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Journalism Ethics

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Journalism ethics, the norms of responsible journalism, can be traced back to the beginning of modern journalism in Europe during the seventeenth century. This chapter provides an overview of contemporary journalism ethics by following its evolution, by reviewing and critiquing major approaches, and by suggesting future work. The chapter begins with a view of ethics as practical normative activity that aims to solve problems, integrate values and help humans live rightly, as individuals and as societies. Journalism ethics is defined as a species of applied ethics that examines what journalists and news organizations should do, given their role in society. The main problem areas include editorial independence, verification, anonymous sources, the use of graphic or altered images, and norms for new forms of media.

The chapter identifies five stages in the development of journalism ethics and four approaches to its study today. First, the invention of ethical discourse for journalism during the seventeenth century. Second, a “public ethics” as the creed for the growing newspaper press, or Fourth Estate, of the Enlightenment public sphere. Third, the liberal theory of the press, during the nineteenth century. Fourth, development *and* criticism of this liberal doctrine across the twentieth century resulting in a professional ethics of objective journalism, bolstered by social responsibility theory; and an alternative ethics for interpretive and activist journalism. Fifth, today’s current “mixed media” ethics which lacks consensus on what principles apply across types of media. These stages are used to explain four approaches: (1) liberal theory, (2) objectivity and social responsibility theory, (3) interpretive theory, and (4) an ethics of community and care.

The chapter then considers criticisms of current approaches by a range of disciplines, from critical and post-colonial theory to sociology of culture. The chapter concludes by arguing that the current media revolution and these new criticisms call for a fundamental re-thinking of journalism ethics. Journalism ethics needs a richer theoretical base, a more adequate epistemology, and new norms for the multi-platform, global journalism of today and tomorrow.

JOURNALISM ETHICS

Ethics is the analysis, evaluation and promotion of what constitutes correct conduct and virtuous character in light of the best available principles. Ethics does not simply ask how to live well. It asks how we should live well *ethically*, that is, in goodness and in right relation with each other, a task that may require us to forego personal benefits, to carry out duties or to endure persecution. Ethical reasoning is about how people interpret, balance and modify their principles in light of new

facts, new technology, and new social conditions (Ward, 2007). The boundaries of ethics change. In our time, ethics has come to include such issues as animal cruelty, violence against women, the environment and the rights of homosexuals (Glover, 1999). Ethical reflection is *normative reason in social practice*. Ethics is the never-completed project of inventing, applying and critiquing the principles that guide human interaction, define social roles and justify institutional structures.

Therefore, ethics, especially journalism ethics, is essentially a practical activity (Black, Steele, & Barney, 1999) that seeks reasons to questions of how to act. Is it ethical for journalists to reveal their confidential sources to police? Is it ethical to invade the privacy of a much-admired politician to investigate alleged misconduct? Ethics includes the theoretical study of the concepts and modes of justification that provide ethical reasons for acting. But the purpose here is also practical: to clarify principles and improve deliberation so as to lead to well-considered ethical judgments. A stress on the practical in ethics assures us that “the problems we have followed into the clouds are, even intellectually, genuine not spurious” (Dworkin, 2000, p. 4).

Journalism Ethics as Applied

Applied ethics is the study of frameworks of principles for domains of activity, such as corporate governance, scientific research and professional practice (Dimock & Tucker, 2004). Journalism ethics is a species of applied media ethics that investigates the “micro” problems of what individual journalists should do in particular situations, and the “macro” problems of what news media should do, given their role in society. Journalists as members of news organizations have rights, duties and norms because as human beings, they fall under general ethical principles such as to tell the truth and minimize harm, and because as professionals they have social power to frame the political agenda and influence public opinion (Curd & May, 1984; Elliott, 1986).

