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ETHICAL AND NORMATIVE
PERSPECTIVES

◆ Clifford Christians

Media ethics is an important branch of professional ethics. Recognizing the power of mass communications in today's global world, occupations in the media are now included with such professions as medicine, law, business, and engineering under the purview of applied ethics. Although the media have been roundly criticized for more than a century,¹ the exponential growth in media ethics did not occur until it began rising in parallel during the 1980s with the growth of professional ethics as a whole. In line with the other professional fields, more monographs and books on media ethics were produced in this decade than had been published in total since the beginning of the 20th century.

From 1978 to 1980, the Hastings Center of New York carried out the most extensive study ever done of the status, problems, and possibilities for teaching professional ethics in American higher education. Funded by the Carnegie Foundation, the results were published in a series of volumes and monographs that have defined the field of applied and professional ethics ever since. The Hastings project included empirical analyses and teaching strategies. It made recommendations about course goals, evaluation, indoctrination, and teacher preparation (e.g., Callahan & Bok, 1980). And the results are evident everywhere. The Association for Practical and Professional Ethics began in 1991 and now publishes its own book series. Journals such as the *International*

Journal of Applied Philosophy, *Ethical Perspectives*, and *Professional Ethics* deal with generic issues, and virtually all the professions now have their own journals, books, and courses on ethics as well. Interest groups within academic associations and centers for ethics and society are commonplace. Research universities are including practical ethics courses within their general education curriculum and in professional programs. Graduate studies typically include courses in the ethics of scientific research and ethical standards in social science methodology. Liberal arts colleges reflect similar dynamics, introducing courses in bioethics and the ethics of health care, ethics in government, social work ethics, computer ethics, and so forth. The dramatic growth in research, teaching, and interest among media professionals and academics has been unrelenting as well. MacDonald and Petheram (1998, pp. 257–349) list more than 200 research centers and academic departments around the world committed to media ethics.

◆ *Developing Credible Theory*

As a subset of professional ethics, media ethics, in terms of its logic and rationale, is bilingual. It combines theory with actual events and real-life dilemmas. Even the most sophisticated media ethics retains an interest in concrete moral judgments, in the way ethical decision making actually functions in media practice. But integrating particular knowledge into general ethical theory is considered crucial as well. Work in the larger world of applied ethics demonstrates that if description of actual morality becomes the exclusive aim, the results are superficial moralism. If abstract theory dominates, the conclusions are out of touch with reality. Therefore, as professional ethics develops itself into a field of philosophy with its own identity, it insists on the interactive character of theory construction, with principles and practice building on one another dialogically (cf. Almond, 1995; Kearney & Dooley, 1999, chaps. 3–5). Stephen Toulmin (1988) has assisted the enterprise by demonstrating that issues from the bedside, newsroom, and parliament have always dominated the history of philosophy, and applied ethics is restoring that vision. The reissuing of Henry

Sidgwick's (1898/1998) *Practical Ethics*, with an articulate defense of its intellectual significance by Sissela Bok, signals this trend toward professional ethics as a scholarly enterprise with its own subject matter.²

There have been intellectual gains in the middle range—on conflict of interest, promise keeping and contractual obligation, paternalism and client autonomy, indoctrination, reform of institutional structures, and vocation. Media ethics has made important advances on the ethics of distributive justice, confidentiality, and deception. However, theory in applied ethics generally and media ethics in particular continues to be a major challenge. Applying ethical principles to specific cases is often busywork, descriptive and functional in character. Students are typically taught to choose among practical alternatives without knowing how to consider ethically the right course of action. They can unravel specific conundrums, but the theory that equips them to deal with similar situations later is often too obscure to have any intellectual payoff. In the first half of the 1980s, the material was largely atheoretical. Media ethics was often defined as descriptive in character, and taking seriously a complex professional arena seemed to demand war stories rather than abstractions. However,

most of today's classroom texts, as well as some anthologies, include a section on theory. On occasion, book-length studies in media ethics now develop a philosophical framework. But the concept of theory as pedagogically meaningful, as well as theory as fundamental to the normative character of communication ethics, remains woefully underdeveloped. The long-term future of the field depends on the common language of theory, not as an abstract authority but as something that assists us in thinking more systematically on our own. Going beyond classical theorists without forgetting them and welcoming theory as empowering provocateur are central to making significant progress on media ethics' complicated agenda at present.

Developing a credible normative ethics in media studies faces a formidable obstacle. Given the dual character of professional ethics, the morality of the practitioners' world interacts with the philosophical framework of academics. On one side of the equation, the conventions and guidelines of media practice are basically utilitarian. In print and broadcast journalism, public relations, advertising, and entertainment, the *modus operandi* is self-consciously or superficially determined by consequences. In news and editorial departments, advertising agencies, and media companies, the overarching appeal is to serve the majority and benefit the greatest public good with the least possible harm. John Stuart Mill's treatise on political freedom in 1859, *On Liberty*, and his *Utilitarianism* in 1861 work in and through each other, as does the natural affinity today in democratic life toward determining the morally right alternative by the greatest balance of good over evil (Mill, 1859/1975, 1861). Mill contended that happiness was the sole end of human action and the test by which all conduct ought to be judged. With later utilitarians expanding the notion of pleasure, assessing rightness or wrongness in terms of the total amount of value is a definite guideline for aiding our ethical choices. A utility calculus fits hand-in-glove with the press's zeal for

the public's right to know, as well as with the commitment in public relations and advertising to provide clients with the maximum benefits at the least cost. For the entertainment industry, utility resonates with capitalism's supply and demand and an institution's risk-benefit calculations. Moreover, the utility principle does not presume commands from heaven or a universe of natural laws and brings together disparate segments of a diverse society. The press's actions in Watergate, for instance, were considered appropriate by most people; the public saw the pain inflicted on a few as proper because the overall consequences for the many were beneficent.

Although the utilitarian perspective is powerful and happiness is an end few would wish to contradict, utilitarianism does present serious difficulties for theory formation in media ethics at this juncture. It depends on making accurate measurements of the consequences, when in everyday affairs, the results of our choices are often blurred, at least in the long term. In addition, utilitarians view society as a collection of individuals, each with his or her own desires and goals. Thus, institutions and structures are not analyzed in a sophisticated manner, and an atomistic, procedural view of democracy is presumed. Moreover, the principle of the greatest public benefit applies only to societies in which certain nonutilitarian standards of decency prevail. And on a deeper level, there is mounting criticism of utilitarianism's commitment to an exceptionless norm as determining all ethical judgments. As a matter of fact, consequentialism in its various forms is intellectually appealing in the same way scientific theories are—a single principle constitutes all moral judgments. In the longstanding conflict over love or justice as the highest good, for example, the balance of pleasure over pain becomes the standard by which to adjudicate them in specific situations. However, the appealing exactness of this one-factor model represents a “semblance of validity” by leaving out whatever cannot be calculated (Taylor, 1982, p. 143).

