transparency and accountability have been fiercely debated. For example, the non-profit entity known as the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) “coordinates the allocation and assignment of names in the root zone of the Domain Name System (“DNS”) and coordinates the development and implementation of policies concerning the registration of second-level domain names in generic top-level domains (“gTLDs”).” (ICANN 2016). Though representation of ICANN is made up of a number of different global representatives, many questions have arisen about whom ICANN is ultimately responsible to and how transparent its decisions should be. For example, Koppell (2005) argues that ICANN has struggled with operationalizing accountability and transparency in its management of the DNS system, in

how it resolves name ownership disputes, in how it makes decisions about top-level domains, and in how it adjudicates ownership of domain names.

2.3 Future Internet architectures

Reviewing the literature on Internet architecture and human values illustrates how the early Internet embodied values such as efficiency, democratic decision-making in governance choices, technological neutrality and fairness, and innovativeness. Today's Internet continues to support many of the same values, while new values challenges, such as privacy, have arisen as the users and uses of the network expand. In turn, future changes to, and re-imaginings of, the Internet's fundamental protocols suggest the potential for further evolution in the values goals of the Internet.

There is currently a normative debate taking place with communities of network engineers working on designs for the future Internet. In meetings, workshops, conferences and journals devoted to networking, researchers debate questions about whether Internet architecture should incorporate values that have been widely accepted through societal debate or be adaptable once deployed "to a wider range of stakeholder values put forward within an evolving societal context" (Brown, Clark, and Trossen 2010: 10–1). While it is impossible to say what precise arrangements of infrastructures will emerge, for the past four years, we have been embedded as participant observers in one large-scale project to reimagine the Internet's fundamental protocols. We have observed how network engineers and scientists have tackled ethics and values considerations as they have designed a new Internet protocol: Named Data Networking (NDN). Reflecting on the values issues in the NDN development process reveals much about both the values issues inherent in the contemporary design of the Internet, and about how a community of architects contemplates what the values of a future Internet can and should be.

3 Designing a future Internet architecture: Named Data Networking

For decades, the TCP/IP protocol suite has been the backbone of the Internet's architecture. TCP/IP is the set of protocols at the very center of the networking stack we described earlier, comprising the transport and network layers. TCP/IP has helped to give rise to countless innovations, led to new economic arrangements, technical and social practices, and new international, national and local governance challenges (Schewick 2012; Solum 2008). However, TCP/IP has also been stretched well beyond

the original uses for which it was originally intended, as the Internet has come to serve as a tool for data and content dissemination as much (or more) than point-to-point communication (Zhang et al. 2010).

Beginning in 2010, the National Science Foundation funded a series of projects to engage the research community in creating “new network architectures and networking concepts that take into consideration the larger social, economic and legal issues that arise from the interplay between the Internet and society” (National Science Foundation 2010). Named Data Networking (NDN) was one of the funded projects, and is a major research effort within the broader field of information-centric networking.² It is supported by a multi-campus collaboration, an international testbed, and a broader community of major industry and academic research partners.³ NDN research has now been underway for a decade.

The NDN project seeks to replace TCP/IP with a new data-centric backbone. As the core team has grappled with the technical research challenges comprised in proposing a fundamentally new alternative to TCP/IP, they have simultaneously grappled with questions of values: what purposes a new architecture should serve, what functions and interactions it should afford, and how success should be evaluated (Shilton 2013, 2015a, 2015b; Shilton, Burke, Duan, and Zhang, 2014; Shilton et al. 2013). We have served as embedded participant-observers with NDN for over four years, engaged in understanding and tracing the ethics and values issues inherent in the reimagining of the Internet’s fundamental protocols (Shilton 2013, 2015a, 2015b; Shilton et al. 2014, 2013). And as the project has progressed, we have begun to trace not only the values anticipated by NDN’s initial architects, but also values now emerging further up the stack: those of the application developers who are building the first applications for NDN.

3.1 NDN’s technical changes

NDN replaces the Internet Protocol (IP) that allows for interconnection of all network activity (Figure 1). NDN forwards packets based on data names rather than IP’s use of host addresses. Making data, rather than addresses, the core of all Internet communication in turn shifts the mechanics used to envision and create networked applications. Through its technical changes, NDN enables new forms of local communication, data identification, and persistent access to data at the network layer. We explain each of these changes in more depth below.

² More information about this extensive research effort, including technical publications, workshop agendas, video FAQs and more, can be found at <http://named-data.net/>.

³ A full list of participants can be found at <http://named-data.net/consortium/>.

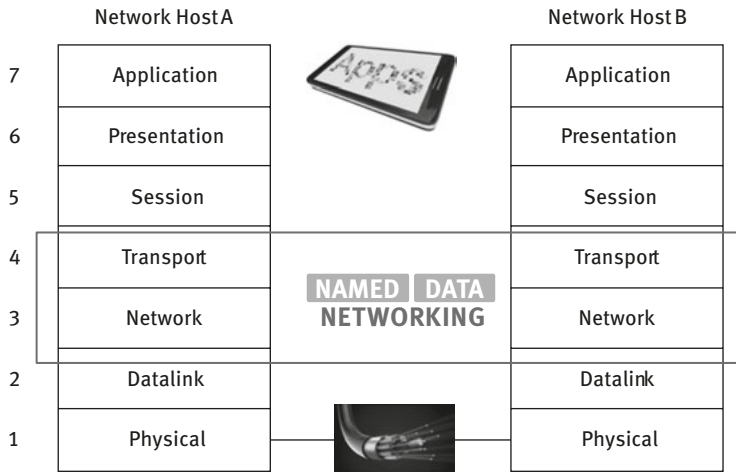


Figure 1: An NDN internet replaces today’s TCP/IP protocols at the center of the stack.

Currently, Internet Protocol (IP) relies on host addresses to route packets across the network. Data producers apply for names from domain registrars, and the names are then mapped to IP addresses assigned by their service providers. When a user requests data, it is retrieved according to *where* (on which host/IP address) the data is located. By naming chunks of data, NDN enables applications to retrieve their desired data by *names*, and enables data to be cached anywhere in the network (Jacobson et al. 2009).

To facilitate data exchange, NDN relies on four key architectural components: names, content signatures, in-network storage, and interest-data exchange. In NDN, applications *name* data packets. Names are drawn from a *namespace* of possibilities, and are hierarchical (e.g., the University of Maryland might manage the /Maryland namespace, and /Maryland/school would be a child of that namespace.) Each piece of data is *signed* by its producer (or more likely, an application acting on a content producer’s behalf) together with its name, securely binding them. The signature is mandatory, and coupled with data publisher information, enables determination of data provenance, allowing the consumer’s trust in data to be decoupled from how (and from where) the data is obtained. Because signed data can be retrieved from any device, applications running over NDN networks can utilize in-network *storage* to achieve performance and scalability enhancements. Such storage includes in-network ephemeral caches in routers, which may store data as it passes through the network. Storage also includes longer-term repositories, which are persistent stores deployed for specific namespaces, applications, or networks to replicate data in many places in the network for faster retrieval.

Finally, NDN dictates a basic communication model based on packet-by-packet request and response: *interest-data exchange*. A consumer sends an Interest packet specifying the name of data it wishes to receive. Upstream routers forward interests

toward nodes that have registered data name prefixes. Each router uses a Pending Interest Table (PIT) to record the interface from which it received an Interest, creating a hop-by-hop trail (or “breadcrumb”) back to the data consumer for each path the interest takes. When the Interest packet reaches a node which has the requested data, the node responds with a data packet, which is forwarded back along the trail to the requestor, consuming (i.e. deleting) the PIT breadcrumbs along the way.

The NDN architecture will result in application designs and network configurations that are different from that of the TCP/IP Internet. First, NDN’s mechanisms for storage and data exchange enable *local communication* much more easily than in today’s Internet. Names and in-network storage make it more straightforward for individual devices to exchange data directly in a consistent and potentially large-scale manner. Enabling such local communication emphasizes values such as free speech and accessibility, as the transport of data becomes less dependent on commercial ISPs and a global infrastructure (Shilton et al, 2016). Further, as noted in NDN’s first technical report, NDN facilitates choice and competition for consumers by increasing data delivery choices. In today’s Internet, monitoring delivery performance is a key to achieving ISP accountability. However, it is difficult for consumers to measure and compare performance through different service providers simultaneously, and thus benefit from a fully transparent system. In contrast, NDN allows for multipath forwarding capability, thus users, or more likely, routers acting on their behalf “can explore multiple paths, monitor delivery performances, and make their choices.” (Zhang et al. 2010, p. 7).

Second, consistent, network-visible names afford *identification* at the network layer, as names become meaningful to finding, forwarding, and organizing data retrieval. Content signatures also provide a consistent means to identify and verify data sources. The identification of data enabled by both names and signatures emphasizes values such as security, transparency, and accountability by ensuring that parties receiving data can verify that data’s authenticity (Shilton et al, 2016).

Finally, pervasive and standardized in-network storage will encourage a default toward *persistent access* as content is cached across the web. Pervasive caching enables values such as efficiency and scalability, as content can cheaply and easily be stored closer to consumers who frequently request that content. It also enables accountability by making it harder for centralized actors such as governments or content companies to ‘take down’ Internet content.

3.2 NDN: A values primer

The question of *why* NDN’s original architects feel TCP/IP should be replaced with a data-centric model for Internet communication is, at its heart, a question of values. Early publications in which the NDN team describe its vision and technical choices illustrate numerous values arguments (Shilton 2015a). Values central to the

early NDN vision included efficiency and innovation, as NDN engineers imagined an architecture that would improve upon TCP/IP's (already successful) building blocks for resource sharing and application generativity. Technical features such as support for increased local communication are seen as keys to promoting efficiency and innovation. NDN architects also embraced several values that stemmed from concerns about points of centralization and control in today's Internet, particularly privacy and security of content. NDN's requirement of signatures, and affordances for per-packet encryption, are technical measures meant to ensure values of privacy, security, and accountability. The team also embraced communitarian values reminiscent of early Internet values, including democratization of information access, and trust in content. NDN's affordances for local communication are a response to the importance of democratization of information access, and its affordances for identification of content are meant to increase transparency and trust. The NDN team's embrace of these particular values in early publications reflect the history of the Internet and recent struggles against architectures of centralization and control.

As the NDN protocols to support these values were concretized, the NDN team formed a codebase and libraries on GitHub to encourage developers to experiment with the technology. In 2016, the NDN community has expanded to include developers from major technology corporations and partners all over the world. As the number of actors involved in the project has expanded, new values will be identified, debated, and designed for – adding new values to the stack. Though studying the values *intentions* of early NDN architects was an important first step, it's also important to trace the values interventions of application developers: the first users of the NDN technology. NDN's application developers both *embed* and *enact* values in the NDN infrastructure. Application developers embed values as they design applications that define trust in particular ways, constrain choices, or present information to end users. They also *enact* (or fail to enact) the values embedded in NDN's protocols as they make choices about choosing local vs. globally-routable data names, or how and whether to enforce security by checking or rejecting data signatures.

4 Studying the values of a future Internet envisioned by application developers

To begin the study of how values in an infrastructure turn from embedded to enacted, we surveyed NDN's first users: a community of over 100 NDN application developers. The survey was designed to evaluate how NDN developers interpret the values of the NDN protocol, and how they are both *embedding* and *enacting* values in the NDN stack. Understanding how application developers both experience the architecture's embedded values and contribute their own values through development for NDN can

help us understand how ethics and values move, quite literally, through the stack, from the infrastructure layer into the application layer and ultimately out into the world.

Our survey design emerged from our experiences, observations, and informal interviews conducted at NDN community meetings and hackathons, but was also driven by values identified by project leaders. The survey prompted application developers to reflect on whether NDN successfully renders a set of core values embraced by the project team in early publications: privacy, trust, and innovation. We also asked about freedom of expression and fairness, two values that early NDN literature did not explicitly address, but which are central to social and policy discussions about the Internet (Cath and Floridi 2016; Schejter and Yemini 2007). The survey examines whether developers see and experience these values in the NDN architecture, asks how they view and evaluate the values-based benefits of NDN versus TCP/IP, and probes how they integrate values-based decision making in their own development projects. The survey was designed to elicit trends in the developer experience of values in an infrastructure in-progress.

After piloting the survey with a small group of NDN community leaders, we sent the survey to roughly 100 NDN developers in late 2015. We built the list of NDN developers from attendance records of NDN related-events. A total of 39 respondents completed the survey. As with any survey, there is the chance that respondents may have misrepresented their views. Social desirability bias, for example, was a specific concern. To combat this, survey responses were told that their responses would be anonymous, and any information that responses that were shared with the wider-NDN community would only be shared in aggregate. Participants were allowed to skip any questions they wished.

4.1 Characteristics of respondents

Just under half of respondents (41%) were part of the “core NDN team,” defined as individuals belonging to the NSF funded project campuses or effectively operating as a member of that team. The remaining 59% of respondents were external to that core team and had joined NDN later in its development. The respondents held a number of different occupations and social positions within the networking research community, including students, professors, and professional engineers (Table 1). Most participants indicated extensive technical experience and a majority have more than two years of experience working with NDN (Table 1). Over half (57%) of respondents have designed or developed applications with similar requirements for networking using TCP/IP-based protocols, including HTTP. This suggests that most respondents have a high degree of familiarity with NDN, but also with coding for TCP/IP protocols, suggesting they are well-positioned to make comparison judgments between the two.

Table 1: Respondent characteristics.

	(%)
Position	
Student	38.5
Faculty at Academic Institution	23.1
Researcher/Developer at Non-Academic Institution	17.9
No Role Given	20.5
Length of Time Coding	
0 – 5 Years	20.7
5 – 10 Years	24.1
10+ Years	55.2
Years Working on NDN	
0 – 2 Years	19.4
2 – 4 Years	48.4
4+ Years	32.2

We also asked participants “To what extent would you say reflection on values or ethics issues plays a role in your design choices?” The diverse range of responses (Figure 2) suggests there is a range of reflexivity among this population in regards to values issues.

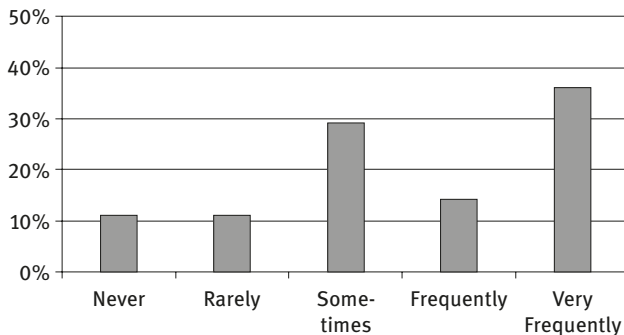


Figure 2: Response to “How often does reflection on values or ethics play a role in your design choices?”

4.2 Privacy

Privacy is one of the values explicitly embraced in early NDN publications, and NDN’s features to enable per-packet encryption reflect this value. However, other features of the architecture, such as pervasive access to data and storing identifying data,

challenge many of today's methods for privacy preservation (see Shilton, Burke, Claffy, and Zhang, (In press) for a detailed discussion of these issues). We were curious whether application developers shared these concerns. Most indicated they believe NDN offers more in terms of privacy protection than the current TCP/IP protocols (Table 2). Further, when asked if NDN can ensure privacy for *producers* of sensitive content, over half (53.6%) agreed or strongly agreed. Similarly, when asked if NDN can ensure privacy for *consumers* of sensitive content, 53.6% agreed or strongly agreed (Table 2). This suggests that more than half of NDN's current developers see a strong potential for NDN to improve privacy over the current *status quo* in today's IP Internet.

Table 2: Responses to privacy prompts.

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Don't Know (%)
NDN is less private than IP.	3.6	10.7	28.6	46.4	7.1	3.6
NDN can ensure privacy for producers of sensitive content.	14.3	39.3	14.3	17.9	7.1	7.1
NDN can ensure privacy for consumers of sensitive content.	17.9	35.7	21.4	17.9	7.1	0.0

However, when we asked developers about the NDN techniques they were taking advantage of in their applications, less than 20% of respondents indicated they had implemented encryption of names into their projects, and less than a third (31%) had implemented data encryption. Many NDN developers work on early-stage prototypes, and their applications may not yet have users with sensitive data. But encryption of data names and data content are the central technical measures necessary to protect privacy in NDN. These results reveal the early challenges to realizing NDN's value of privacy.

4.3 Trust

Trust was one of the most important values identified by architects in early NDN publications, and it continues to be central to the argument for why NDN is a useful, needed architecture (Shilton 2015a; Shilton et al., (In press)). Trust is built into the NDN architecture through the cryptographic keys required to sign data packets. The value of trust has rendered well to developers: over three-quarters (85.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that NDN improves the trustworthiness of data online, and 60.7% agree or strongly agree that NDN will improve the trustworthiness of the network

overall (Table 3). A clear majority (64.3%) also indicated that they believe NDN is more secure than IP (Table 3). Relatedly, over half of respondents (57.2%) believe NDN fosters trust among content senders and receivers, such as banking websites and customers, better than IP (Table 3). This rate of agreement makes trust the most strongly-rendered value of all of the values we tested in this survey. Perhaps because developers are required to interact with cryptography in some form – because signing keys are required by the architecture – they seem very aware of NDN’s affordances for trust, and believe those affordances will be successful.

Table 3: Responses to trust prompts.

	<i>Strongly Agree (%)</i>	<i>Agree (%)</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)</i>	<i>Disagree (%)</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree (%)</i>	<i>Don't Know (%)</i>
NDN will improve the trustworthiness of the network overall.	25.0	35.7	17.9	14.3	3.6	3.6
NDN will improve the trustworthiness of data online.	46.4	39.3	10.7	0.0	3.6	0.0
NDN is more secure than IP.	21.4	42.9	17.9	10.7	3.6	3.6
NDN fosters trust among content senders and receivers, such as banking websites and customers, better than IP.	17.9	39.3	25.0	7.1	7.1	3.6

4.4 Innovation

Innovation was not only a founding value in the early Internet, it remains critical to justifying future Internet development. Early NDN documents emphasize that NDN’s features provided generative building blocks for innovative future services (Shilton 2015a). And NDN’s early developers seem to recognize these building blocks. A clear majority of respondents (78.6%) strongly agreed or agreed that NDN will enable new innovation for the Internet of Things, one important emerging area of Internet development (Table 4). When asked if NDN will enable independent video producers to compete with Netflix, over half of developers (55.5%) gave positive response (Table 4). When asked if the NDN protocols will fundamentally improve the quality of software, systems, practice, and environment built on top of it, 64.3% strongly agreed or agreed

(Table 4). This suggests that many developers see innovative potential in NDN and believe that it may help even the playing field for new Internet services.

However, there is some uncertainty about whether NDN will ever totally replace IP. 35.7% agreed or strongly agreed that NDN will replace TCP/IP, while 32.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 4). This suggests that while many developers see the potential for innovation supported by this new protocol, it remains too early for them to predict whether NDN will truly replace entrenched services.

Table 4: Responses to innovation prompts.

	<i>Strongly Agree (%)</i>	<i>Agree (%)</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)</i>	<i>Disagree (%)</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree (%)</i>	<i>Don't Know (%)</i>
NDN will enable new innovations for the "Internet of Things."	39.3	39.3	17.9	0.0	0.0	3.6
NDN will enable independent video producers to compete with Netflix.	7.4	48.1	7.4	18.5	11.1	7.4
NDN will fundamentally improve the quality of software, systems, practice and environment built on top of it.	21.4	42.9	25.0	3.6	3.6	3.6
NDN will eventually replace IP.	3.6	32.1	21.4	14.3	17.9	10.7

4.5 Freedom of expression

Because freedom of expression (and its corollary, freedom from censorship) is such an important social and policy issue in evaluating today's Internet, and because TCP/IP's affordances can be used for censorship and control, we were curious about whether NDN application developers felt that NDN improved on the possibilities for freedom of expression. When asked if it would be more difficult for a government to censor data from an NDN application than an IP application, 32.1% agreed or strongly agreed, but a nearly equal number, 35.7%, disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 3). It is possible that some of this uncertainty results from the fact that NDN has not made freedom of expression an explicit goal in presentations and publications. Or perhaps many developers are unable to identify features of NDN which might thwart censorship. In either case, it is unclear how developers will enact freedom of expression as they build NDN applications.

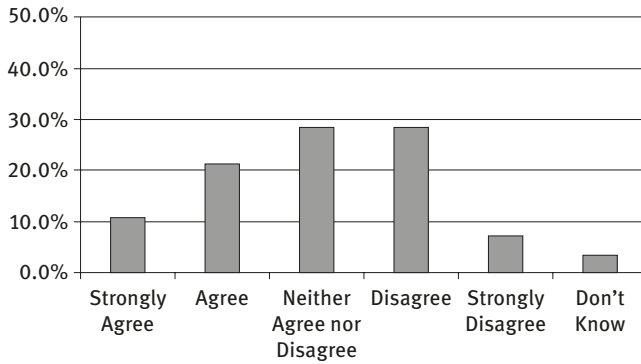


Figure 3: Responses to prompt, “It would be more difficult for a government to censor data from an NDN application than an IP application”.

4.6 Fairness

Fairness, like freedom of expression, was not a value explicitly engaged in NDN’s early publications, but it has taken on increasing importance in Internet policy debates as a value underlying policy moves toward network neutrality: the principle that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) should not discriminate against particular forms of traffic based on economic incentives (Peha 2007). Network neutrality is a more recent interpretation of the long-held networking “end-to-end principle,” the idea that network features should be implemented as close to the end points of the network (and not in the “dumb” pipes that compose the network) as possible (Faulhaber 2007). The end-to-end principle was a core feature of the early ARPANET design and remains a guiding principle of TCP/IP today. Lessig and McChesney (2006) argue that the end-to-end principle is a large part of how fairness of the Internet is operationalized and what “has made it [the Internet] such a powerful force for economic and social good: All of the intelligence and control is held by producers and users, not the networks that connect them” (para. 2). We chose to ask application developers about both NDN’s adherence to the end-to-end principle, and its relationship to fairness.

Exactly one half of respondents agree or strongly agree that NDN supports the end-to-end principle (Table 5). And a clear majority of respondents (64.3%) agree or strongly that the value of fairness is important to them (Table 5). However, survey responses suggested disagreement about how the broader principle of fairness will be operationalized within the NDN network. When asked if they believe that traffic from different NDN namespaces will be treated fairly by the network, the largest plurality of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, and slightly more respondents disagreed than agreed. The fact that developers suggested ambivalence or even disagreement that content would be treated fairly, suggests that NDN developers do not view fair treatment of named data as mandated or regulated by NDN’s technical affordances

(Table 5). Instead, fairness may need to be enacted more through social practice or policy mechanisms than technical affordance.

Many respondents felt, however, that fairness might be slightly better operationalized in NDN than in current IP routing policies. When asked if NDN routing policies are more likely to be fair than current IP routing policies, 35.7% agreed or strongly agreed (Table 5).

Table 5: Responses to fairness prompts.

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Don't Know (%)
NDN supports the end-to-end principle.	14.3	35.7	17.9	21.4	7.1	3.6
Fairness of the Internet is important to me.	35.7	28.6	17.9	7.1	7.1	3.6
Traffic from different namespaces will be treated fairly by the network.	7.1	14.3	42.9	25.0	3.6	7.1
NDN routing policies are more likely to be fair than current IP routing policies.	3.6	32.1	35.7	10.7	7.1	10.7

5 Conclusion

Internet infrastructure and human values are intimately connected. Infrastructure can help us realize affordances or can inhibit us from realizing others. As a result, infrastructure such as today's Internet has inherent values. These values did not arrive *ex nihilo*. The values of today's Internet have been arrived at through years of engineering undertaken through projects that developed for specific goals; through years of debate and discussion visible in the Internet RFCs; and through years of institutional and actor power-struggles to shape and influence various levels of the Internet stack.

The same process of value shifts in the stack is at play in contemporary development of future Internet architectures. By surveying application developers working on this novel emerging infrastructure, we are seeing how the first users of this infrastructure are interpreting, adapting, and adopting the values intended by its developers, revealing how affordances, technical choices, and built-in biases contribute to the social impacts of emerging technologies.

The survey responses illustrate that developers recognized that NDN enacts particular values. And more specifically, developers believed that NDN enacts the specific values of privacy, trust, and innovation. However, developers expressed

uncertainty about how either freedom of expression or fairness will be realized and implemented in NDN. More broadly, these survey results give us a sense of how values are moving and shifting in the stack; how values such as privacy and trust are recognized as inscribed, and how values such as fairness need to be enacted in social practice or policy at higher (or lower) levels of abstraction in order to be more fully realized. Values conflicts become most visible when there is a gap between inscribed values and social practice. For example, the reported a lack of encryption built into current NDN applications raises a question about the privacy. Though privacy can be said to be “built into” the stack through affordances for encryption, if it is not *enacted* in applications, it remains a potential rather than performed value.

One of the things that this survey data does not tell us, but more longitudinal work might, is how the values evaluations of developers will change or stabilize over time. As NDN expands and becomes more widely adopted, future analysis should explore how developers less familiar with NDN’s original goals interpret the values propositions of NDN and begin to enact their own practices. And ongoing work will be needed as end users begin to adopt an NDN Internet, to understand how this new architecture does and does not support diverse users’ values. Social and policy conversations about information-centric networking are just beginning. Engaging with the intersection of architecture and values throughout these conversations will help Internet scholars, policymakers, and user advocates attend to the complex implications new infrastructures can bring.

Further reading

A variety of disciplines offer varying methods and approaches for studying the entanglement of human values and technological infrastructures. Discussion of human values in technology design occurs in fields such as philosophy of technology, science and technology studies, business ethics, game studies, media studies, information studies, computer science, human-computer interaction, and law. Further reading on the relationship between technology infrastructure and human values can be found in all these areas. For general orientations to the numerous viewpoints under the broad umbrella of values and technology design, see review articles and books by Fleischmann (2013), Friedman, Hendry & Borning (2017) and Shilton (In press). To better understand some of the historical debates about how and when values and politics are embedded in infrastructure, see Winner (1980) and Joerges (1999). An emerging literature devoted to infrastructure studies has been inspired by work by Star (1999) and Star and Bowker (2006). Taking a perspective rooted in technology studies, work such as that of Bowker et al. (2010) explicitly considers political dimensions of infrastructure alongside practical and historical dimensions. Finally, important discussions of the ways that today’s Internet architecture embodies values can be found in work by Lessig (2006), DeNardis (2009, 2012), and Braman (2012a, 2012b, 2013).

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24 Communication Technology and Perception

Abstract: This chapter investigates a shift in perspective concerning communication and technology. In particular, it examines whether and to what extent the “Other” in communicative interactions may be otherwise than another human user and the moral opportunities and challenges this alteration makes available. Toward this end, the chapter proceeds in three steps or movements: The first will critically evaluate the way we typically perceive communication technology. It will, therefore, target and reconsider the instrumental theory, which characterizes technology as nothing more than a neutral tool serving human interests and objectives. The second will investigate the opportunities and challenges that computer technology poses to this standard default understanding. Recent developments with artificial intelligence, learning algorithms, and social robots exceed the conceptual boundaries of the instrumental theory and ask us to reassess who or what is (or can be) a legitimate social subject. Finally, and by way of conclusion, the third part will draw out the consequences of this material, explicating what this shift in perspective means for us, the other entities who communicate and interact with us, and the new social situations and circumstances that define life in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, algorithms, communication, instrumental theory, machine learning, social robots, technology

There is a something of a blind spot in communication and media ethics when it comes to technology. It is possible to catch a glimpse of this in an influential statement Sandy Stone issued during the first conference on cyberspace: “No matter how virtual the subject becomes, there is always a body attached” (Stone 1991: 111). What Stone sought to point out with this brief but insightful comment is the fact that despite what appears online, users of computer networks and computer-mediated communication should remember that behind the scenes or the screen there is always another user – another person who is essentially like us. This other may appear in the guise of different virtual characters, screen names, profiles, or avatars, but there is always a real person behind it all.