Therefore, a question about journalism is an *ethical* question, as opposed to a question of prudence, custom or law, if it evaluates conduct in light of the fundamental public purposes and social responsibilities of journalism. A story that sensationalizes the personal life of a public figure may be legal—it may be legally “safe” to publish—but it may be unethical in being inaccurate and unfair. However, there is no necessary incompatibility between ethical values and other types of value. A story may be well-written, legal and career-enhancing, yet also ethical. What one regards as a question of journalism ethics depends, ultimately, on one’s conception of the primary functions of journalism and the principles that promote those aims. Consequently, there is room for disagreement on the level of practice, in applying norms, and on the level of theory and principle.

Problem Areas

A major task of journalism ethics is to determine how existing norms apply to the main ethical issues of the day. Some current problem areas are:

- *Accuracy and verification*: How much verification and context is required to publish a story? How much editing and “gate-keeping” is necessary?
- *Independence and allegiances*: How can journalists be independent but maintain ethical relations with their employers, editors, advertisers, sources, police and the public. When is a journalist too close to a source, or in a conflict of interest?
- *Deception and fabrication*: Should journalists misrepresent themselves or use recording technology, such as hidden cameras, to get a story? Should literary journalists invent dialogue or create composite “characters”?

- *Graphic images and image manipulation*: When should journalists publish graphic or gruesome images? When do published images constitute sensationalism or exploitation? When and how should images be altered?
- *Sources and confidentiality*: Should journalists promise confidentiality to sources? How far does that protection extend? Should journalists go “off the record”?
- *Special situations*: How should journalists report hostage-takings, major breaking news, suicide attempts and other events where coverage could exacerbate the problem? When should journalists violate privacy?
- *Ethics across media types*: Do the norms of mainstream print and broadcast journalism apply to journalism on the Internet? To citizen journalists?

MAIN APPROACHES

The history of journalism ethics can be divided into five stages. The first stage is the invention of an ethical discourse for journalism as it emerged in Western Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Gutenberg’s press in the mid-fifteenth century gave birth to printer-editors who created a periodic news press of “newsheets” and “newsbooks” under state control. Despite the primitive nature of their newsgathering, and the partisan nature of their times, editors assured readers that they printed the impartial truth based on “matters of fact.” The second stage was the creation of a “public ethic” as the creed for the growing newspaper press of the Enlightenment public sphere. Journalists claimed to be tribunes of the public, protecting their liberty against government. They advocated reform and eventually revolution. By the end of the eighteenth century, the press was a socially recognized institution, a power to be praised or feared, with guarantees of freedom in the post-revolution constitutions of America and France. This public ethic was the basis for the idea of a Fourth Estate—the press as one of the governing institutions of society (Ward, 2005a, pp. 89–173).

The third stage was the evolution of the idea of a Fourth Estate into the liberal theory of the press, during the nineteenth century (Siebert, 1956). Liberal theory began with the premise that a free and independent press was necessary for the protection of the liberties of the public and the promotion of liberal reform. The fourth stage was the simultaneous development *and* criticism of this liberal doctrine across the twentieth century. Both the development and the criticism were responses to deficiencies in the liberal model. The “developers” were journalists and ethicists who constructed a professional ethics of objective journalism, bolstered by social responsibility theory. Objectivism sought to use adherence to fact and impartiality towards political party to restrain a free press that was increasingly sensational (or “yellow”) and dominated by business interests (Baldasty, 1992; Campbell, 2001). The “critics” were journalists who rejected the restraints of objective professional reporting and practiced more interpretive, partial forms of journalism such as investigative reporting and activist (or advocacy) journalism.

By the late 1900s, the liberal and objective professional model was under attack from many sources as journalism entered its fifth stage, a stage of “mixed media.” Not only were increasing numbers of non-professional citizen journalists and bloggers engaging in journalism, but these communicators used interactive multi-media that challenged the ideas of cautious verification and gate-keeping. As a result, journalism ethics was (and continues to be) fraught with disagreement on the most basic notions of what journalism is and what journalists are “for” (Rosen 1999).

