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Primordial Issues in Communication Ethics

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In order to organize the primordial issues in communication ethics, and give them their correct scope and character, a standard typology should be useful. The study of ethics is normally divided into three parts: metaethics, normative ethics, and descriptive ethics.

Descriptive ethics reports on the moral behavior of specific persons or groups and studies the way ethical decision-making functions *de facto*. In terms of communication, descriptive ethics gives an account of failures and successes in journalism practice, locates the problems, and identifies specific dilemmas facing media workers. Metaethics addresses issues about normative theories and philosophically examines, among other things, the nature of the good and right, the problem of evil, and the validity of ethical theories. Normative ethics fuses actual morality with principles, concentrating on the justice or injustice of societies and institutions. Most broadly, normative ethics concerns the best ways for professionals to lead their lives and the principles to be promoted. Normative ethics seeks to establish norms and guidelines, not merely to describe details or deal with abstractions.

The normative category has received the greatest scholarly attention in media ethics, so five of the eight primordial issues presented below are from that domain: social justice, truth, non-violence, human dignity, and privacy. The need to retheorize classical theory and relativism are the two major issues in metaethics. Given the dramatic innovations in global media technology, instrumentalism is the premiere issue when conducting research into the morality of communication professionals and institutions.

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Metaethics

1 Moral theory

Ethical theory always needs attention, and with a special urgency today. The classical canon – centered on virtue or consequences or duty – has opened the pathway to sophisticated work in media ethics. However, a new generation of media ethics in the multicultural and transnational mode requires that we retheorize existing theory (see Christians, 2009). Rather than ethical theories rooted in rationalism that are rule-ordered and gendered masculine, beliefs and worldviews should be made more central in theory-making. Rather than a rule-based system, theory should empower the imagination to give us moral discernment and an inside perspective on reality. Even though we make an epistemologically acceptable move to more dynamic theory, a crucial challenge is whether it answers the question, "Why should I be moral?" This is a summary of the first primordial issue; what follows is an elaboration.

Presuppositional thinking

Mainstream ethical theory, grounded in rationalism, produces moral principles that are unconditioned by circumstances. For ethical rationalists, the truth of all legitimate claims about moral obligation can be settled by formally examining their logical structure. Humans act against moral obligations only if they are willing to be irrational.

This kind of media ethics, rooted in classical moral philosophy, is unidimensional. Autonomous moral agents are presumed to apply rules consistently and self-consciously to every choice. Through rational processes, basic rules of morality are created that everyone is obliged to follow and against which all actions can be evaluated. In communication ethics, neutral principles operate by the conventions of impartiality and formality. This is an ethics of moral reasoning that arranges principles in hierarchical fashion and rigorously follows logic in coming to conclusions. Journalism ethics that follows this approach, therefore, is based on standards and doctrines that guide professional practice. In mainstream professional ethics, codes of ethics are the typical format.

Utilitarianism is a single consideration theory, for example. It does not simply demand that we maximize general happiness, but renders irrelevant all other moral imperatives that are in conflict with it. Moral reasoning is equivalent to calculating the consequences for human happiness. Utilitarianism presumes there is one domain that determines what we ought morally to do. The exactness of this one-factor model is appealing, but gains its validity by leaving out whatever cannot be calculated. Kant is another example. He assimilated ethics into logic. Moral laws to be universally applicable must be free from inner contradiction. Through the mental calculus of willing an action to be universalized, imperatives emerge unconditioned by circumstances. Moral absolutes are identified in the same rational way that syllogisms are identified as valid or invalid.

A new generation of media ethics that is both intercultural and international needs to go beyond one-dimensional models by incorporating presuppositions

into its theories. Human beings are committed to presuppositions inescapably. All human knowledge must take something as given. A faith commitment is the condition through which human cognition universally is intelligible. Theories of morality do not arise from an objectivist rationalism, but from our fundamental beliefs about the world. Worldviews are the gyroscope around which our thinking and experience revolve. They are the home of our ultimate commitments at the core of our being. Worldviews give meaning to our consciousness. They represent a set of basic beliefs about human destiny. Presuppositions are therefore *sine qua non* in rethinking moral theory

Why be moral?

Even if we broaden the boundaries of our moral theory to include the presuppositional, does this retheorizing answer the question, "Why should I be moral?" When theoretical models center on decision-makers who are accountable to a principle, then why I should be moral is pertinent and answerable. However, when transnational and intercultural beliefs and values are the target and beginning point, the issue seems obscure and tenuous.

An inescapable contribution of classical theory is that they were serious about addressing the question, "Why be moral?" The only presuppositional theory that is acceptable is one that answers it also. The moral domain by its very character entails the question. Like a magnetic force, the good compels me as a moral agent. Should no such imperative exist, morality as a whole is incoherent. "Why should I be moral?" is understood not as a prudential question ("Why is morality in my interest?"), but as a question about justification: "Why should I accept the moral demand as a demand upon me?" (cf. Hare, 2001).