In some media situations, consequences are a reliable guide. But practitioners usually find themselves confronting more than one moral claim at the same time, and asking only what produces the most good is too limiting. In the full range of human relationships, we ordinarily recognize that fulfilling promises, preventing injury, providing equal distribution, and relieving distress are moral imperatives. But utilitarianism as a single-consideration theory renders irrelevant other moral demands that conflict with it. In some of the most crucial issues we face at present, utility is not an adequate guide—for understanding distributive justice, diversity in popular culture, violence in television and cinema, truth telling, digital manipulation, conflict of interest, and so forth. We face the anomaly that the ethical system most entrenched in the media industry is not ideally suited for resolving its most persistent headaches.

Insisting on a rigorous version of rule-utilitarianism is one alternative.³ The best types of utility are not the same as expediency, nor are they a simple matter of ends justifying the means. A sophisticated model of utilitarianism emphasizing long-term consequences will eliminate many of the media's day-to-day quandaries and provide critical leverage over against the quasi-utility that is typically invoked at present. However, based on a century of experience with utilitarian rationalism and its fluorescence as media ethics has grown over the past two decades, it is arguable that an ethics of duty is a more compelling means of moral decision making for the media professions.⁴ Duty responds to a broader range of human experiences and relations. Duty recognizes that responsible actions are necessary to keep the human community humane. For Emmanuel Levinas (1981), for instance, our duties to others are more fundamental to human identity than are individual rights. Oxford's W. David Ross (1930) has developed the most influential critique of utilitarianism within philosophical circles and establishes *prima facie* duties as a compelling

alternative, in which reparations, fidelity, justice, noninjury, gratitude, and self-improvement are given centrality. An ethics of duty provides a critical framework for checking our common inclinations toward majoritarianism rather than having our theory and practice slide into one another. Therefore, in terms of the overall task of developing a theoretically credible media ethics, the most promising direction is a deontological one.

◆ *Medium- and Genre-Specific Issues*

With constructing a credible theoretical foundation as the overarching task, our work in media ethics can be divided into three main branches according to the standard functions of communication systems in democratic societies—reporting news, promoting products and services, and entertaining. In capitalist societies, however, practitioners of journalism, advertising, and entertainment often belong to the same corporation and encounter all three media areas directly or indirectly in their work. And with the convergence of media technologies into digital formats, cyberspace is a current concentration point for dealing with media ethics. Three of the important issues described below represent each of the media genres—truth (news), sexism (advertising), and violence (entertainment). Two pressing issues are selected from the new technologies (just distribution and hate speech). Together, they illustrate the challenge of moving particular problems from their generally utilitarian orientation to duty ethics instead.

TRUTH

The press's obligation to truth is a standard part of its rhetoric. High-minded editors typically etch the word on cornerstones and on their tombstones. Virtually every

code of ethics begins with the newsperson's duty to tell the truth under all circumstances. Credible language is pivotal to the communications enterprise. As the norm of healing is to medicine, justice to politics, and critical thinking to education, so truth telling is the occupational norm of the media professions.

Living up to this ideal is virtually impossible, even for those who idolize it. Seeking the truth in newsgathering and producing the truth in news writing is complicated by budget constraints, deadlines, editorial conventions, and self-serving sources. Journalism is often referred to as "history in a hurry"; providing a precise, representative account can rarely occur under such conditions. Meanwhile, sophisticated technology generates unceasing news copy so that journalistic gatekeepers must choose from a mountain of options, often without the time to sift through the intricacies of truth telling. Agreeing on visual accuracy in a digital world has been impossible even among competent professionals of good will.

Rather than Band-Aids to cover the sore spots and bleeding, a believable concept of truth is the primary need. Truth is typically shriveled down to accurate facts and neutrality. 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 of neutral data. Presenting unvarnished facts was heralded as the standard of good performance. The best news mirrored reality. Objective reporting was not merely a technique, but withholding value judgments was considered a moral imperative.

This mainstream view of truth as accurate information is too narrow for today's social and political complexities. A more sophisticated concept is truth as disclosure. Already in 1947, the famous Hutchins Commission Report on *A Free and Responsible Press* (Commission on Freedom of the

Press, 1947) called for this alternative. It advocated a deeper definition of the press's mission as "a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning." Forsaking the quest for precision journalism does not mean imprecision but precision in disclosure and authenticity—in getting to the heart of the matter. To replace newsgathering rooted in empiricism, fiction and fabrication are obviously not acceptable substitutes.

In terms of disclosing the meaning, reporters will seek what might be called "interpretive sufficiency." They recognize that no hard line exists between fact and interpretation; therefore, truthful accounts mean adequate and credible interpretations rather than first impressions. The best journalists will ensure the news story's deeper reading by understanding from the inside the attitudes, culture, language, and definitions of the people and events they are actually reporting. In the process of weaving a tapestry of truth, reporters will attempt to reduce as much as possible the distance between the concepts of social science and those of the particular news context itself. Their disclosures will ring true on both levels; that is, they will be theoretically credible and realistic to those being covered. The truth of authenticity unveils the inner character of a series of events. They generate an insightful picture that gets at the essence of the matter. Rather than reducing social issues to the financial and administrative problems defined by politicians, the news media ought to disclose the depth and nuance that enables readers and viewers to identify the fundamental issues themselves.⁵

ADVERTISING AND GENDER

Companies in the United States spend \$200 billion a year on advertising. Its effects are controversial, but would the \$1 million to produce a Super Bowl commercial and the \$1.5 million to air it be spent if advertising had no impact? When

Victoria's Secret paraded models in lingerie across the screen for 30 seconds during the 1999 Super Bowl, 1 million people logged onto the Web site promoted in the ad. In the standard calculations, average Americans see more than 3,000 ads per day and spend more than 3 years of their lives watching commercials. Advertising is pervasive, using all media, making itself inescapable, and intruding on our privacy. As George Gerbner (1994) puts it,

For the first time in human history, most of the stories about people, life, and values are told not by parents, schools, churches, or others in the community who have something to tell, but by a group of distant conglomerates that have something to sell. (p. 389)

If the advertising industry can persuade us to buy products or particular brands, it can surely influence the way we think. Given its size and power, as privatization and the market principle expand around the world, advertising will be controversial—and one longstanding issue is its exploitation of women. In the Middle East, for instance, “as for privately owned Arab satellite channels, global consumerism is clearly manifest in the array of advertisements and video clips featuring Arab women who, interestingly enough, conform more to a Western archetypal beauty ideal than to an Arab one” (“The Power of Advertising,” 2001, p. 9). Similarly in China,