With these stages in mind, we can better appreciate four normative theories of the press that are currently influencing this fifth stage: (1) liberal theory, (2) objectivity and social responsibility theory, (3) interpretive and activist theory, and (4) an ethics of community and care.¹

Liberal Theory

Liberal theory continues to underpin current discussions, if only to act as a theory to be revised or criticized. Liberal press ideas, as espoused from John Milton and David Hume to J. S. Mill and Thomas Paine, were part of liberalism as a political reform movement for the surging middle classes.² Liberalism sought the expansion of individual liberties and an end to the privileges of birth and religion that marked non-liberal, hierarchical society. In economics, liberalism supported *laissez-faire* attitudes; in press theory it supported a free marketplace of ideas. Mill's *On Liberty* appealed to the individual *and* social benefits of freedom, within specified limits (Mill, 1965). This ascendant liberalism supplied the ethical ideology for both the elite liberal papers, such as *The Times* of London, and the egalitarian popular press, from the penny press to the mass commercial press of the late 1800s (Schudson, 1978). For liberal theory, journalists should constitute an independent press that informs citizens and acts as a watchdog on government and abuses of power. Today, the liberal approach continues to be used to justify arguments for a free press against media restrictions, such as censorship of offensive views, and the abuse of libel laws to curtail publication.³

Objectivity and Social Responsibility

As noted above, objectivism and social responsibility theory were liberal theories attempting to respond to a disillusionment with the liberal hope that an unregulated press would be a responsible educator of citizens on matters of public interest. That hope flagged in the late 1800s and early 1900s as a mass commercial press turned into a business of news directed by press barons. One response was to develop the ideal of an objective news press, with codes of ethics and other professional features. The liberal idea of a social contract (Darwall, 2003; Scanlon, 1982) was used to argue that society allowed professional journalists to report freely in return for responsible coverage of essential public issues (Klaidman & Beauchamp, 1987; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001).

From the early 1900s to the middle of the twentieth-century, objectivity was a dominant ethical ideal for mainstream newspapers in the United States, Canada and beyond, although it was less popular in Europe. By the 1920s, major journalism associations in the United States had adopted formal codes that called for objectivity in reporting, independence from government and business influence, and a strict distinction between news and opinion. The result was an elaborate set of newsroom rules to ensure that journalists reported “just the facts” (Schudson, 1978; Mindich, 1998).

The liberal social contract gave rise to two types of principles in professional codes of ethics: “proactive” and “restraining”⁴ which were cashed out in terms of more specific rules, standards and practices. Pro-active principles assert that journalists do not simply have freedom to publish but they also have a *duty* to publish the most accurate and comprehensive truth on matters of public interest, and to report independently without fear or favor. “Seek truth and report it” and “act independently” are primary pro-active principles of most Western codes of ethics. Restraining principles call on journalists to use this freedom to publish in a responsible manner. Restraining principles include the duty to “minimize harm” to vulnerable subjects of stories, such as children or traumatized persons, and the duty to be accountable to the public for editorial decisions.

The professional model favors a holistic, contextual approach to the application of principles. For any situation, journalists are expected to weigh principles, standards, facts, expected consequences, rights and the impact on personal reputations (Black, Steele, & Blarney, 1999, pp. 29–30). When norms conflict, such as when reporting the truth conflicts with the desire to minimize harm, such as to *not* report a sensitive fact, journalists will have to decide which prin-

ciples have priority. Reasoning in journalism ethics challenges journalists to reach a “reflective equilibrium” among their intuitions and principles (Rawls, 1993, p. 8).⁵

Another liberal response was social responsibility theory (Peterson, 1956), developed by scholars and journalists in the United States. While liberal theory recognized the idea of press responsibility and social utility, social responsibility theory underlined these neglected responsibilities. In the United States, the Hutchins Commission into the Freedom of the Press in the late 1940s gave the theory a clear and popular formulation.⁶ In its report, *A Free and Responsible Press*, the commission stressed that the main functions of the press was to provide “a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account” of the news and events and “a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism.” The press should provide a “representative picture of the constituent groups in society,” and assist in the “presentation and clarification of the goals and values of society,” and “provide full access to the day’s intelligence” (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947, pp. 21–28). If journalistic self-regulation failed, social responsibility proponents warned that government regulators might intervene. Today, the ideas of social responsibility theory have “won global recognition over the last 50 years,” such as in European public broadcasting (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004, p. 4) and as far afield as Japan (Tsukamoto, 2006). Moreover, the theory continues to provide a basic vocabulary for new ethical approaches, such as feminist and communitarian theories, while providing standards by which press councils and the public can evaluate media performance.