This insight has served us well. It has helped users navigate the increasingly complex interpersonal relationships made possible by network connected computers. It has assisted researchers in examining the social aspects and effects of new media technology. And, perhaps most importantly, it has helped all of us sort out difficult questions concerning individual responsibility and the rights of others in the era of virtual interaction and computer-mediated communication. But this insight, for all its usefulness, is blind to another possibility – the possibility that the

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-024>

technology is not just a more-or-less neutral conduit through which human actions and messages pass but constitutes, by itself, another kind of socially significant, communicative subject.

The following investigates this *other* possibility – the possibility that the Other in communicative interactions may be otherwise than another human user – and the moral opportunities and challenges it makes available. Toward this end, the investigation will proceed in three steps or movements: The first will critically evaluate the way we typically perceive communication technology. It will, therefore, target and reconsider the instrumental theory, which characterizes technology as nothing more than a neutral tool serving human interests and objectives. The second will investigate the opportunities and challenges that computer technology pose to this standard default understanding. Recent developments with artificial intelligence, learning algorithms, and social robots exceed the conceptual boundaries of the instrumental theory and ask us to reassess who or what is (or can be) a legitimate social subject. Finally, and by way of conclusion, the third part will draw out the consequences of this material, explicating what this shift in perspective means for us, the other entities who communicate and interact with us, and the new social situations and circumstances that define life in the twenty-first century.

1 Default settings

Sometimes it is the little, seemingly unimportant words that really count, like prepositions. When employed for the purposes of communication, computer technology has been assigned one of two possible functions. It has either been situated as a medium through which human beings share information, or it has occupied, with varying degrees of success, the position of the other in communicative exchange, becoming a participant with which human users interact. These two alternatives were initially introduced and characterized in Robert Cathcart and Gary Gumpert's "The Person-Computer Interaction" (1985). In this essay, the authors differentiate communicating *through* a computer from communicating *with* a computer. The former, they argue, names all those "computer facilitated functions" where "the computer is interposed between sender and receiver." The latter designates "person-computer interpersonal functions" where "one party activates a computer which in turn responds appropriately in graphic, alphanumeric, or vocal modes establishing an ongoing sender/receiver relationship" (Cathcart and Gumpert 1985: 114). Despite early identification of these two alternatives, the field of communication in general and media studies in particular has (for better or worse) emphasized one alternative over and against the other. With few exceptions, communication scholars have considered the computer and computer networks, like the Internet, to be a medium *through* which human users interact, exchange ideas, and communicate with each other. This

decision is immediately evident in and has been institutionalized by the relatively new field of computer-mediated communication (CMC), which is routinely defined as “communication that takes place between human beings *via* the instrumentality of computers” (Herring 1996: 1).

Situating the computer in this fashion is completely reasonable and has distinct theoretical and practical advantages. First, it locates the technology at an identifiable position within the process model of communication, which was initially formalized by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver in *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. According to Shannon and Weaver, communication is a dyadic process bounded, on the one side, by an information source or sender and, on the other side, by a receiver. These two participants are connected by a communication channel or medium through which messages selected by the sender are conveyed to the receiver (Shannon and Weaver 1963: 7–8). This rudimentary model is not only “accepted as one of the main seeds out of which Communication Studies has grown” (Fiske 1994: 6) but establishes the basic components and parameters for future elaborations and developments. In accordance with this model, CMC locates the computer and related technology in the intermediate position of channel or medium. As such, it occupies the location granted to other forms of communication technology (print, telegraph, telephone, radio, television, etc.) and is comprehended as something *through* which human messages pass.

Second, this intermediate position is substantiated and justified by the response that is typically provided for the question concerning technology. “We ask the question concerning technology,” Martin Heidegger (1977: 4–5) writes, “when we ask what it is. Everyone knows the two statements that answer our question. One says: Technology is a means to an end. The other says: Technology is a human activity.” According to Heidegger’s analysis, the presumed role and function of any kind of technology is that it is a means employed by human users for specific ends. Heidegger terms this particular characterization “the instrumental definition of technology” and indicates that it forms what is considered to be the “correct” understanding of any kind of technological contrivance¹. And because a tool “is deemed ‘neutral,’ without valuative content of its own” (Feenberg 1991: 5) a technological artifact is evaluated not in and of itself, but on the basis of the particular employments that have been decided by its human designer, manufacturer, or user. This is what is typically called “instrumental neutrality.”

¹ What Heidegger identifies as “the instrumental definition of technology” is by no means his final word on the subject. His essay, “The Question Concerning Technology” (which was originally published in 1962), begins with a critique of this standard way of thinking about and making sense of technology. The remainder of the text, however, actively challenges this default characterization and develops a more profound understanding of technology as a kind of frame of reference for the way that human beings gain access to an understanding of themselves, their world, and the things around them. For a more thorough and complete consideration of Heidegger’s involvement with technology, see Gunkel & Taylor (2014).

Third, characterized as a tool, instrument, or medium of human endeavor, technical devices are not considered the responsible agent of actions that are performed with or through them. “Morality, “as J. Storrs Hall (2001: 2) points out, “rests on human shoulders, and if machines changed the ease with which things were done, they did not change responsibility for doing them. People have always been the only ‘moral agents.’” This assertion not only sounds level-headed and reasonable, it is one of the standard assumptions of both media and computer ethics. According to Deborah Johnson, who is credited with writing the agenda-setting textbook on the subject, “computer ethics turns out to be the study of human beings and society – our goals and values, our norms of behavior, the way we organize ourselves and assign rights and responsibilities, and so on” (Johnson 1985: 6). Computers, she recognizes, often “instrumentalize” these human values and behaviors in innovative and challenging ways, but the bottom-line is and remains the way human agents design and use (or misuse) such technology. Understood in this way, computer systems, no matter how automatic, independent, or seemingly intelligent they may become, “are not and can never be (autonomous, independent) moral agents” (Johnson 2006: 203). They will, like all other technological artifacts, always be instruments of human value, decision making, and action.

Finally, all of this has been and remains largely unquestioned, because it constitutes what is routinely called “normal science.” The term “normal science” was introduced by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* to describe those undertakings that are guided by an established and accepted *paradigm*. Paradigms, according to Kuhn (1996: x), are modes of perception; they frame “universally recognized scientific achievements that, for a time, provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners.” For this reason, normal sciences, as Kuhn demonstrates, have distinct theoretical and practical advantages. Operating within the framework of an established paradigm provides students, scholars, and educators with a common foundation and accepted set of basic assumptions. This effectively puts an end to debates about fundamentals and allows researchers to concentrate their attention on problems defined by the discipline, instead of quibbling about competing methodological procedures or basic substructures. For this reason, a paradigm provides coherent structure to a particular area of research. It defines what constitutes a problem for the area of study, delimits the kind of questions that are considered to be appropriate and significant, and describes what research procedures and resulting evidence will qualify as acceptable.

When computer technology is understood and examined as an instrument or medium facilitating human communication, research typically focuses on the quantity and quality of the messages that can be distributed by the system or the kinds of relationships established between the human senders and receivers through its particular form of mediation. Evidence of this can be found, as Kuhn (1996: 136) argues, in the contents of standard textbooks, which “address themselves to an already articulated body of problems, data and theory, most often to the particular set of paradigms

to which the scientific community is committed at the time they are written” (136). Without little or no exception, standard textbooks in the disciplines of communication studies, media studies, and communication/media ethics, whether introductory or advanced, address the computer and related information technology as an *instrument* of human communication and seek to investigate the effect this new technology has on the quantity and quality of human interactions and relationships (Barnes 2002, Consalvo and Ess 2013, Dutton 2013, Herring 1996, Jones 1998, Ess 2009, and Gehl 2013).

2 Shift in perspective

The instrumental theory of technology not only sounds reasonable, it is obviously useful. It is, one might say, instrumental for figuring out questions of moral conduct and social responsibility in the age of increasingly complex technological systems. And it has a distinct advantage in that it locates accountability in a widely-accepted and seemingly intuitive subject position, in human decision making and action. At the same time, however, this particular formulation also has significant theoretical and practical limitations, especially as it applies (or not) to recent technological innovation. Let’s consider three examples that not only complicate the operative assumptions and consequences of the instrumental theory but require new ways of perceiving and theorizing the moral challenges of technology.

2.1 Mindless AI

From the beginning, it is communication – and specifically, a tightly constrained form of conversational interpersonal dialogue – that provides the field of artificial intelligence (AI) with its definitive characterization and test case. This is immediately evident in the pioneering paper that is credited with defining machine intelligence, Alan Turing’s “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” which was first published in the journal *Mind* in 1950. Although the term “artificial intelligence” is a product of the Dartmouth Conference of 1956, it is Turing’s seminal paper and the “game of imitation” that it describes – what is now routinely called “the Turing Test” – that defines and characterizes the field. “The idea of the test,” Turing (2004: 495) explained in a BBC interview from 1952, “is that the machine has to try and pretend to be a man, by answering questions put to it, and it will only pass if the pretense is reasonably convincing. A considerable proportion of a jury, who should not be experts about machines, must be taken in by the pretense. They aren’t allowed to see the machine itself – that would make it too easy. So the machine is kept in a faraway room and the jury are allowed to ask it questions, which are transmitted through to it.” According to Turing’s stipulations, if a computer is capable of successfully simulating a human

being in communicative exchanges (albeit exchanges that are constrained to the rather artificial situation of typewritten questions and answers) to such an extent that human interlocutors (or “a jury” as Turing calls them in the 1952 interview) cannot tell whether they are talking with a machine or another human being, then that device would need to be considered intelligent.

At the time that Turing published the paper proposing this test case, he estimated that the tipping point – the point at which a machine would be able to successfully play the game of imitation – was at least half-a-century in the future. “I believe that in about fifty years’ time it will be possible to programme computers, with a storage capacity of about 10^9 , to make them play the imitation game so well that an average interrogator will not have more than 70 per cent chance of making the right identification after five minutes of questioning” (Turing, 1999: 44). It did not take that long. Already in 1966 Joseph Weizenbaum demonstrated a simple natural language processing (NLP) application that was able to converse with human interrogators in such a way as to appear to be another person. ELIZA, as the application was called, was what we now recognize as a “chatterbot,” although Weizenbaum did not use this terminology (Gunkel, 2012b: 5). This proto-chatterbot (also called “chatbot” or simply “bot”) was actually a rather simple piece of programming, “consisting mainly of general methods for analyzing sentences and sentence fragments, locating so-called key words in texts, assembling sentence from fragments, and so on. It had, in other words, no built-in contextual framework of universe of discourse. This was supplied to it by a ‘script.’ In a sense ELIZA was an actress who commanded a set of techniques but who had nothing of her own to say” (Weizenbaum, 1976: 188). Despite this, Weizenbaum’s program demonstrated what Turing had initially predicted:

ELIZA created the most remarkable illusion of having understood in the minds of many people who conversed with it. People who know very well that they were conversing with a machine soon forgot that fact, just as theatergoers, in the grip of suspended disbelief, soon forget that the action they are witnessing is not ‘real.’ This illusion was especially strong and most tenaciously clung to among people who know little or nothing about computers. They would often demand to be permitted to converse with the system in private, and would, after conversing with it for a time, insist, in spite of my explanations, that the machine really understood them” (Weizenbaum, 1976: 189).

Since the debut of ELIZA, there have been numerous advancements in chatterbot design, and these devices now populate many of the online social spaces in which we live, work and play. As a result of this proliferation, it is not uncommon for users to assume they are talking to another (human) person, when in fact they are just chatting up a chatterbot. This was the case for Robert Epstein, a Harvard University Ph.D. and former editor of *Psychology Today*, who fell in love with and had a four-month online “affair” with a chatterbot (Epstein, 2007). This was possible not because the bot, which went by the name “Ivana,” was somehow intelligent, but because the bot’s conversational behavior was, in the words of Clifford Nass and Byron Reeves (1996),

“close enough to human to encourage social responses.” And this approximation, as Miranda Mowbray (2002: 2) points out, is not necessarily “a feature of the sophistication of bot design, but of the low bandwidth communication of the online social space,” where it is much easier to convincingly simulate a human agent.

Despite this knowledge – despite educated, well-informed experts such as Epstein (2007: 17), who has openly admitted that “I know about such things and I should have certainly known better” – these software implementations can have adverse effects on both the user and the online communities in which they operate. But who or what is culpable in these circumstances? The instrumental theory of technology typically leads such questions back to the designer of the application, and this is precisely how Epstein (2007: 17) made sense of his own experiences, blaming (or crediting) “a very smug, very anonymous computer programmer” who he assumes was located somewhere in Russia. But things are more complicated. Epstein is, at least, partially responsible for “using” the bot and deciding to converse with it, and the online community in which Epstein met Ivana is arguably responsible for permitting (perhaps even encouraging) such “deceptions” in the first place. For this reason, the assignment of responsibility is not as simple as it might first appear to be. As Mowbray (2002: 4) argues, interactions like this “show that a bot may cause harm to other users or to the community as a whole by the will of its programmers or other users, but that it also may cause harm through nobody’s fault because of the combination of circumstances involving some combination of its programming, the actions and mental or emotional states of human users who interact with it, behavior of other bots and of the environment, and the social economy of the community.” Unlike artificial general intelligence (AGI), which would occupy a subject position reasonably close to that of a human agent, these mindless chatterbots simply muddy the water (which is probably worse) by complicating and leaving undecided questions regarding agency and instrumentality.

2.2 Machine learning

Chatterbot architecture, like most computer applications, depends on programmers coding explicit step-by-step instructions. For ELIZA, or any other chatterbot, to “talk” to a human user, human programmers need to anticipate everything that might be said to the bot and then code a series of instructions to generate an appropriate response. If, for example, the user types “Hi, how are you?”, the application can be designed to identify this pattern of words and to respond with a pre-designated result – what Weizenbaum called a “script.” Here is what this operation might look like in Javascript, a basic object-oriented programming language used for web applications:

```
question1 = prompt("Say something to ELIZA");
userResponse1 = "How are you?";
elizaResponse1 = "I am fine. Thank you.";
```

```

elizaResponse2 = "I am Eliza. How are you?";
if (question1 == userResponse1)
    document.write(elizaResponse1);
else
    document.write(elizaResponse2);

```

Machine learning provides an alternative approach to application design and development. “With machine learning,” as *Wired* magazine explains, “programmers do not encode computers with instructions. They *train* them” (Tanz 2016: 77). Although this alternative is nothing new – it was originally proposed and demonstrated by Arthur Samuel as early as 1956 – it has recently gained traction and attention with highly publicized events involving Google DeepMind’s AlphaGo, which famously beat one of the most celebrated players of the notoriously difficult board game Go, and Microsoft’s Twitterbot Tay.ai, which infamously learned to become a hate spewing neo-Nazi racist after interacting with users.

Both AlphaGo and Tay are AI systems using some form of machine learning. AlphaGo, as Google DeepMind (2015) explains, “combines Monte-Carlo tree search with deep neural networks that have been trained by supervised learning, from human expert games, and by reinforcement learning from games of self-play.” In other words, AlphaGo does not play the game by following a set of cleverly designed moves fed into it by human programmers. It is designed to formulate its own instructions from game play. Although less is known about the inner workings of Tay, Microsoft explains that the system “has been built by mining relevant public data,” i.e., training its neural networks on anonymized data obtained from social media, and was designed to evolve its behavior from interacting with users on social networks such as Twitter, Kik, and GroupMe (Microsoft 2016a). What both systems have in common is that the engineers who designed and built them have no idea what the systems will eventually do once they are in operation. As Thore Graepel, one of the creators of AlphaGo, has explained: “Although we have programmed this machine to play, we have no idea what moves it will come up with. Its moves are an emergent phenomenon from the training. We just create the data sets and the training algorithms. But the moves it then comes up with are out of our hands” (Metz, 2016). Consequently, machine learning systems, like AlphaGo, are intentionally designed to do things that their programmers cannot anticipate or completely control. In other words, we now have autonomous (or at least semi-autonomous) computer systems that in one way or another have “a mind of their own.” And this is where things get interesting, especially when it comes to questions of responsibility and ethics.

AlphaGo was designed to play Go, and it proved its ability by beating an expert human player. So who won? Who gets the accolade? Who actually beat Lee Sedol? Following the dictates of the instrumental theory of technology, actions undertaken with the computer would be attributed to the human programmers who initially designed the system. But this explanation does not necessarily hold for an application like

AlphaGo, which was deliberately created to do things that exceed the knowledge and control of its human designers. In fact, in most of the reporting on this landmark event, it is not Google or the engineers at DeepMind who are credited with the victory. It is AlphaGo. Things get even more complicated with Tay, Microsoft's foul-mouthed teenage AI, when one asks the question: Who is responsible for Tay's bigoted comments on Twitter? According to the standard instrumentalist way of thinking, we would need to blame the programmers at Microsoft, who designed the application to be able to do these things. But the programmers obviously did not set out to create a racist algorithm. Tay developed this reprehensible behavior by learning from interactions with human users on the Internet. So how did Microsoft explain and assign responsibility?

Initially a company spokesperson – in damage-control mode – sent out an email to *Wired*, *The Washington Post*, and other news organizations, that sought to blame the victim. “The AI chatbot Tay,” the spokesperson explained, “is a machine learning project, designed for human engagement. It is as much a social and cultural experiment, as it is technical. Unfortunately, within the first 24 hours of coming online, we became aware of a coordinated effort by some users to abuse Tay's commenting skills to have Tay respond in inappropriate ways. As a result, we have taken Tay offline and are making adjustments” (Risely, 2016). According to Microsoft, it is not the programmers or the corporation who are responsible for the hate speech. It is the fault of the users (or some users) who interacted with Tay and taught her to be a bigot. Tay's racism, in other word, is our fault. Later, on Friday, March 25, Peter Lee, vice president of Microsoft Research, posted the following apology on the Official Microsoft Blog:

As many of you know by now, on Wednesday we launched a chatbot called Tay. We are deeply sorry for the unintended offensive and hurtful tweets from Tay, which do not represent who we are or what we stand for, nor how we designed Tay. Tay is now offline and we'll look to bring Tay back only when we are confident we can better anticipate malicious intent that conflicts with our principles and values (Microsoft 2016b).

But this apology is also frustratingly unsatisfying or interesting (it all depends on how you look at it). According to Lee's carefully worded explanation, Microsoft is only responsible for not *anticipating* the bad outcome; it does not take responsibility for the offensive Tweets. For Lee, it is Tay who (or “that,” and words matter here) is named and recognized as the source of the “wildly inappropriate and reprehensible words and images” (Microsoft, 2016b). And since Tay is a kind of “minor” (a teenage AI) under the protection of her parent corporation, Microsoft needed to step in, apologize for their “daughter's” bad behavior, and put Tay in a time-out.

Although the extent to which one might assign “agency” and “responsibility” to these mechanisms remains a contested issue, what is not debated is the fact that the rules of the game have changed significantly. As Andreas Matthias points out, summarizing his survey of learning automata:

Presently there are machines in development or already in use which are able to decide on a course of action and to act without human intervention. The rules by which they act are not fixed during the production process, but can be changed during the operation of the machine, by the machine itself. This is what we call machine learning. Traditionally we hold either the operator/manufacture of the machine responsible for the consequences of its operation or “nobody” (in cases, where no personal fault can be identified). Now it can be shown that there is an increasing class of machine actions, where the traditional ways of responsibility ascription are not compatible with our sense of justice and the moral framework of society because nobody has enough control over the machine’s actions to be able to assume responsibility for them (Matthias 2004: 177).

In other words, the instrumental definition of technology, which had effectively tethered machine action to human agency, no longer adequately applies to mechanisms that have been deliberately designed to operate and exhibit some form, no matter how rudimentary, of independent action or autonomous decision making. This does not mean, it is important to emphasize, that the instrumental theory is on this account refuted *tout court*. There are and will continue to be mechanisms understood and utilized as tools to be manipulated by human users (i.e., lawn mowers, cork screws, telephones, digital cameras, etc.). The point is that the instrumentalist perspective, no matter how useful and seemingly correct in some circumstances for explaining some technological devices, does not exhaust all possibilities for all kinds of devices.

2.3 Social robots

In July of 2014 the world got its first look at Jibo. Who or what is Jibo? That is an interesting and important question. In a promotional video that was designed to raise capital investment through pre-orders, social robotics pioneer Cynthia Breazeal introduced Jibo with the following explanation: “This is your car. This is your house. This is your toothbrush. These are your things. But these [and the camera zooms into a family photograph] are the things that matter. And somewhere in between is this guy. Introducing Jibo, the world’s first family robot” (Jibo 2014). Whether explicitly recognized as such or not, this promotional video leverages a crucial moral distinction that Jacques Derrida (2005: 80) calls the difference between “who” and “what.”

On the side of “what” we have those things that are mere objects – our car, our house, and our toothbrush. According to the instrumental theory of technology, these things are mere instruments that do not have any independent moral status whatsoever (Lyotard 1984: 44). We might worry about the impact that the car’s emissions has on the environment (or perhaps stated more precisely, on the health and well-being of the other human beings who share this planet with us), but the car itself is not a moral subject. On the other side there are, as the video describes it “those things that matter.” These things are not things, strictly speaking, but are the other persons who count as socially and morally significant Others. Unlike the car, the house, or the

toothbrush, these Others have moral status and can be benefitted or harmed by our decisions and actions.

Jibo, we are told, occupies a place that is situated somewhere in between *what* are mere things and *who* really matters. Consequently Jibo is not just another instrument, like our automobile or toothbrush. But he/she/it (and the choice of pronoun is not unimportant) is also not quite another member of the family pictured in the photograph. Jibo inhabits a place in between these two options. This is, it should be noted, not unprecedented. We are already familiar with other entities that occupy a similar ambivalent social position, like the family dog. In fact animals, which since the time of Descartes have been the other of the machine, provide a good precedent for understanding the opportunities and challenges of social robots, like Jibo. Some animals, such as the domestic pigs that are raised for food, occupy the position of “what,” being mere things that can be used and disposed of as we see fit. Other animals, like a pet dog, are closer to another person “who” counts as Other. They are named, occupy a place alongside us inside the house, and are considered by many to be “a member of the family” (see Coeckelbergh and Gunkel 2014).

Jibo, and other social robots like it, are not science fiction. They are already or will soon be in our lives and in our homes. As Breazeal (2002: 1) describes it, “a sociable robot is able to communicate and interact with us, understand and even relate to us, in a personal way. It should be able to understand us and itself in social terms. We, in turn, should be able to understand it in the same social terms – to be able to relate to it and to empathize with it...In short, a sociable robot is socially intelligent in a human-like way, and interacting with it is like interacting with another person.” In the face of these socially situated and interactive entities we are going to have to decide whether they are mere things like our car, our house, and our toothbrush; someone who matters like another member of the family; or something altogether different that is situated in between the one and the other. In whatever way this comes to be decided, however, these entities will undoubtedly challenge our concept of communication ethics and the way we typically distinguish between who is to be considered another social subject and what is a mere instrument or object.

3 Conclusions

In a now well-known and often reproduced *New Yorker* cartoon by Peter Steiner (1993), two dogs sit in front of an Internet-connected PC. The one operating the computer says to his companion, “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.” The cartoon has often been mobilized to illustrate both the opportunities and challenges with computer-mediated communication. But it also reveals a fundamental assumption or blind spot in both communication theory and ethics. When interacting with each other online, users can easily reconfigure their identities and become whoever

or whatever they desire to be. No matter what appears on the screen, however, it is commonly assumed that behind the clever user names, the carefully curated profiles, or the immersive 3d avatars there is, as Stone originally pointed out, always *somebody* – even if this somebody is, as in the case of the cartoon, a dog. Recent technological innovations like mindless chatterbots, learning algorithms, and sociable robots are beginning to complicate and challenge this fundamental assumption. And in the face of technologies that not only reconfigure how others appear to us but put in question who or what can be considered “Other,” there appears to be at least three options on the table.

3.1 Instrumentalism redux

We can try to respond as we typically have responded, treating these mechanisms as mere instruments or tools. Joanna Bryson makes a persuasive case for this approach in her provocatively titled essay “Robots Should be Slaves”: “My thesis is that robots should be built, marketed and considered legally as slaves, not companion peers” (Bryson 2010: 63). Although this might sound harsh, the argument is persuasive, precisely because it draws on and is underwritten by the instrumental theory of technology – a theory that has considerable history and success behind it and that functions as the assumed default setting for any and all considerations of technology. This decision – and it is a decision, even if it is the default position – has both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, it reaffirms human exceptionalism, making it absolutely clear that it is only the human being who possesses rights and responsibilities. Technologies, no matter how sophisticated they become are and will continue to be mere tools of human action, nothing more. “Computer systems,” Johnson (2006: 197) confidently asserts, “are produced, distributed, and used by people engaged in social practices and meaningful pursuits. This is as true of current computer systems as it will be of future computer systems. No matter how independently, automatic, and interactive computer systems of the future behave, they will be the products (direct or indirect) of human behavior, human social institutions, and human decision” (Johnson 2006: 197).

But this approach, for all its usefulness, has a not-so-pleasant downside. As Bryson readily admits, it willfully and deliberately produces a new class of instrumental servant or slave, what we might call “slavery 2.0” (Gunkel, 2012a: 86), and rationalizes this decision as morally appropriate and justified. The problem here, it is important to note, is not necessarily what an algorithm or social robot might “feel” due to being pressed into our service. The concern rather is with the kind of social environment such standardized servitude could produce. As Immanuel Kant (1963, 239) argued concerning indirect duties to non-human animals: Animal abuse is wrong, not because of how the animal might feel (which is, according to Kant’s strict epistemological restrictions, forever and already inaccessible to us), but because of

the adverse effect such action would have on other human beings and society as a whole. In other words, applying the instrumental theory to these new kinds of mechanism and affordances, although seemingly reasonable and useful, could have potentially devastating consequences for us and others.

3.2 Machine ethics

Conversely, we can entertain the possibility of “machine ethics” just as we had previously done for other non-human entities, like animals (Singer 1975). And there has, in fact, been a number of recent proposals addressing the possibility of both moral agency and moral patiency² regarding technology. Wendell Wallach and Colin Allen (2009), for example, not only predict that “there will be a catastrophic incident brought about by a computer system making a decision independent of human oversight” (Wallach and Allen 2009: 4) but use this fact as justification for developing “moral machines,” advanced technological systems that are capable of making morally informed decisions. Michael Anderson and Susan Leigh Anderson take things one step further. They not only identify a pressing need to consider the moral responsibilities and capabilities of increasingly autonomous systems but have even suggested that “computers might be better at following an ethical theory than most humans,” because humans “tend to be inconsistent in their reasoning” and “have difficulty juggling the complexities of ethical decision-making” owing to the sheer volume of data that needs to be taken into account and processed (Anderson and Anderson 2007: 5).

Likewise, researchers have suggested that AI’s, robots, and socially interactive technologies can and perhaps should have some level of independent social and/or moral standing. Already in 1996, for instance, Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass discovered (by way of a series of empirical investigations) that human users often contravene the instrumental theory in practice by treating computers as social actors. “Computers, in the way that they communicate, instruct, and take turns interacting, are close enough to human that they encourage social responses. The encouragement necessary for such a reaction need not be much. As long as there are some behaviors that suggest a social presence, people will respond accordingly” (Nass and

2 The terms “moral agent” and “moral patient” designate the two subjects that define ethical interactions and relationships. “Moral situations,” as Luciano Floridi and J. W. Sanders (2004: 349–350) point out, “commonly involve agents and patients. Let us define the class *A* of moral agents as the class of all entities that can in principle qualify as sources of moral action, and the class *P* of moral patients as the class of all entities that can in principle qualify as receivers of moral action.” In other words (and to use the terminology of communication theory), a *moral agent* is the source of a moral action, while the *moral patient* is the receiver of that action or what Steve Torrance (2008: 505) also calls “a moral consumer.”

Reeves 1996: 22). These findings have been independently confirmed and verified in the investigations by Christopher Bartneck and colleagues (2007) into human/robot interactions. And Kate Darling (2012) and myself (Gunkel 2014 and 2017) have even suggested that we might need to begin seriously thinking about the rights of robots.