The virtue ethics of Aristotle and Confucius both assumed that moral obligations have authority from the community to which we belong. For Aristotle, the city is like a parent; it has made us what we are. Membership in a community reaches beyond our values and sentiments to engage our identity itself. To be true to ourselves, we have to acknowledge the authority of the moral demand our community instills into us.

Another alternative from the classics is to locate the authority of morality in human nature, specifically in the organic human inclinations. In this perspective, we can tell what is good for us by looking at what we are naturally inclined to act upon. Doing the good benefits our human flourishing. For Jeremy Bentham, for example, the chief good is satisfaction, and for all humans the source of their true happiness is experiencing pleasure and avoiding pain.

For Kant, reason demands moral action. It is the nature of reason to will universal law, and it demands this not only in theories of science, but in practical thinking about what we do. Hence, we ought to base morality on reason. Reason is my authority for acting morally.

If our motivation is only self-interest, psychoanalysis is needed, not morality. If I decide to seek a Provost's position because of my own career and without altruism, then the moral domain has no validity. Forty-six million Americans are without health

insurance. Why should I care about health care reform if it means higher rates or poorer quality for me? Politics or economics could explain my position – health care is currently out of control and providing it more extensively hurts my small business. Or politically, for the sake of our international reputation and attracting foreign investment, our country should be able to match or exceed national health care anywhere in the world.

Regarding the biological turn, why should I be held accountable if the moral arena is subsumed by sociobiology or neuroscience? James Q. Wilson's *The Moral Sense* (1993) faces the critique that morality and sense perception are two different domains. Morality is not like other human arenas, in this case, perception. I am reading Charles Taylor's *The Secular Age* and too preoccupied with it to lay it down. I feel a moral compulsion to attend a university workshop on Palestinian refugee camps, but decide in this instance to keep reading. But, I have no choice regarding perception. I'm at my desk and the desk exists. The moral sense is inescapable, but where is the moral demand in it?

For those of us committed to ethics, we insist on moral obligations as crucial, over the long term, to human action. It is obvious in family life that self interest, politics and economics do not exhaust our motivations. Regarding the environment, a vocabulary of moral obligation is taking shape that will help ensure social and cultural change. However, psychoanalytic, economic, and political explanations are so powerful that the moral domain is typically rendered impotent. Once again the urgent question – will a new generation of presuppositional theory be able to answer convincingly, "What should I be moral?" To be intellectually legitimate, resolving this issue is essential as media ethics theory is retheorized.

2 Relativism

Another premiere challenge in metaethics is relativism, and unless we deal with it philosophically, the future of the news media is limited (see Christians, 2009). Relativism is a longstanding problem since Friedrich Nietzsche made it inescapable. However, in this first decade of the twenty-first century, relativism has reached maturity, and has taken on a comprehensiveness that threatens our conceptual progress in media ethics.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Obviously relativism has been a prominent issue since the nineteenth century's Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). In his terms, in a world where God has died and everything lacks meaning, morality makes no sense. We live in an era beyond good and evil ([1886]1966). Since there is no transcendent answer to the why of human existence, we face the demise of moral interpretation altogether. For Nietzsche, morality had reached the end of the line. In its contemporary version, defending a good beyond the senses is not beneficent, but imperialism over the moral judgments of diverse communities.

For relativists in the Nietzschean tradition, the right and valid are only known in local space and native languages. Judgments of right and wrong are accepted as such by their adherents' internal criteria. Therefore, these concepts and propositions are considered to have no validity elsewhere. For cultural relativism, morality is a social product. Whatever the majority in a given culture approve is a social good. Since all cultures are presumed to be equal in principle, all value systems are equally valid. Cultural relativity now typically means moral relativism. Contrary to an ethnocentrism of judging other groups against a dominant Western model other cultures are not considered inferior only different.

All forms of public communication tend to exacerbate the problem of relativism – journalism's emphasis on particulars, for instance. Reporters work at the juncture of globalization and local identities – both of them happening simultaneously. They are caught in the contradictory trends of cultural homogeneity and resistance. The integration of globalization and ethnic self-consciousness is a major necessity. The news media's penchant for everyday affairs makes integration difficult. In their passion for ethnography, for diversity, for the local – media academics and practitioners typically allow cultural relativity to slide into philosophical relativism.

The preoccupation in communication studies with narrative usually leaves relativism unattended. Through stories we constitute ways of living in common. Moral commitments are embedded in the practices of particular social groups and they are communicated through a community's stories. However, narrative ethics is conflicted in its own terms about which value-driven stories ought to be valued. What in narrative itself distinguishes good stories from destructive ones? On what grounds precisely does narrative require fundamental changes in existing cultural and political practices? Because some customs are relative, it does not follow that all are relative. While there are disagreements over details, policies, and interpretations, these differences do not themselves mean that no moral judgments can be made about major historical events – The Holocaust, Stalinism, genital mutilation, the slave trade, apartheid in South Africa, and so forth. The challenge for journalism ethics in a global age is honoring cultural diversity, while simultaneously rejecting moral relativism.