Interpretation and Activism

The liberal ideal that a free press should inform citizens also has been embraced by the tradition of interpretive journalism that seeks to explain the significance of events and by the tradition of activist journalism that seeks to reform society. Both interpretive and activist traditions believe that journalists have a duty to be more than stenographers of fact. However, this stress on an active, non-objective press is not new. For most of modern journalism’s history, journalists have been openly partisan, and their reporting has been biased towards political parties and funders. However, in the early 1900s, a less partisan interpretive journalism arose that sought to rationally and independently explain an increasingly complex world. For instance, Henry Luce’s interpretive journalism was the model for *Time* magazine in the 1920s. In the 1930s and beyond, scholars, foreign reporters and journalism associations acknowledged the need to supplement objective reporting with an informed interpretation of world events, wars and economic disasters like the Great Depression (MacDougall, 1957). Newspapers in the 1930s and 1940s introduced weekend interpretations of the past week’s events, beat reporters and interpretive columnists with bylines. This tradition of interpretive journalism would gather strength in the second half of the twentieth century in the hands of broadcast journalists, literary journalists and, then, online journalists.

Meanwhile, from the 1960s onward, activist journalists defined “informing the public” as challenging the status quo, opposing wars and promoting social causes. Activist journalists sought to organize public opinion against government and private sector misconduct, and unjust or unwise policies. Modern activist journalists were anticipated historically by the reform journalists of the late eighteenth century in England, and by the revolutionary journalists in America and France. Activist journalists also share many values with the muckraking magazine journalists in America during the first two decades of the 1900s (Filler, 1968; Applegate, 1997). In the 1990s, American journalists advocated a moderate reform journalism called “civic journalism” that saw the journalist as a catalyst for civic engagement (Rosen 1996).

Today, many journalists see themselves as some combination of informer, interpreter and advocate. Traditional values, such as factual accuracy, are not completely jettisoned. Even the

most vocal muckraker or activist journalist insists that their reports are factually accurate, although they reject neutrality (Miraldi, 1990). Rather, they see their facts as embedded in interpretive narratives that draw conclusions. For both interpretive and activist journalism, the main ethical questions are: What are its norms and principles, if objectivity is not the ideal? What ethical theory can restrain the possible abuses or excesses of non-objective journalism?

Community and Care

The fourth influential approach to journalism ethics is the application of communitarian ethics (Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993) and a feminist ethics of care to the practices of journalism (Gulligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Koehn, 1998).

Both approaches provide criticism of, and an alternative to, liberal theory. Both approaches emphasize the “restraining principles” of minimizing harm and being accountable while de-emphasizing the “pro-active” principles. The liberal perspective stress individual freedoms and rights; the communitarian and care perspectives stress the impact of journalism on communal values and caring relationships.⁷

Communitarianism in journalism ethics reflects a revival in communitarian ethical, legal and political theory over several decades (Peden & Hudson, 1991; Seters 2006). Communitarians stress the communal good and the social nature of humans. They argue that neither liberalism nor any theory can be liberal among different views of the good and therefore, journalists should support their community’s commitment to substantive values and conceptions of the good life. Communitarian media ethicists, such as Clifford Christians, use the primacy of “humans-in-relation” to argue that the main function of the press is not a “thin” liberal informing of citizens about facts and events. The main function is the provision of a rich, interpretive dialogue with and among citizens that aims at “civic transformation” (Christians, 2006, pp. 65–66).