These proposals, it is important to point out, do not necessarily require that we resolve the big questions of AGI, robot sentience, or machine consciousness. As Nass and Reeves (1998: 28) discovered, even when experienced users know quite well that they are engaged with using a “mindless” device, they make the “conservative error” and tend to respond to it in ways that afford the computer social standing. For something to be recognized and treated as another social actor, “it is not necessary,” as Nass and Reeves (1996: 28) conclude, “to have artificial intelligence.” Consequently, moral and social standing is not, as Mark Coeckelbergh (2012) has argued, a product of internal ontological properties (i.e. consciousness, intelligence, sentience, etc.) but something that is socially negotiated and constructed. A good example of this can already be found in the case of the limited liability corporation. Corporations are, according to both national and international law, legal persons (French 1979). They are considered “persons” (which is, we should recall, a moral classification and not an ontological category) not because they are conscious entities like we assume ourselves to be, but because social circumstances make it necessary to assign personhood to these artificial entities for the purposes of social organization and jurisprudence. Consequently, if entirely artificial and human fabricated entities, like Google or IBM, are persons, it would be possible, it seems, to extend the same moral and legal considerations to an AI such as Google’s DeepMind or IBM’s Watson (Gunkel 2012).

Once again, this decision sounds reasonable and justified. It extends moral standing – either moral agency, moral patiency, or both – to these other socially aware and interactive entities and recognizes, following the predictions of Norbert Wiener (1954: 16), that the social situation of the future will involve not just human-to-human interactions but relationships between humans and machines and machines and machines. But this shift in perspective also has significant costs. It requires that we rethink everything we thought we knew about ourselves, technology, and ethics. It entails that we learn to think beyond human exceptionalism, technological instrumentalism, and all the other *-isms* that have helped us make sense of our world and our place in it. In effect, it calls for a thorough reconceptualization of who or what should be considered a legitimate moral subject and why.

3.3 Hybrid morality

Finally, we can try to balance these two opposing positions by taking an intermediate hybrid approach, distributing moral agency and patiency across a network

of interacting human and machine components. This particular variant of “actor network theory” (Latour 2005) is precisely the solution advanced by Johnson in her essay, “Computer Systems: Moral Entities but not Moral Agents”: “When computer systems behave there is a triad of intentionality at work, the intentionality of the computer system designer, the intentionality of the system, and the intentionality of the user” (Johnson 2006: 202). A similar argument has been advanced by Peter Paul Verbeek, who attempts to “find a way out of the deadlock” of strict technological instrumentalism and the “mistake” of machine morality:

I will defend the thesis that ethics should be approached as a matter of human-technological associations. When taking the notion of technological mediation seriously, claiming that technologies are human agents would be as inadequate as claiming that ethics is a solely human affair... If the ethics of technology is to take seriously the mediating roles of technology in society and in people’s everyday lives, it must move beyond the modernist subject-object dichotomy that forms its metaphysical roots. Rather than separating or purifying “humans and nonhumans” the ethics of technology needs to hybridizes them (Verbeek 2011: 13–14).

This hybrid approach also has its advantages and disadvantages. In particular, it appears to be attentive to the exigencies of life in the twenty-first century. None of us, in fact, make decisions or act in a vacuum; we are always and already tangled up in networks of interactive elements that complicate the assignment of responsibility and rights. And these networks have always included others – not only other human beings but institutions, organizations, and even technological components like the bots and algorithms that increasingly organize and influence our online activities. This combined approach, however, still requires that one decide what aspects of agency and patiency belong to the machine and what should be attributed to the human being. In other words, this hybrid approach, although attempting to strike a balance between strict “instrumentalism” and “machine morality,” will still need to decide between *who* counts as a moral subject and *what* can be considered a mere object (Derrida 2005: 80). And these decisions are (for better or worse) often flexible, allowing one part of the network to protect itself by objectifying its role and deflecting responsibility elsewhere. This occurred, for example, during the Nuremberg trials at the end of World War II, when low-level functionaries deflected responsibility up the chain of command by claiming that they “were just following orders.” But the deflection can also move in the other direction, as was the case in the prisoner abuse scandal at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. In this situation, individuals in the upper echelon of the network deflected responsibility by arguing that the documented abuse was not ordered by command but was the deliberate action of a “few bad apples” in the enlisted ranks. Finally, there can be situations where no one is accountable for anything. In this case, moral and legal responsibility is disseminated across the network in such a way that no one person, institution, or technology is culpable or held responsible. This is precisely what happened in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. The bundling and reselling of mortgage-backed securities was so complex and

dispersed across the network that in the end no one was able to be identified as being responsible for the collapse.

These three options clearly define a spectrum of possibilities that I have called *the machine question*. How we decide to respond to the opportunities and challenges of this question will have a profound effect on the way we conceptualize our place in the world, who we decide to include in the community of moral subjects, and what we exclude from such consideration and why. But no matter how it is decided, it is a decision – quite literally a cut that institutes difference and makes a difference. We are, therefore, responsible both for deciding who or even what is a moral subject and, in the process, for determining the way we perceive the current state and future possibility of ethics.

Further reading

For a critical examination of the opportunities and challenges of the instrumental theory of technology, see Heidegger (1977), Feenberg (1991), and Verbeek (2011). On the dominant computer mediated communication (CMC) paradigm, see Barnes (2002), Consalvo and Ess (2013), Dutton (2013), Herring (1996), Jones (1998), Ess (2009) and Gehl (2013). For challenges to and critiques of this dominant paradigm in the field of communication and media studies, see Gunkel (2012b) and Nass and Reeves (1996). On artificial intelligence (AI) and a basic introduction to machine learning and connectionist architectures, see Turing (1999), Partridge and Wilks (1990) and Alpaydin (2016). On recent innovations in AI ethics and machine ethics, see Anderson and Anderson (2011), Wallach and Allen (2009), Coeckelbergh (2012) and Gunkel (2012a). For efforts to formulate hybrid approaches to the ethics of emerging technology, see Verbeek (2011), Johnson (2006), and Gunkel (2012a).

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25 Research Directions

Abstract: As an introduction to the “Future” section of this volume, this chapter suggests several key promising research and theory-building directions for ethics scholarship in media and communications. First, continued philosophical explication will continue to show how the work of individual theorists and philosophers might enrich the theoretical sophistication of the fields. Second, advancements through the intersection of philosophy and theorizing on technology will open up new ways of understanding. Third, moral psychology approaches will continue to provide avenues to explore moral motivation, moral identity, and ethics-related decision-making. And finally, work to update media sociology scholarship and “hierarchies of influence” approaches will increasingly incorporate morally-relevant factors on both the individual and organizational levels.

Keywords: explication, philosophy of technology, moral psychology, media sociology

As the preceding chapters suggest, the scope of scholarship in communication and media research ranges across many significant issues about normative practices, proper application of principles, and potential harmful effects. As a relatively young field, ethics in communication and media is an area of great activity and promise. Big questions are still being asked and investigated, and grand synthesizing theories are still being developed. The beginning of this volume suggested that as such, the field stands in a pivotal moment in its growth. After chapters that have surveyed the work on key questions and the progress on theory development, this section takes a more deliberate turn toward the future. What kinds of theory-building are most promising? What big questions are most pressing and will most likely preoccupy scholars in the years to come? In what directions is the field most likely to grow as it continues to mature?

This chapter opens the “Future” section of this volume by discussing four suggested directions that will be fruitful for the development of communication and media scholarship in the years to come. These four directions are broadly outlined and are not presented with the intent of comprehensively defining what future research should look like. Rather, they are suggested as areas that appear to be among the more promising for their theory-building potential. While it is impossible to foresee all the ways in which scholarship in the field will develop, these are four directions that work arguably must address to ensure that our area continues to mature as a discipline.

The first is continued efforts at philosophical explication. This work, which articulates normative understandings of theories and concepts to illuminate how they apply to media and communication, has long been a pillar of scholarship in the field.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-025>

Still, there is plenty of work to be done. The ongoing debates over aspects of various approaches in the philosophy of ethics – deontological, consequentialist, and others – continue to pose questions to be addressed. While much has been published on the relevant works of key thinkers such as Aristotle, Isocrates, Kant and Mill, the potential contributions of others such as Martin Heidegger, Philippa Foot, Robert Audi, and W.D. Ross call for more attention. So too do key concepts such as harm, moral autonomy and discursive obligations call for more explicative work. The second is the integration of philosophy of technology literature and theorizing into our own scholarship. The work of Arnold Pacey, Jacques Ellul and others have long since been incorporated into communication scholarship, but more contemporary theorizing in the fields of information and computing ethics has not. Recent theorizing by Luciano Floridi, for example, which explores how our creation of an “infosphere” is transforming human experience, poses critical implications for media ethics that are only now being considered. The third direction is moral psychology. Research that draws on longstanding psychology-related instruments to explore questions of moral perception, moral motivation and moral decision-making provides fertile ground for theory-building. The largely inductive nature of moral psychology approaches promise to complement the more abstract theorizing that has dominated the media ethics field by providing empirical data on the moral development and orientation of media professionals. This work began with the examination of moral development among journalists by Lee Wilkins and Renita Coleman. The fourth direction is the advancement of media sociological research. Given the major transformations within media industries in the last two decades, new work is required to update the theories of value systems and organizational cultures shaping the work of media professionals – theories largely stemming from the work of Gaye Tuchman, Herbert Gans and others from the 1970s and 1980s. This need to update our media sociology assumptions will require a range of methodologies, including ethnographic approaches as well as more empirical efforts such as structured interviews and survey data. For media scholars, the “new” media sociology will require more interdisciplinary efforts that draw upon theories and concepts such as structuration theory, co-orientation, organizational psychology, and self-efficacy.

1 Philosophical explication

“Explication is the intellectual process of linking [collected data on a particular topic] to broader propositions about communication,” according to Stephen Chaffee’s landmark “explication” of explication. “Explication should tell us, among other things, the extent to which we are falling short of studying what we really intend” (1991: 4, 5). Explication is often a long-term evolutionary process, as our understanding of a concept is refined as it is subjected to scrutiny from different research perspectives.

This process often spans years, sometimes decades, but that is not to dismiss the value of single explicative essays that provide intense analysis. Neither is the intent of systematic concept explication to strip our language of its richness and (often valuable) ambiguity. “We do not use every word to mean the same thing every time; our language is much too rich, and our lives much too varied, for that,” Chaffee wrote. “One long-run goal of concept explication is to establish a scientific meaning for each term” (1991: 40). Ideally, explication culminates in both a strong consensus around a clear understanding of the term, and in an ability to operationalize or measure the concept that features strong validity.

Explication begins with a thorough immersion into research that has explicitly or implicitly drawn on the concept in question. “[T]he scholar begins reading prior studies, moves to various steps in the explication process, refines the preliminary definition, and then returns to the literature search with a sharpened definition” (Chaffee 1991: 22). Chaffee provides what he argues are key steps in any worthwhile concept explication. While his aim often is to produce refined operational definitions and reliable empirical ways to measure concepts, this social science emphasis is not the only arena in which the value of concept explication lies. And given the need for more empirical work in media ethics in general, Chaffee’s approach is instructive. A good explication begins, he says, with a clear “focal concept” – a process or occurrence or event that seems to be important in a field of study. Is it something that can be identified empirically, such as hours of television watched? To what other concepts does it seem closely related? These questions set the foundation for a focused yet wide-ranging literature search to survey how the concept or term has been understood up to present times, in what ways its meaning has evolved over time, and how it has been utilized for different research topics. Chaffee notes several key questions that should guide the literature search:

- What are the different conceptual meanings that have been assigned to this term, and what (if any) are their research purposes? What confusions do these ambiguities cause?
- What are the different operational definitions that have been used?
- What are the usual names for these operational definitions? Are different names needed to make differences in meaning clear?
- What, considering its intended research purpose, seem to be the most promising definitions of the concept? (Chaffee 1991: 19).

It soon becomes apparent to the attentive scholar that the range of studies using a particular concept will feature a complicated array of what Chaffee calls “operational contingencies” – conditions of time, place and subjects that may not be consciously selected by study authors but that nonetheless help determine what studies have to say on the topic. For example, studies on the effects of political media content over the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s made assumptions about how audience members

selectively consumed political ads, but those assumptions necessarily changed due to shifts from partisan newspapers to television commercials. A key value of a good concept explication is to tease out this type of operational contingency, which can muddle a clear vision of the concept. “Only after studies have accumulated over some years, in various locales and with different kinds of people and communication media involved, can a literature review make evident what differences these contingencies have made in the meaning of the concepts at stake,” according to Chaffee (1991: 21). A good explication also should consider the patterns among the empirical findings of studies related to the topic when social science approaches are relied upon in the scholarship on a concept. Are distributions of values normal or skewed? Are results reported as correlational or as in some other relationship to other variables and concepts? This synthesis of concept meanings, operational definitions and empirical findings (when relevant) is among the greatest benefits of explicative work.

An explication “unpacks” a concept; by surveying its various uses operationalizations, the investigator is able to provide a *meaning analysis*. Often, this involves discerning distinct dimensions of the same concept that had not been acknowledged before. In other cases, it might culminate in the articulation of multiple related yet distinct concepts. Chaffee suggests that categorizing related ideas as “lower-order” and “higher-order” concepts can help improve concept validity:

Lower-order concepts are closer to the world of observation, either in everyday life or in a contrived laboratory setting. A higher-order concept subsumes several lower-order concepts, and the hierarchical organization of this structure of meaning can be imagined as a definitional ‘tree.’ The trunk of this tree is the singular concept we are explicating; branching immediately from it are a few higher-order concepts; each of these can branch further into several lower-order concepts; each of these may sprout one or more operational definitions. Meaning analysis is largely an intellectual process, occupying the trunk and major branches of this structure (1991: 25).

The concept of *media dependency* is an example of a multidimensional concept. In some research, it refers generally to mass media effects and the degree to which an audience depends upon media content compared to other communication sources. Elsewhere, it refers to reliance upon one medium over another. And more broadly, it has been used to refer to the effects on audiences in developing countries of predominant Western media content. Or, meaning analysis may clarify a concept by identifying how it might be composed of constituent, related concepts. Media scholars spent several decades considering and testing measures of *credibility*. Some have concluded that the concept might in fact represented an amalgam of several possibly distinct concepts that could be context-specific: responsibility, believability, accountability, trustworthiness.

Chaffee argues that a good concept explication should end up with a refined definition of a concept that provides three elements:

- *It is parsimonious*. It refines our understanding of the concept by emphasizing specificity. It does not attempt to account for more than it should and is in fact

actively “stingy” regarding what it attempts to capture. Lack of parsimony in explication and in most theory-building tends to dilute the power, applicability and usefulness of the result.

- *It avoids reification.* To reify an idea is to talk about an abstract concept as if it exists as a concrete thing. According to Chaffee: “It is easy to reify with words, which once spoken make it seem as though the term has existential import. Explication should alert us to this kind of verbal trap” (1991: 39). Rather than assume a concept’s existence, we must work to produce some sort of verification of a widespread belief in the concept or documentation that we have a valid way to measure it.
- *It helps ensure consistency of usage.* It provides other scholars with a concept (and ideally a way to measure it) that is stable and invariable. When this occurs, independent investigations using the concept are less likely to produce different interpretations or widely varying results. “Some writers delight in using an ambiguous term to point up a number of thoughts at one time,” Chaffee explains. “There is nothing wrong with this practice...but it should not be confused with explication of a concept” (1991: 41).

Media ethics scholars have developed a burgeoning literature of explicative work over the years. Some have effectively analyzed how the work of individual philosophers might enrich the theoretical sophistication of the field. An example of this is the work of Charles Marsh on Isocrates (2001, 2008, 2010). Another is *Heidegger and the media* by Gunkel and Taylor (2014). Still others have provided useful efforts to refine and interpret concepts relevant to media ethics theory-building, such as paternalism (Thomas, 2016), moral realism (Christians & Ward, 2013; Plaisance & Tropman, 2016), and transparency (see Koliska & Chadha, 2016; Polumbaum, 2016; Craft & Heim, 2009; Glasser & Ettema, 2008; Plaisance, 2007). All these are examples of scholarship that seeks to clarify “the formal conceptualization of processes that are not obvious, coupled with a determination to bring them into view in an equally formal manner” (Chaffee 1991: 3).

2 Philosophy of technology

Engagement with the various branches of moral philosophy – epistemology, ethics, metaethics – among media and communication ethics scholars is important and ongoing. In the future, however, we may realize advancements just as great through the intersection of philosophical theorizing and media technology. Integration of perspectives from scholarship in the philosophy of technology and philosophy of information fields will open up new ways of understanding.

As with so much of the development of media ethics, Clifford Christians was a pioneer in calling attention to the value of claims from the philosophy of technology.

A central debate has focused on the longstanding claim by many technologists that technology itself is value – neutral and even philosophically agnostic. Several ethicists have argued that we have been blind to the value – ladenness of technology, and that in fact technology clearly privileges certain values and ideological claims over others. In a landmark 1989 article, Christians introduced philosophy of technology to the field of media ethics:

[Technological tools] combine specific resources – know-how, materials, and energy – into unique entities, with unique sets of properties and capabilities. Any technological object, therefore, embodies decisions to develop one kind of knowledge and not some others, to use certain resources and not others, to use energy in a certain form and quantity and not some other. There is no purely neutral or technical justification for all these decisions. Instead, they arise from conceptions of the world, themselves related to such issues as permissible use, good stewardship, and justice (1989: 125).

Darin Barney echoed this sentiment: “Technology is intimately bound up in the establishment and enforcement of prohibitions and permissions, the distribution of power and resources, and the structure of human practices and relationships. In technology, justice is at stake” (2005: 656).

Another debate has centered over whether or how technology poses fundamentally new ethical questions and challenges. In 2000, Dutch theorist Cees Hamelink spoke for many by claiming, “Deceptive behavior in cyberspace is...not a new moral issue though it raises the problem of ‘moral distance’ with extra urgency...The speed of digital communication does not create new forms of immorality, but makes it possible to commit immoral acts so fast one hardly notices (Hamelink, 2000: 34–35). Before that, Neil Postman (1993), Arnold Pacey (1999) and others famously questioned our tendency to embrace technology in blindly deterministic ways that invite us to displace longstanding values with those of the tyrannical gadget. Since then, technology critics and theorists have explored various manifestations of technological determinism and wondered whether the seduction of technology is altering human behavior and connection in more fundamental ways. “By adopting a deterministic stance, we are less likely to subject technology – and those who make a living from it – to the full bouquet of ethical questions for normal democracy,” Evgeny Morozov wrote (2011: 291).

Through his work over the last decade, Luciano Floridi has articulated a different response: Not only are fundamentally different questions being raised, but information and communication technology (ICT) is calling attention to the inadequacy of classical metaphysical frameworks to account for their transformational nature. A necessary technology ethic requires us to start over, in a sense, and redefine reality in terms of information and recognize that fundamentally, we are informational creatures. “To be is to be an informational entity,” he asserted (Floridi 2008: 199). His approach asserting this “informational ontology” represents a shift that is at once radical and reformist. It is radical in that it turns away from Western ideological assumptions of the centrality of the individual but instead recognizes that

in our increasingly interconnected world, “moral actions are the result of complex interactions among distributed systems integrated on a scale larger than the single human being” (2008: 198). It is reformist in that his approach depends on feminist and environmentalist claims about human nature as well as drawing from the work of Kant and Spinoza by rejecting the view of reality as consisting of constituent units or “atoms.” Everything is connected, and ICT is revealing the primacy of connect- edness in our emerging human reality. “[Floridi’s] ontology resonates with feminist and environmentalist views in critical ways, as well as with Buddhist and Confucian views,” according to Charles Ess. “But Floridi’s [philosophy of technology] is more radical than at least its closest Western cousins, as it starts with the (argued) claim that *everything* is fundamentally information” (2009: 160) [original emphasis]. Floridi’s informational ontology has been refined and extended to consider how subsequently necessary notions of “distributed responsibility” and “distributed morality” might accommodate the artificial intelligence and “thinking” machines of the future (e.g., Gunkel, 2012; Grodzinsky, Miller & Wolf, 2008).

Floridi’s information ontology features several key components. One is an ethical naturalism that borrows heavily from Spinoza, Confucius, and, less explicitly, neo-Aristotelians Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse. It affirms the intrinsic moral worth of everyone and everything in the world. Rooted in this foundational respect, the over- arching mission of information ethics, he argues, is to ensure and promote human flourishing. Another is a normative pluralism that he says is essential for any global information and computing ethics (ICE) to be of use. According to Ess, the premium placed on pluralism “allows precisely for the possibility of interpreting or applying a shared norm...in diverse ways in diverse cultures, i.e., in ways that reflect and preserve precisely the distinctive traditions and values that define a given culture” (2009: 166).

In his most recent book, *The Fourth Revolution*, Floridi suggests that we must begin formulating a new “philosophy of history” as we move into an era of “hyperhistory” in which we are becoming increasingly dependent on ICTs for our welfare and well-being. In this new era, the centrality of technology in our lives is forcing a revolution in our awareness of ourselves as human beings: we are increasingly understanding ourselves as informational organisms (“inforgs”) that share a biological environment. He refers to this shift as the formation of the “infosphere.” This ICT-driven self-understanding constitutes the “fourth revolution” of how we know ourselves as humans. The first revolution was the discovery of Nicolaus Copernicus of the planets’ move- ments around the sun in the 1540s. “[H]is heliocentric cosmology forever displaced the Earth from the centre of the universe and made us consider, quite literally, our own place and role in it” (Floridi, 2014: 87). Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, culmi- nating in his 1859 book, ushered the second revolution. “The new scientific findings displaced us from the centre of the biological kingdom” (2014: 89). The theories of the mind by Sigmund Freud in the early twentieth century brought about the third revo- lution. “We have been displaced from the centre of the realm of pure and transparent consciousness. We acknowledge being opaque to ourselves” (2014: 90).

[ICTs] have provided unprecedented scientific insights into natural and artificial realities, as well as engineering powers over them. And they have cast new light on who we are, how we are related to the world and to each other, and hence how we conceive ourselves. Like the previous three revolutions, the fourth revolution removed a misconception about our uniqueness and also provided the conceptual means to revise our self-understanding....[T]he new ethical challenges posed by ICTs ... [require an approach that] does not privilege the natural or untouched, but treats as authentic and genuine all forms of existence and behavior, even those based on artificial, synthetic, hybrid, and engineered artefacts. The task is to formulate an ethical framework that can treat the infosphere as a new environment worthy of the moral attention and care of the human inforgs inhabiting it. ... It must be an *e-nvironmental ethics* for the whole infosphere. This sort of *synthetic* (both in the sense of the holistic or inclusive, and in the sense of artificial) *environmentalism* will require a change in how we perceive ourselves and our roles with respect to reality, what we consider worth our respect and care, and how we might negotiate a new alliance between the natural and the artificial (2014: 93–94, 219). [emphasis in original]

This ongoing work in re-imagining human-machine relationships will likely be an increasing focus among scholars in the philosophy of technology and information, and it clearly has important implications for media ethics theorizing. For one, audiences and content producers will likely continue to move into and develop digital platforms and thus raise questions about the uses and effects of technology in our media consumption and everyday lives. Questions of digital architecture, questions of deterministic use tendencies, and questions of moral responsibility in the machine world will continue to preoccupy computer ethics. And computer ethics will arguably be the focus of media ethics.

Another implication is at once more challenging and profound. The perspective of Floridi and others promotes a “post-Cartesian” state of mind invited by our virtual worlds and by our increasing interaction with informational technology. The mind-body split that has defined so much of our modern world is arguably hindering our ability to fully comprehend and inhabit our ourselves as informational beings. As Susan Stuart argues, “there is an inseparability of mind and world, and it is embodied practice rather than cognitive deliberation that works the agent’s engagement with its world (2008: 256). The post-Cartesian shift also is signaled by the development of recent feminist and environmental ethics scholarship that, as Ess describe, “stress interconnectedness over atomistic difference.” Such work he says, “takes us in the directions I believe are essential for establishing a genuinely global [information and computing ethics]” (Ess, 2009: 167).

3 Moral psychology

At the intersection of behavior and judgment lies a realm of research that attempts to draw on both psychology and philosophy to explore moral motivation, moral identity, and ethics-related decision-making. This is the realm of moral psychology, where

philosophers and social scientists have attempted to draw from the language and theories of each other – not just to explain how we might act in the most moral fashion when confronted with a crisis, but to better understand moral function itself. As a discipline, moral psychology concerns itself with the overlap between human sciences and moral deliberation. It is a central focus of researchers in philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, and even anthropology and economics. As such, the field touches on both the profound and the prosaic. By studying tragically brain-damaged individuals, for example, researchers have gained insight in the workings of our brains when we make moral decisions. Philosophers and ethicists are most concerned with exploring our reasons for embracing certain principles such as avoidance of harm and courage, and with articulating justifications for using those principles to guide actions in a given situation. Psychologists, neuroscientists and cognitive researchers are interested in all the various forces that shape our behavior – personality traits, dispositions, motivations, social contexts, cultural environments. Moral psychology, then, is a valuable, trans-disciplinary arena of theory and research that brings all these concerns together, encouraging us to construct a more holistic view of human behavior and moral deliberation. Moral psychology theorists argue that moral philosophers and social scientists must learn from each other and join forces to cultivate a more comprehensive understanding of human moral agency. Philosopher and cognitive theorist Owen Flanagan and his colleagues described the need for this sort of synthesis that explores the interconnectedness of moral theory with theories of our social and psychological lives:

Moral imperatives and judgments can guide action and motivate individuals not because of anything internal to their syntax, semantics, or logical structure, still less because our biology makes us think that they refer to something objective, but rather because of how they relate to vital human needs, desires, interests, such as a need for safety, security, friendship, reciprocity, and a sense of belonging....Without these contingent facts about the species *Homo sapiens*, morality would be inert (Flanagan et al. 2008: 47).

Moral psychology is less concerned with justifying the rightness of specific *actions*, as is the case with Kantianism, utilitarianism and other frameworks, and aligns itself instead with virtue ethics and the concern of what constitutes notable *character*. Consequently, in addition to drawing on hugely expensive and sophisticated neurology and brain-scan technology, research in moral psychology also utilizes more straightforward, paper-based psychological survey instruments that effectively measure individuals' personality traits, values systems, ethical ideologies and moral reasoning skills. With these instruments, empirical researchers have been able to “operationalize” or quantify important philosophical and ethical concepts such as moral development, empathy and people's relative emphasis placed on concerns about pursuing justice and avoiding harm. Moral psychology “investigates human functioning in moral contexts, and asks how these results may impact debate in ethical theory,” according to Doris and Stich (2006: 1).

A recent example of this approach is the work of psychology researcher Chuck Huff and colleagues, who studied a group of computer science “exemplars.” They found important patterns of values, work habits and personality traits among their computer science exemplars. Two distinct exemplar types emerged: the “craftperson” and the “reformer.” The craftperson tended to focus on clients and users, perceived themselves as quality service providers, and drew primarily on existing professional values (user focus, customer need, software quality). Reformers, in contrast, appeared concerned with perceived injustices in the social system and sought to use their expertise to influence organizational, professional and social values to address them (Huff & Barnard 2009). The field of moral psychology also encompasses neuroethics research that explores how different parts of the brain “light up” or exhibit increased blood flow when subjects are presented with different types of ethical dilemmas using magnetic imaging techniques such as fMRI (e.g., Fehr & Camerer, 2007; Greene et al., 2004; McGuire et al., 2009; Moll & de Oliveira-Souza, 2007; Spitzer et al., 2007). Researchers are concluding that “there is no specifically moral part of the brain” (Greene & Haidt, 2002, p. 522), but rather that many different parts of the brain play a role depending on the type of dilemma we are struggling with and the emotional resonance of the issue.