When cultural pluralism slides into moral relativism, we usually have not faced up to the pernicious politics that insists on the prerogatives of a nation, caste, religion or tribe. Cultural relativism turned into a moral claim is disingenuous. If we argue that moral action depends on a society's norms, then "one must obey the norms of one's society and to diverge from those norms is to act immorally … Such a view promotes conformity and leaves no room for moral reform or improvement" (Velasquez *et al.*, 2009). Ordinarily social consensus does not indicate the wrongness of a society's practices and beliefs. While continuing to critique relativism on its own terms, another need in metaethics is defending the credibility of realism. A valid realism is the antidote to philosophical relativism, and the next section establishes its possibility.

Realism

Our creative ability works within the limits of a given animate order, creativity within a shared cosmos. People shape their own view of reality. This fact however, does not presume that reality as a whole is inherently formless until it is defined by human language. A natural world that exists as a given totality is the presupposition of historical existence. Reality is not merely raw material, but is ordered vertically and through an internal ordering among its parts. Some kinds are hierarchical, subspecies within species, and species within genus; but relations among humans are horizontal, that is, no inferior race to serve a superior one. This coherent whole is history's source, an intelligible order that makes history itself intelligible. From a realist perspective, we discover truths about the world that exist within it.

This is ontological realism, inscribed in our very humanness. It does not appeal to an objective sphere outside our subjectivity. Among human beings are common understandings entailed by their creatureliness as lingual beings. All human languages are intertranslatable. In fact, some human beings in all languages are bilingual. All languages enable their users to make abstractions, draw inferences, deduce and induce when solving problems. All human languages serve cultural formation, not merely social function. All humans know the distinction between raw food and cooked. Of major importance in our philosophical work is a legitimate realism on this side of Einstein, Freud, and Darwin, and realism grounded in human language qualifies.

In terms of ontological realism, norms can be embedded successfully within culture and history, East and West. As an indicator of its distinctiveness, the sociologist Robert Wuthnow (1987) argues that as the human species generates symbolic systems it maintains boundaries between moral norms and actual behavior. Through natural language, *homo sapiens* establishes the differences and similarities of people's worldviews. In an ironic twist on conventional skepticism, normative claims that presume realism are not a medieval remnant but the catalyst for innovation. Given the ambiguities within relativism itself, and the possibility of a constructive response through realism, theorizing in media ethics can move forward constructively.

Normative Ethics

3 Social justice

The bulk of the work in communication ethics is normative, where principles are established for media institutions and practitioners. Of the five normative principles requiring the most attention, justice is first. To insure the effectiveness of new media technologies for the long term, a number of moral issues have become transparent within the global information system. Some are new moral problems and others are being transformed. The centerpiece is social justice. Especially in these days of the information revolution, the venerable concept of justice should be at

the forefront of normative media ethics. Only a sophisticated view of social justice can respond adequately to the new world information order. Justice is the normative foundation on which to base regulatory standards and professional guidelines for the convergence of information and computer technologies (ICTs).

The major question for social justice as a primordial issue is accessibility. In terms of the principle of just distribution of products and services, media access ought to be allocated to everyone according to essential needs, regardless of income or geographical location. Comprehensive information ought to be assured to all parties without discrimination.

In contrast, the standard conception among privately owned media is allocating to each according to the ability to pay. The open marketplace of supply and demand determines who obtains the service. The assumption is that decisions about the consumers' money belong to them alone as a logical consequence of their right to exercise their own social values and property rights without coercion from others. From this perspective, media businesses are not considered charitable organizations and therefore have no obligation to subsidize the information poor.

An ethics of justice in which distribution is based on need defines fundamental human needs as those related to survival or subsistence. They are not frivolous wants or individual whims or desires. As a matter of fact, there is rather uniform agreement on a list of most human necessities – food, housing, clothing, safety, and medical care. If we cannot provide them for ourselves because of the limitations of our circumstances, they nonetheless remain as essential goods. Everyone is entitled without regard for individual success to that which permits them to live humanely.

The electronically convergent superworld cannot be envisioned except as a necessity. Media networks make the global economy run, they give us access to agricultural and health care information, they organize world trade, and they are the channels through which the United Nations and political discussion flow; through them, we monitor both war and peace. Therefore, as a necessity of life in a global order, the ICT system ought to be distributed impartially, regardless of income, race, geography, or merit.

However, there is no reasonable likelihood that need-based distribution will ever be fulfilled by the marketplace itself. Technological societies have high levels of computer penetration and nonindustrial societies do not. Digital technology is disproportionately concentrated in the developed world, and under the principle of supply-and-demand there are no structural reasons for changing these disproportions. Even in wired societies, the existence of Internet technology does not guarantee it will reach its potential as a democratic medium. There is a direct correlation between per capita Gross National Product and Internet distribution. In the United States, for example, 80% of those households with incomes of $75 000 have computers; only 6% do of those with incomes of $15 000 or less. "Socio-cultural barriers, such as income, gender, age, education, and ethnic status still prevail worldwide despite countervailing trends in industrialized countries. New media and the Internet do not just perpetuate social inequalities, but often multiply them. In reality the global village is a gated community" (Debatin, 2008, p. 260; cf. Chester, 2007).