Advertising not only sells goods but also identity. . . . The White female has become the prime fetish in a new Chinese symbolic universe, governed not by class struggle and resistance to imperialism, but by the symbolic exchange of a globalized commodity culture. (Johansson, 1999, p. 377)

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has named advertising as the world's worst offender in perpetuating the image of women as sex symbols and

therefore an inferior kind of human being (www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/index.html). As Sut Jhally (1989) says, “Never in history has the iconography of a culture been so obsessed or possessed by questions of sexuality and gender.” Life is rich and varied, but “there is no sense of scale in advertising”; it capitalizes on and feeds the overemphasis on sex in our lives while “underemphasizing other important things (friendship, loyalty, fun, the love of children, community)” that define human relationships (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 265). Advertising as a form of communication seeks its audience, and explicit sex attracts attention. Calvin Klein has set the standard for proving it works. Undergarments or the lack of them in Calvin Klein's ads from 1980 to 1995 captured an audience and aroused controversy. The CK Jeans campaign since 1995 (“nothing between me and my Calvin's”), lascivious perfume ads, and preschool children in designer underwear have positioned Klein with the appealing image as daring rebel to the majority of its customers. Along with the windfall of media publicity, Klein's jean sales have doubled already in the first year (Ivinski, 2000, pp. 108–115).

The critique of advertising's portrayal of women falls along three lines: their objectification, deformation of human sexuality, and what Jean Kilbourne calls “the hypersexualization of girls” (“The Power of Advertising,” 2001, p. 6).

The first pressing concern about advertising's image of women is their objectification. Women and their body parts are used to sell every product imaginable. Objectifying and dismembering create second-class citizens of those used to serve someone else's interest.

Cathy Shepherd of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) describes the issue in these terms for the Caribbean media:

Locally, alcohol advertising consistently portrays women as sex objects who exist for the viewing and consuming pleasure of men. . . . Many males learn to see

women as a pretty package, something to behold, but not necessarily to respect. ("The Power of Advertising," 2001, p. 6)

The Media Monitoring Project in South Africa drew the same conclusion about its advertising industry in 1999: "Women are exhibited in social roles for the benefit of entering and providing pleasure to men" ("The Power of Advertising," 2001, p. 6). Erving Goffman (1978) demonstrated in *Gender Advertisements* that the poses and language of advertising teach us the superiority (often disdainful) of males and the subservience of women.

A second issue in gender and advertising revolves around the corrupting of relationships.

Most of us yearn for intimate and committed relationships that will last. . . . But we are surrounded by advertising that yokes our needs with products and promises that things will deliver what in fact they never can. . . . All too often our market-driven culture locks people into adolescent fantasies of sex and relationships. And there is a connection between the constant images of instant sexual gratification and passion and the increasing burden on marriage and long-term lovers. . . . Of course, all these sexual images aren't intended to sell sex. . . . but shopping. This is the intent of the advertisers—but an unintended consequence is the effect these images have on real sexual desire and real lives. (Kilbourne, 1999, pp. 25, 77, 268)

In subtle but excessive form, products no longer are a means to a noble end but the end itself. Advertisements encourage us to develop an identity with and loyalty to the products themselves. They turn "lovers into things and things into lovers" and nurture "passion for products rather than our partners. . . . In the world of advertising, lovers grow cold, spouses grow old, children grow up and move away—but possessions stay with us and never change" (Kilbourne,

1999, pp. 77, 94). In this climate, abuse is inevitable. "It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to be violent to someone we consider an equal human being, but it is very easy to abuse a thing" ("The Power of Advertising," 2001, p. 7).

Third, advertising images demean and trivialize girls. Columnist Ellen Goodman contends that the fashion and advertising worlds help to produce "another generation of girls growing up in painfully hostile relationships with their own bodies" (quoted in Christians, Fackler, Rotzoll, & McKee, 2001, p. 179). Ads by and large create ultra-slender role models with silky hair and flawless skin. "Stunning creatures," writes Don Kaul, "but thin, painfully, excruciatingly thin. It's the modern equivalent of foot binding" (quoted in Christians et al., 2001, p. 180). One study found that women's magazines contained "ten times as many advertisements and articles promoting weight loss as men's magazines—corresponding exactly to the ratio of eating disorders in women versus men" (Jacobson & Mazur, 1995, p. 75). As Carol Gilligan and other social critics have pointed out in recent years,

Adolescent girls in America are afflicted with a range of problems, including self-esteem, eating disorders, binge drinking, date rape and other dating violence, teen pregnancy, and a rise in cigarette smoking. Teenage women are engaging in far riskier health behavior in greater numbers than any prior generation. (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 129)

"We need to take the obsession with thinness and eating problems as seriously as we take drug problems and treat them as public health problems, not as individual pathologies" ("The Power of Advertising," 2001, p. 9). For advertising, girls are a montage of perfume, clothing, and bodies. In this form, they are "extremely desirable to advertisers because they are new consumers, are beginning to have significant disposable income, and are developing brand loyalty that might

last a lifetime. Teenage girls spend over \$4 billion annually on cosmetics alone” (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 132).

Given the complexity of advertising’s exploitation along these three lines, the argument that sexually explicit advertising is morally offensive has little to recommend it. Nudity, erotica, and racy language indeed do affront tastes and are legitimately labeled soft-core pornography. Advertising is not generally interested in artistic realism or authentic sensuality as are high-minded writers and producers in entertainment. In that sense, advertising’s sexism rightly offends the virtuous. But opposing it on the basis of embarrassment or offensiveness carries little public clout. It easily dissipates into debates over whose morals are under attack. Most advertisers, for example, see wider latitude in standards among the younger audience they are aiming to reach and, in fact, welcome objections from parents. In addition, the moral offensiveness argument is too easily dismissed by those who do not want restrictions on free speech.

In terms of ethics, the fundamental issue is discrimination based on gender. Subordinate images of women hinder their chance of equal opportunity; depictions of subordination perpetuate subordination. Advertising’s exploitation of women violates their human rights as a class. The world of male dominance and female submission is dehumanizing in principle. Women as sexual turn-ons or, more blatantly, as objects for conquest and possession face unacceptable discrimination. Civil equality is virtually impossible to achieve when a multi-billion-dollar industry promotes inequality. Rather than arguing from offended tastes, women’s rights cuts a wider swath. It is a broad, compelling basis for moving forward constructively.