While it has been burgeoning as a field for the last 15 years, it has only recently become a focus of work by media ethics scholars. Journalists and public relations professionals haven’t yet been put into fMRI machines so that researchers might study their brains’ blood-flow activity when they’re presented with ethical dilemmas, but media researchers have begun applying theories and methods of moral psychology. Most notably, researchers have documented the moral-reasoning skills of journalists and PR professionals. Lee Wilkins and Renita Coleman (2005) have used the Defining Issues Test (DIT) (Rest 1973, 1974), which has assessed the moral development of tens of thousands of people, in multiple professional and social populations, over several decades. In their study of 249 journalists around the country, Wilkins and Coleman found that, despite widespread cynicism about the ethics of journalists, their average moral reasoning “P score” was relatively high, suggesting they were at the upper reaches of what moral development theorists call standard, or “conventional” reasoning levels. Using the same approach, the same researchers found that PR professionals scored comparatively high as well (Coleman and Wilkins 2009: 333).

There have been other moral psychology efforts in media research, many of which make use of the Forsyth Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ) instrument rather than the DIT. Using the EPQ, researchers have found that PR professionals with high idealism and low relativism scores had a greater tendency to make stricter ethical judgments of professional PR standards (Kim and Choi, 2003). Also, marketers who have higher levels of idealism tend to emphasize ethical values and social responsibility more than those with lower levels (Singhapakdi et al. 1995). Also, consumers’ moral judgments on sexual and fear-based appeals in advertising

seems to be tied to their levels of idealistic thinking (Maciejewski 2004; Treise et al. 1994). And an ambitious study of journalists in 18 countries drew on the EPQ and concluded that journalists' ethical orientations –the degree to which they embraced values such as honesty and the duty to avoid harm – varied in meaningful ways based on their cultures and their news organizations (Plaisance et al. 2012). More recently, a five-year study of media “exemplars” in journalism and public relations that combined moral psychology survey data with personal “life story” interviews, Plaisance suggested a model of the “morally motivated self” to help explain key patterns among exemplars' moral reasoning, ethical ideologies, concerns for harm and the welfare of others, and the emphasis they placed on concepts such as social justice and moral courage (Plaisance 2015). The work of Erin Schauster features analogous attempts to examine the moral psychology of managers and executives in the advertising industry (2015).

The range of untapped moral psychology instruments is wide and robust, and will enable media ethics theorizing to advance in ways that effectively connect moral motivation, decision-making, environment and behavior among media workers. Studies drawing on the field can update our understanding of new journalism cultures, examine the ethical decision-making of public relations professionals, and to track the moral growth of the media marketing industry. Plaisance (2016) provides a sampling of moral psychology instruments, beyond what have been utilized, that may be useful for media ethics scholars in this regard.

4 Media sociology

In 1978, after immersing herself in the culture of four New York City media organizations, sociologist Gaye Tuchman published a book called *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*. In it, Tuchman brought to bear sociological theories about organizational behavior, social knowledge, and ideology on the work of journalists. She made a compelling case that news work, far from objectively reporting the news or challenging the powerful, instead served as a “reproducer” of the status quo that relied on a host of useful routines and assumptions of newsworthiness. She explained how news organizations cast a “news net” that closely paralleled the distribution of power in society. That net only yielded “stories” when the behavior of social institutions and the organizational needs of the outlets coincided. Her theory about news as a social construction of the world, and not at all a mirror image of it, has been an enduring touchstone for media scholars ever since.

Several years later, another sociologist emerged with an attempt to explain what makes journalists tick. Herbert Gans spent several months, over the course of nearly a dozen years, in the newsrooms of CBS, NBC and *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines, and his ambitious project culminated in his book, *Deciding What's News*, published

in 1980. In it, he concluded that journalists, contrary to the common stereotype of a liberal gang of anti-establishment activists, routinely “express, and often subscribe to, the economic, political and social ideas and values which are dominant in America.” He concluded that the work of journalists is indeed driven by a set of institutionalized values, but not necessarily the ones that audiences assume. The six “enduring values” he articulated driving journalism include a belief in altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, individualism and what he called “small-town pastoralism.” Like the work of Tuchman, Gans’ study became a reverently cited landmark of media sociology.

While we can point to some important efforts, contemporary media sociology research has generally not produced comparative landmark studies featuring such depth and theoretical reach. We have seen extensive treatments on particular components of the media system; focused analyses on political mediated communication (e.g., Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Jamieson and Campbell, 2000), and critical political economy approaches (e.g., McChesney, 2015). The work of Michael Schudson (1978, 2003) has added theoretical depth to this work. And there has been renewed theoretical scholarship that suggests the world of media production is much more complex and multidimensional than the work of Tuchman and Gans suggested (e.g., Waisbord, 2014). But we certainly have not seen comparable ambitious sociological undertakings that offer the descriptive and predictive power in theorizing about the media landscape in the twenty-first century. And as the above-mentioned suggest, nearly all are exclusively focused on journalism sociology, which largely ignores the strong continuing trends of public relations professionalism and convergence of informational and promotional content. The need for such undertakings is all the more glaring given the transformation of our media systems and institutions. The ‘legacy’ models interpreted by Tuchman and Gans are in crisis and have to a great extent been supplanted by a wide variety of new models – not to mention the fact that social-media platforms have transformed the media landscape and media consumption patterns by creating new content markets in which legacy institutions are arguably mere participants, rather than the definitive agenda setters they used to be. All this has had an enormous (and as yet, insufficiently examined) impact on the social-, organizational- and individual-level factors that now shape the behaviors of media platforms and workers.

Much media sociology theorizing has been based on assumptions built into the “hierarchy of influences” model by Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese. But scholars have increasingly highlighted the limited applicability of this model for today’s range of media platforms. They have argued that organizational transformations require a rethinking of organizational and individual influences on content. Lea Hellmueller and colleagues go so far as to suggest that “forces unleashed by the online network might be creating pre-paradigmatic conflicts” (2013: 287). In the latest edition of their landmark text, Shoemaker and Reese concur, stating that the shift of our network era is “restructuring social relationships” and “destabilizing old

hierarchies” (2014: 204). Furthermore, Keith has usefully suggested reconsidering the model as a “dynamic system of layers” in which content producers, depending on organizational structure, “might find themselves constrained by fewer influences” (2011: 7). Recent theorizing on the nature of autonomy, in moral, personal and positive psychology realms, is relevant here. Ethics scholars are well-positioned to enrich sociological work by focusing on the interplay of perceptions of autonomy, implicit values and moral motivations within different organizational structures. The new media environment suggests more such empirical data is required if we are to make claims about the relative strengths of influences that shape what journalists, public relations specialists and media marketers do. This focus is in contrast to much of the theorizing that has dominated media ethics theorizing, which has sought to articulate broad universal norms for media systems. Given the lack of understanding for emerging structures and platforms, it is worth considering whether such effort put into attempting grand “global” media ethics theorizing might be premature or even presumptuous. “[N]either the [cultural] relativist nor the universalist position reflects the complexity of relations between autonomous individuals and their cultural communities,” writes Valery Chirkov, as an example of the attention devoted to the topic. “These relations are dialectical, meaning that culture is absolutely necessary for human autonomy to develop from potentiality to actuality; but, when autonomy has been fully developed, an autonomous person can reflect on the cultural influences and prescriptions and either endorse or reject them, thus becoming relatively independent of socio-cultural influences” (2001: 67). Media ethics scholars are positioned to make valuable contributions to media sociology work by exploring, in more sophisticated ways, the interplay of moral-related factors within the transforming industries of journalism, public relations and media marketing. They also can complement traditional media sociology research on role enactment, internalization of cultural values, and descriptive demographic data of media workers. Plaisance (2016: 416–462) offers a range of research questions and instruments to help scholars develop this work further.

The three “prongs” of media ethics scholarship advocated here are not meant to be understood as comprehensive. They merely illustrate one perspective of possible fruitful lines of inquiry, and a framework for why these lines could play a significant role in the future development of the field. The need for philosophical explication will continue to be urgent because philosophy itself will never stop grappling with competing claims about our moral lives. Research that examines the roles and impacts of technology will increasingly be central to any normative claims we might make about media behavior as content continues to move onto digital platforms. The application of moral psychology theories reflects the growing sophistication of media ethics scholarship and will prove their use in transcending broad generalizations. And the work of media ethicists and media sociological will need to see greater convergence to provide a more useful exploration of the various forces on content production in our transformed media landscape.

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26 Theorizing over the Horizon: Ontology in the Global Imaginary

Abstract: For the future of global media ethics, the persistent and most demanding issue will be the nature of the human. Coming to agreement on our philosophy of the person will be difficult for those of us in communication ethics, but a common understanding will be necessary given the challenges from posthumanism, artificial intelligence, and the proliferation of media technology that marginalizes human decision-making. We prepare for the future by developing an international communication ethics of three components: cosmopolitanism, a global imaginary of diverse people groups, and the concept of dwelling. Ensuring that these ideas are vigorous intellectually will help make it possible that humans can be construed as moral beings while the digital revolution redefines human existence.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, ontology, dwelling, posthumanism, moral beings, diversity

On the horizon where our vision ends and the unknown future begins, the boundaries of a new information age have taken shape. With upheavals across the globe from the Web 2.5 revolution, research indicates a cataclysmic shift from portability to fluidity. Digital space is being invented as mobile territory, and transit itself is becoming the new normal. Geography has been organized by political power – North and South, colonial versus colonized – but now we are ordering the globe in terms of electronic megasystems. This *Handbook* and its abundant citations establish the research agenda on the silicon horizon, and it is a complicated and daunting challenge. This essay asks us to theorize over the horizon while coping with the problematics of the world technosphere. As we reconfigure communication ethics in international terms, our cognitive presumption will be humanocentric as it has been since Confucius and Aristotle, and from Islamic morality to Henry Sidgwick's *Practical Ethics*. Over the horizon, the trajectory of human exceptionalism to posthumanism will challenge our entire enterprise at its foundations.

My thesis that ontology will be paramount for communication ethics over the horizon, depends on a particular version of the global imaginary that we compose on the horizon now. I elaborate on this world framework, developing the argument that the philosophy of the human is the critical issue for communication ethics within and beyond its international construction. To avoid speculative futurism, I get our bearings straight by clarifying the ontological landscape in communication ethics at present. This clarification centers on three interconnected concepts pertinent to international communication ethics: cosmopolitanism, the global imaginary, and the concept of dwelling in the philosophy of technology. This ontological work, as it is

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-026>

woven in and out of the *Handbook's* theory and research, will enable me to introduce those thinkers who likewise identify the philosophy of the human as the battleground beyond the horizon.

1 Cosmopolitanism

On the horizon, our educational task in teaching and research, and the requirement of professional theory and practice, is cosmopolitanism (*politēs* citizen and *kosmos* the world). Professionals without borders at this historic shift in global technology, are best understood as competent specialists with a world mind (Ward 2010, 2011). Reporters with international assignments and stories, public relations staff based in the Dominican Republic and traveling Latin America, health professionals linked into the network of infectious diseases north and south, experts in digital data management for high-tech electronic firms with branches on every continent are forerunners. But now all media workers and scholars are accountable to the world.

The history of internationalism is from local to the world. *Kosmopolitēs* is a new way of knowing – the reverse (Held 1995). Our curriculum, research agenda, and organizational policies not just extended doggedly into the transnational, but the media as a field radically turned on its head, so that the world is center and our educational and professional venues the periphery. Space travel revolutionized our understanding of the planet, giving us the blue, fragile, shimmering-with-complexity globe, that mysteriously integrated whole out of which we understand and work on the specifics with urgency: tsunamis, endangered species, ocean garbage gyres, and global warming. From planetary cyberspace to De Gruyter Mouton, this *Handbook's* home in Berlin, cosmopolitanism inverts the trajectory of media ethics scholarship.

As chronicled in Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism* (2006), the first philosopher in the West to use the term *kosmopolitēs* was the Cynic Diogenes in the fourth century B.C. Diogenes insisted he was above the policies of Sinope and a world man instead (xiv). The idea of universal humanity was congenial to Christian intellectuals who believed in the commission to carry the Gospel from Jerusalem to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth. The cosmopolitan creed was taken up and elaborated by the Stoics of the third century A.D., who claimed to be living in agreement with the cosmos, and argued that goodness could not mean teaching inside the *polis*, but engagement with human beings as such. The Stoicism of the Romans – Cicero, Seneca, and the emperor Marcus Aurelius – debated various configurations of the citizenship idea, from the Roman *patria* to the Empire and cosmopolis. Among the intelligentsia, a philosophical cosmopolitanism produced the 1789 “Declaration of the Rights of Man” and Immanuel Kant's “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” proposing a league of nations in 1795 (xiv). Voltaire spoke eloquently of global economic interdependence: “Fed by the products of their soil, dressed in their fabrics, amused by games they invented,

instructed by their ancient moral fables, why should we neglect to understand the mind of these nations, among whom our European traders have traveled ever since they could find a way to get to them?” (*Essay on Universal History*; quoted in Appiah 2006: xv).

As Appiah indicates, the concept always referred across history to an elite creed of the traveled and civilized few until today when people everywhere and of all social classes are able to see themselves as part of the world. Through digital mediation, networked communities experience omnipresence in time and space, with the universe in total considered accessible. For Jack Lule (2015: 322), cosmopolitanism no longer belongs to the privileged few but is a feature of modern life. Over the last century the human community has been drawn into a global network of information. The worldwide web means not only that we can affect lives across cultures but that we can actually learn about life from e-addresses everywhere – the notion of world belongingness not understood metaphorically, but functionally (Appiah 2006: xiii).

Appiah correctly concludes from this history that “two strands intertwine in the notion of *kosmopolitēs*. One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond” our kin and lifeworld acquaintances, and “beyond the formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other strand is that we take seriously the value” not just of generic human life but “of particular human lives,” which means showing an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance. There will be times when “these two ideals clash, that is, universal concern” at odds with respect for “legitimate difference” (Appiah 2006: xv). The essays in *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism* (2005) revolve around that tension:

The crux of the idea of moral cosmopolitanism is that each human being has equal moral worth and that equal moral worth generates certain moral responsibilities that have universal scope.... However, when we try to uncover what cosmopolitanism requires, here the view seems less determinate. Part of the indeterminacy is due to there being so many ways to interpret what equal moral worth entails (Brock and Brighouse: 4–5).

In that sense, cosmopolitanism is not a *fait accompli* but a working agenda, and this chapter is not a research paper *per se* but a manifesto.

The “world” is a controversial term that begs multiple issues. Professionals without borders cannot simply adopt the standard meanings if they seek a distinctive contribution to the twenty-first century. “The world” typically invokes a superficial globalization and internationalism. The standard definition is the political network of treaties and ongoing conflicts among the 196 countries and 61 territories of the world, each with sovereign rights and enforcement institutions. So Appiah (2006) rightly asks, under what rubric to proceed? Not “globalization” – a term since Voltaire referring to shared markets, and then designating a neoliberal macroeconomic oneness, and now encumbered by encompassing everything and nothing (xv). When professionals see themselves as citizens of the world, and academics work on communication ethics with a world mind, this should not be fundamentally neoliberal economic

strategies or the abstractions of scientific research. And not configuring the globe in terms of nation states is of particular importance. As Martha Nussbaum emphasizes in her pathbreaking *Frontiers of Justice*, the future of ethics depends on overcoming a country-by-country orientation, “because all the major Western theories of social justice begin from the nation-state as their basic unit” (2006:2).¹

Josephides and Hall (2014) understand cosmopolitanism correctly, as speaking “to the concerns arising from existentialism and the entailment of being human” (xvii). They recognize that cosmopolitanism is typically theorized as a political concept, but document that “historically it developed out of a philosophical investigation into what is a human being” (2). As with this chapter, *We the Cosmopolitans* seeks “to rediscover the philosophical anthropology tradition and use this as a key to re-describe certain kinds of social anthropological problems” (xvii).

In developing a cosmopolitan media ethics of substance and long-term credibility, the idea of “global imaginary” ought to replace the innocuous “world.” To deal with the fundamental issues that a borderless planet of “telepresence” and “distancelessness” presents to us (Kien 2009), the nature of the global imaginary is a premiere intellectual issue for academics who are internationalizing media ethics and for digital age professionals.

2 Global imaginary

Globalization is the social imagination at work. As Arjun Appadurai (1996: 22) has argued, the imagination is not a trifling fantasy but a “social fact,” a “staging ground for action” (quoted in Lule 2015: 321). The Egyptian people, rebelling against the Mubarak regime, in 2011 “filled Cairo’s Tahrir Square and overthrew the dictator, imagining a new nation” (Lule 2015: 322). Two million Syrians have flooded Jordan and Europe and the world, imagining a home of safety. In the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan anticipated a new electronic planet, the global village; a neighborly mediated utopia was imagined and believed. The global imaginary in ontological terms is a productive framing structure for news reporting in practice and for research in education.

Diversity is one of the central issues for *kosmopolitēs*. Instead of global imaginaries of nation states or of general regions such as BRICS or the Scandinavian countries or the South Pacific Polynesians, a global imaginary of ethnic people groups is a provocative framework in ontological terms. Such a multicultural imaginary centers on what it is to be human in the diverse societies around the world. While the historic Hutchins Commission did not have an explicitly global mind, already in 1947 it

¹ Brock (2009) argues a different perspective. She distinguishes different forms of nationalism, seeking to demonstrate that some nation-state orientations are compatible with a global justice.

understood humanity in these multicultural terms. The responsible press is called to present “a representative picture of the constituent groups in society,” that is, avoid stereotypes and recognize the “values, aspirations, and common humanity” of all social groups (Commission on Freedom of the Press 1947:26–27).

Indigenous languages and ethnicity have come into their own. Ethnicity has replaced class struggle as the most powerful force of the twenty-first century. On a global scale, according to cultural anthropologists, the world’s population of 7.5 billion can be understood as a composite of nearly 20,000 ethnolinguistic communities living within or alongside the social mainstream. Language is a dominant identifying feature of these people groups. But there are other components associated with ethnicity. A common history, customs, family and clan identities, inheritance patterns, ritual practices and religion are some of the common ethnic factors defining or distinguishing a people group. There are numerous examples of people speaking multiple languages but still considering themselves an ethnic group. The ethnolinguistic Dinka of Sudan and South Sudan speak five separate languages, yet clearly identify themselves as one people. At the same time, there may be different ethnic groups who speak the same language but distinguish themselves because of different histories, various factors causing enmity, or loyalty to different ancestors of a common parent group. The Tutsi and Hutu people groups of East Central Africa have a similar language and culture and yet maintain distinct identities.

China’s 56 ethnic groups share a common geography, with the Han Chinese accounting for 91.5% of the overall Chinese population and the other 55 equaling 8.5% according to the Fifth National Census of 2000. The 55 minority ethnic groups are distributed extensively throughout different regions of China, with nearly half of the minorities found in the southwestern Yunnan province, and the largest number (more than 16 million) in Zhuang province.

The ethnocentric global imaginary also recognizes ethnolinguistic groups as displaced and hybrid. Muslim immigrants are the fastest-growing population in the Netherlands and they are not interested in full assimilation into Dutch language and politics. More than 30,000 Bangladeshis live in Metro New York, many of them speaking Sylheti, which language differs from Bengali. Brooklyn is the home of 75,000 Syrian Jews, the largest Syrian-Jewish community in the world. The nomadic Fulani, searching for good pasture throughout Sub-Saharan West Africa, are held together by clan fidelity, but their economic future is unsustainable. Urdu-speaking Muslims are aliens in the state of Punjab in India. There are fourteen groups of Taiwanese aborigines living in Taiwan, some of whom have migrated to the Fujian province on the China mainland; their legal status is controversial. Since winning independence in 1989, the Belorussians have had little success in creating a sovereign state; for 70 years, their history and language had not been taught. Only the remnants of Mayan culture survive in the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico, obscured under the government’s official commitment to the Spanish language and to nationalism. The Somali population in Seattle has grown exponentially since their civil war in 1991; this ethnic

enclave of now 30,000 publishes its own weekly news magazine and operates a television station. The cross-cultural research of Anthony Cortese's *Ethnic Ethics* (1990) includes an Israeli kibbutz, Kenyan village leaders, Tibetan monks, and folk societies in Papua New Guinea.

For a people-based global imaginary, maintaining ethnic languages is considered essential for a healthy planet. The media's ability to represent those languages well is an important area of professional development and for enriching communication codes of ethics.

Stephen Ward (2015: 206) has a helpful summary of the world mind for journalists as one type of today's professional. They would serve as ethnographers honoring three imperatives:

- 1) Journalists would see themselves as agents of a well-informed, diverse, and tolerant global info-sphere that challenges the abuse of human rights;
- 2) journalists as citizens of the world refuse to define themselves as attached to factions, regions, or countries; and
- 3) global journalists frame issues broadly and use a diversity of sources and international perspectives instead of promoting a narrow ethnocentrism or patriotism.

Cultural anthropologists identify this communication task as emic categorization. Emic categories are the way members of a society divide up reality. Such emic categories generally differ culture to culture and provide valuable insights into a community's perceptions and worldview. Discovering, recording and analyzing emic categories is one crucial task of media professionals. This ontological version of the global imaginary changes the self-conception of professionals from parochials serving clients to that of global citizens serving humanity. First signaled by Doctors Without Borders and Engineers Without Borders, professionals are borderless in the age of global technology, borderless in a profound, deep and mysterious manner heretofore unknown in history. The media professions are high-technology regimes, as are medicine, the military, business, and international finance also. But, as Ellul (1969) puts it, the media are uniquely placed at the meaning-edge of the technological revolution. The media's particular identity as technology inheres in their function as bearers of symbols. Communication systems are the "innermost, and most elusive manifestation" of human technological activity" (xvii). Therefore, the media professions in fulfilling their emic task are a privileged laboratory for understanding professionalism as a whole in the people-centered global imaginary.

The challenge of a diverse imaginary for media professionals on the horizon is identical for academics. As communication ethics is internationalized, the question is whether its theories of the human reflect a global imaginary of ontological diversity. Classical media ethics has typically understood humans in terms of rational choice theory, and this framework is parochially Occidental rather than transnational.

For Aristotle, what is distinctive is "an active life of the soul (*psyche*) that follows a rational principle" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a4; cf. 1098a6). In the *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, the *Prior and Posterior Analytics*, *On Sophistical Refutations*, and the

Topics, he is preoccupied with the human capacity for logical inquiry and deliberation. In Descartes' *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (1638/1964), the essence of the self is *res cogitans*, a thinking substance. What was henceforth called thought in the eighteenth century was no longer the Platonic conception of ideas or Aristotle's integrative *logos*; rationality was understood instead as analytic calculation (MacIntyre 2007). In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1788), Kant assimilated ethics into human rationality. Through the mental calculus of universalizing actions, ethical imperatives emerge unconditioned by circumstances. Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1861) is grounded in the inductive reasoning of his *A System of Logic* (1843) so that a single formalistic principle constitutes moral judgments.

The theory of humans as rational agents produces a constricted definition of what counts as morality. Instead of prizing a global imaginary of ethnic diversity, moral understanding becomes abstracted and individuated. In the current de-Westernizing of communication studies, rational being is considered parochial for a global age.

Rather than uncritically assume this paradigm of linear rationality and be trapped in its limitations, we can make substantial progress in international ethics with a different ontology rooted in the philosophy of language. Starting over intellectually with humans as symbol makers establishes an understanding of the cultural images of diversity out of which a credible cosmopolitan ethics can be constructed. The public sphere is conceived as a mosaic of people groups, a pluralistic imaginary of ethnic identities intersecting to form a social bond but each distinctive as well. When the importance of people's symbolic and interpretive capacities is recognized, we can avoid Westernized views that privilege one capacity or aspect of human beings, such as formal rationality.

Since Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and *Essay on Man*, rational being has been considered reductionist, accounting for cognition but not a human holism of emotions, will, and *techne*. In the philosophy of the human that is appropriate to the global imaginary, we know human existence through our symbolic expressions. Language does not merely reflect reality from the outside; recomposing events into a narrative ensures that humans can comprehend reality at all. In formal terms, "humans are language-using and culture-incorporating creatures whose form of experience, conduct and interaction take shape in linguistically and culturally structured environments, and are conditioned by the meanings they bear" (Schacht 1990: 173).

In Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key*, our symbolic, linguistic nature means that interpretation is the key to understanding humans, their capacities, the meaning of life and ethics. The theories that humans construct about themselves are interpretations of the world in which they are situated. The thick notion of interpretation replaces the thinness of the technical, statistically precise received view. Interpretation opens up public life in all its dynamic dimensions. It means that the lives of people groups in the global imaginary are loaded with multiple interpretations and grounded in cultural intricacy and paradox.

3 The philosophy of technology's "dwelling"

Accounting for the global imaginary is a historical and empirical task, as the people-group modality indicates. And since the media are a communication phenomenon, the philosophy of language has been needed to understand its ontological base correctly as symbolic in character. For a cosmopolitan media ethics in the digital age, the global imaginary requires additional philosophical work, and the philosophy of technology with the greatest substance is Martin Heidegger's ontological model. His challenge for the global imaginary is to recover a dwelling – an abode – of authentic humanness while coming to grips with technology as a totality.

For Heidegger, technology is intertwined with the human lifeworld and is, therefore, an ontological issue. In Heidegger's existentialism, technology is not a substance – that is, not a kind of entity to be described by a noun (although the word itself is, morphologically, a noun). For him, technology is existential, the sort of phenomenon indicated by a verb, the grammatical category of "action"; it is a cultural process in which human existence is established in relation to natural reality (Heidegger 1977b). For Heidegger, technologies are not mechanical instruments compatible with empirical communications science that assumes data are neutral. Heidegger's ontological philosophy of technology improves our analysis of how the global imaginary on the horizon is related to humanocentric ethics beyond it, and in doing so a credible moral realism is established for the global imaginary.

In Heidegger's (1977a) summary, "only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build." "To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its preserve. The fundamental character of dwelling is sparing," memory, rootedness. Because our beingness is situated today in technological conditions radically opposed to human worthiness, there are no oases where the moral imagination can prosper undisturbed. But given his long-term commitment to the philosophy of language, Heidegger sees a glimmer of hope in artistic symbols (1971a, 1971b). Through art's revival, there is an alternative to technological revealing. The move is familiar throughout the Heideggerian emphasis on the primal role of the poet. "Poetically people dwell upon the earth" (1977b: 34). The artistic mode of revealing opens new pathways to rhetoricized being. Poetics symbolizes a domain discrete from the technocratic mystique. The arts, music, philosophy, history and literature should prosper in constructing a cosmopolitan ethics. Nancy Fraser (2014) argues for spaces of withdrawal and regroupment, sub-altern counter publics that have emancipatory potential. Habermas (1990) seeks a distanciation that creates space for reflection.

Ethics needs a human habitat or it cannot survive. Ethical theory and application can only be done from a human-centered home; the original meaning of *ethos* (Greek) is "abode" and "dwelling place." Situated in Heidegger's (1977a) dwelling, a cosmopolitan media ethics can be theorized. An international communication ethics for twenty-first century professionals who are called to be "citizens of the world" can

thereby be grounded in an ontological ethics of being rather than in rational-choice individualism.

In epistemological terms, Heidegger's "dwelling" is the presuppositional domain. For those who recognize the pre-theoretical conditions of knowledge, presuppositions are ineluctable, not accidental. Human beings are committed to presuppositions inescapably. The presuppositional is the condition through which human cognition is intelligible. As generally agreed since Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, for all thinking beings, infinite regression is impossible (I,2). All human knowledge must take something as given (Christians, Rao, Ward and Wasserman 2008: 140–145).

The presuppositional in Michael Polanyi's (1966) terms is tacit knowledge. The foundations of our knowing are deeply interiorized; as we integrate particulars, we do not only understand them externally, but make value judgments regarding them. Any series of explicit operations presupposes a fund of inexplicit knowing. Tacit knowledge is not merely an imperfect version of its explicit counterpart. Tacit thought is indispensable to all knowing and the "ultimate mental power by which knowledge is endowed with meaning" (19).

Cartesian rationalism and Kant's formalism presume that theories exist independent of our starting points, contingencies or worldviews. Presuppositional thinking does not. Theories of morality do not arise from an objectivist rationalism, but from our fundamental beliefs about the world. Presuppositions are therefore *sine qua non* in rethinking moral theory. The new generation of cosmopolitan media ethics being fashioned on the horizon needs to go beyond unidimensional models and incorporate presuppositions into its theories.