What is most important about convergent media technology is not so much the availability of the computing device or the Internet line, but rather the ability to make use of both the device and conduit for meaningful social practice. Those who cannot read, who have never learned to use a computer, and who do not know the major languages of software and digital content will have difficulty getting online, much less using the information system productively.

There are no grounds for supposing that the geography of the digital world will be fundamentally different from that of the offline world. There is no technological solution for universal diffusion. This history of the communications media indicates that they follow existing political and economic patterns; inequities in society lead to inequities in technology. The normative principle of social justice requires that we intervene through legislation, government policy, technology practice, and public ownership to implement open access. Our thinking about media institutions should be modeled after schools, which we accept as our common responsibility, rather than determined by engineers or profits alone.

In the age of convergent media – rooted in computers, fiber optics, the Internet, satellites, and the World Wide Web – ideally all types of persons will use all types of media services for all types of audiences. But universal service is the Achilles heel of new technologies driven by invention, engineering, and markets. Without intervention into the commercial system on behalf of distributive justice, we will continue to divide the world into the technologically elite and those without adequate means to participate. Therefore, the normative guideline ought to be universal access, based on need.

However, the concept of social justice is not limited to fairness in present circumstances. Under the conditions of globalized media technology, unintended consequences cannot be ignored. Any consideration of new media technologies must include an assessment of possible negative consequences, particularly in light of the complexity and sophistication of networked media. Social justice insists on "the regulatory idea that development must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Debatin, 2008, p. 258). In policy decisions regarding convergent media, technological and societal development are assured while making certain that this growth will not be achieved at the expense of the future. The emphasis is not only on equity within generations but also between generations, including equitable distribution and democratic participation. Sustainable development of communication technology should therefore ensure that both present and future media foster an informed citizenry and a democratic polity.

4 Truth

Truth is not only a primordial issue, but a perennial one in normative media ethics. Nearly all codes of ethics begin with the reporter's duty to tell the truth under all circumstances. Credible language has long been considered pivotal to the media enterprise as a whole – accuracy in news, no deception in advertising, authenticity

in entertainment. Media professionals have tended to agree, at least in a low-level sense, with philosopher Karl Jaspers (1955): "The moment of communication," he said, "is at one and the same time the preservation of, and a search for, the truth." Though interpreted in various ways, media ethics as a scholarly field and professional practice recognizes the wheel imagery of the Buddhist tradition – truth is the immovable axle.

Historically the mainstream media have defined themselves in terms of an objectivist worldview. Centered on human rationality and armed with the scientific method, the facts in news have been said to mirror reality. The aim has been true and incontrovertible accounts of a domain separate from human consciousness. Truth is understood in elementary epistemological terms as accurate representation and precision with data. News corresponds to context-free algorithms, and professionalism is equated with impartiality.

During a formative period for the media in the 1920s, a dichotomy between facts and values dominated Western thinking. Genuine knowledge was identified with the physical sciences, and the objectivity of physics and mathematics set the standard for all forms of knowing. Journalistic morality became equivalent to unbiased reporting or neutral data. Presenting unvarnished facts was heralded as the standard of good reporting. Objective reporting was not merely a technique, but withholding value judgments was considered a moral imperative (Ward, 2004, ch. 6).

James Carey has observed correctly that the commitment to objectivism is rooted in both academia and the profession. Objectivity emerged in journalism out of the struggle within the press for a legitimate place to stand within the complexities of rapid industrialization. "Journalists, capitalizing on the growing prestige of science, positioned themselves outside the system of politics, as observers stationed on an Archimedean point above the fray of social life" (Carey, 1997b, p. 207). Originally this form of journalism – beginning most prominently with the wire services – was rooted "in a purely commercial motive: the need of the mass newspaper to serve politically heterogeneous audiences without alienating a significant segment" of them. Subsequently this strategy of reporting "was rationalized into a canon of professional competence and the ideology of professional responsibility" (Carey, 1997b, p. 208). With scientific naturalism the ruling paradigm in the academy, universities institutionalized the conventions of objective reporting in journalism curricula.

Seeking the truth in newsgathering and producing the truth in newswriting have been complicated by budget constraints, deadlines, editorial conventions, and self-serving sources. Agreeing on visual accuracy in a digital world has been almost impossible, even among competent professionals of good will. Even if we could get our thinking straight, sophisticated electronics bury us with unceasing information and little time to sift through the intricacies of truth-telling.

The prevailing view of truth as accurate information is now seen as too narrow for today's social and political complexities. Objectivity has become increasingly controversial as the working press' professional standard, though it remains entrenched in various forms in our ordinary practices of news production and dissemination. In Carey's dramatic terms,

> The conventions of objective reporting were developed as part of an essentially utilitarian-capitalist-scientific orientation toward events. … Yet despite their obsolescence, we continue to live with these conventions as if a silent conspiracy had been undertaken between government, the reporter, and the audience to keep the house locked up tight even though all the windows have been blown out (Carey 1997a, p. 208).