Women’s rights links advertising and gender with the longstanding problem of sexism in the media as a whole. Instead of being scandalized by advertising’s sex appeals per se, the ethical challenge is acting against discriminatory culture, actions, and

policies in news reporting, entertainment media, interactive information systems, and public relations as well as advertising. We need the leverage of human rights to make a difference not only in consumer culture but also in popular culture and in the citizen culture represented in the press. In this major component of media ethics—that is, the ethics of representation—the master principle is gender inclusiveness. And in terms of gender parity, the goal is to clarify and critique and transform the media’s role in reproducing and reinforcing patterns of discrimination against women in society. In addition to examining the limited role of women in decision making and media production, the ethics of representation focuses on the deficiencies in the way women are symbolized and imagined in all media forms beyond advertising (see “New Age, New Agendas,” 2001, p. 4). What William Bird concludes regarding South Africa is true of industrialized countries across the globe: “The most pressing needs . . . are to reinvent and reformulate advertising in line with a democracy and constitution which enshrines human rights” (“The Power of Advertising,” 2001, p. 6).

With sexism embedded in our culture and social order, the broader agenda needs the persistent and thoughtful attention of media professionals everywhere. Even if media behavior is improving in particular cases, without institutional, representational, and structural reform, a long and entrenched history will not be permanently changed.

TELEVISION VIOLENCE

Few issues command as much attention from media reformers as violence in television and film. In the United States, for example, studies have shown that by high school graduation, the average 17-year-old will have seen 18,000 murders on TV. From the horrific shootings at Columbine High School in the spring of 1999 to similar tragedies in other states and countries

since then, teenagers who slaughter their classmates and teachers and then kill themselves are linked by debate or research to the culture of violence in which they live. Although “the U.S. leads the world in the prevalence of violence on television . . . findings indicate that television shown in all parts of the world contains a great deal of violence,” including a high percentage of guns as weapons, indifference to brutality, and consequences only in hints or not shown at all (Potter, 1999, pp. 56, 59). “Gun-related deaths increased more than 60% from 1968–1984, and this problem is now considered a public health epidemic by 87% of surgeons and 94% of internists across the United States” (Potter, 1999, p. 1). America has been a violent society since its birth in the Revolutionary War, but now there is more anxiety about it than ever.

In the past 15 or so years, a remarkably cavalier, vicious, wanton, and senseless pattern of violence entered society and the American psyche. Drive-by shootings and gangbanger crimes, fueled by a trade in handguns and crack cocaine, has ushered in fears of an epidemic of violence we may not fully comprehend. The violence panic of this time . . . seems much more to surround children and youth, as both the victims and the perpetrators of violence. (Wartella, 1996, p. 3)

The opposition of media industries and combat-hardened libertarians to the censors of violence can be summarized around four claims:

- ◆ Artistic freedom and aesthetic integrity demand a *laissez-faire* approach. The government has no business policing writers and directors.
- ◆ Violence is a social and historical problem, not the result of violent television or films. To think otherwise is the same as blaming John Wayne for the Vietnam War.
- ◆ Boundaries between news and entertainment programming are artificial. Television news-magazine shows, for instance, are hungry for visual material that will generate revenue-rich audiences. All of the free marketplace arguments that traditional news has enjoyed are now applied equally to entertainment programs. The public apparently wants the pleasure of being aroused, and the industry wishes “to use the violence formula to build audiences and thus maximize their profits. . . . Violence is harmless entertainment and it is okay to pursue selfish ends” (Potter, 1999, p. 163).
- ◆ No direct effects can be documented or proved. Indirect effects are the consequence of living one’s life in a world of mediated messages and cannot be made the basis of criminal prosecutions.

This last argument against curtailing violence on television has long been the most persistent and persuasive. However, the no-effects conclusion is not credible any longer. “Evidence of a causal relationship between media violence and real violence has been accumulating for at least 40 years.” Certainly, “violent behavior is a complex, multivariable problem, formed of many influences.” And “violence in the media may not be the most important contributor to violence in the real world.” But “it is surely one of the multiple, overlapping causes” (Wartella, 1996, pp. 3–4). Meta-analyses during the 1990s of literally hundreds of studies on media violence “demonstrated a causal link between viewing televised violence and real-life aggression with some of the strongest effects observed among younger children” (Wilson, Smith, et al., 2002, p. 6). The same conclusion was verified by research for the American Medical Association, the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and through the exhaustive multiyear

National Television Violence Study (1994–1998) (Wilson, Colvin, & Smith, 2002, pp. 36–57; Wilson, Smith, et al., 2002, pp. 9–31).⁶ In James Potter’s (1999) review of the research—with the caveat that the effects process is highly complex—he is certain of both immediate and extended consequences from televised violence. In the short term, fear and habituation occur, but “increased viewer aggression” is most strongly supported also. And likewise for long-term effects, “we can conclude that exposure to violence in the media is linked with long-term negative effects of trait aggression, fearful worldview, and desensitization to violence” (Potter, 1999, p. 42).

Violence is a serious ethical issue because it violates the persons-as-ends principle. In Immanuel Kant’s standard formulation, we must treat all rational beings as ends-in-themselves and never as means only. In Judeo-Christian *agape* and feminist relational ethics, violence contradicts Other-regarding care. Gratuitous cheapening of human life to expand ratings, in terms of Aristotle’s teleological model, is a reprehensible misuse of human beings as means to base ends. From the persons-as-ends perspective, there is a special interest in the sexual violence so common in music video, horror movies (especially slasher films), pornographic literature, videocassettes, and the commercials promoting them. Sadistic, bloodthirsty torture in a sexual context is a particularly offensive form of dehumanization.

In complicated cases with several layers of meaning and disagreements among legitimate parties such as with television violence, Aristotle’s mean enables us to think ethically and avoid doctrinaire moralism. With temperance the cardinal virtue for the Greeks through which all others flowed, moral virtue in Aristotelian terms is a middle state determined by practical wisdom.⁷ Humans who are not fanatics or eccentrics but of harmonious character, over a career of moral growth, develop acuity in their perceptions and a disposition to reason wisely. And those of such integrated traits of

character apply their practical wisdom, in this case, to televised violence and locate the “mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect” (Aristotle, 1947, 1107A). With censorship—the evil of defect—and gratuitous, sensational violence without restraint—the evil of excess—practical wisdom (*phronesis*) identifies aesthetic realism as the middle state. The path of equilibrium and harmony is artistically genuine violence, programs of artistic integrity. Violence, physical and psychological, is in itself not amenable to a center but contradictory of humans as ends in themselves. *Artistic* representations of violence, however, admit of a virtuous middle state such as exemplified in *Holocaust*, *Schindler’s List*, *Gandhi*, *Amistad*, *Roots*, *The Pianist*, and *The Day After*. And consistent with aesthetic proportion are the several middle-level solutions worth pursuing—media education, an effective classification and ratings system, v-chip technology, reflective writers and producers, media criticism, informed network executives voluntarily reducing violence, publicly appointed monitors and congressional pressure, a violence index, and so forth.