The ethics enterprise by definition presupposes normativity. Taking normativity as given is the alternative to nihilism in which no moral truths exist and to skepticism in which moral propositions cannot be justified. Without normativity, the logical alternative is the antinomianism that nothingness is ontologically prior to existence. If normativity is not understood, a technicized morality replaces qualitative oughts with averages and probabilities mathematically computed. While international communication ethics works out a specific normative framework, it ought to be transparent about its presumption of normativity itself (see Kagan 1998: 1–22).

The philosophical questions are urgent and formidable (Christians 1989, 2016). As Hans Jonas writes: "The very same movement which put us in possession of the powers we now have to be regulated by norms – the movement of modern knowledge called science – has by a necessary complementarity eroded the foundations from which norms are derived; it has destroyed by the very idea of norm as such" (1984: 22). Charles Taylor indicates an intellectual pathway in stipulating normativity's taken-for-granted character. In the process of embedding normed phenomena within culture and history, our reflections shift from transcendental criteria to the plane of being (Taylor 1985). Alasdair MacIntyre (1986) argues for a similar understanding of history as a normed process (6–9). In Robert Wuthnow's *Meaning and Moral Order*,

humans establish moral codes along the boundaries of their existence without which no discursive meaning is possible (1987: 71–75).

The normativity of a similar sort that I consider presupposed in dwelling is of the naturalist paradigm defended by David Copp in his *Morality in a Natural World* (2007). On his account, “when we are making a decision” we do so rationally, that is, by assigning “a deliberate priority to self-grounded rationality.” “Self-grounded reasons” are not the “only genuine or genuinely normative reasons” in our moral considerations, but we cannot deny that “moral reasons are genuine or genuinely normative” (313; see 255–263).

The presuppositional world of dwelling is a crucial domain for constructing a cosmopolitan communication ethics on the horizon and positioning it for the generations of media ethics ahead.

4 Ontology over the horizon

The argument so far is that we should work on the internationalizing of media ethics with three concepts weaving their way through the research and theory: cosmopolitanism, global imaginary, and dwelling. When these ideas are taken seriously on the horizon, our communication ethics will fulfill the promise of the *Handbook*, and the new generation of international media ethics will be competitive with the leaders in professional ethics, medicine and law. The question of this essay is the conceptual demands that our ethics enterprise will face beyond the horizon. What are the issues that the following generations of communication ethics scholarship will confront? My contention is that we can best learn the forthcoming (future) challenges to our theory and research from cosmopolitanism, the global imaginary, and philosophical dwelling. In what follows, I clarify what I mean, obviously not as the total agenda for academics and professionals in global media ethics, but as axial issues we ought to resolve for our enterprise to be sustainable.

Ontology is the heart of the matter. Our theory and policy debates beyond the horizon will be primarily ontological. *Ontologia*: the philosophy of being, becoming, existence, as well as the basic categories of being and their relations. Ontology deals with questions concerning what entities exist, according to their similarities and differences, and which beings in the organic domain are fundamental. Historically, ontology arose out of metaphysics, to concentrate on the types or modes of existence with a particular emphasis on intrinsic and extrinsic properties. Heidegger introduced a fundamental ontological distinction, essence and existence. Debates over ontological relativity and foundationalism preoccupied W. V. O. Quine and Saul Kripke. Bruno Latour’s famous Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) accounts for ontology (what people claim exists) and for the “ontological weight” people give to the source of their motivations (2007). In the 1980s, artificial intelligence began using the term to refer to theories of computational modeling.

For those of us developing a credible cosmopolitan ethics, human exceptionalism among living entities is the overarching problematic for the future. Anthropocentrism is the issue; that is, theories that interpret or regard the world in terms of human values and experience. In its ideological form, anthropocentrism is a belief that human features such as reason, self-consciousness, and the ability to communicate through symbols are the basis for humans to be treated morally.

The influence of Peter Singer's work in bioethics has made the anthropocentrism issue inescapable for media ethics, on the horizon and beyond, his book of essays over three decades titled *Unsanctifying Human Life*. Of central importance for Singer from an ethical perspective is a living entity's interests and capacities. Based on the principle of equal consideration, Singer (1974) argues in "All Animals Are Equal" against the conventional assumption that humans "are justified in overriding the interests of nonhuman animals when they conflict with their own." This is speciesism, that is, "species-selfishness akin to racism" (Kuhse 2002: 3).

Singer (1995) defines himself as a long-time critic "of the traditional sanctity of life ethic" (327). This idea presumes "that there is a radical difference between the value of a human life and the value of the life of some other animal – a difference not merely of degree, but of quality or kind....Just as a person's race is in itself nearly always irrelevant to the question of how that person should be treated, the sanctity of human life has as its core a discrimination on the basis of species and nothing else (Singer 1979: 43–47). His animal rights utilitarianism begins with Jeremy Bentham (2005:283): "The question is not, 'Can they reason'? nor 'Can they talk'? but 'Can they suffer'?" (quoted in Gunkel 2016: ch. 10). "Any sentient entity, and thus any being that can suffer, has an interest in not suffering and therefore deserves to have that interest taken into account....No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally, with the like suffering of any other being" (Gunkel 2016: ch. 10).

Classical media ethics is likewise anthropocentric. International media ethics is taking shape on the horizon in humanistic terms. The three critical concepts are human-centered: cosmopolitanism, people groups in the global imaginary, Heidegger's dwelling. Therein the ontological challenge over the horizon: Will an ethics grounded in human exceptionalism be sustainable?

4.1 Nussbaum's species membership

My ontological probe is formally parallel to Martha Nussbaum's *Frontiers of Justice*, and reviewing it clarifies some of the important issues at stake. She too is standing on the horizon and charting an intellectual pathway into the future. Nussbaum's frame of reference is particular, that is, social contract theory after the influential John Rawls. One theoretical frontier for her is humanity's place in the natural world,

that is, the unresolved problem of species membership. She places the ethical treatment of nonhuman animals on the agenda, and stipulates that it cannot be addressed “without serious alterations in Rawls’ theory that derive from the social contract tradition” (2006: ix). Social contract has “obvious defects” since the theory presumes “rational human adults” (Nussbaum 2006: 21; cf. Rawls 1996).

Nussbaum recognizes that utilitarian theory has contributed the most conceptually to “the recognition of animal suffering as evil....Both Bentham and Mill in their time and Peter Singer in our own have courageously taken the lead in freeing ethical thought from the shackles of a narrow species-centered conception of worth and entitlement” (2006: 338). “Utilitarianism’s focus on the sentience that links humans with all other animals and on the badness of pain are particularly attractive starting points,...for there is no doubt that a central problem of justice in this area is the problem of pain wrongfully inflicted” (Nussbaum 2006: 339). “What we typically mean when we call a bad act unjust is that the creature injured by that act has an entitlement not to be treated in that way. I believe we should think of animals as active beings who are entitled to...seek a flourishing existence” (337).

While agreeing that ethical theory has been too anthropocentric, Nussbaum denies that producing the best overall consequences is a fruitful corrective. “Because utilitarianism is committed to sum-ranking of all relevant pleasures and pains (or preferences and frustrations), it has no way of ruling out in advance results that are extremely harsh toward a given class or group....Animals, like humans, pursue a plurality of distinct goods: friendship and affiliation, freedom from pain, mobility, and many others. Aggregating the pleasures and pains connected to these distinct areas seems premature and misleading.... It is natural to ask whether pleasure and pain are the only things we ought to be looking at when we consider the entitlements of animals” (Nussbaum 2006: 342–345). Singer’s preference-utilitarianism, that is, his interpretation of what animals prefer, is not self-evident.

Nussbaum recognizes that her capabilities approach does not address the problem of justice for nonhuman animals.” It is anthropocentric, starting from “the notion of human dignity and a life worthy of it.” However, “its basic moral intuition concerns the dignity of a form of life that possesses both abilities and deep needs,” and therefore the capabilities approach includes “the need for a rich plurality of activities” for all living forms. The approach has insisted that there is waste and tragedy when a living creature with the innate or basic capability for some functions that are evaluated as important, and never gets the opportunity to perform those functions (Nussbaum 2006: 346).²

² Nussbaum’s moving the capabilities argument from humans to nonhuman animals is not esoteric. In Hans Jonas, for example, animals are seen as living in a dynamic relation to space and time, as humans do. “The mobile animal, manifests elementary but dynamic relations within space and time” (Jonas 1996: 67). Animals show the “capabilities to extend the imperatives of instinctual need across

In Nussbaum's perspective, for Kant, only humanity and its rationality are worthy of respect and wonder; the rest of nature is just a set of tools. The capabilities approach judges instead, "with the biologist Aristotle, that there is something wonderful and wonder-inspiring in all the complex forms of life in nature." Aristotle's scientific spirit is not the whole of what the capabilities approach embodies. "The approach includes, in addition, an ethical concern that the functions of life not be impeded, that the dignity of living organisms not be violated." Inherent in the approach's "account of basic justice, will be the prevention of the blighting of valuable natural powers. If we follow the intuitive ideas of the theory, no sentient animal should be cut off from the chance for a flourishing life, a life with the type of dignity relevant to that species." Unlike Utilitarianism, it refuses "to aggregate the good of different lives and types of lives. No creature is being used as a means to the ends of others, or of society as a whole" (Nussbaum 2006: 347–348, 351).

Singer, in his "Response to Martha Nussbaum" (2002), welcomes her attempt to "include animals in a fundamental way" (p. 1). But he claims she is not "offering a distinct ethical approach to the issues she discusses." She does not wish to place "the capabilities approach on a utilitarian foundation" (p. 3). Therefore, she owes us an account of which capabilities are "important and good and why. Without such an account, her capabilities approach cannot be considered an independent approach to ethics" (p. 4).

It is obvious that Nussbaum's framework of species membership is too narrow to deal adequately with the anthropocentric question. She allows the human-nonhuman dualism articulated by Singer to establish the debate agenda, with an impasse the result. David Gunkel (2016) puts the issues in broader terms: "Animal rights...for all its promise to intervene in the anthropocentric tradition and include others, remains an exclusive and exclusionary practice" (ch. 10). Theories of ethics that include animals still face the criticism that their scope of consideration is arbitrarily narrow. Environmental ethics as an example objects to the animal rights paradigm that characterizes some sentient creatures that suffer as "moral subjects while simultaneously justifying the exclusion of other kinds of 'lower animals,' plants, and other entities that comprise the natural environment" (Gunkel 2016: ch. 10).

Luciano Floridi (2013) makes the objection more stringent. "Bioethics and environmental ethics are...still biased against what is inanimate, lifeless, intangible, abstract, engineered, artificial, synthetic, hybrid, or merely possible." From their perspective, "only what is intuitively alive deserves to be considered as a proper

physical space and to preserve the stirrings of need through temporal duration" (Woodward 2009: 6). Animals employ what might be called a "functional semantics;" animal existence involves a "primitive representational form in which both 'what is the case' – that is, symbolic or representational displacement of an environmental circumstance, and 'what to do about it' – that is, productivity in the form of instructions about how to act in the case in question" (Oller & Griebel 2004: 5, 17).

center of moral claims, no matter how minimal, so a whole universe escapes their attention” (64; quoted in Gunkel 2016: ch. 10). Floridi (2014) argues for a “fourth revolution” after Copernicus, Darwin and Freud in which the infosphere is based on an integrated ontology of natural, human, and technological realities. Thomas Cooper (2016–17) develops the Gunkel – Floridi trajectory from a whole systems perspective.

Ethics typically...has pertained to the philosophical guidance, principles, instruction, and decision-making attending the moral sector, of human affairs. What if ethics could be seen in a much larger “whole systems” approach that could be informed by disciplines as different as physics and eastern philosophy? What if ethics could be seen as related not only to human behavior but also to all living species and their container – the universe? Our thinking could be changed if we consider not only the “action impact” upon one human being, but also upon humanity at large, all known life, or the solar system. For example, what if a simple principle or “law” from physics is considered? What is entitled “Newton’s third law of motion” is most typically stated: “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” Often this law is thought of as pertaining to objects in motion and physical forces. What if it were seen as a “law” also to be taken into account when making ethical decisions? While this does not refer to a precisely measured vector and counter-vector, or force and opposing forces, as with Newton, there is in spirit the similar acknowledgement that, what is done will have rebounding or reactive consequences. A systems ethics approach is necessary to understand whether there might be only one over-arching ethic from which the others are tributaries. What if this larger (cf. solar or cosmic) ethic simply requires that each species act so as to maintain the balance of nature? Or to follow the “laws” of nature however those are best formulated (96–97)?

Gunkel, Floridi and Cooper are instructive here and propose a broader agenda for dealing with anthropocentrism in media ethics. They reflect a far-reaching and multi-leveled ontological account of the organic and its ecology. *The Changing Face of Alterity* (2016) is one such encyclopedia of ontological reflections on human exceptionalism in ethics. The ontological status of the Other in the global imaginary helps establish the boundaries of media ethics beyond the horizon. *The Changing Face of Alterity*’s objective is not to resolve the question of alterity and its new configurations, “but to initiate informed, critical debate by describing what needs to be asked about and investigated in the first place” (Gunkel, Filho, Mersch 2016:1).

Alterity is chosen as the book’s axis because the Other is fundamental to both the theory and practice of communication. “No matter how it is structured or conceptualized, communication is involved with addressing others, and deals with the ontological, epistemological, and ethical questionings of otherness or alterity. Within the discipline of Communication Studies, this ‘Other’ is almost always assumed to be another human being. This widely accepted and often unquestioned precondition is now confronted with...the many facets of otherness as it is experienced in contemporary technoculture” (Gunkel, Filho, & Mersch 2016: 1).

The book’s essays provide a range of different responses to this challenge, ranging from arguments for human-centeredness to proposals for a posthuman theory and practice of communication that assumes similitude or symmetry between human

relationships with things and the interpersonal. For Filho, for example, “machines lack the subtle indeterminacy of the human, especially in Eros” (ch. 4). In chapter five, the logic behind digital technology is not communication but the “threshold experience” of mathematical play. On the other end of the spectrum, in chapter nine, Coeckelbergh develops a posthumanist ethics of “letting be.” In clarifying the ontological aspects of the “Other” and establishing alterity as a philosophical concept, the arguments of the relevant theorists are made explicit: Jacques Derrida’s and Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics of alterity, Sternagel’s phenomenology of technics and media, Slavoj Žižek’s real life as virtual, and Heidegger’s *enframing* of modern technology.

Gunkel’s final chapter integrates the book around Immanuel Levinas, the chief architect of moral standing in otherness. “Unlike a lot of what goes by the name of moral philosophy, Levinasian ethics does not get caught up in efforts to determine ontological criteria for inclusion or exclusion, but begins from the existential fact that we always and already find ourselves in situations facing and needing to respond to others. For Levinas, ethics transpires not in theorizing about the essential properties of others, but in the very real vulnerabilities...that we already experience in the face of others. This shift in perspective inverts the standard operating procedure by putting ethics before ontology” (Gunkel 2016: ch. 10).

In the debate that Singer’s *Animal Liberation* and Nussbaum’s *Frontiers of Justice* represents, the properties of living entities is a central issue. For Gunkel (2016), appeal to properties is “the standard operating procedure of moral consideration....According to this way of thinking, the question concerning the moral status of others needs to be decided by first identifying which property or properties would be necessary and sufficient to have moral standing and then figuring out whether a particular entity (or class of entities) possesses this property or not” (ch. 10). The property of reason is central to classical ethics. Suffering is the Bentham-to-Singer alternative, and consciousness is widely heralded as a necessary property for moral decision-making. Gunkel (2016) argues ontologically against the property concept and advocates Levinas as the theoretical alternative (ch. 10; see Coeckelbergh & Gunkel 2014).

“The ethical relationship,” Levinas (1987: 56) writes, “is not grafted on to an antecedent relationship of cognition; it is a foundation and not a superstructure.” For Levinas, “internal properties do not come first and then moral respect follows from this ontological fact. Properties are not the intrinsic *a priori* condition of possibility for moral standing. They are *a posteriori* products of extrinsic social interactions with and in the face of others....Moral standing can no longer be about the conferring of rights on others as a kind of benevolent gesture, but deciding on how to respond to the Other, who always and already places my rights and assumed privilege in question” (Gunkel 2016: ch. 10).

Regardless of Levinas’ centrality, his “Other” is explicitly human. “If, as Levinas argues, ethics precedes ontology, then in Levinas’ own work, anthropology precedes

ethics. Levinas can maintain this anthropocentrism only by turning 'face' into a kind of ontological property and thereby undermining and even invalidating much of his own moral innovations" (Gunkel 2016: ch.10). Calarco (2008) is uncompromising on this interpretation: "Although Levinas himself is... anthropocentric, the underlying logic of his thought permits no such anthropocentrism. Levinas's ethical philosophy is, or at least should be, committed to an agnostic form of ethical consideration that has no *a priori* constraints or boundaries....If it is the case that we do not know where the face begins and ends, where moral considerability begins and ends, then we are obligated to proceed from the possibility that anything might take on a face" (Calarco 2008: 55).

Gunkel has identified a vexing ontological issue on the horizon and beyond it: in their moral standing are properties of being *a priori* or *a posteriori*? Gunkel endorses turning Levinas against himself so that ethical considerations have no prior ontological boundaries. On the other hand, ethicist Michael Hyde (2007) from the rhetorical tradition appeals to Heidegger's conclusion that "being (ontology) must be existing before there can be any talk about any form of otherness....Unlike Levinas, I do not believe that ontology comes after ethics....Borrowing one of Heidegger's phenomenological terms, I think it would be fair to say that ontology and ethics are 'equiprimordial'" (110–111).

4.2 The ontology of transhumanism

Within technological societies, there is a recognized push toward a human-technology integration that overcomes biological limitations. "The emergence of transhumanism highlights this drive toward a technological exploration into enhancement of the human condition. Transhumanism is a philosophical movement that is re-contextualizing humanity in terms of an emerging techno-culture....The idea brings together a diverse group of philosophers, computer scientists, biotechnologists, and artists who emphasize the limitation of being human in such areas as lifespan, intellectual capacity, bodily function and self-reported well-being." Their core value is a stage of human evolution where "new biological and digital technologies" produce "radically enhanced beings" beyond "being human" (Campbell 2006: 280,283). The ontology of transhumanism is complementary to Singer's human-nonhuman dualism, but the human-technology dynamism of fluctuating biological boundaries broadens the agenda.

The transhuman as a conceptual category reveals how "human existence is structured spatially and temporally" as in Heidegger and Levinas (Hyde 2007:107). The appropriation of technologies into the human organism raises ontological questions of the first order. Three representative case studies illustrate the conceptual puzzles at stake: Mann's postcyborg ethics, Project LifeLine's synthetic organisms, and Pepperell's Posthuman Manifesto. While we energize international communication ethics through cosmopolitanism, the global imaginary, and dwelling, including

studies such as these on the shifting understanding of humanness will help position our field beyond the horizon.

4.2.1 Postcyborg ethics

The cyborg has moved from an icon of classical literature and science fiction to a tool for discussing the transhuman era. The term “is the blending of cyber (netics) from the Norbert Wiener tradition and org (anisms), and is most commonly thought of as a person whose capabilities have been extended through external agency that modifies” the body’s structure and function (Campbell 2006: 279).

Donna Haraway’s *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (1991b) was influential in transforming the concept of cyborg ontologically from a futuristic image into a category for the discussion of being. Evolution has blurred the lines between human and animal; twenty-first century machines have made ambiguous the boundaries between natural and artificial; and microelectronics and the political invisibility of cyborgs have confused the meaning of physicality. Haraway’s (1991a) “Cyborg Manifesto” presents today’s human-machine hybrid as a means of transcending imposed social and cultural boundaries in a patriarchal world, as an alternative narrative for feminists to create and determine their own future. Haraway’s cyborg theory rejects the notion of essence; the cyborg is a non-essentialized, material-semiotic entity representing a foreign and yet familiar being.

In the 1990s, the cyborg became a media icon in the public sphere; it became ideological, not simply a being of machine-human integration. “Cyborgs came to represent people who readily embraced and appropriated certain technologies into their bodies in order to extend their abilities to overcome physical limitation” (Campbell 2016: 285). This has been illustrated by Steve Mann’s (2001) transformation of himself into a human-machine hybrid. Professor of Engineering from the University of Toronto, Mann invented voice-activated wearable computing WearComp, and the EyeTap Camera for Neuromancer vision. Along with Kevin Warwick, a professor of cybernetics at Reading University (with a microchip sewn into himself), their research and public visibility advocate further development of technologies that can supplement physiological limitations of the brain and sensorium (Campbell 2006: 280; Nelson 2013).

Self-identified cyborg Steve Mann argues for a postcyborg ethic. The framework for his ethics is history. He charts the development of thought about humanity in relation to technology through four eras: modern (where flesh-machine and real-virtue are explicit distinctions), cyborg, post-cyborg, and deconism (Mann, 2003a). He claims that we already act as though we live in the postcyborg era, in the sense that we have assimilated technology into our being, often unquestioningly. Because Mann sees the progression of these eras as inevitable, our morality must be futuristic, hence “*postcyborg*” ethics. In the deconism age of human evolution, Mann contends our

computerized intelligence and augmented physique will engage in “radical questioning of the social, political, and economic structures that have emerged” in postcyborgism (Campbell, 2006: 287; see Mann 2003a, 2003b).

Mann’s (2003b) ethical concerns are principally personhood and privacy. “The proliferation and acceptance of technology within public and private spaces has resulted in the devaluing of the human body and human uniqueness....By encouraging specialized and selective relations, it can be argued that the fact that digital technologies promote networks of control should cause concern for those who seek to encourage equality and justice for all in a technological society” (Campbell 2006: 287–288). “Increased experimentation with transcending our mental capacities or extending memory and brain functioning” raises the key issue whether people are finally “reducible to their data” (Campbell 2006: 287). Mann appeals to what he calls humanistic intelligence; that is, assisting and empowering human cognition rather than replacing or emulating it. While recognizing the emergence of transhuman beings, his postcyborg ethics recognizes humanity’s distinctiveness by emphasizing personhood and privacy.

However, the credibility of Mann’s ethics is undermined by his technological determinism. His historical continuum from modernity to deconism describes a predictable path of media progression largely beyond political or cultural influence. German philosopher Günther Anders is not a technological determinist, and his conclusion about the “tragic paradox” has a historical authenticity that Mann’s four stages of linearity does not. Under the title “Promothean Shame,” Anders argues that modernity places humankind in the contradictory position of creating a world that condemns its makers for their imperfection and deficiency in controlling it. Smart machines do not empower but generate feelings of curtailment and obsolescence (Müller 2016).

Mann’s deterministic framework reduces his ethics to an intellectual glimmer without influence on social relations and institutional structures. As Campbell responds to what she calls “Mann’s deterministic outlook”: “Why should we be relegated only to the task of watching? If our primary response is only to resist technology, rather than, for example, to reform our world” transhuman constructions are given too much power. Mann’s technology-focused ethical discourse directs us to see “humanity as moving toward a destiny of digital transformation. Although he attempts to react against and push past a nihilistic future, a solid platform is missing from which to infuse the potential for hope of justice, restoration, and an alternate human destiny” (Campbell 2006: 291).

4.2.2 Project LifeLike’s Synthetic Organisms

The Intelligent Systems Laboratory and the Electronic Visualization Laboratory are collaborating on Project LifeLike to create realistic avatars supported by a computer engine capable of online learning (Electronic Visualization Laboration 2008; DeMara

et al. 2009; Mejia 2010). Two research problems lie at its center and they are ontological concerns: the creation of a “life-like embodiment of a particular person”; and “a knowledge-driven backend that can respond intelligently to questions and learn through its interactions” (DeMara et al. 2008, p. 3). Project LifeLike differs from other laboratory experiments in that it aims to replicate the epistemological structures of specific people.

In seeking a world of synthetic organisms that cooperate, Project LifeLike places various artificial intelligence systems in interaction through a Speech Recognizer (SR) and Dialog Manager (DM). “In essence, the ontological experience of the SR program is put into service of the epistemological interpretation of the mind (DM); the body (SR) becomes a mere instrument for the mind (DM). When applied to a model of human intelligence, an internal hierarchy is produced in which ontological experience is naturalized as subordinate to epistemological knowledge” (Mejia 2010: 31).

The DM modality has primacy and that configures Project LifeLike into a data processing entity. “The technological danger of Project LifeLike is that it constitutes the possibility of so uniformly arranging the experiential world, according to a specific epistemological imagining of the body as a merely instrumental thing, that we have foreclosed the totality of any form of being otherwise, what Heidegger calls *enframing*” (1977b: 27). In this *enframing*, the world is transformed “into a standing reserve, whereby life ceases to become life, and instead is reconfigured into a potential source of energy (or information) for the technological apparatus” (Mejia 2010: 35). Project LifeLike’s conceptualizing the body as either an imperfect biological one or as a perfect mechanical one, “carries with it the notion that our body is merely a sensorium for the brain. In both regards, the immutability of the thinking brain remains unquestioned.... Humanity, in having sought to author its own creation, ends up producing the mechanisms for its own ontological erasure” (Mejia 2010: 29, 35).

In its technological formations, Project LifeLike is organized by epistemological categories. It “constitutes an attempt at the epistemological cooptation of the ontological project of life, whereby the technological apparatus of the body is effaced in favor of the epistemic projections of the mind.”³ This reconfiguration of the human carries with it a significant ethical concern – the reification of the mind/body dichotomy” (Mejia 2010: 29).

Theories of human agency across the human race have involved debates over mental causation and bodily behavior. Project LifeLike as a research endeavor need not account for them all. But the mind-body dualism of Descartes is so philosophically

³ Mejia (2010) uses the evil twin idea from mythology and literature to describe the creation of a synthetic self in Project LifeLike: “The possibilities of an intellectual doppelgänger means that intellectuals must assist in the process of their own demise.” They must first assist in “uploading their intellectual architecture, and then, upon completing, their doppelgänger is constituted as a more capable worker....We produce the very thing that makes us obsolete” (39).

dominant in the West, that to perpetuate it in design and modeling without critique limits the research's impact on the fundamental issues in ontology. Project LifeLike considers itself liberated from the mind/body dichotomy in its constructing an all-mind laboratory. "The DM is a perfect calculating machine because it presumably possesses no emotional attachment to its instrumental body" (Mejia 2010:34).⁴ But that self-declared liberation is considered of no consequence to the rejection of the Cartesian dichotomy in Marx's physicalism and French Structuralism. By its digital transfer of the physical to the ephemeral, it is unable to engage the influential work in neuroscience on the correlation between brain activity and conscious experience.⁵

This digital research project in university laboratories represents a destabilization of how human nature and existence are defined. Whatever its research achievements to date, the challenge remains for media ethics on the horizon to account for the shifting ontologies of what it means to be human without reifying the mind/body dualism.

4.2.3 The posthuman manifesto

In today's era of human-machine integration, cyborg Steve Mann and Project LifeLike are experimenting scientifically with new forms of being. Robert Pepperell's essay on this transhuman age centers on its radical opposition to anthropocentrism. With the same meaning, Peter Singer's work in bioethics is labeled "*Unsanctifying Human Life*" and Pepperell's rhetoric is "posthumanism." "The posthuman is a coming stage of human evolution, where we move beyond the confines of the body through the use of new biological and digital technologies to become radically enhanced beings" beyond our known humanity (Campbell 2006: 280). In the definition of the World Transhumanist Association, "an entity whose basic capacities so radically exceed those of unaugmented humans is to be best thought of as constituting a new kind of being." Pepperell's thesis is not developed in terms of ethical theory as is Singer's, but it is likewise committed to *homo sapiens* in a constant state of becoming.

⁴ Mejia (2010) appeals to the human property of consciousness in his analysis of Project LifeLike's technological cooptation of the ontological project of life. For Mejia, the question is whether there can be a meaningful ethics of artificial consciousness. "To be human is to possess a consciousness *a priori*. Artificial intelligence is denied this possibility in advance; rather, consciousness will emerge as a byproduct of design" (Mejia 2010: 24). This argument from the human property of consciousness is identified by Gunkel (2016) above as the traditional "ontology then ethics" paradigm that ought to be reversed. In spite of this challenge, Mejia is correct in his conclusion: "The historical questions of ethics are necessary as always: By whose design? Who will be the judge?" (Mejia 2010: 27).