As Ward describes it, "the traditional notion of journalistic objectivity, articulated about a century ago, is indefensible philosophically, weakened by criticism inside and outside of journalism" (Ward, 2004, p. 4). "Traditional news objectivity is, by all accounts, a spent ethical force, doubted by journalists and academe" (p.261).

With the dominant scheme no longer tenable for this primordial principle, philosophical work on it is critically needed. Instead of abandoning the idea or appealing to coherence versions, the concept of truth needs to be transformed intellectually. In Descartes' mathematical reasoning, it is the mind alone that knows. However, in a fuller understanding, there is no propositional truth independent of human beings as a whole. Truthtelling is not considered a problem of cognition per se, but is integrated into human consciousness and social formation. In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Ethics,* a truthful account takes hold of the context, motives, and presuppositions involved" (Bonhoeffer, 1995, ch. 5). Truth means, in other words, to strike gold, to get at "the core, the essence, the nub, the heart of the matter" (Pippert, 1989, p. 11). To replace newsgathering rooted in the methods of the natural sciences, rigorous qualitative procedures must be followed instead. Reporters aiming to inform the public adequately will seek what might be called interpretive sufficiency, or in Clifford Geertz's terms, thick description. This paradigm opens up the social world in all its dynamic dimensions.

The thick notion of sufficiency supplants the thinness of the technical, exterior, and statistically precise received view. No hard line exists between fact and interpretation; therefore, truthful accounts entail adequate and credible interpretations rather than first impressions. The best journalists weave a tapestry of truth from inside the attitudes, culture, and language of the people and events they are actually reporting. The reporters' frame of reference is not derived from free-floating data, but from an inside picture that gets to the heart of the matter. Rather than reducing social issues to the financial and administrative problems defined by politicians, the media disclose the subtlety and nuance that enable readers and viewers to identify fundamental issues themselves. Telling the truth is not aimed at informing a majority audience of racial injustice, for example, but offers a form of representation that fosters participatory democracy. Interpretive sufficiency in its multicultural dimension locates persons in a noncompetitive, nonhierarchical relationship to the larger moral universe. It imagines new modes of human transformation and emancipation, while nurturing those transformations through dialogue among citizens. The nature of truth as the larger context requires continuing debate so that this cornerstone of communication ethics continues to have credibility.

5 Nonviolence

Nonviolence is also an important ethical principle at present, and how to implement it a major challenge. Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Jr., developed this principle beyond a political strategy into a philosophy of life. Vaclev Havel and Nelson Mandella were totally committed to it. In Emmanuel Levinas, interaction between the self and the Other makes peace normative. "The first word from the Other's face is 'Thou shalt not kill.' It is an order. There is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me" (Levinas, 1985, p. 89). In the dialogic, face-to-face encounter, the infinite is revealed. The Other's presence involves an obligation to which I owe my immediate attention. In communalistic and indigenous cultures, care of the weak and vulnerable (children, sick, and elderly), and sharing material resources are a matter of course. Along with *dharma*, *ahimsa* (nonviolence) forms the basis of the Hindu worldview. For St Augustine, peace is natural to human relationships. The public's general revulsion against physical abuse in intimate settings and its consternation over brutal crimes and savage wars, are glimmers of hope reflecting this principle's validity.

The golden rule is the ethical principle for dealing nonviolently with unrest, protest, and civil disobedience (Battles, 1996). In fact, almost all discussion of ethics in a violent context refers to the golden rule as the best guide for morally appropriate action. It can function effectively as an ethical principle without borders, that is, as an expression of the common moral wisdom of humanity worldwide. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is fully practicable in the face of the extremely complex situations in which individuals or groups must often act. Its brevity and simplicity obscure its radical implications (Kang, 2006).

The golden rule when understood generally as a rule of reciprocity between others and oneself seems unarguable, the natural way to live harmoniously in human community. It proceeds from the assumption of human equality; in thinking about and living the golden rule we regard others as basically like ourselves. For media institutions internally and externally, the golden rule leads away from hostile actions and verbal abuse toward respect and goodwill.

Peace journalism is an illustration of how this principle works itself out for the news in violent conflicts worldwide. As a form of reporting, peace journalism is an interpretive process, and the principle of nonviolence gives the foundation and direction by which the interpretation ought to be done.

The Norwegian scholar, Johan Galtung, has developed and applied the principle systematically through peace studies, concerned not simply with the standards of war reporting, but positive peace – creative, nonviolent resolution of all cultural, social, and political conflicts (e.g., 2000, 2004). As with Galtung, Jake Lynch recognizes that military coverage feeds the very violence it reports, and therefore he has developed an on-the-ground theory and practice of peace initiatives and conflict resolution (e.g. Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005; Lynch, 2008).

Conflict has significant news value. Peace journalism is a self-conscious, working concept which denies that premise. Galtung (1998) has sought to reroute journalism

on the "high road to peace," instead of the "low road" often taken by news media, when they fixate on "a win-lose outcome, and simplify the parties to two combatants slugging it out in a sports arena." In his literature review of war and peace journalism, Seow Ting Lee (2009) sees three contrasting features of each.