Media ethics can contribute to understanding media violence by delineating responsibility. Nonutilitarian ethics always takes seriously the matter of who should be held accountable. The important question then becomes whether producers of violent entertainment can dismiss their responsibility by claiming to give the public what it wants. Are only parents culpable for the television programs their children watch, or do advertisers and networks carry obligations also? If so, in what proportions? Does the person with greatest technical expertise have the greatest moral liability? How can paternalism that downgrades laypeople and informal social networks in the decision-making process be avoided? When is the state or the courts the final adjudicator? In professional ethics generally and media ethics specifically, clarifying accountability is an important safeguard against the human penchant for evading culpability. The ongoing challenge

for media ethics, then, is establishing the appropriate levels of responsibility among the principal players in media violence: producers and writers, actors, network executives, the public, and politicians. In meeting this challenge, communication ethics will make a unique contribution to understanding media violence and offer sure-footed guidance in dealing with it.

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

A host of ethical issues are already obvious as global media empires take shape. Some are new moral problems, such as digital manipulation. Other longstanding issues are being transformed. Privacy, surveillance, deception, gender discrimination, and ethnic diversity are more complicated than ever.

But the centerpiece ought to be the ethics of justice. A social ethics of justice should be up front at the vortex of the information revolution. 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 for international communication.

The overriding question of justice 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 ensured to all parties without discrimination.

In contrast, the standard conception among privately owned media is allocating to each according to ability to pay. The open marketplace of supply and demand determines who obtains the service. A prominent role is assigned to free choice. Consumers are considered to be at liberty to express their preferences and to select freely from a variety of competing goods and services. The assumption is that decisions about allocating 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, commercial companies 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 offers a radical alternative to the conventional view. Fundamental human needs are related to survival or subsistence. They are not frivolous wants or individual whims or desserts. Agreement is rather uniform on a list of most human necessities—food, housing, clothing, safety, and medical care. If we cannot provide them for ourselves because of the finitude 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 electronic superhighway cannot be envisioned except as a necessity. Communications 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 war and peace. Therefore, as a necessity of life in a global order, the information system ought to be distributed impartially, regardless of income, race, religion, or merit.

But 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 those disproportions. Around 75% of the world's users are in selected Asian countries (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and the Hong Kong region), Europe, and the United States. Only .01% of the population in Africa has computers, and in India, 1 out of 50,000 uses the Internet. Finland has more Internet hosts than all of Latin America. 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 (GNP) 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.

Universal diffusion driven by profits is unlikely. 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 fix. The history of the communications media indicates that they follow existing political and economic patterns; inequities in society lead to inequities in technology. An ethics of justice requires that we intervene through legislation, government policy, and public ownership to implement open access. Our approach to media institutions should be modeled after schools, which we accept as our common responsibility, rather than determined by engineers or by profits alone.

Given the realities of international politics and limited resources, the need-based principle of justice must be supplemented by the similar treatment formula. In the actual distribution of services under sub-optimal conditions, the principle of similar treatment for similar cases calls us to honor the equal distribution of limited services for all. If providing an entire range of expensive technologies for everyone is impossible, it is unjust for a few to be equipped with sophisticated systems and the rest given only minimal service or none at all. If we accept the case for equal access, it is more just to discriminate in terms of categories of service rather than between the information rich and poor. All homes, for instance, could have fire and police view-data communications capability, rather than some being served by every convenience and others receiving no benefits. The formula of similar treatment for similar cases modifies the application of a need conception of justice to address the real world of constraints. But

the goal of equal access to essential services remains due to its moral significance. To realize it only in part is better than jettisoning the formula because of difficulties in implementing it within an environment characterized by resource limitations.

Distributive justice earlier produced a social responsibility framework for broadcasting, as well as a professional ethics of social responsibility for newspapers and magazines. The guideline is informed citizenship, that is, the public learning the day's events in a context of meaning. For telecommunications, the just distribution principle yields the norm of equitable access, with data transmission, telephony, and legal and postal services available to everyone following equivalent standards.

But social responsibility for broadcasting and journalism and equitable access for telecommunications are guidelines in a national setting. They presume and serve explicit political entities. In the digital age—rooted in computers, 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. Therefore, the normative guideline ought to be universal access, based on need. And universal service is the Achilles heel of new technologies driven by invention, engineering, and markets. As the economic disparity between rich and poor continues to grow, a structurally defined information underclass exacerbates the problem under the patina that information and education are the pathways to equality. 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.

HATE SPEECH ON THE INTERNET

Hate groups are on the rise, boosted by the Internet. In 1995, former Ku Klux Klan (KKK) leader Don Black established Stormfront, the first White supremacist site

on the World Wide Web. As access to the Internet became less expensive and creating Web pages much simpler, the number of Web sites and people visiting them has grown exponentially.

Mirroring this growth, bigoted Web sites have grown dramatically also, with more than 2,200 such sites promoting hate, which have been identified in the 2001 Report of the Simon Wiesenthal Center (www.wiesenthal.org; see www.adl.org). "In the past, hate was promoted through crude graffiti and mimeographed pamphlets." Low-class mailings to a few hundred were always difficult. But "these days, slick Web sites devoted to hate are available for a potential audience of millions" (Lauterman, 1999, p. 1).

Today's Ku Klux Klan is more fragmented than at any time since World War II, but its many factions are using the World Wide Web for revitalization. The Southern Poverty Law Center has identified 200 active KKK sites at present. They maintain and defend "the superiority of the White race" and warn "against miscegenation of the races." Jews are vilified as Satan's people, and immigration is condemned as an "uncontrolled, outrageous, and unprecedented plague." In addition, the number of Web sites for the National Association for the Advancement of White People (NAAWP), founded by former Klan leader David Duke, has mushroomed and energized the so-called "Klan without robes" (www.adl.org/main_internet).

Numerous neo-Nazi Web sites promote the anti-Semitic racism of Adolf Hitler's Nazi party. According to the Anti-Defamation League, the National Alliance is the most prominent overtly Hitlerian organization in the United States today, and its Web site includes transcripts of anti-Semitic radio broadcasts, scathing articles from its *National Vanguard* magazine, and a catalog of more than 600 books. Jews are blamed for inflation, media brainwashing, and government corruption, with Blacks depicted as criminals and rioters. Books and speeches by Hitler, Joseph Goebbels,

and the American neo-Nazi George Lincoln Rockwell are displayed and promoted. A host of the sites are devoted to Holocaust revisionism, denying the murder of Jews in World War II. In addition, many neo-Nazi skinheads such as the Oi! Boys and Hammer Skin Nation have Web sites saturated with racist hard rock music (www.adl.org/main_internet).