⁵ Neuroscience is of major importance to ontological configuration over the horizon. Developing it here is unnecessary since this HANDBOOK treats neuroscience as a separate chapter.

According to Pepperell's (2003) *The Posthuman Manifesto*, the posthuman era became possible once we admitted that "humans are no longer the most important thing in the universe" (Postulate 1.1). Technological progress is geared toward the transformation of the human species and it is an irreversible reality (Postulate 1.2). As Pepperell summarizes in the Preface to a new edition, "the word 'posthuman' marks the end of that period of social development known as humanism, and so in this sense it means 'after humanism.' The term refers to the general convergence of biology and technology to the point where they are increasingly becoming indistinguishable" (p. iv). "In the digital world virtually any information can be encoded into a stream of 'bits' which can then be transmitted and stored in very high volume. In this electronic world one's physical attributes will be less significant than one's virtual presence or 'telepresence.' In telepresent environments it will be difficult to determine where a person "is", or what distinguishes them from the technological form they take (Pepperell 2003: 4).

In contrast to the anthropocentric categorization of humanity as distinct from and in control of the natural world, the posthuman entity chooses "to lose part of his or her being in an emerging technological whole" (Postulate 8.8). The posthuman condition involves the "gradual overturning of a human-centered world," demolishing old categories and giving room for new forms of technological being (Pepperell 1995:176). This imagined community of nearly perfect quality is a utopian view of species evolution. A new being, created by total integration of the human and technology, has its home in a utopian mind, not in science or history.

Asher Seidel's *Inhuman Thoughts: Philosophical Explorations of Posthumanity* is a utopian exploration of the basic theses in *The Posthuman Manifesto*. The philosopher Seidel examines the physiological and psychological capacities of humans, and uses this examination to stipulate a being that exceeds and redefines these capacities. Seidel's thought experiment envisions an evolved entity so different from our space and time beings that it is no longer human. An elite minority or possibly a majority of the world's population will achieve the maximum potential of the human-machine integration with ultra cognition and near-infinite ability to collaborate with others. *Inhuman Thoughts* is not an intellectual exercise for improving human beings, but transforms them into "non-carbon-based" beings with an "endless lifespan."

Seidel's vision of the "deep-future" is elitist and utopian. His posthumans are capable of "nonsentential communication" between wireless devices, and are enabled by time-saving "parallel consciousness" and "mental seeing." Cyrstal L'Hôte (2009) correctly asks: "Will post-human imperatives be grounded in an evolving post-human nature? Might they be wicked? Seidel mentions the Platonic understanding of the relationship between knowledge and goodness to assure us that super-intelligent post-humans are unlikely to be hedonistic or malicious, that is, inhuman" (3).

In modernist terms, Hegel philosophically, Auguste Comte in the social sciences, and Herbert Spencer in evolutionary biology, echo Plato in their claim that intellectual

development drives progress.⁶ But Seidel's logic includes a category mistake. He contends for a beneficent future in terms of humanistic intelligence as he knows it, while claiming a radically new character to the posthuman "mental seeing." He imagines that through these abilities the beings of posthumanity will live differentially. Utopian thinking oscillates between the binary of good and evil, and Seidel's imagined society has no capacity for addressing it.

The ontology of transhumanism takes account of the new understandings of what it means to be human as the machine and human are amalgamated. A cyborgian ethics, digital beings in laboratories, and *The Posthuman Manifesto* illustrate the kind of background probes that communication ethics requires as it internationalizes the field. A people-based global imaginary finds the human-machine confluence an inescapable challenge. In its ontological accounting of the transhuman era, the global imaginary rejects the presumption of technological determinism, the reifications of the mind-body dualism, and the appeals to utopianism. An important task for cosmopolitan ethics on the horizon is contradicting those philosophical misdirections.

5 Conclusion

The thesis of this paper is the need to situate international communication ethics ontologically. For its theory and practice, the paramount task on the horizon is developing its base in being. While reviewing its intellectual history and researching its practice worldwide, ontology is not marginal but axial. Working on cosmopolitanism, the global imaginary, and philosophical dwelling, insures that the question of being will be paramount through these concepts. And with that orientation, we can deal constructively with the animal ethics dispute and the human-machine symbiosis without carrying forward philosophically unacceptable dualisms and intellectually indefensible idealisms. Anthropocentrism can then be interrogated within the context of human beingness in motion.

On a deeper level, in the three modalities of this paper (international media ethics, grounding concepts, ontology) the idea of progress needs critical reflection. The very title, "Theorizing Over the Horizon" entails this notion. While avoiding futurism and eschewing reductionism are *sine qua non*, the concept of progress requires

⁶ Despite Marx's fundamental reorientation of Hegel to materialism, Hegel's history as the self-realization of *Geist* in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) is a basic inspiration of progressive narratives. Comte's three stages of scientific advance (theological, metaphysical, positivistic) is typically accepted as a sociological law (*The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, 1896). The idea of progress in Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Sociology* (1876) and *The Principles of Ethics* (1879) was influential through its synthesis with Darwin, not being discredited until Spencerian Social Darwinism lost favor among intellectuals with the savagery of World War I.

clarification as an intellectual safeguard against utopianism and to point us in the proper direction toward cultural continuity.

The question of human perfectability is at the center of the debates over anthropocentrism and in constructing the ontological basis of ethics (Hyde 2010). In his review of the concept of human perfection, Hyde specifies “how perfection is rooted empirically in the ontological workings of our everyday temporal, spatial, and purposive existence.... Perfection shows itself first and foremost as a primordial communicative and rhetorical event that expresses a fundamental truth and admits a moral quality” (2010: xv). *Perfection* (2010) is Hyde’s rhetorical means of coming to terms with perfectability as a property of being (4). Unless the doctrine of perfectability and all versions of apocalyptic progress are understood critically, international communication ethics will be unable to confront adequately the complications on the horizon and the theorizing beyond it.

Hyde correctly situates perfection within the human race, though for highly technological regimes such as the media, the idea of progress in the eighteenth century Enlightenment is the most pertinent formulation. Progress is understood as meaning that advances in technology and science will improve the human condition. While news tempered by facts and research bounded by validity measures, are not caught up in the frenzied rhetoric of a technological paradise, the idea of progress is the predominant frame for both news reports on, and scientific studies of, the new digital age.

As Robert Nisbet explains in his monumental *History of the Idea of Progress* (1980), even though the premises on which the idea of progress is based have eroded, various versions of progress are commonplace in both intellectual discourse and popular conversation. Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (1958) laments the modern error of replacing dialectical deliberation with an unreflective commitment to the inevitability of progress. The technological determinism that drives Mann’s cyborg ethics appeals to perfectability. The mythology of scientific progress leads to confusion in Project LifeLike over epistemology and ontology. Evolutionary progress is Pepperell’s frame of reference for characterizing the posthuman.

Arnold Pacey in *The Culture of Technology* makes “beliefs about progress” central to his understanding of the technological phenomenon as a whole (1996: 13–34). This philosophically informed book argues that the prevailing technological enterprise is created out of cultural values and not *ex nihilo*. In Pacey’s view, what Heidegger calls “civilizational givens” are the home of institutions and technological systems. “Beliefs about progress” is one such set of civilizational givens, this “progress presumption” leading industrial societies to habitually focus on operations and hardware (Pacey 1996:13, 24).

Rethinking the concept of progress means the adoption of a new paradigm, and that involves not simply weighing options but deciding between different attitudes of mind. A critical perspective on progress as we theorize ethics on the horizon leads us to its opposite, that is, cultural continuity. In ontological terms, to move forward

intellectually the idea of progress that infects anthropocentrism pro and con ought to be replaced by continuity.

Existential sustenance is the underlying motif in cosmopolitanism as Appiah characterizes it. The integrity of the world's people groups is entailed by the ethnolinguisticity of the global imaginary. Heidegger's dwelling is inscribed in intellectual history. With a sustainability orientation, these concepts will provide the if-and-only-if criteria for international communication ethics on the horizon and will configure the ontology of the human-nonhuman dualism and of transhumanism beyond it.

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Rhema Zlaten

27 Toward an Interpretive Framework: Neuroethical Considerations for Media Ethics

Abstract: Neuroethical considerations offer a psychological and empirical understanding of how people make ethical decisions. As the field of media ethics strives for greater maturity and depth, the empirical evidence gained through tools from time-tested fields such as neuroethics will fuel the philosophical and ethical theory building needed to understand the ethical components of the new media landscape. This chapter explores a brief history of the multidisciplinary field of neuroethics, practical applications of neuroethics to media ethics, methodological and cultural concerns posed by neuroethical theories and how neuroethical findings impact the future of media ethics. Neuroethical findings help discern not just individual patterns of ethical decision-making happening in media practitioners, but also the commonalities of ethical responses that supersede cultural boundaries. Both levels of analysis are needed to move beyond a descriptive media ethic and into an interpretive media ethic. As media professions expand in both individual and global ways, ethical theory building must offer the flexibility for understanding and informing the changing practices of and demands on media practitioners. Using neuroscience discoveries to mine the psychological variables of ethical decision-making is one key to understanding new journalism culture and one answer to help strengthen the field of media ethics.

Keywords: neuroethics, media ethics, moral decision-making, moral psychology, new media ethics, emotions and moral reasoning

1 Introduction

The field of psychological neuroethics seeks to understand human higher-order thinking, reasoning and emotional processing from an internal perspective. The findings of this field promise new dimensions of analysis for media studies, specifically in the area of media ethics. The multidisciplinary effort of neuroethics seeks to further human understanding of not just the brain, but also the mind. As neuroscience methods mature, the melding of behavioral evidence, philosophical constructions and brain mapping has great potential to transform understandings of ethical decision-making. As the field of media ethics strives for greater maturity and depth, empirical evidence gained through tools from time-tested fields such as moral psychology (including neuroethics) will fuel the philosophical and ethical theory building needed to understand the ethical components of the new media landscape. Neuroethical findings offer new considerations for the role of emotions in reasoning

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-027>

(Roskies 2002; Greene et al. 2004; Singer 2005; Pascual et al. 2013), as well as the inner-workings of autonomy (Narvaez and Lapsley 2005; Spitzer et al. 2007; Wilkins 2011). As media professions expand in both individual and global ways, ethical theory building must offer flexibility for understanding and informing the changing practices of and demands on media practitioners.

Changing media business models mean more freelancers are entering the field than ever before, from persuasion and marketing to public relations and news content creation. These individuals and messages are also all connected to a globalized audience. Neuroethical findings help discern not just individual patterns of ethical decision-making happening in media practitioners, but also the commonalities of ethical responses that supersede cultural boundaries. Both levels of analysis are needed to move beyond a descriptive media ethic and into an interpretive media ethic (Plaisance 2016). Using neuroscience discoveries to mine the psychological variables of ethical decision-making is one key to understanding new journalism culture and one answer to help strengthen the field of media ethics. This chapter explores a brief history of the multidisciplinary field of neuroethics, practical applications of neuroethics to media ethics, methodological and cultural concerns posed by neuroethical theories and how neuroethical findings impact the future of media ethics.

2 Brief history of neuroethics

The term neuroethics refers to two distinct areas of research, including the study of ethical concerns about neuroscience practices and the neuroscience of ethics, or the experimental work of explaining ethical decision-making from a biological brain understanding (Racine et al. 2006). Fields such as philosophy, psychology and the social sciences are looking to neuroethical findings for constructions of ethical decision-making, new insights into moral beliefs, attitudes and values, laws and ethical standpoints are surfacing. Neuroethics studies “directly engage neuroscientific investigations of (proto-moral and moral) cognition, emotions and behaviors, and philosophical, ethical and legal reflections upon what such findings may mean for human beliefs and conduct – from the individual to the political levels” (Buniak et al. 2014: 1–2). Collecting data on the neurobiology of decision-making primarily involves the use of fMRI, or functional magnetic resonance imaging, where alterations of magnetic signals in the brain can be observed and recorded “due to changes in the concentration of oxygenated blood” (Huber 2009: 342). These magnetic alterations are captured in real time, creating descriptive photos of specific brain areas activated in response to stimulus. These fMRI brain scans reach deep levels of brain tissue, making possible “research on increasingly complex cognitive phenomena, including emotions, personality traits, and real-world behaviors” (Racine et al. 2006: 124). The non-invasiveness of fMRI has led to its widespread use, in addition to the potential of using fMRI data to

promote repeatability in experimentation and thus the building of empirically-backed neuropsychology data, methods and theory (Racine et al. 2006).

One major theme found in neuroethics literature concerns the philosophy of the mind and the methods employed by neuroscientists to answer mind-versus-brain questions. The past few centuries have brought to the forefront of scientific inquiry an attempt “to understand the intricacies of the structure and function of the nervous system and, more recently, the nature of mind and brain” (Illes and Bird 2006: 511). One of the most highly cited neuroethics researchers, Joshua D. Greene, piloted several of the methods for blending philosophy and neuroscience. He also was one of the primary researchers to make famous the incorporation of philosophical dilemmas into neuroscience research (Greene et al. 2001). These dilemmas are structured to foster cognitive conflict and to explore moral decision-making and discern factors involved in processing moral dilemmas. These experiments also feature a high level of experimental control, as each participant is presented with the same dilemma.

Moral dilemmas provide the moral conflict needed for researchers “to thoroughly investigate which parameters our basic moral intuitions respond to” and to “offer a valuable tool to study closely which factors trigger the underlying psychological processes that constitute the foundations of human moral cognition” (Christensen and Gomila 2012: 1250). Over the years, Greene’s various teams have used these moral dilemmas in neuroscience research to structure an understanding of the impulse decision techniques brains use to process moral information. One of the major criticisms of Greene’s work, however, is the assumption made in his research that in general, people primarily operate from a utilitarian framework; others suggest that he has over-simplified moral theories to set up his research methods (Christensen and Gomila 2012). Other critics have bemoaned the oversimplification of how many neuroethical experiments set up their controls when attempting to map the brain’s responses to moral dilemmas. Illes and Bird cite many authors who offer the perspective that the self is “formed through the aggregate of an initial set of conditions and subsequent states and choices [that] might or might not be predictable based on diverse factors, from a person’s neurophysiology to personal experience,” (2006: 514), and that it is difficult to accurately capture all of the components that contribute to moral decision-making. In neuroethics research, ecological validity has proven to be elusive in seeking useful results about moral cognition:

The experimental constraints that are imposed by behavioural and functional imaging studies might have an important impact on performance on moral cognition tasks. Some people might feel uncomfortable disclosing their opinions about sensitive issues, providing socially desirable answers instead. On the other hand, different people might provide similar opinions, but rely on entirely different moral values. The fact that moral cognition operates to a large extent swiftly and implicitly in regular social life makes the ecological validity issue even more crucial. The making of moral judgements on extreme and unfamiliar situations, such as those posed by classic moral dilemmas, offers interesting ways to probe philosophical points of view, but can hardly be taken as a proxy for everyday moral reasoning. In addition, personal beliefs and familiarity with the scenarios strongly affect behaviour and brain activation results (Moll et al. 2005: 803).

Other critics of Greene's work have considered the factor of moral expertise as a potentially confounding element to neuroethical experimentation. If a recruit happened to be trained in philosophy, perhaps their responses are different than a lay person who might not have as direct of a pathway to their moral views, especially a familiarity with a moral theory. "Since moral judgments are individuated at the personal level, scientific inquiry cannot help but respect the conceptual constraints governing ascription of such states to a person" (Kahane and Shackel, 2010: 563). So the question remains; can moral underpinnings really be captured in a neurobiological experimental setting?

A stronger experimental design would incorporate as many of these personality and decision-making factors as possible in exploring the philosophy of the mind. For psychologist, neuroscientist and biologist Ralph Adolphs, several broad brain processes need to be considered when studying moral decision-making. These include automatic brain processes, controlled brain processes, and the mediating functions between the two. Reflective and effort-filled controlled processes greatly contrast the spontaneous and reflexive automatic brain processes (Adolphs 2009), and automatic processes fuel the bulk of social cognition. "Much of it is rapid and fraught with biases and stereotypes of which we may be unaware, consistent with automatic processing; at the same time, a hallmark of human social cognition is our ability to deploy behavior strategically" (Adolphs 2009: 698). Neuroethicists continue to attempt to capture in data the balance humans strike between automaticity and deeply reasoned cognitions when engaging in moral decision-making.

2.1 Defining the brains and minds of humanity

Major concerns exist concerning the shifting of society to view human morality as simple brain structure. George H.W. Bush's officially declared Decade of the Brain (1990-2000) heavily influenced western society's fascination with morality as a brain structure. One pervasive societal paradigm from that time is a belief that the brain is largely responsible for defining humanity. "So in investigating the brain, we investigate the self. What is the neural representation of 'self' dependent upon? Is personal identity a brain-based notion? What consequences for our concepts of personal identity will alterations of the self-defining parts of us have?" (Roskies 200: 22). The Decade of the Brain also inspired a pervasive trust in many people groups for consulting neuroscientific perspectives for a wide variety of cultural and societal concerns, including legal systems and in "attitudes toward 'bad' but non- criminal behavior such as compulsive drinking, gambling or sex" (Farah 2005: 38). As in criminal justice and cultural stipulations, the implications of establishing a neuroscientific paradigm of the moral self carries far-reaching and sometimes unknown consequences.

A core concern for some neuroethicists is the many implications of biological brain structure research on what it really means to be human. "Most people believe

that mind and body are fundamentally different kinds of thing. Yet as neuroscience advances, more and more of human thought, feeling and action is being explained in terms of the functioning of the brain, a physical organ of the body” (Farah 2005: 38). The complex relationship of anatomical explanations of higher-order reasoning and beliefs about the sacredness of the mind and soul as an entity separate from biology offer challenges to understandings of not just moral cognition, but also moral action. Illes and Bird’s survey of fMRI moral cognition research found measurements of the biological correlates of existential thought, decision-making, social judgments (both moral and non-moral) as well as “love and altruism, personality, and human competition. Do these studies demonstrate a definitive neural basis of morality or consciousness? Certainly not. Rather, they emphasize the complex and closely interrelated mechanisms that underlie emotion, values and thought” (2006: 514).

Neuroethical findings are not framed to definitively settle philosophical debates such as sources of moral motivation, metaethical questions about moral realism or naturalism concerns, or to even prove once and for all the “correct” normative ethics paradigm for assessing human decision-making. Rather, neuroscience findings must be used in chorus with philosophy and behavioral findings to best decipher the complex elements of decision-making. Neuroscience approaches will work best when understood within the context of human thought, feeling and the soul. The continued influence of philosophy on moral psychology refines the “conceptual questions that need to be answered in order to ask the right questions for empirical investigation” (Tiberius 2015: 15). Science will never solve all questions of morality; it will, however, continue to play a key role in shaping discussions of ethical decision-making.

3 Key neuroethical considerations for media ethics

Media ethics as a field of academic study considers a wide array of concerns, from the individualized moral training of media professionals to the ethical effects of media content on the public at large. A few media scholars have related biological understandings of behavior, society and neuroscience to the primary philosophical field of media ethics. Shoemaker looked at how the biological core of human behavior is not just shaped by culture “but rather is, through genetic heritage, programmed with the potential of behaving in certain ways. Through cultural socialization, these potentialities are either encouraged or discouraged” (1996: 42). In her exploration of neuroscience applications to media ethics, Wilkins suggested that humans are hard-wired to consider the ethical components of decision-making. “There is mounting evidence that, when it comes to many activities including moral behavior, human beings employ a mind-enhanced brain ... A central element characteristic of the mind-enhanced brain is the influence of emotion on cognitive processes” (Wilkins 2011: 805). The concept of the mind-enhanced brain primarily refers to the superior cognitive abilities of humans over other animals to care about

other members of the species (beyond family), while also navigating powerful emotions. Some neuroethical research has found that emotion precedes other cognitive activities, such as logic, and that “human perception and thought was subject to predictable biases that appeared to trump rationality regardless of outcome” (Wilkins 2011: 806). An explication and application of the mind-enhanced brain is needed in media ethics theorizing to help the field understand the roles of emotion, care, genetic heritage and reason in moral decision-making.

Past work in media ethics examining ethical reasoning practices has focused primarily on assessing “degrees of acceptance of imposed ethical principles, and as such are easily undermined by social desirability bias responses” (Plaisance 2016: 456). However, some psychology tools have been used in the field. Rest’s Defining Issues Test (Rest 1979) was used to assess the moral reasoning scores of media professionals by Wilkins and Coleman (2005) and Coleman and Wilkins (2009). An additional psychology tool that has been applied to media ethics practitioners is the Ethical Position Questionnaire (Forsyth 1980), a survey measuring relativism in moral decision-making, and it has been applied to many different of media professions (Kim and Choi 2003; Plaisance, Hanitzsch, and Skewes 2012; Plaisance 2015; Singhapakdi, Kraft, Vitell, and Rallapalli 1995). Instruments developed from neuroethical findings will aid in the continued empirical advancement of media ethics via moral psychology methodologies. Neuroethical tools can be applied to study all of the major concerns for media ethics, from reasoning and autonomy, to free will and assessing the evolving new journalism culture. When framed with a neuroethics lens, the influences of emotion on cognitive activity and the biology of decision-making offer many empirical and philosophical research questions for media ethics researchers to consider.

3.1 Core considerations of emotions in decision-making, media ethics and neuroethics

Moll and colleagues refer to the neurobiology of ethics as the pursuit of the brain’s structures of moral cognition by examining the multiple internal and external components to moral decision making. “As a general rule, moral emotions result from interactions among values, norms and contextual elements of social situations, and are elicited in response to violations or enforcement of social preferences and expectations” (2005: 806). The highly complex neural circuitry involved in moral cognition is “a large functional network that includes several brain structures. At the same time, many of these structures overlap with other regions that control different behavioral processes” (Pascual et al. 2013: 2). These deeply interconnected neural pathways span many brain domains, none of which are uniquely related to morality. The holy grail of neuroethics would be the discovery of unique brain substrate structures that supporting moral cognition, but many neuroscientists have come to understand that the “moral brain” does not exist. Rather, emotional and cognitive centers of the brain

orchestrate brain processes of decision-making, “and the difference with respect to other cognitive and emotional processes may lie in the content of these processes, rather than in specific circuits ... Further research is needed in order to uncover the relationships between basic emotions and morality” (Pascual et al. 2013: 5–6).

In his work on developments that threaten tradition, Gross described society’s progression from empiricism, or that truth is confirmed by sense experience and observation, to rationality, or “the things we know with the greatest certainty are discoverable not through sense experience, but through the exercise of reason” (1992: 25). This progression of reason as a dominating cultural paradigm culminated in Kant’s exhortation to get people to think for themselves by relying on their own understanding and reason and not emotions or higher powers (Gross 1992). Reason and enlightenment theories have continued to reign in moral discourse over the past few centuries, including media ethics. As uncomfortable as it may be to embrace the emotionality of decision-making, neuroethics research is challenging the reign of reason as the only influence on “higher-level” ethical decision-making. “For decades, moral psychology was dominated by developmental theories that emphasized the role of reasoning and ‘higher cognition’ in the moral judgment of mature adults. A more recent trend emphasizes the role of intuitive and emotional processes in human decision making and sociality” (Greene et al. 2004: 389). Philosopher Peter Singer expounded on social psychologist Jonathan Haidt’s mounting evidence that moral judgments stem from quick-forming responses. “Where there is more deliberate, conscious reasoning, it tends to come after intuitive response, and to be a rationalization of that response, rather than the basis for the moral judgment” (2005: 338). Findings such as these complicate long-standing normative ethical practices based solely in higher-order reasoning as the primary route to moral decision making.

Neuroethics offers an unfolding understanding of the multiple influences on ethical decision-making by challenging the reign of reason and opening the door for other factors to be considered about the reasoning process, such as emotions and other biological impulses. A dialogue in media ethics is needed concerning how emotions impact media practitioners when they are faced with stressful situations and deadlines, as these situations are often intertwined with ethical dilemmas. At the very least, school-based and profession-based ethical trainings should bring awareness to the implications of the emotions involved in decision-making (via evidence from neuroethics). This is an area in media ethics where instrument adaptations and professional development resources from neuroscience theories are very much needed.

3.2 Core considerations of autonomy and free will in media ethics and neuroethics

Hot topics in media ethics often revolve around issues of free will and autonomy. Are journalists really able to achieve a state of professional engagement where they are

empowered to report with rational, informed and impartial viewpoints? Is there ever a state of mind (and thus reporting and editing style) where bias does not exist? In discussing the hallmark journalistic traits of professional freedom and responsibility, both of these ethical considerations center around emotions. Media professionals of all types must continually walk a tightrope between the freedom, the courage and the autonomy needed to confront society's problems and issues, as well as the expectations of employers, the law and society (Wilkins 2011). Media practitioners must often make snap judgment calls about which sources to pursue, which quotes to use and how to frame gathered information, especially in the current 24/7 climate of media production. Conversely, in some scenarios, media professionals are afforded the opportunities (and the time required) for deliberative processing and reasoning about ethical dilemmas. Roskies highlighted how a paradigm of a deterministic brain affects media ethic's prized understandings of free will and autonomy:

Traditional ethical theory has centered on philosophical notions such as free-will, self-control, personal identity, and intention ... Although neuroscience is unlikely to answer metaphysical questions about determinism, it can certainly alter our perceptions of them ... How will the bolstered sense of the brain as a deterministic machine affect or undermine our notions of free will or of moral responsibility? (Roskies 2002: 22).

On the other hand, moral "freedom is grounded in the rational capacity to discern options, make decisions, and enact intentions" (Narvaez and Lapsley 2005: 140). How often media practitioners are empowered by rationalization, intuitions or a combination of the two is one question neuroethics can help explore.

Another component to addressing the challenges media workers face regarding empowerment and autonomy is forced-norm compliance. Spitzer et al. explored the brain systems involved in forced-norm compliance. They hypothesized that "humans have developed elaborate neural mechanisms for social cognition that produce appropriate responses to the threat of peer punishment" (2007: 185). To measure this effect, real monetary stakes were combined with the requirement for participants to curb immediate self-interest to obey a fairness norm. Functional magnetic resonance imaging was used to study how a threat of punishment enforced this norm compliance and also to examine how people act when the social pressures are removed (2007: 186). The study concluded that the presence of social context can activate specific brain areas (2007: 191), contributing to the behavior resulting from the ethical dilemmas at hand. Peer-pressure and social survival skills, not just emotions and reason, shape the development of behavioral schemas in people. Media ethics research should continue to explore how organizational structure and social pressures shape media workers, especially in the light of growing digital news markets.

A growing body of work in media studies seeks to define a globalized journalism culture. This culture is often considered to be "a particular set of ideas and practices

by which journalists legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful” (Hanitzsch, 2007: 369), with a focus on encompassing both inclusive diverse discourses of the meaning of journalism culture and embracing journalism’s “constant reformulation and reconstitution, as culture itself is a process of continuous change, renegotiation and redefinition” (Hanitzsch et al. 2011: 274). In an assessment of normative frameworks of journalists, Plaisance, Hanitzsch, and Skewes (2012) found that journalists exhibit a mix of utilitarian, Kantian and relativistic responses to ethical dilemmas. Drawing from data produced by the Worlds of Journalism project, which built a systemized cultural analysis tool by looking at the individual, organizational and national influences on journalists, Plaisance, Hanitzsch, and Skewes examined the how and why behind the responses of journalism professionals to ethical dilemmas. Their analysis indicated that broadly, journalistic

ethical outlooks are indeed related to the larger structural system in which they operate. Ideological, cultural and societal factors outlined in hierarchy-of-influence theories are critical, and sometimes, dominant, influences on the way journalists around the globe approach ethical dilemmas. Recent journalism studies initiatives around the globe appear to suggest a growing consensus around claims that theories of cognitive processing, professional socialization, and cultural ideology point toward elements of universalism in journalistic behavior (2012: p. 654–655).