The three characteristics of mainstream war journalism are: (1) Focus on the here and now, on military action, equipment, tangible casualties and material damage; (2) An elite orientation: use official sources, follow military strategy, quote political leaders, be accurate with the military command perspective; and (3) A dichotomy of good and bad. Simplifying the parties to two combatants, them versus us, in a zero sum game – binaries such as Arab intransigence and Israeli militarism (Lee, 2009).

There are three salient features of peace journalism, grounded in the principle of nonviolence (Lee, 2009). (1) Present context, background, historical perspective following the golden rule. Use linguistic accuracy – not generic Muslim rebels but rebels identified as dissidents of a particular political group. (2) Take an advocacy stance editorially for peace, and focus in news on common values rather than on vengeance, retaliation, and differences. Emphasis on people's perspective – not just organized violence between nations, but patterns of cooperation and integration among people. 3) Multiplicity orientation. Represent all sides and all parties. Create opportunities for society at large to consider and value nonviolent responses to conflict. Include ways the conflict can be resolved without violence (e.g. as in Dayton and Kriesberg, 2009). Consensus building efforts are considered newsworthy.

Peace journalism is typically understood as an innovation in mainstream news-gathering – along with developmental and public journalism. If these three, and perhaps others, offer new paradigms for reporting then a detailed comparative analysis is needed of their histories, demographics, achievements, and structure (e.g., see Hackett and Zhao, 2005). In order to advance this demanding agenda, journalism needs to give up its utilitarian neutrality and detachment, and adopt the principle of nonviolence. Humans are moral beings and this ethical principle, implemented through the golden rule, can inspire journalists to report on a violent world and act peaceably at the same time.

6 Human dignity

The principle of human dignity is also of primordial importance to communication ethics across the globe. Different cultural traditions affirm human dignity in a variety of ways, but together they insist that all human beings have sacred status without exception. Native American discourse is steeped in reverence for life, an interconnectedness among all living forms so that we live in solidarity with others as equal constituents in the web of life. In communalistic societies, *likute* is loyalty to the community's reputation, to tribal honor. In Latin-American societies, insistence on cultural identity is an affirmation of the unique worth of human beings. In Islam, every person has the right to honor and a good reputation. In Confucius,

veneration of authority is necessary because authorities are human beings of dignity. Humans are a unique species, requiring from within itself regard for its members as a whole.

From this perspective, one understands the ongoing vitality of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. As the preamble states: "Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1988, p. 1). Every child, woman, and man has sacred status, with no exceptions for religion, class, gender, age, or ethnicity. The common sacredness of all human beings regardless of merit or achievement is not only considered a fact but is a shared commitment.

For two decades now, media ethicists have emphasized human dignity in working on ethnic diversity, racist language in news, and sexism in advertising. Gender equality in hiring and eliminating racism in organizational culture are no longer dismissed as political correctness, but seen as moral imperatives. Human dignity takes seriously the decisive contexts of gender, race, class, and religion. A community's polychromatic voices are understood to be essential for a healthy democracy.

Ethnic self-consciousness these days is considered essential to cultural vitality. The world's cultures each have a distinctive beauty. Indigenous languages and ethnicity have come into their own. Culture is more salient at present than countries. Rather than the melting-pot Americanization of the past century, immigrants now insist on maintaining their culture, religion, and language. With identity politics arising as the dominant issue in world affairs following the end of the cold war, social institutions, including the media, are challenged to develop a healthy cultural pluralism. Human dignity pushes us to comprehend the demands of cultural diversity, and give up an individualistic morality of rights. The public sphere is conceived as a mosaic of distinguishable communities, a plurality of ethnic identities intersecting to form a social bond, but each seriously held and competitive as well.

Putting the principle of human dignity to work, Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki (2000) indicate how the race dimension of cultural pluralism ought to move forward in the media. Race in twenty-first century United States remains a preeminent issue, and their research indicates a broad array of White racial sentiments toward African Americans as a group. They emphasize not the minority of outright racists but the perplexed majority. On a continuum from comity (acceptance) to ambivalence and then racism, a complex ambivalence most frequently characterizes the majority (p. 21). Correcting White ignorance and dealing with ambiguities appear to hold "considerable promise for enhancing racial comity" (p. 21). The reality is, however, that ambivalence shades off into animosity most easily and frequently. In Entman and Rojecki's interviews, personal experiences of Black effort and achievement tend to be discounted "in favor of television images, often vague, of welfare cheats and Black violence. … The habits of local news – for example, the rituals in covering crime – facilitate the construction of menacing imagery" (p. 34). Rather than actively following human dignity and enhancing

racial understanding among those most open to it, the media tend to tip "the balance toward suspicion and even animosity among the ambivalent majority of Americans" (p. 44). When the normative principle of human dignity becomes a priority in the media, this important swing group would be enabled to move forward and cultural pluralism would be enhanced.