The Web sites of religious groups are flourishing too. Congregations of Christian Identity are virulently racist and anti-Semitic. Today's Jews are not descended from Old Testament Jews but are Satan's creation. Jews and Blacks are enemies, a virus seeking to destroy "the purity of the Aryan (White) race." The World Church of the Creator (WCOTC) calls non-Whites physiologically inferior, subhuman "mud people." Vicious drawings brutalize Jews and Blacks, and a WCOTC Kids Web site promotes White supremacy in children's terms. The site for White Aryan Resistance (WAR) preaches "your races as your religion" and rails with others against the "non-White birthrate," "massive immigration," and "racial intermarriage." Other religious sites are anti-Catholic and anti-Muslim or violently anti-abortion. Alex Curtis's Nationalist Observer Web site features his "Tribute to Jewry," that is, "Jew York City" decimated by an atomic bomb (www.adl.org/main_internet).

Most organizations that monitor Internet hate activity do not advocate censorship. Education is seen as more effective than trying to silence the bigots. The Southern Poverty Law Center publishes a comprehensive "Community Response Guide" on ways to combat hate. The Anti-Defamation League, as a tool for parents, provides a software filter that blocks hate sites. The Simon Wiesenthal Center advocates that Internet service providers follow the lead of newspapers, which traditionally have rejected advertising judged offensive. David Goldman, founder and director of HateWatch, a Web-based educational resource organization to combat online bigotry, wants knowledgeable citizens to

speak up. He summarizes the general conclusion of most observers that ignorance and apathy “allow this poison to grow” (Lauterman, 1999, p. 7).

Whereas with most moral problems in the media, some ethical theories are more appropriate than others, hate speech on the Internet is contradicted by all major theories without exception. Even consequentialism speaks without ambiguity about it. For Aristotelian virtue ethics, vitriolic hatred is patently a vice. Kant’s principle that humans ought to be treated as ends in themselves does not tolerate physical or psychological abuse. In utilitarian ethics, White supremacy–Black inferiority produces too much harm and benefits only a misguided few. The advocacy of hate speech, as well as any actions based on it, violates John Rawls’s first principle guaranteeing maximum equal liberty for all. And obviously Internet hatred, as in real life, is the polar opposite of agape’s Other-regarding care. This condemnation across the theoretical board suggests that all personal, educational, and policy efforts to combat it are permissible, even mandatory, but obviously short of revengeful and aggressive means that contravene good ends.

◆ *Generic Concerns*

Some important ethical problems cut across all three functions, media technologies, and organizational structures. Two of the most urgent, with the greatest potential impact, are cultural diversity and democratization.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Indigenous languages and ethnicity have come into their own. Sects and religious fundamentalists insist on recognition. Culture is more salient these days than countries.

Muslim immigrants are the fastest growing segment of France’s population,

and longstanding policies of assimilation have not been credible. Thirty thousand Navajos live in Los Angeles, isolated from their native nation and culture. The nomadic Fulani search for good pasture throughout sub-Saharan West Africa and are held together by clan fidelity, but their political future hangs in the balance. Hasidic Jews in the Williamsburg community of Brooklyn, New York, live under constant threats to their safety. The Detroit area has 200,000 people of Middle Eastern descent; 1,500 small grocery and retail stores in the vicinity are owned by a subculture of Chaldean Christians with roots in Iraq. More than 30% of the information technicians working for mammoth Microsoft come from India. At the turn of the 20th century, 80% of the immigrants to the United States emigrated from Europe. Starting in the 1960s, the majority has come from Asia, Latin America, and developing countries in Africa. And rather than the melting-pot Americanization of the past century, immigrants now insist on maintaining their culture, religion, and language. With identity politics the dominant issue in world affairs after the cold war and ethnic self-consciousness a source of social vitality, social institutions, including the media, are challenged to develop a healthy cultural pluralism.

To comprehend the new demands of cultural diversity, we must give up an individualistic morality of rights for a social ethics of the common good. A commitment to cultural pluralism makes sense when the community is understood to be axiologically and ontologically prior to persons. Human beings in this communitarian perspective do not disappear into the tribe, but their identity is constituted organically; persons depend on and live through the social realm. Our selfhood is not fashioned out of thin air. We are born into a socio-cultural universe where values, moral commitments, and existential meanings are both presumed and negotiated (Schutz, 1967, chap. 2). Social systems precede their occupants and endure after them. Indeed,

Socrates argued playfully that he could not be responsible for ruining the polis or free to save it because the polis educated him.

In communitarian ethics, morally appropriate action intends community. Unless my freedom is used to help others flourish, my own well-being is negated. Fulfillment is never achieved in isolation but only through human bonding at the epicenter of social formation. Contrary to the 18th-century dualism between thinker and agent, reason and will, we know ourselves primarily as whole beings in relation. There are no singular selves split into mind and body pursuing an isolated identity across time. Humans survive and develop through interaction with others and not from isolated introspection or private experience. Thus, communitarian democracy argues that an atomistic political liberalism operating with an aggregate of individual pursuits cannot yield a comprehensive approach to the age of diversity. Because the social nature of human life has been underdeveloped in classical liberal theory, it lacks the intellectual resources to articulate a multicultural society. In communitarianism, moral agents are understood to need a context for assessing what is valuable. What is worth preserving cannot be determined in isolation but ascertained only within specific social situations in which human identity is nurtured. The public sphere is conceived as a mosaic of distinguishable communities, a pluralism of ethnic identities and world-views intersecting to form a social bond but each seriously held and competitive as well. At its origin three centuries ago, liberal political philosophy found traditional communities unproblematic and saw the intellectual challenge as defining individual autonomy. While coming to grips with liberty and expanding its scope conceptually and governmentally, liberal societies have tended to rely on a dualism of two orders—liberty in the public arena of involved citizens undergirded by moral values in the sphere of family and peers. However, instead of paying lip service to the social nature of the self while presuming this

divide, communitarian democracy interlocks liberty and communal well-being as both inscribed in the social organism.⁸

For linking communal values with the political ideals of freedom and equality, only democratic models of community are appropriate. Some forms of association are authoritarian and gender biased. Occupational groups or fans supporting a local baseball team are not communities in the sense that one's self-identity is derived from the whole. The Ku Klux Klan is driven by racial supremacy. Some ethnic communities are sexist. Thus, Carole Pateman (1989) advocates participatory democracy as the normative core of community formation. In her perspective, social contract theory, from John Locke to Rawls, argues for voluntary consent but actually demands acquiescence. Liberal arguments for freely created obligation obscure the nature of the political obedience involved; otherwise, "it would strip the liberal democratic state of a major portion of its ideological mantle" (Pateman, 1989, p. 70). Participatory democracy alone is appropriate to community formation. Civil associations bound together by a network of beliefs and values are only possible through active participation in articulating the common good and mutuality in implementing it.