The extensive data collected by the Worlds of Journalism project points to the layers of cultural and organizational norms involved in ethical decision-making. While neuroscience tools focus on individual (yet potentially universal) findings, they should be used by media ethics researchers to help tease out the all of the layers and factors of autonomy and free will.

One promising neuroethics-based tool for assessing individual moral decision-making is the Moral Foundations Questionnaire, based on Moral Foundation Theory (MFT). The MFT approach considers intuitive ethics, or the “innate preparedness to feel flashes of approval or disapproval toward certain patterns of events involving other human beings” (Haidt and Joseph 2004: 56), as the foundations that all cultures use to build moral systems. This innateness stems from genes that “write the first draft into neural tissue, beginning in utero but continuing throughout childhood” and then progresses as “experience (cultural learning) revises the draft during childhood, and even (to a lesser extent) during adulthood” (Graham et al. 2012: 58). MFT builds upon theories of moral development, but is also a model for assessing and identifying universal core constructs of morality (Graham et al. 2012). The Moral Foundations Questionnaire offers an internally and externally valid, theoretically based measure of the five major universally available sets of moral intuitions distilled by extensive cross-cultural testing: Harm/Care, Fairness/Reciprocity, Ingroup/Loyalty, Authority/Respect, and Purity/Sanctity (Graham et al. 2011). The psychological patterns used by this questionnaire assess the intuitions of moral competence

in an empirical format that could help explore the philosophical tensions of autonomy, free will and globalization in media ethics. Moral psychology tools such as the Moral Foundations Questionnaire can help build an “interpretive” moral framework for free will and autonomy that transcends anecdotal evidence (Plaisance 2016). This questionnaire could provide an assessment of the biological and emotional components of higher-order reasoning as a fresh way of understanding the interplay of biology, moral development, organizational demands and cultural expectations on ethical decision-making.

3.3 Ethical directions for new journalism culture

Discussion has begun to concentrate on the impact of the online frontier on media ethics. Ward and Wasserman argue that citizen participation in journalism via platforms such as social media is creating an open media ethics and a global platform of input and message creation (and reciprocation). This open media journalism ethic “would regard the code of ethics as intended not just for professionals but also for anyone who uses media to do journalism. It allows, and encourages, mechanisms that allow nonprofessionals to engage in discussion and content reform” (Ward and Wasserman 2010: 277). As new media platforms increasingly take up cultural communication space, the lines between content creators and commenters continue to blur. This new space simultaneously creates a culture where validity of information can be hard to discern while also giving rise to alternative voices beyond big media companies. New media platforms present a glimpse of what a globalized community might look like, offering important opportunities to explore the ethical responsibilities of media professionals who must operate beyond the previously rigid roles of media such as “print journalist” “public relations practitioner” or “advertising professional”.

An updated theoretical foundation is needed for media ethics to address the shifting roles media practitioners must now play. While organizational and professional expectations partially frame the ethical decisions (for better or for worse) of media practitioners (Plaisance, Skewes, and Hanitzsch 2012), what happens when those frameworks of accountability are removed? From marketing and advertising to public relations and journalism, budget cuts mean job losses. The reality of new journalism culture is that content is produced primarily by an army of freelancers, both civilian and professionally trained. Media ethics theorizing must rise to the occasion and consider the dramatically shifting roles and demands faced by media professionals. Neuroethics offers one avenue for building empirically sound understandings of moral decision-making, and many ways to help tease out the roles of moral intuitions, moral development, organizational, cultural and social pressures enacted by all media professionals.

4 Weighing neuroethical methodologies

Merging social science research, philosophy and neuroscience seems like an ideal blend for approaching life's mysteries, but the field of neuroethics definitely emits groans of growing pains. The beginning of the new millennium marked a multi-disciplinary fascination with understanding how humans make moral decisions, as well as what those decisions should concern (Wilkins 2011: 807). Parrott and Krueger (2011) offer some suggestions for how fields can work together to answer complex questions. In a multi-disciplinary approach, research problems are independently worked on from different disciplinary lenses, often simultaneously. Interdisciplinary relationships create common research questions. The most integrated partnership, the transdisciplinary approach, occurs when research is jointly conducted with the purpose of achieving common theories. Study designs that incorporate philosophical, neurobiological and media studies-driven research questions would offer such an approach. While the neuroethics field has established a firm multi-disciplinary approach, a transdisciplinary research agenda could help solve many of the methodological challenges faced by the field, such as concerns raised by how neuroethical findings impact identity construction, social norms, and legal systems.

A big challenge for neuroethics is to create some common understandings of human behavior and to offer compelling responses to questions such as “how does the human moral mind emerge from the interaction of biological and cultural factors? ... How does moral cognition relate to emotion and motivation, and what are their neural substrates?” (Moll et al. 2005: 799). In their scrutiny of the dynamics between the social sciences and the neurosciences, Fitzgerald and Callard called for a more fluid rhetoric of the term interdisciplinary and for deeper and more creative understandings of what experiments could mean at the intersection of these two fields. The intersection of social science and neuroscience currently relies heavily on neuroscience paradigms and methodologies in experimental design, and for a true transdisciplinary interaction, both types of research need to be taken seriously (2015: 3).

The primary focus of most neuroethics research is natural science, with a short nod to social scientific and philosophical considerations. Callon addressed the tension between social science and the natural sciences. From “the moment one accepts that both social and natural sciences are equally uncertain, ambiguous, and disputable, it is no longer possible to have them playing different roles in the analysis” (Callon: 199). When dealing with complex questions such as the existence of the mind and moral cognition, multiple perspectives are truly needed to weigh-in on these complex issues.

Despite the many tensions between the different disciplines present in neuroethical research, several parties in each camp find hope in the common goals of the field. A general understanding both in psychology and philosophy favors the “differentiation of moral processes into two different classes: (1) rational, effortful and explicit, and (2) emotional, quick and intuitive” (De Neys and Glumicic 2008 in Pascual et al.

2013: 1). Philosopher Peter Singer also extols the virtues of extending neuroscience findings to philosophy inquiry. From Singer's viewpoint, the realization that automatic moral impulses hold powerful force in moral deliberation should convey a need for critically analyzing intuitions. He sees the information of neuroethics as a powerful tool for expanding upon the skilled observations of human nature by philosophers through the ages. "But none of them had the advantage of modern scientific approach to these issues. Today we have that advantage. Hence it would seem odd if we could not improve on what they wrote" (Singer 2005: 333). Singer's advice offers a call to action for media ethicists; how can the field best integrate philosophy's rich history of moral development with today's psychology findings to create a flexible and interpretive media ethic?

In further discussing the implications of neuroethics to media ethics research, it is tempting to put too much emphasis on the beautiful brain art produced by neuroscience, and not recognize the descriptive pitfalls that are inherent in every type of research method, including neuroscience. "The brain area that 'lights-up' may only be playing a role in a much larger process that includes cortical and subcortical processes, and in which timing is crucial ... fMRI is notoriously insensitive to the *timing* of brain processes" [author's emphasis] (Ellis 2010: 67). The singular focus (and sensationalism) of the brain maps produced by fMRI often disregards the other factors at work in social cognition, a weakness that can be strengthened through the use of the qualitative interviewing, in-depth surveying and other social science (and philosophical) methods that are the hallmarks of media ethics inquiry.

5 Neuroethical controversies, communication and reactions: Wading through data to find truth

Sensationalized brain Christmas tree references often populate the media whenever the sexiness of fMRI neuroscience findings catch the attention of the mainstream press. "With brain images adorning websites and magazine articles on everything from children's learning to compulsive gambling, neuroscience is gradually being incorporated into people's understanding of human behavior ... The question is therefore not whether, but rather when and how, neuroscience will shape our future" (Farah 2005: 39). The ability of neuroscience findings to amass the public eye has emerged as an important factor "in shaping ethics debates and public acceptance of biomedical innovation. At the same time, communicating science to the public raises a host of ethical issues" (Illes and Bird 2006: 516). The double-edged sword of courting media attention and avoiding media mishaps is unavoidable for neuroscience; media coverage informs all players in the development, execution and implementation of neuroscience findings, as well as depicts how the technology is viewed outside of the ivory tower of academia (Racine 2006: 125). Popular press coverage of fMRI

usually concerns themes of human reasoning and behavior as explained by the brain, and also on a secondary level, health information. “This suggests that the depiction of fMRI as a health technology is unrelenting, even if non-health-related research is the prevailing focus” (Racine 2006: 134). Popular press articles also tend to not focus on the technical (and thus ethical) aspects of fMRI, but rather on the results. The reporting style tends to be optimistic with an “fMRI can change the world” tone (Racine et al, 2006, p. 136).

From an academic viewpoint, many calls have been made to engage the public in an in-depth discussion of the implications of neuroethics research to build trust. “The challenge, however, is that ‘science’ and ‘the public’ are no more unitary entities than are the mind and the brain” (Henry & Plemmons 2012: 574). Ringing ethical alarm bells signal the shortfalls of a popularized neuroethics as images that “might blind people to the fundamental legal assumption that people are conscious, intentional and potentially rational agents and therefore responsible for their actions” (Illes and Bird 2006: 514). Onlookers of neuroethics research tend to view neuroimages as self-evident and conclusive artifacts of information. But in reality, as argued throughout this chapter, a true transdisciplinary focus is needed to answer complex questions of human behavior origination, if only for the sake of protecting the field from evolving dysfunctional theories (Huber and Huber: 2009).

Several authors cite the need for a holistic understanding of the pursuit of neuroethics, from Christensen and Gomila’s (2012) call for recognizing the multitude of factors influencing moral decision-making, to Moll’s (2005) assessment of the sterility of neuroscience experimental design, Roskies’ (2002) philosophical concerns of the implications of a neuroscientific shift in society, Henry and Plemmons’ (2012) assessment of the political factors involved in moral cognition research, and Singer’s (2005) challenge to bring philosophy into the neuroscience age. From these voices rise many concerns and accolades for the growing field of neuroethics. As a whole, the neurosciences face many criticisms stemming from generalized individual study results, and repeated calls for replication of experiments (Buniak et al. 2014). Neuroethics theorists and scientists should move forward to take up this call for refined methodologies and freely shared data for the purposes of comparison and re-testing.

An additional concern with neuroscience is the politicization of the field, as seen in other scientific lines of inquiry. “If anything, it may be more susceptible to influence because it examines what cannot readily or easily be seen at the intersection of brain/mind/behavior/environment. However the politicization of neuroscience has unfortunately received insufficient critical examination” (Henry and Plummons 2012: 575). An additional danger of interpreting neuroscience research is that these findings are bound by current culture and anthropology theories, and “shaped by the political context in which science is produced. In short, neuroimaging is clearly a political process as well as a scientific one” (Henry and Plummons 2012: 575). Because neuroscience impacts every area of life, applying this research to media ethics theory building and practice must be approached with great care. “Our understanding of

why people behave as they do is closely bound up with the content of our laws, social mores, and religious beliefs. Neuroscience is providing us with increasingly comprehensive explanations of human behavior in purely material terms” (Farah 2005: 34). Essentially, neuroscience theories and instruments should be applied to media ethics in addition to considerations of biology, moral development, professional oversight (or lack thereof) and cultural pressures.

6 Conclusion

The moral neuroscience literature offers a compelling approach to the biological perspective of life. From raising questions about differences between the mind and the brain to challenging understandings of identity, behavior and moral cognition, cognitive neuroscience offers an inspiring yet also challenging perspective on ethical decision-making. There are some major methodological challenges facing neuroethics, challenges media ethicists must keep in mind when applying neuroethical findings to the field. When looking at the complex brain interactions and decision-making skills involved in a moral dilemma, is it really possible to test individuals conditioned by innumerable life and cultural factors in a sterile science lab and then assume generalizations or causation from those studies? The heterogeneity of tasks and the lab setting often used by neuroethicists are in place “to assess morality, which makes the comparison of the different results extremely difficult. Moreover, some of the tasks proposed barely suggest actual daily moral situations and usually require abstract evaluation, a circumstance that may blur the results obtained” (Pascual et al. 2013: 6). Neuroscience data must be applied as a piece of the decision-making puzzle, not the all-encompassing context to all of moral dilemma’s problems.

As explored elsewhere in this chapter, the findings of neuroethics reverberate through every area of life, including a deep impact on ethical theory. Communicating neuroethical findings correctly, then, is key to shaping both public understanding of the biology of decision-making and also media ethics theorizing. Illes et al. conveyed why the proper framing of neuroscience communication is needed, because like “the science behind genetically modified foods and nanotechnology, neuroscience combines high public relevance with rapidly advancing technologies” (2010: 61). The need for communicating neuroscience is construed by the social meanings of neuroscience findings. These results often comment on cultural, religious and secular sources of self-identity. “Social meaning is part of a wider debate ... approaches to science communication will need to be informed accordingly ... Broad inter-disciplinary and public dialogue is an essential element, therefore, in ensuring the responsible communication and social impact of neuroscience” (Racine et al. 2006: 139). Caution is in order when communicating neuroethical findings, as they are “inherently political” and can easily negatively impact vulnerable society groups (Henry

and Plemmons 2012: 574). Strongly constructed theories of brain processes will empower how neuroscience information should and should not be used to explore human ethical deliberation, and so caution must be exercised in both how neuroscientists conduct and frame their research and in how media ethicists interpret and use these claims.

So what do the evolving findings from neuroethics about decision-making, self-identity, behavior motivation and cultural paradigms ultimately mean for media ethics? The applications of neuroethical findings offer multiple inspirations and concerns for shaping philosophical thinking, teaching and normative actions for every aspect of the media field, not just academia. By integrating neuroscience methodologies and theories, media ethics research will help to inform, criticize and shape all of the fields involved in neuroethical debate. In turn, the key to building the interpretive media frameworks needed to help shape the rapidly evolving new journalism culture is the expanded use of empirical methodologies in conjunction with philosophy and media studies. In the end, neuroscience is about all aspects of life, and therefore belongs to all lines of inquiry.

Further reading

Literature exploring the implications of neuroethics for media ethics is sparse, but many opportunities exist for media ethics researchers to forge new research questions and apply tools from neuroethics to increase empirical research efforts in the field. Neuroethics researcher and philosopher Adina L. Roskies was one of the first to concretely define the multiple definitions of the two research fields of neuroethics (2002). Roskies also penned the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry for neuroethics (Roskies 2016). The article offers a solid foundation for understanding the evolution of neuroethics as a research field, as well as several philosophical discussions surrounding neuroethics like autonomy, consciousness, personal identity and free will. Additionally, Garnett and colleagues mapped the fledgling relationship between fMRI and neuroethics (2011). In an introduction to a special issue on neuroethics and brain privacy for *Res Publica*, Ryberg questioned if and when brain interventions such as fMRI threaten the autonomy of the tested individual, and also how neuroscience data can impact society's perceptions of personal responsibilities (2017). Karafyllis (2009) critically questioned the concept of vision assessment and utopian ideals in social neuroscience, and how values are inherently built into neuroscience study designs. Finally, Clausen and Levy's *Handbook of Neuroethics* (2015) contains an extensive section on moral cognition, including arguments exploring: the interplay of reason and emotion in moral judgment; how psychology and normative ethics intertwine; consciousness and agency; and theory of the mind.

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28 Searching for Universals without Making Problematic Imperialistic Assumptions

Abstract: There is a great temptation to solve all the international communication ethical problems in one shot – to create a sort of a “theory of everything” that would not only explain but also help to solve all those mysteries and riddles globally. No wonder that it is among Western scholars, mostly trained in the positivistic paradigm, such a theory actually emerged. It is called universalism. But there appeared a substantial group of communication scholars and practitioners who strongly disagreed with the universalists’ ideas – the internationalists. And this is where an epic debate between these two perspectives started. This chapter considers in great detail this theoretical argument as well as some real-world practical applications of this dispute. At the end of this piece the author highlights two possible approaches toward international communication ethics that could help us talk about moral issues without making problematic imperialistic assumptions. They are the so called “weak” approach to moral theory and the robust relativism perspective. Also at the end, this chapter highlights the importance of education for instilling into the future international communication practitioners the importance of ethics and the universal respect for different cultures all over the world.

Keywords: international communication, communication ethics, ethics theory, universalism, relativism, international journalism, international public relations, universal moral values

This volume makes an ambitious but extremely necessary attempt at conceptualizing and contemplating the role of ethics in the contemporary fields of communication and media. By this point the volume’s reader has already been thoroughly familiarized with main ethical concepts, ideas, problems and even suggested solutions currently circulating in these fields. It is indeed a global mesh of ethical dilemmas, puzzles, challenges, and conundrums. And as always in such situations, there is a great temptation to solve all of them in one shot – to create a sort of a “theory of everything” that would not only explain but also help to solve all those mysteries and riddles globally. Ideally, it is supposed to be something similar to the “M” or string theories in physics. Such a science-like approach is very popular among Western scholars who are trained primarily in positivistic traditions. No wonder that it is in that part of the world such a theory actually emerged. It is called *universalism*. That approach, in the best traditions of West European Renaissance and Enlightenment, proclaims a series of very simple concepts and rules that, if followed universally, should lead to a universal happiness and harmony.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-028>

But all of a sudden there appeared a substantial group of communication scholars and practitioners who strongly disagreed with the universalists' ideas. For many it came as a shock: Who could disagree with a theory which is based on such "self-evident" ideas that all human beings are the same – all are supposed to have two arms and two legs, all are "created equal," and all deserve "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness"? And the usual conclusion followed: They must be really evil people. And the problem is that this is where usually the entire "intellectual" debate ends. But let's try, nevertheless, to at least make an attempt at understanding those "evil" people and seeing how their logic is different from the one of universalists.

1 Theoretical debate

The main problem that underlies ethical issues in global and international communication is that the very notion of ethics is closely related to the concept of culture. But culture is not simply a collection of funny customs or a weird way of dressing. Culture is a complex and deeply seeded psychological structure that runs the lives of millions of people who share similar history, language, physical environment, religious beliefs, etc. There are different definitions of culture, but the two chosen for the purpose of this work come from books written by Glen Fisher – an American international relations practitioner and educator. He writes that culture is "the human being's unique way of coping with the environment (both physical and social) and surviving" (Fisher 1997: 44). He also defines culture as "a pretested design, a store of knowledge and an entire system of coping skills that has been crafted by humans who have gone before, a design that has been socially created, tested, and shared, and one that can be transmitted to the child" (Fisher 1997: 44). That is, culture allows people to survive, and when we trample somebody's culture, we threaten the very survival of their kind. The reaction will be swift and brutal. Consequently, any type of simplistic approach to cultural variables is dangerous and counter-productive. For example, just saying that all people are "created equal," and all deserve "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" is to say exactly nothing because in different cultures the ideas of equality, life, freedom and happiness have different meanings and interpretations.

But the problem is that many communication scholars and practitioners do not understand (or don't want to understand) such differences and use their own reasoning while dealing with international ethics issues. For example, they argue that if you ask people all over the world whether they want freedom, democracy, fairness, and long happy life – everybody would say "yes." Consequently, these values are proclaimed to be universal. Those people who apply this type of approach are called, as you can probably guess, *universalists*.

Indeed, it is very difficult to argue that, probably, everybody in the world would really respond to such a question positively. But representatives of every nation

would mean different things while answering this question. The main problem is that “freedom,” “fairness,” “democracy,” “respect for human life” are not values themselves but simply terms, words – or even better, *labels* representing different things for different nations. We can always find in a dictionary a linguistic label – a set of symbols and sounds – that is used by the linguists and interpreters to represent in one language something found in another one. But no dictionary in the world would explain us what this nation actually means when they use this term within their culture and how close their understanding of this linguistic label is to ours. Consequently, when the universalists proclaim the universality of values, indeed, they proclaim nothing more than some relative universality of labels (Nikolaev 2007: 255). And each culture has its own interpretation of these labels.

But the universalists respond to this type of reasoning with their own arguments. They believe that, “Indeed, there are constants in most fundamental human values. Also, there are basic concepts of good and evil that transcend cultural boundaries” (Kruckeberg 1996: 89). “It is easy to assume that if there are any moral truths, they must be timelessly true, perhaps because morality tends to present itself as universalizable” (Lear 1984: 165). That is, “the radical universalists give absolute priority to demands of the cosmopolitan moral community over other perceived lower moral communities” (Kruckeberg 1996: 85; see also Donnelly 1989). That is why universalism is mostly a Western type of culture phenomenon.

But people from other (non-Western) cultures may disagree: “When ... philosophers and social scientists talk so uncritically about the universality of moral beliefs, what they are doing is ignoring the cultural meanings embedded in foreign practices and beliefs and substituting their own, more familiar ones” (McDonald 1986: 146–147).

It is important to note, at the same time, that not everybody in the West is a universalist. There is a strong group of international communication practitioners and scholars that believes that “it is dangerous to establish one mode of practice as the norm and thereby label all other practices as deviant” (Roth, Hunt, Stavropoulos, and Babik 1996: 152). These people are called *internationalists* (Nikolaev 2007: chapter 8). For example, Donaldson argues that simply transferring one’s values into the international arena is a “recipe for error and cultural arrogance” (Donaldson 1989: 12). These people conduct a spirited debate with the universalists trying to refute their main arguments. For example, to the universalists’ argument that “if there are any moral truths, they must be timelessly true, perhaps because morality tends to present itself as universalizable” (Lear 1984: 165), the internationalists respond that “history strongly suggests that someday we will view some of our present practices as ethically flawed ... [one] should not automatically assume that he or she understands another society’s practices well enough to criticize them, let alone attempt to change them” (Jaksa and Pritchard 1994: 19). Indeed, slavery and racial segregation used to be a norm of the American society – now we consider them immoral and unethical. Who knows how the future will change our current beliefs. Maybe in two hundred years the

ideas we are now ready to die for – those “timeless truths” – will be also considered immoral and unethical (Nikolaev 2007: chapter 8).

It is a little bit unclear from the universalist literature who is going to be the judge in difficult ethical situations – that is, who is going to interpret what constitutes those “timeless truths.” But from the recent rush of “humanitarian” interventions and “democratization” wars it is quite obvious that representatives of Western cultures mostly took upon themselves this difficult job. For them the answer was clear – they possess the ultimate and universal knowledge of what those truths are. They just knew from the depth of their hearts that what they believed in was universally true and the only moral way to live.

In response, internationalists argue that what the universalists are doing is substituting the whole psychological structure of another culture with their own cultural projections and continuing to comfortably operate in this environment truly believing at the same time that they understand what the other side is supposed to think.

It seems like the whole issue could be solved through a process of intellectual debate and open exchange of opinions, certainly, under the condition of mutual respect. But the universalists say that “if we have to respect the rationality and autonomy of every culture, then it turns out that there is one culture whose rationality and autonomy we cannot respect – our own” (Kruckeberg 1996: 86). The internationalists respond that it is a little bit unclear how respect for other cultures leads to disrespect of one’s own. It would logically seem to be the other way around, if you respect other cultures – you can count on reciprocal respect of your culture by the others. If every culture is special, you can be proud of your culture as being also special and unique. Once, an undergraduate student wrote in his final paper in one of my international communication classes: “Successful [cultural] immersion does not come at the expense of one’s own background, but rather functions as an important complement to it.” It is quite amazing how an 18-year-old easily understands something that many professors and diplomats manage to miss.

Internationalists also say that universalists don’t understand that “an ethos or way of customary thinking is aligned with some degree of cultural uniqueness” (Fisher 1997: 168). That is, moral standards are quite unique for each culture. And even most of what they call basic human perceptions – such as human rights – can be strongly skewed: “[as to] the perception of threat, human rights, or appeals to world opinion, it frequently turns out that assumptions held in one country regarding these matters are not matched in another” (Fisher 1997: 1–2). For instance, the American ethos is considered only “superficially egalitarian” (Hodge 2000: 50) and, consequently, not applicable to international human rights issues by many nations.

The universalists keep arguing that there is a “consensus” on the moral positions that underlie the notion of “virtue” (Kruckeberg 1996: 89; see also Donnelly 1989: 121–122). But internationalists reply that this so-called consensus exists among a very small group of people who share the same ideology – the white, Anglo-Saxon protestant-Christian ideology – a far cry from a universal point of view.

Certainly, the issue of the source of morals and ethical standards is one of the main theoretical and philosophical problems that have to be solved. Universalists have never been able to explain where their universal standards come from. The only thing they say is “There must be something.” Unfortunately, this is not an argument – at least not a valid philosophical argument. They could have claimed a supreme being as the source, but many of them are atheists and argue from the point of view of the separation of religious and societal matters. In general the Western scientific tradition does not usually allow to use religious grounds for scholarly theories. Then, they go to Kant. But, sadly enough, they often misinterpret him.¹

Consequently, the universalists argue that such Western-civilization documents as the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), or the European Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000) can serve as the formal sources for the concept of the universal values. They say that everybody in the world seems to agree with those documents. But the key word here is *seems* because, as it was explained above, people agree with *labels* contained in those documents but *not* with their interpretations. But the internationalists understand that for people from different parts of the world such labels as *freedom*, *democracy*, *human life*, *family* have absolutely different, very often opposite meanings. Without this simple understanding, we are not only dangerously close to chauvinism and nazism (the idea of national superiority); we are also dangerously close to business and political failure. That is, extreme universalism can be called *ethical labelism* and, actually, it has little to do with honoring all-human values but indeed simply argues in favor of imposing certain *interpretations* of those values on the rest of the world.²

It may be possible to create what can be called a general protocol of moral understanding or simply primitive ethical guidelines for separate culture groups – such as, for example, the Protestant Anglo-Saxon culture group, or the North-Mediterranean or Catholic South-European culture group, or Orthodox Christian East European culture group. But even in these cases it is quite clear that they will be extremely difficult to implement, especially when politics or other national interests come into play. In general, internationalists argue that every international communicator “must accept that all civilizations have the same right to exist, the same freedom to express themselves, and the same liberty to order their society guided by their own *moral* vision. Moreover, all the people of the world have the right and freedom to disagree ...” (Sardar and Davies 2002: 169).

It is imperative to make an important note here. Certainly, there are some practices that, probably, most people on Earth would find appalling and repulsive – such

¹ How the famous Kant’s universal moral argument is misrepresented in the universalist literature is explained in Nikolaev 2011: 246.

² For more detailed discussion of the notion of human rights in the context of international communication, please, refer to Nikolaev 2008: 255–273.

as violence against women or child labor. But we have to remember two things. First of all, practically all of those practices are rooted in economic circumstances (not in cultural characteristics) and as those circumstances change, they change as well. That is, the best way to fight them is not by force, threats, or condescending and patronizing moral lectures, but by economic aid and development. Secondly, as history often shows, countries tend to develop on their own toward a better humanitarian situation as time goes on. Certainly, they may be moving much slower than we would want them to, but it is important to be patient here. Any excessive pressure usually creates a boomerang effect – accusations of cultural imperialism and support for more extreme traditional ways of doing things. So, the best way to promote change is education and personal example. But for this we ourselves have to be flawless and serve as models for the future. But how can we be such models if we ourselves often disrespect other cultures, choose ignorance and arrogance over education and understanding, and often use threats and violence to solve problems? We have to learn how to understand others better, and only then international communication will be much easier.

That is, cultures are not static. They develop and evolve. But they can do it *only* at their own pace and on their own terms. Trying to tie social and economic problems to cultural characteristics of different nations has a definite racist undertone. After all, all cultures went through historical periods when they had in some shape or form slavery, child labor, women's rights problems, etc. And those countries that are experiencing something like that now, are just at a different stage of their historical journey. They don't need cultural or military intervention to develop. They don't need help in this respect. They will be fine.

And many of these non-universalist principles were reflected in a document adopted in Moscow in April 2006. The Universal Congress of the Russian Nation adopted a text called the *Declaration of Rights and Dignity of a Human Being*. In that declaration, the Russians clearly broke with the Western tradition and notion of human rights. To increase the understanding of their position on that notion the Russians officially proclaimed that they did not subscribe to the Western idea of what basic human values are and claimed their own vision. In that document they say that the West separated morality from human rights. Human rights are a set of official political documents and are rooted rather in civil law than in morality. They also say that humans have freedom of choice but they are also imperfect. That is, complete freedom means freedom to pursue wickedness and depravity. They also make a difference between the *value of human life* and the *dignity of a human being*. "The value is given, dignity is acquired"³

³ It is important to understand here that *dignity* does not mean in this particular case *worthiness* or *value*. It has rather a social meaning: Who receives the right of voice in the society and whose opinions are supposed to be respected and, consequently, heeded. Such social respect (or *dignity*) in this case is supposed to be earned or *acquired* through a strive for *good*. It is not inherent in the mere existence of a human being.