7 Privacy as a moral good

Privacy is another fundamental issue, especially with the dramatic growth of digital technologies for gathering and storing personal information. Privacy is not merely a legal right but a condition or status in which humans, by virtue of their humanness, control the time, place, and circumstances of information about themselves. A private domain gives people their own identity and unique self-consciousness within the human species. Democracies as a system of rule by the people distinguish themselves in these terms. Legally it means that citizens have freedom from government control over what they themselves control. Totalitarian societies use the near absence of privacy to produce a servile populace. Those with no privacy lose their sense of human dignity. Government surveillance may demand personal records outside owner controls, but human dignity requires absolute protection. Security measures that intrude upon personal information without notification in the process of securing a nation state deny its democratic character.

Instead of a bevy of rules and constraints to determine whether privacy is being invaded by the press or the government, the question is whether the people themselves consider the information or action invasive. Protection of privacy is basically a citizen's ethics, understood and implemented by policy makers and media professionals who see themselves first of all as human beings, not as professionals. The human dignity of the citizenry, rather than legalities, is the alpha and omega, the beginning and end. Hence the formal criterion for privacy as a moral good: Since human dignity entails control of private life space, information is communicated about human beings to others if and only if a reasonable public considers it permissible.

Public opinion polls indicate that the invasion of privacy ought to be a premier issue in journalism ethics. Intruding on privacy creates resentment and damages the credibility of the information providers. Legal definitions by themselves are an inadequate foundation. How can the legally crucial difference between newsworthy material and gossip or voyeurism be reasonably determined? Privacy is not a legal right only but a moral good. For all of the sophistication of case law and tort law in protecting privacy, legal safeguards do not match the challenges of powerful new media technologies for storing data and disseminating information.

Therefore, while acknowledging legal distinctions and boundaries, the protection of privacy must be constructed and defended as a normative principle. Privacy is a moral good since it is a condition for developing a healthy sense of personhood. Violating it, therefore, violates human dignity. However, privacy cannot be made absolute because people are cultural beings with responsibility in the social and political arena. People are individuals and therefore need privacy. People are social

beings and therefore need public information about others. Since people are individuals, eliminating privacy would eliminate human existence as they know it; since people are social, elevating privacy to absolute status would likewise render human existence impossible. These considerations lead to the formal criterion that the intimate life space of individuals cannot be invaded without permission unless the revelation averts a public crisis or is of overriding public significance and all other means to deal with the issue have been exhausted.

ICTs have greatly facilitated data collection, privacy invasion, and surveillance. And with the "War on Terrorism", ICT-based surveillance policies and practices have increased dramatically.

> Invasion of privacy and abuse of personal data by third parties, as well as harassment and identity theft are oft-criticized side effects of data networks and new communication technologies. Popular Web 2.0 applications such as social networking sites, provide a convenient socializing tool for its users who often carelessly reveal detailed personal information in their profiles. This makes social networking sites gigantic data collection agencies that allow highly individualized forms of marketing and advertising through the combination of user profiles and user behaviors (Debatin, 2008, p. 261).

Small micromedia, such as podcasts, blogs, mobile phones, and social networking sites are increasingly used to publicize personal and intimate information within the so-called anonymity of the digital environment. It can be assumed that the threats to privacy will only be aggravated as new smart communication technologies pervade industrial societies. This type of technology tends to become invisible because it is so widely adapted that it is readily taken for granted. "In the not-too-distant future, ubiquitous computer technology will be embedded in every aspect of our everyday environment. It is obvious that this new pervasive technology will inevitably lead to unintended consequences with ethical implications due to its invisibility, definitional power and deep impact on existing social structures" (Debatin, 2008, p. 261).

In fostering an ethics of privacy, the vitality of education becomes our preoccupation rather than focusing on the violations of privacy one-by-one. The question is not first of all policy makers and media professionals dealing with privacy issues case-by-case, but their commitment to privacy as normative for a healthy democracy. To the extent that privacy as a moral good is known and appreciated, the details of privacy protection in law and professional practice will be interpreted correctly.

Descriptive Ethics

8 Instrumentalism

As with metaethics and the normative, academic work in the third category of media ethics has a worldwide scope. Descriptive ethics is only now turning to the developing world to account for its media use and social values. Robert Fortner's Center for International Media has become a world leader in systematically

researching media technologies in nonindustrial societies. This handbook pays special attention to ethical issues under the conditions of low-level technology, with advanced media only available for the elite few. As this research multiplies, primordial issues will become transparent.

The focus here is on instrumentalism as the major challenge for doing descriptive ethics in technologically sophisticated countries. The prevailing worldview in industrial societies is instrumentalism – the view that technology is neutral and does not condition our thinking and social organization.

The French social philosopher, Jacques Ellul, developed the argument that technology is decisive in defining contemporary culture (Ellul, 1964). A society is instrumental, he argues, not because of its machines, but from the pursuit of efficient techniques in every area of human endeavor. Unlike previous eras where techniques are constrained within a larger complex of social values, the pervasiveness and sophistication of modern ICTs reorganize society to conform to the demand for efficiency.