Communitarianism as the basis for cultural pluralism enables us to move beyond melting-pot homogeneity and replace it with the politics of recognition. Amy Gutmann's (1994) question gets to the heart of the matter: "Is a democracy letting its citizens down, excluding or discriminating against us in some morally troubling way, when major institutions fail to take account of our particular identities?" (p. 3). In what sense should our specific cultural and social features as African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Buddhists, Jews, the physically disabled, or children publicly matter? Should not our public institutions treat us as free and equal citizens without regard to race, gender, or religion and ensure only that democratic citizens share an equal right to political

liberties and due process? Charles Taylor (1994, pp. 25–73) considers the issue of recognizing multicultural groups politically as one of the most urgent and vexing on the democratic agenda at present, and the equalitarian social philosophy of classic democratic liberalism cannot accommodate it. Beneath the rhetoric is a fundamental philosophical dispute that Taylor calls the “politics of recognition.” As he puts it, “Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need” (Taylor, 1994, p. 26). This foundational issue regarding the character of cultural identity vis-à-vis equal rights needs resolution for cultural pluralism to come into its own.

Dialogic relations are the heart of the communitarian paradigm, and from a dialogical perspective, recognition is not a supercilious pursuit. As Taylor (1994) argues,

We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. But we learn these modes of expression through exchange with others. People do not acquire the languages needed for self-definition on their own. Rather we are introduced to them through interaction with others who matter to us. . . . My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others. . . . In a culture of authenticity, relationships are seen as the key loci of self-discovery and self-affirmation. (pp. 32, 34, 36)

Language is the marrow of community, the public agent through which our identity is realized. Persons are displayed, made accessible, nurtured, and integrated into social units through symbol, myth, and metaphor. Our constitutive relations as humans are linguistic. Symbols cannot

be isolated in our cranium. The lingual dimension forms an organic whole with our deepest humanness, and its vitality or oppression inevitably conditions our well-being. Our first existential order is the symbolic theater we call culture, and therefore our human identities inscribed in culture matter to us.

Therefore, while requiring political neutrality in government affairs, communitarian democracy simultaneously insists that public institutions further particular cultural values. Michael Walzer (1994, pp. 11–12) distinguishes two kinds of liberalism: Liberalism 1 is committed to a neutral state and the strongest possible version of individual rights. In Liberalism 2, the state promotes the survival and flourishing of particular cultures and religions. Should there be multicultural societies of Liberalism 2, Liberalism 1 would be chosen through a democratic process. However, both versions are possible at the same time. Amy Gutmann recommends correctly that we see these conceptions as two strands within a single paradigm of liberal democracy—one that requires state neutrality in such areas as religion “but not in others, such as education, where democratically accountable institutions are free to reflect the values of one or more cultural communities as long as they also respect the basic rights of all citizens” (Walzer, 1994, p. 12). Within this model, the democratic institutions of communications are challenged to develop policies and practices that take seriously the politics of recognition based on a dialogic social philosophy.

Consistent with this framework, Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki (2000) indicate how the race dimension of cultural pluralism ought to move forward in the media. Race in 21st-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 to animosity and then racism, a complex ambivalence most frequently characterizes the majority. “Whites bring complicated combinations of assumptions, misinformation, emotional needs, experiences, and personality traits to their thinking about race” (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 21). They may believe, for example, that Blacks face discrimination and merit aid but argue against welfare spending for Blacks out of a suspicion of government programs. They do not “generally harbor deep-seated fears or resentment, . . . but also sometimes lose their patience over racial issues” (p. 33). 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, “the media serve as resources for perpetuating racial animosity.” Personal experiences of Black effort and achievement tend to be discounted “in favor of television images, often vague, of welfare cheats and Black violence.” Unfortunately, interviewees did not draw “on television or other media for evidence that pulled them toward comity” (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 28). Overwhelming in the White majority experience are

media images of Blacks on welfare, of Black violence on local news, and of crude behavior—open sexuality and insolence—in entertainment television. The mediated experience rises just above a critical threshold where these ambivalent respondents say they do know better intellectually, from coming into contact with a variety of Black people who offer compelling evidence to the contrary, but nevertheless feel themselves taken in by the flood of images. . . . The habits of local news—for example, the rituals in covering urban crime—facilitate the construction of menacing imagery. (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 34)

The media are not enhancing racial understanding among those most open to it. They are “tipping the balance toward suspicion and even animosity among the ambivalent majority of Americans” (p. 44). Unfortunately, the media do not serve this important swing group for moving forward and changing policy and institutions toward cultural pluralism.

Democratization

How can the global media, entertainment empires, international wire services, and cyberspace fulfill their democratic potential? Ethicists are always concerned about ends, aims, and goals. Therefore, an important question is whether educational and information services will be primary in the technologically sophisticated media systems of the 21st century. Worldwide news operations open windows on politics everywhere. Technologies such as the interactive Internet give people a voice and connect users directly without professionals or gatekeepers in between. They are democratic tools in principle—hence the concern that the new media serve the people’s needs rather than those of special interest groups or the market’s. “I have some reservations,” Ellen Goodman (1993) writes,

about an information superhighway roaring through my front door. For one thing, . . . this highway is not heading for the library; it’s heading for the marketplace. [Automobile] highways took people from Main Street to the Mall. The information highways hope to turn our homes into domestic versions of the Great Mall of America in Minneapolis. Has anybody asked for this? . . . The superhighways are promoting, indeed betting on, superspending. (p. 15)

Five hundred online channels are technically feasible. Will they tangibly improve the quality of education, broaden our political horizons, or make public policy alternatives more understandable? Can

a complicated enterprise overcome the contradiction between an antidemocratic, media-centered professionalism and a citizen-centered ethics?

The social narrative we call news is an agent of political deliberation. In deliberative democracy, the public must press their claims “in terms accessible to their fellow citizens”; they must “reason beyond their narrow self-interest” and use arguments that “can be justified to people who reasonably disagree with them” (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996, pp. 55, 2; see also p. 255). The media, in other words, facilitate the process of negotiation over the social, political, and cultural agenda. In terms of the deliberative democracy entailed by the dialogic social ethics advocated here, citizens engage one another in normative terms, that is, on both practical matters *and* social vision. Social conflicts are a major component of democratic life, and in deliberative politics, they remain the province of citizens rather than usurped by judicial or legislative experts. Affirmative action, environmental protection, health policy, global warming, gun control, incarceration, arms trade, and welfare reform raise moral conflicts that the public themselves must negotiate. When agreement is not forthcoming, channels of continued interaction are kept open by acknowledging “the moral standing of reasonable views” opposed to our own (Macedo, 1999, p. 123). This approach is more pluralistic than Habermas’s discursive account and more substantive than Rawls’s liberal neutrality allows (Bohman, 2000, pp. 4–15).