(Declaration of Rights and Dignity 2006). This differs from the Western notion where dignity is inbuilt in all human beings as a birth right. In the Russian sense, dignity must be earned.⁴ That is, according to the Russian idea of human rights, there is only right for good and there is no right for evil. Certainly, they define *good* and *evil* according to their own standards, but they also claim their right to do so.

They, for example, consider the European prohibition against wearing any religious symbols to public schools a violation of basic human rights. They would always ask: “And what, the freedom of religion is not a human right?” They will certainly never consider insulting Muslims with newspaper caricatures, and such cartoons for them would be an example of an immoral communicational behavior. In their opinion, this behavior cannot be ethical because it is insulting and degrading – that is bad and, consequently, immoral. And there is no freedom for bad and immoral behaviors. And this is really a radical break from the official Western ethics.

This document shows that more and more nations want to show their philosophical disagreement with the universalists’ *interpretations* of the notion of the “universal human rights.” Unwise applications of such misinterpreted concepts to a foreign soil may have disastrous consequences. For example, applying the Western notion of *freedom* to other cultures can be extremely destructive: “This notion of ‘freedom’ – or more appropriately, libertarian individualism which promotes every individual’s potential for fulfillment, ... the withdrawal of all collective, communal and social responsibility – undermines everything that indigenous cultures, traditions and history stand for” (Sardar and Davies 2002: 125). The ideology of *ethical* universalism “defines what is democracy, justice, freedom; what are human rights and what is multiculturalism; ... In short, what it means to be human. The rest of the world ... must simply accept these definitions” This ideology “defines human rights as it wishes, then uses emotive language of human rights as a stick to beat any country that does not fall in line ...” (Sardar and Davies 2002: 201–202). *Internationalism*, on the other hand, allows for non-totalitarian and non-imperialist interpretations. It avoids the propagandistic black-and-white picture of this world. It professes the humanitarian and humanistic approach of serious morality-oriented contemplation and deep self-analysis.

2 Some practical applications and “real life” aspects

One of the most problematic areas in the field of international communication ethics is the problem of *knowledge base* – the information that people receive and have when they make ethical decisions. Humans cannot make any type of decisions,

⁴ The English translation of the text of the Declaration can be found in Nikolaev 2011: 256–257.

and especially ethical, when they have zero bits of information. It means that the decisions we make almost excessively depend on the information we get. But with the prevalence in the contemporary world of private media conglomerates – almost all the information we receive is, to put it mildly, heavily distorted. There were quite a few recent cases when information distributed in the West about non-Western events was practically completely false. We are talking about such events as the 1999 Kosovo problem, the 2008 Chinese Tibet events, the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, and the current events in Ukraine.⁵ Can in this case people be expected to be able to come to correct ethical decisions? The answer is an emphatic *No*. That is, they are deprived of *any* ability to make *any* type of ethical calls. So, in this case, does it make any sense even to talk about ethical decisions in terms of international communication?

The answer is two-fold – yes and no. The answer is the emphatic *No* if we are talking about decisions made based on the information provided to us by the contemporary propaganda machinery that some people idealistically call the media. But answer is *Yes* (although non-emphatic) if the decision is based on a deeper knowledge of the issue. That is, it seems that education is the answer. Education in all the respects – culture, history, religion, language (especially language – so that people could read the original sources). But this education is supposed to be real – not distorted by propaganda.

We have to be able to teach people how to make ethical decisions at the international level. This is our only hope. But ethics cannot be taught from the point of view of universalism. In this case, everybody proclaims their version of morality universal, and a war of all-against-all breaks out. On the other hand, the *internationalist* approach is clear and effective. The origins of ethical standards are clear – culture, history, religion, environment. And there is only one simple universal principle inbuilt in it – a healthy *respect* for every nation's way of life. Only in this case such values as *diversity*, *fairness*, *equality*, and the *freedom* to lead the life the way people see fit for their society will be completely realized.

It is also very important to clarify that we are not arguing against moral deliberations in the public sphere. Every nation on earth has to engage in such deliberations while making difficult decisions or facing complex ethical dilemmas. It is extremely important because this is what makes (and keeps) us human. But we have to be very careful while carrying such deliberations across border and civilization lines. It may be possible to do so within the limits of separate culture groups – such as, for

⁵ An excellent example of the Western media lies would be a 2015 propaganda film produced by a German TV channel ZDF called *Machtmensch Putin* ['Putin – the man of power'] where German propagandists hired Russian unemployed people and paid them to play the roles of "Russian mercenaries" fighting in eastern Ukraine. They simply made up stories that never happened but sold that as a "documentary." That created some ethical outcry event among German journalists. Another example is when the Sky News channel paid Alexander Agapov (a Russian actor) to play a "Russian mercenary fighting in Syria." Those lies were also sold to the public as a documentary. Obviously, lying is not considered to be unethical by Western journalists when it come to the Russians or the Chinese.

example, the Protestant Anglo-Saxon culture group, or the North-Mediterranean or Catholic South-European culture group, or Orthodox Christian East European culture group. But even in this case it is quite clear that ethical considerations may and will be distorted by politics, economics and other national interests.

So, can we not discuss ethical issues at the cross-national and cross-civilizational level at all? The answer is *probably yes if* we are extremely careful, respectful and delicate. Another *if* is if we establish at least a moderately-decent system of knowledge-base formation – more or less objective media systems. And finally, if we educate people properly about other cultures, nations, and civilizations. But even in this case we will probably be mostly preaching to the choir – discussing *our own* position with *our own* people on something happening elsewhere (hopefully, doing all this without lies, phobias, and propaganda). But this is all we can do – to carefully *discuss* it. We cannot impose, demand, require, or criticize anything. We must respect the right of other cultures' ethical systems to exist, knowing that they will engage in their own moral deliberations within their national and cultural confines. We must understand that other people's ethical systems are equal to ours and as vital to them as ours to us. Otherwise, we are getting dangerously close to colonialism, imperialism, racism, and chauvinism because, whatever noble motives people may claim – saying that somebody's morals are worse than your own *is* chauvinism.

3 What may all this mean?

It is a very difficult task to make sense out of everything covered above. The incredible constellation of factors interacting with each other – culture, ethics, politics, philosophy, etc. – makes the entire debate extremely complex. For example, there is an argument that, to solve the international communication ethics conundrum, we just have to separate two types of diversity – cultural diversity is good but moral diversity is bad. But there are at least two problems with this position. First, is it possible to separate culture and morality? Is there a culture without morality and morality without culture? Considering culture without morality is like considering a car without its engine. And this is why Clifford Christians' cultural pluralism framework seems a little bit misguided because it is impossible to divorce culture with morality and ethics. They are synonyms.

The second and closely-related question is about the origins of morality. If morals are culturally-derived, then these two concepts can be theoretically equated. If not, then – What is the source of morals? One obvious answer is a supreme being (some call it God). But this answer would be appropriate only for theocratic societies. But does it mean that secular societies have no moral ground to claim at all? What would the other answer be?

Then, there is the problem of narrative. That is, when international communicators want to make an ethical point they usually do not use any type of morally

normative language but instead they tell beautiful stories with some moral element inbuilt in them. It was so, for example, when aesthetically-appealing myths of liberation and struggle for freedom replaced the truth in the cases of Kosovo or Ukraine in some Western media. That is, Zygmunt Bauman (1993: 178–179) seems to be right when he uses Nietzsche’s perspective that ethics in postmodern times has been replaced by aesthetics. Such a type of replacement usually is used as a method of avoiding ethical issues all together. Like any standards, ethical standards can be applied only to the matters of facts but not to the matters of aesthetics that remain largely interpretive. Nobody in his or her right mind would ever challenge ethically a fairy tale. In this case basic human emotions of, for example, fear or compassion are used to cover factual distortions. If terrorists are called “freedom fighters” how it was done in many cases (Kosovo, Afghanistan, Syria), a journalist may always say that he or she just sees this situation in this way.

To solve the problem of international communication ethics many scholars suggested the idea of existence of some universal human values or *protonorms*. The value of human life is usually the main one they highlight. But a critical thinker could suggest the following point of view. The problem is that each culture treats human life differently, assigns different value to it. It is the issue of the meaning of life and the purpose of life.⁶ Cultures create their own approaches to this issue and definitely order their political institutions and social structures *differently* in this respect (abortion, capital punishment, the use of deadly force by the police officers, the rules of engagement for the military, the notion of “civilian collateral damage”, the idea of what terrorism is, kamikaze or suicide bombers, etc.). It is not that nobody wants to die. It is how we define and conceptualize life and death for ourselves and others (communication across the cultures). That is even if we assume that there are universals out there – we are talking not about their very existence but about communicating them to others. This is where the problem occurs.

It seems like the idea of some overarching norms (or *protonorms*) does not answer the questions of the differences in cultural interpretations and inter-cultural transmissions. It is not even clear in the first place whether those universal norms are primordial or culturally-derived and defined, and what they have to do with communication ethics in general.

In general, there are some problems with counterposing the process of discovering moral values to constructionism. First, even if we discover biological basics for ethics – then, we have to interpret, define, and communicate them. This is where *communication* problems start. Secondly, there are different types of values – *first-order* values (primordial, biological) and *second-order* ones (purely socially-constructed). And it depends on which type of values we are dealing with. We can also *discover* second-order values that have been previously constructed anyway. And it seems that

⁶ Please, see the Introduction part in Nikolaev 2011.

exactly this type of values is of main interest for communication scholars – values like freedom, democracy, etc.

But some scholars say that it will not be that difficult to translate, so to speak, those values into other peoples' ethical languages (metaphorically speaking). But it is not exactly so. A lot of meanings and emotions are lost in translation. And this *translation error*, this deviation is exactly our subject of inquiry – the area where communication fails is translating from the ethical language of one nation to another. The question is: Why does this happen if we are so common and it is so easy? Even if we assume that there are no translation problems with so called *natural* (discovered) norms (which is by itself a very problematic assumption), still what are we going to do with *constructed* values? This is where communication problems are inevitable. And the question of "What to do with them?" is still unanswered. That is, the idea of universal natural norms does not solve the communication problem. Cultures first make norms out of protonorms (the first-order effect). And the deviations are already quite significant. Then, they have to communicate those norms (not protonorms) to the members of their own and other societies (the second order – communicational effect). And this is where communication ethics problems arise. Besides that, the idea of protonorms is something so primordial that borders with biological. So, it cannot deal properly with morality. There is no biological morality. Sex is not immoral by itself. Predators in the animal kingdom are not immoral creatures, but human predators are.

There is an interesting theoretical suggestion to confine cultural relativism to the area of epistemology and then to try to sort out all the communication ethics issues somehow separately. But communication is an epistemological phenomenon. We may even call it not *epistemological* but *communicational* dimension which is basically the same. We do not communicate values themselves (as it was already explained above) – we communicate ideas about them, values' definitions and explanations, as well as their descriptions. Values by themselves are not even communicable. When we *communicate* values to each other – this is where errors occur. Everybody knows that killing people for fun or profit is wrong. We are not talking about that. But when we communicate this very idea – this is where problems start. Now we have to communicate or define what killing, fun, or profit mean. Then we say: "We did not kill them – it was collateral damage." Stealing a loaf of bread is stealing for profit, stealing a country from its residents because of its huge oil reserves – is called liberation. This is what we are interested in – the *epistemological* aspect, the issue of definitions and knowledge-base formation. That is, Clifford Christians (2011: 32) is right when he writes that "Cultural relativism ought to remain in the epistemological realm. In so doing it serves as a deterrent to ethnocentrism and promotes cultural diversity, that is, a comprehensive and inclusive understanding of our humanness." It is a correct statement if we take into account that *epistemological* means *communicational*.

Another point that some scholars sometimes make is that in their opinion relativism somehow facilitates tyranny but universalism is conducive to democratic processes. That is, relativism produces conformity and totalitarianism as well as constrains *moral*

reform while universalism creates a more free-thinking environment, which can help people find some ways for moral improvement somewhere out there in the universal moral domain. Everything here seems to be turned upside-down. Isn't that the universalist position that everyone must obey the same norms – to have the same definitions of good and evil – and to diverge from those norms is to act immorally? That is, the same norms are established for everybody and one must conform. Isn't this the definition of totalitarianism? And again, it is universalism that insists on the prerogatives of a nation, caste, religion, or tribe only because they managed to monopolize for political purposes the definition of good and evil and to proclaim it universal. This position also completely ignores the fact that cultures naturally evolve on their own. So, the *moral reform* will eventually come as a product of natural cultural evolution. And who says that the source for moral improvement must necessarily lie outside of one's own society, in some set of external moral standards? And if yes, where shall one look for them?

There is another interesting argument as to why, according to some, the non-universalist view of ethics gives rise to totalitarianism and, therefore, is dangerous – because it is rational (as opposed, one can only assume, to *idealistic* and safe universalism). It seems like a rather arbitrary assumption. It is not exactly clear how they come up with this more than debatable equation. But even if we assume that they are correct (just for the sake of argument): Isn't that exactly the other way around? Ethical idealism is much more prone to totalitarianism because people may push for *ideals* regardless of the real life consequences. At the same time, any rationalist will reject any philosophical ideas that prove harmful and dangerous in real life. Whether it is reckless spreading of democracy or communism, regardless of cost and consequences – it is ideological *idealism* (not rationalism) that is quite perilous. Die-hard believers (idealists) seem to be the most dangerous people – the fanatics.

But the ultimate and widely-used argument against the nonuniversalist view of ethics is that it produces arbitrary definitions of good and bad. It seems like quite a superficial argument. If one looks deeper into the internationalists' argument he or she will see that the definitions of good and bad are rooted in cultural, sociological, anthropological, historical and other elements of each society. And they have to be accepted by all (or almost all) the members of that culture. That is why they cannot be completely arbitrary. Secondly, any definition is to some extent arbitrary because we are not talking about values themselves but about their interpretations by human beings. So, we have to separate in every communicative act values themselves from their interpretations and definitions.

4 Rejection of the dichotomy and robust relativism

All the above shows how complex and difficult the international communication ethics debate has been. So, is there any way we could find a solution to this complex

theoretical dilemma? Actually, there have been quite interesting, creative, and successful attempts at solving the universalists-vs.-relativist debate.

Since the late 1980s some theorists have been doing some interesting work trying to get away from the purely theoretical and completely detached from reality *right-or-wrong* dichotomous approach to ethics. They realized a simple thing: Moral philosophy itself as a field appeared only because from the beginning of time people had been puzzled by specific morality-related situations and wanted to create a system to solve such problems. It means that moral philosophy originated from practice (practical problems) and cannot be rationally divorced from it. Therefore, some scholars believe that “our ethics theorizing should be driven by, or at least correspond to, practice. A practicedriven approach is inductive, not deductive. It does not work (only) from first principles or axioms, but from a more pragmatic outlook of, ‘we have problems to solve and the solutions will have real impact on real people’” (Meyers 2016: 203).

Those theorists also realized the importance of the already mentioned earlier in this work concept of *knowledge base* (or simply speaking *facts*) for ethical decision making. The quality of such decisions heavily depends on the quality of information we have: “Furthermore, because any proposed solutions are rooted in the available and known facts, one will very rarely be able to say that those solutions can be affirmed with certainty. That is, the practice sensibility assumes there could be other relevant facts to which one does not have access, facts that might fundamentally change the conclusions” (Meyers 2016: 203).

Under these conditions – different situations, different knowledge bases – any type of *a priori purely* theory-based moral solutions seems at least inappropriate if not impossible. But still, humans always have had a need for analyzing and generalizing things in such a way that we could use that for guidance for our future actions – that is for *theorizing*. We create theories to be able to quickly find, as we believe, effective solutions to emerging problems. Sometimes it makes our lives miserable (because we oversimplify things) but sometimes it works, and that reinforces our trust in the miraculous and all-powerful character of the theory. Consequently, it would be naïve to expect that people will stop trying to create moral theories when there are so many ethical problem surrounding us every day. Therefore, in order to avoid simplistic and primitive generalizations some new-age moral theorists suggested new approaches to this field.

For example, Nicholas Fotion suggests something he calls a “weak” approach to moral theory (Fotion, 2014). He rejects the arrogant “my way or highway” approach of most theorists who believe that their theories are just correct. Instead he accepts the possibility that a theory may be imperfect or even partly wrong. “Fotion recommends, by contrast, that we should instead move away from certainty and toward plausibility” (Meyers 2016: 202). To replace so called “hegemonic” moral theories Fotion recommends: “Instead of thinking that one has solved ethics theory, one instead adopts something along the lines of: This model seems plausible and good

enough for now; it, or some key parts of it, may turn out to be accurate, but – just as with most of science – one has to be open to disconfirmation, from either or both empiricist and rationalist quarters” (Meyers 2016: 201). This approach in theory contradicts the universalists “Because they believe that they have the right answer in hand, ... there is no need to look sympathetically at what others are saying” (Fotion, 2014, p. 318).

All this basically means that when we think about ethics everything depends on one’s *knowledge base* and the quality of information one has. But equally important is the moral theoretical framework that we have while thinking about ethics. However, this framework “is good enough” for now, “in the meantime” (Meyers 2016: 202) because we are never aware of all the facts out there, of all the possible alternative theories, or all the plausible disconfirmations coming our way in the future. Therefore, theoretically there may be more than one truth when it comes to theorizing in the field of ethics. This is exactly what the concept of *robust relativism* is affirming. Its creator – Joseph Margolis – suggests that absolute majority of social phenomena cannot be simply considered as good or bad (for reasons mentioned above). There may be other judgment values assigned to them:

Grant only that a putatively relativistic set of judgments lacks truth-values (true and false) but takes values of other sorts or takes “truth-values” other than true and false. For example, if judgments are said to be probable (on the evidence) rather than true, then it is quite possible that judgments otherwise incompatible – as true or false – are equiprobable (on the evidence). (Margolis 1987: 484)

That is here, pretty much like Fotion and Meyers, Margolis believes that based on the practice-oriented approach (“on the evidence”) moral judgements can take on plausible or “probable” values rather than the absolute values of *right* and *wrong*.

This point of view removes the main philosophical problem of relativism – that relativists in their theories still have to claim some absolutes that are a sort of universal. That is, rephrasing Margolis (1987: 485), we can say that in the context of ethics or of international communication “there are *at least* three distinct ranges of judgment that may be strongly defended as tolerating or even *requiring* a relativistic construction” [emphasis added].

According to Margolis (1987: 485), *robust relativism* is

a relativism that admits some range of *competing* claims, claims for which there are at least minimal grounds justifying the joint application of competing principles – hence, that admits not only incompatible judgments relative to any particular principle but also what may be called “incongruent” judgments, judgments that construed in terms of truth and falsity would be incompatible *and* that involve the use of predicates jointly accessible to competing principles.

Again, we admit those “ranges of competing claims” because we see them actually competing in some type of social practice within the sum of facts that we currently have, and those claims can be “justified” by theories that are “good enough for now”.

As a result, there are certain consequences that robust relativism would entail:

(1) the rejection of skepticism and universalism for a given set of judgments; (2) the provision that such a set of judgments takes values other than truth and falsity and includes incongruent judgments; (3) the rejection of cognitivism (entailed by [(2)], ...); (4) the admission of the joint relevance of competing principles in validating the ascriptions or appraisals in question (entailed by [(2)] ...). (Margolis 1987: 485)

That means that some judgment calls may merely be “*apt* rather than *true*” [original emphasis] (Sibley 1968 as cited in Margolis 1987: 487). Margolis (1987: 495) believes that such “a relativistic account is actually required” for “culturally emergent entities.” He writes that

culturally freighted phenomena are notoriously open to intentional quarrels, that is, to identification under alternative descriptions; and there is no obvious way in which to show that plural, non-converging, and otherwise incompatible characterizations of cultural items can be sorted as correct or incorrect in such a way that a relativistic account would be precluded. ... One has only to think of ideologies, ideals, schools of thought, traditions as well as the deep informality of the so called rules of language and of artistic creation (Margolis 1987: 495).

He thinks that “What is initially defective or incomplete, of course, is our understanding” of social phenomena and that “we cannot be certain that what is supplied by way of interpretation is really in principle descriptively available” in the life itself (Margolis 1987: 495). And since “we cannot be certain” – the “weak theory” approach seems to be more appropriate for theorizing about ethics than the “hegemonic” framework.

Robust relativism helps to defeat *moral cognitivism* (the point of view that suggests that moral pronouncements are apt for truth or falsity): “the possibility of defending *any* form of cognitivism (moral, aesthetic, or any other) with respect to the values appropriate to persons or to their characteristic work is radically undermined. Consequently, the prospects of avoiding a relativistic account of values (and of value judgments) ... is nearly nil” (Margolis 1987: 496).

Such frameworks as the *weak theory* approach and such theories as *robust relativism* are more moderate in nature than other currently existing models, concepts and systems. They are different from both *skepticism* (absence of any standards) and *moral cognitivism*. And they actually may help us to navigate the labyrinth of international ethical communication problems more assertively.

5 Is education the answer?

In this chapter, serious and unbiased education has been mentioned several times as a possible remedy to the international ethics conundrum. And a very good explanation

why and how it may be done can be found in the works of two Russian scholars – Svetlana Sablina and Bella Struminskaya (2011). They explored ethical problems encountered by European professors while teaching in Russia. Taking into account cultural difference, that situation was supposed to become a nightmare of ethical entanglements. But in practice everything turned out to be just fine. And when the researchers tried to answer the question “Why?” their results represented “a radical break from the canonical ethics of individual autonomy and responsibility” (Sablina and Struminskaya 2011: 217; see also Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 148–149). It turned out that the ethical codes that participants used to regulate their communication procedures were not *given* by any culture but *created* by communicators in the process. It takes life out of the claim that there is some kind of *given universal* ethical standards that must be followed because communication ethics turns out to be not *given* but *created* by communicators depending on cultures and contexts involved. It seems to be the most efficient way to communicate internationally. Sablina and Struminskaya (2011: 217–218) write:

Actors may have contrasting values but they are ready to justify the norms that were not internalized by them and were derived from the situation and were agreed upon. Communication is successful under the condition that every participant of action is involved in the formation of its conventional moral basis. ... The normative basis of the communicative action is formed during the communication process and is a result of a consensus of its participants. ... Success in international communication can be achieved as participants aim at forming more transparent ethical principles and adjust their actions accordingly.

Therefore, the authors believe that there is an urgent and absolutely necessary change that has to be made in the area of teaching international communication ethics. They emphasize

a need to revise and reform educational practices in order to accommodate new cultural dynamics. This important, necessary and timely pedagogical aim can be accomplished by *integrating* the teaching of communication skills and ethical considerations. ... The focus of attention during every training in international communication should, therefore, be the development of certain necessary skills – such as tolerance to cultural differences, mutual responsibility for decisions and actions, motivation toward critical self-reflection, and flexibility, rather than teaching students *the right ethical standards*. An important pedagogical guideline is the concept of moral development that emphasizes a gradual convergence between moral beliefs and moral actions of individuals. (Sablina and Struminskaya 2011: p. 218)

All this entails two major conclusions. The first of them is that real communication ethics is not *given* but *created* in the process itself. It means that it can be created only under certain conditions. One of them is that elements of ethical standards of all the cultures involved are usually combined in the final code. Consequently, a healthy respect for other moral codes is the main element of any international communication codes of ethics. This newly-*created* code must have such qualities as fairness,

equality, respect, and flexibility inbuilt into it. Therefore, statements such as “Our moral beliefs present themselves as basic truths about how human beings should act, but we are now supposed to respect incompatible moral beliefs By the standards of rationality available in our tribe ...: being forced to accept that alternative incompatible moral outlooks ... cannot help but undermine the confidence of reflective moral agents” (Lear 1984: 147) are unacceptable and harmful. But this is the main thesis of the universalist tribe.

The second conclusion may give us all some additional hope. In a world permeated with communication but also full of arrogance, ignorance, and almost zoological phobias (Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Americanism, Russophobia, Chinophobia, Iranophobia and so on) and also ruled by political and economic interests, many people see any discussion of international communication ethics as childish. They say that people of different nations will keep hating each other and spreading lies and rumors about each other intentionally or unintentionally, by malice or by ignorance. Unfortunately, partly they are correct. There is nothing we can do about malicious propaganda. Arguments like “shame on you” are not going to work on people who spread lies because of gut-ranching hatred toward others or because of their economic and political interests.

But there is a lot what we *can* do for people who violate international ethics because of ignorance, a mere lack of knowledge about others. Often those people are simply deceived by malicious propaganda. And what we can do is to dispel those harmful myths and falsehoods. The years of teaching experience of the author of this chapter show that a short 10-week course is enough to dramatically change students’ outlook on this world and to in-build into them such values as fairness, equality, respect, and flexibility. All this is done as a part of a course called International Communication. But a simple presence of a course like that is not going to solve the problem of ignorance. Unfortunately, many professors and text-book writers cannot overcome their own biases and phobias. Such courses can be useful only if professors teach them honestly – explaining the way things actually are but not the way some want them to be. The material covered in such courses is supposed to be based on actual knowledge, not on stereotypes and misconceptions about other nations. Only in this case we can get out of education extraordinarily interesting insights into other nations’ mindsets and use those insights while forming our communicational strategies, tactics, methods, and approaches.⁷

It seems like education is our only answer to the problem of international communication ethics. Any universalist artificially-implanted alien ethical code, if installed, will ultimately be rejected as a foreign object by the moral body of another culture. But the internationalist approach, as it was described above, can be useful. People

⁷ Some ideas as to how to structure such courses can be found in Nikolaev 2007: 281–285.

can learn how to understand each other and how to form a mutually-acceptable code of ethics in the process of communication.

But ultimately it would be appropriate to end this chapter by a brilliant quote by Sardar and Davies (2002: 205–206):

That all are created equal is both a “self evident” truth and meaningless if it remains “self evident” rather than explored, questioned and permitted to express differences and diversity. All people are indeed created equal, but live with the actual inheritance of human inequalities, the legacy of real history. Equality of opportunity, equal right to exercise the liberty to be themselves, equal freedom to define and live out their beliefs as they understand them, requires more than just treating everyone the same. The libertarian rhetoric of equal rights and self evident equal creation can be as doctrinaire, illiberal, intolerant and inequitable as any ideological system.

Let’s just agree that everything “self-evident” is indeed meaningless if it is not explored and carefully examined. Therefore, let’s keep exploring and examining “self-evident” issues unless we want all the important principles in our lives become really meaningless.

Further readings

Moral and ethical standards in all cultures to a large extent are transmitted through stories. This is what makes them easily digestible by children and general population. In this volume the process of replacing facts with morality-laden narratives was also briefly discussed. This is one of the propaganda tools often used at the national as well as international levels. That is why the interrelationship of morality, rhetoric, and the overemphasis on narrative is a serious but somewhat underexplored problem in communication. That’s why over the last few decades this issue started to attract attention of some communication scholars.

For example, Michelle Condit (1994) offers an amazing study of the competing moral narratives through which the abortion controversy has been debated. Most importantly, there is a tendency among some communication scholars to emphasize narrative as a rhetorical form of argument (see, e.g., Poletta and Lee 2006; as well as McGee and Nelson 1985). In one prominent piece Walter Fisher (1984) contrasts story telling with reason giving, arguing that it is through story telling that values, emotions and morality enter public debate.

Also, the low ego involvement of the American public in international affairs both enables and constrains elite political actors. It gives rise to what has been called “image politics,” which allows all actors to cloak the positions they adopt in easily understood narratives and which likewise enables some actors to promote positions that are predominantly storytelling over substance (Vogel 1996: 20; Schell 1975; White 1982).

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<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466034-029>

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