In Ellul's (1969) framework, the media represent the meaning-edge of the technological system. Convergence media technologies, for example, incarnate the properties of technology while serving as agents for interpreting the meaning of the very phenomenon they embody. Though exhibiting the structural elements of all technical artifacts, their particular identity comes from their function as bearers of symbols. Scientific techniques are applied not just to nature, but to social organizations and our understanding of personhood. Civilizations across history have engaged in technical activities and produced technological products, but modern society has sacralized the genius behind machines and uncritically allowed its power to infect not just industry, engineering, and business, but also politics, education, the church, labor unions, health, and international relations.

The problem for technological societies is not technologies per se, but the mystique of efficiency that underlies them. Like heatness in red hot iron, the spirit of machineness permeates everywhere. The world of means expands in size and speed; human ends shrivel and become mysterious. Human values are replaced by the machine-like imperative of efficiency. Human goals are buried under a preoccupation with means. The new electronic media exacerbate the problem. While ICTs amplify, store, and distribute information as do books and television, ICTs specialize in the processing and connecting of information. Bernhard Debatin of Ohio University describes the contemporary situation this way:

> As technology advances from mere use of tools to the employment of machines and then to the implementation of complex technical systems, technology depends more and more on its own mediating capacities, since technicization introduces greater complexity into the human realm of action and perception. In other words, the technologically created sphere requires increasingly technical mediation for its own operations. This is the birth of homeostatic machines, cybernetic systems, control technology, and user interfaces. In the technical-scientific world, the focus of technology changes from merely controlling the forces of nature to controlling increasingly intransparent technologies and compensating for their unintended and unforeseen consequences (2008, p. 258).

The average end-user is reduced to participating in a largely predetermined system through the computer/browser interface.

In an instrumental age enamored of machines, life becomes amoral, without moral bearings, devoid of moral categories. Moral vocabulary is not understood. Moral distinctions have little meaning. In the process of fabricating expert mechanical systems such as the digital order, the world is sanitized of the moral dimension. In a technological era, the social fashion is to be emancipated from moral standards and to disavow moral responsibility.

Several social analysts have noted that basic human values have deteriorated in today's technological world. Disrespect for others, lack of civility, crude and offensive language, selfishness and greed – all of these are increasing dramatically on the Internet and in popular culture. Politicians show little concern for ethical standards. Opportunism through the financial system created a massive worldwide collapse. Children are increasingly defiant at home and school. When efficiency, speed, and productivity dominate, morality based in human life becomes alien to us. Moral purpose is sacrificed to technical excellence.

Under these conditions, in order to do research on descriptive ethics credibly, we need to reconceive technology itself. A fundamentally different approach to technology is needed instead of the instrumentalist one. The technological enterprise is a human process, value-laden throughout. Valuing penetrates all technological activity, from selecting the needs to address and which materials to use, through the processes of design and fabrication, to the resulting tools and products. Although valuing is surely involved in the uses to which people put technological objects, valuing saturates every phase prior to usage as well. There can be no isolated, neutral understanding of technology as though it exists in a presuppositionless vacuum. The problems of one group are addressed but not all. Certain resources are used and not others.

True to the character of machineness, the values of productivity, power, and efficiency direct the technological process when societies are characterized by instrumentalism. The principle of self-augmentation begins to rule, pushing the global media toward greater speed and larger size, marginalizing small-scale activities, and taking on a life of its own, no longer subject to human control. This instrumentalist worldview must be reversed. The whole phenomenon ought to be called into question, not just some of its features. Policy-makers, academics, business executives, and media professionals face a double challenge – developing a noninstrumental perspective on convergent media and a deep understanding of the global technological revolution that is concentrated in the electronic giant nations of the world.

The opposition is not to technological products, but to technicism. We need to desacralize technology and free our academic and professional language from technological metaphors. Against an overweening technocratic mystique, a culture needs to be developed in which questions of meaning, life's purpose, and moral values predominate.

Instead of the elementary view that technologies are value-free, the reality is that they are caught in ever-expanding means that tend to overwhelm all ideals worthy

of human allegiance. In the instrumental view, technology is static – products, machines, laptops, iPods, communication satellites. In a more adequate human-centered model, technology is not a noun but a verb, the arena in which human existence is established. We need a new paradigm. The instrumental worldview must be turned on its head and inside out.

There is no magic answer. The only solution is long term. Through education, beliefs about media technology can change, and when our values are transformed, technologies will follow in their wake. Rather than emphasize computers for their own sake in a mechanized society, the humanities ought to be emphasized instead. The arts, music, philosophy and literature should prosper, not just engineering and electronic gadgetry. Beliefs about instrumental progress, consumerism, expertise and magnitude must be replaced with values rooted in the sacredness of human life.

Summary

Primordial issues in communication ethics can never be solved once-and-for-all. The dynamic and continually changing world of media technology makes permanent resolution impossible. Given the complexity of communication ethics across the three categories, no one academic or media professional is competent to address these issues singlehandedly. Scholarship on primordial issues is a shared enterprise, and this collaboration must be decisively international and multicultural.

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