Public life cannot be facilitated in technical terms only, but professionals must speak of moral issues in appropriately moral discourse. When journalists, for example, investigate government policies that are vacuous or unjust, they must do so in terms of common values that have broad acceptance in the community as a whole. Our widely shared moral intuitions—respect for the dignity of others, for instance—are developed through discourse within a community.

In this sense, media professionals participate in the citizens’ ongoing process of moral articulation. In fact, culture’s continued existence depends on identifying and defending its normative base. Therefore, public texts must enable us “to discover truths about ourselves”; narratives ought to “bring a moral compass into readers’ lives” by accounting for things that matter to them (Denzin, 1997, p. 284). Communities are woven together by narratives that invigorate their common understanding of good and evil, happiness and reward, the meaning of life and death. Recovering and refashioning moral discourse helps to amplify our deepest humanness and to provide the soil in which democracy can flourish.

Most democratic theorists since Rousseau have considered deep moral conflicts intractable. As Bohman (2000) notes, “Moral and epistemic diversity often go hand in hand” (p. 86). Differences in moral outlook are entangled in different assessments of the evidence, varying data, and disagreements over appropriate public language. In these instances, “Appeal to a common human reason can still fail to produce agreement even when agents are not irrational” (p. 86). And Rawls’s “method of avoidance” in such cases is typically counterproductive. Certainly, pragmatic devices such as a “gag rule” or “self-binding” device to remove some issues from public discussion do not entail deliberation but contradict it (p. 74). Therefore, a dynamic and pluralistic framework does not seek a singular, impartial standpoint that all citizens are expected to endorse (Rawls, 1993, p. 217). Rather, the media facilitate a public discourse that takes all interpretations into account, without aiming toward the convergence of an abstract point of view. No single norm of reasonableness is presupposed, and deliberation goes beyond trade-offs and making concessions that compromise our beliefs. In a pluralist democracy, “Agents can come to an agreement with one another for different publicly accessible reasons. . . . The ideal of public reason . . . permits rather than denies

or avoids, moral conflict and differences in democratic politics” (Bohman, 2000, pp. 83–84). In terms of the democratization promoted by the contemporary media, citizens’ values and conceptions of the good life put up for public debate “provide an expanded framework for deliberating about differences” (p. 92). When the terms of debate are widened beyond the values of individual rights, and moral disagreements are articulated in public communications, a larger universe of discourse can emerge, or, at a minimum, the various sides can learn to tolerate one another’s position.

◆ Conclusion

The utilitarian ethics that dominates the media professions needs to be replaced by a sophisticated deontological theory. The building blocks in constructing such a theoretically credible media ethics are moving the specific conundrums in the field away from their utilitarian orientation.

In the process of restructuring media ethics in nonutilitarian terms, this normative composite must become explicitly cross-cultural in character. As true of professional ethics generally, media ethics ought to be repositioned as a comparative domain. The media ethics canon has been largely Western, gender biased, and monocultural. The field of the future must be international, gender inclusive, and multicultural. The global reach of communication systems and institutions requires a broadband ethics commensurate with its scope.

The ethics of individualistic rationalism has presumed political neutrality but is now more clearly understood as a “fighting creed.” It is not a “meeting ground for all cultures” but expresses “one range of cultures, quite incompatible with other ranges” (Taylor, 1994, pp. 62–63). The traditional ethics of reason is entangled with the West’s democratic liberalism in presuming its neutrality while actually imposing its own logic, fueled by a

colonialism of intellectual and political superiority—thus the revolution in perspective toward a diversified comparative ethics with a level playing floor rooted in equal respect for all cultures. Replacing a one-way monologic ethics with a collaborative media ethics in the interactive, transnational mode is “by no means unproblematic and involves something like an act of faith” (Taylor, 1994, p. 66). The claim is that human cultures have something important to say to all human beings, a starting hypothesis that must be validated concretely. This presumption does not require of us “preemptory and inauthentic judgments of equal value, but a willingness to be open to comparative . . . study of the kind that displaces our horizons in the resulting fusions” (Taylor, 1994, p. 73). With its roots in language, culture, dialogue, and identity-in-relationship, media ethics has the opportunity to set the cross-cultural standard for all of applied and professional ethics.

◆ Notes

1. The first use of *ethics* by press critics was in July 1889. Garcia (1989) terminates her examination of journalistic standards in the United States at this date, citing it as the transition from everyday procedures to a more reflective period focusing on ethical precepts.

2. Ethics is normally distinguished into three parts: descriptive ethics, normative ethics, and meta-ethics. Descriptive ethics accounts for actual moral practices, beliefs, and traditions of particular persons or groups. It avoids moral judgments. In approach, it belongs to the social sciences. Normative ethics and meta-ethics are encompassed within moral philosophy. Meta-ethics examines the means and uses of moral terms, analyzes moral discourse and reasoning, and establishes the foundations on which moral judgments are made. Normative ethics examines moral arguments for the justice or injustice of

societies and institutions. It studies which classes of conduct are right or wrong, good or bad, and worthy of praise or blame (Kagan, 1998). Professional ethics, with its interaction of theory and practice, considers itself a type of normative ethics.

3. Richard Brandt (1963) and J. O. Urmson (1953) constructed a rule utilitarianism that confronted the weaknesses in emphasizing acts. In this view, we should judge rightness and wrongness not by the consequences of specific acts but by the consequences of their becoming a general rule. The question is not which action yields the greatest utility but which rule does. The principle of utility is still the standard, but at the level of rules rather than individual judgments. If one household waters its lawn in a drought, there are no discernible consequences, but rule utilitarians make a broadly applicable rule based on the results that suppose everyone did. Most critics of utility see little practical difference between act and rule utilitarianism because only maximum human happiness determined by counting one by one has intrinsic value in both versions.

4. For a detailed review of utilitarian rationalism from 1890 to the present, see Christians (2000).

5. For elaboration, see Denzin (1997, chaps. 8–9).

6. For a complete bibliography of television violence research, see Wilson, Colvin, and Smith (2002, pp. 57–60); Wilson, Smith, et al. (2002, pp. 32–53); and Potter (1999, pp. 257–285). The *National Television Violence Study* (1996–1998) was published in three volumes.

7. In Aristotle's own words, the principle is this: "Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, that is, the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it" (Aristotle, 1947, 1107a).

8. *Communitarianism* is understood here as a social philosophy developed by Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel, Carole Pateman, and others as an alternative to egalitarian democracy (such as Richard Rorty's procedural version). When Amitai Etzioni uses the term for a political movement, it bears the same discontinuity with communitarian political theory as the Democratic Party does with the term *democracy*.

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