The communitarian approach is close in spirit to theories of care, developed by feminists and other scholars.⁸ The promotion of caring human relationships, as an essential part of human flourishing, is a primary principle (Card, 1999; Pierce, 2000). Feminists promoted an ethics of care “founded on notions of community rather than in the rights-based tradition” (Patterson & Wilkins, 2002, p. 292). Gilligan (1982) criticized the moral development theory of Lawrence Kohlberg for ignoring gender.

An ethics of care attempts to restrain a news media that is often insensitive to story subjects and sources. As Jay Black has written, feminist scholars have argued that by paying attention to the tenets of an ethics of care, “a fuller, richer media system may emerge, on that can and will consider such concepts as compassion, subjectivity, and need” (Black 2006, p. 99). Ethicists have applied an ethics of care to cases in journalism, such as formulaic coverage of murders in Canada and the United States (Fullerton & Patterson, 2006). Steiner and Okrusch (2006) have argued that idea of professional responsibility in journalism can be re-interpreted in terms of caring.

All of these major approaches are informed by a significant increase in the empirical and theoretical analysis of journalism practice and ethics. The past half-century has seen an unprecedented rise in the study of media and culture and in the channels available for public discussion, from new books, journals, and Web sites to new associations and institutes for the rigorous study of journalism ethics and practice. Scholars, working in established academic departments of sociology or political science, or in expanding schools of journalism and communication, pursue vigorous lines of research such as the agenda-setting role of media (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997), audience theory (McQuail, 1997), media economics and sociology (Picard, 1989; Albarán & Chan-Olmsted, 1998; McQuail, 1969), moral development among journalists (Wilkins & Coleman, 2005), and the history of journalism ethics (Spencer, 2007; Ward, 2005a). Journals

and magazines publish ever new case studies and surveys using content analysis and other quantitative and qualitative methods of social science. These studies not only provide ethicists with data, they also enlarge the conceptual base of journalism ethics as a discipline by placing talk of principles and practices in a larger critical and theoretical framework. Of special note is the development of an international approach to the study of media communication and journalism. The studies provide a portrait of the “news people” around the world and how their media systems and values compare (Demers, 2007; Weaver, 1998). Discussions of ethics now take place against this growing body of literature on the relation of journalism ethics to economics, ideology, politics and global culture.

CRITIQUES OF TRADITIONAL JOURNALISM ETHICS

However, despite an increase in these studies, or perhaps partly because of them, the current climate of journalism ethics is one of fundamental disagreement about its nature and purpose. There are three main sources of debate. One source is a disagreement among the four approaches, outlined above, an internal debate within journalism ethics. A second source is a range of academic and critical perspectives from disciplines external to journalism and journalism ethics—political science, sociology, and culture and communication studies. These theories critique the project of journalism ethics by considering the relationship between ethical discourse and the exercise of power, Western economic and cultural dominance, and post-modern skepticism about truth and objectivity. The main questions raised are: (1) How can we interpret and practice journalism ethics so that we avoid turning ethical discourse into ethical ideology, a tool of Western dominance? (2) How can the universal principles of journalism ethics recognize political, social and cultural differences? A third source of debate is more practical. Changes to the technological and social conditions of journalism are creating a “new media” journalism with different values (Pavlik, 2001).

In this section, I summarize two “external” challenges to traditional journalism ethics: a post-modern questioning of the professional ideal of seeking the truth, objectively; and a “critical” analysis of journalism ethics.

Questioning Truth and Objectivity

Professional journalism ethics was built upon the twin pillars of truth and objectivity. By the late 1800s, mass commercial newspapers displayed a robust empiricism—an energetic pursuit of the news that amounted to a “veneration of the fact” (Stephens, 1988, p. 244). By the early 1900s, journalism textbooks, associations and codes of ethics attempted to restrain that robust empiricism by citing truth, objectivity and social responsibility as fundamental principles of the emerging profession. The adherence to truth and objectivity was part of an Enlightenment belief in a rational public—that humans would rationally seek and discern truth from falsehood, right from wrong, if they were provided with the facts, or objectively presented information. The heyday of traditional objectivity was from the 1920s to the 1950s in the mainstream broadsheet newspapers of North America. The doctrine was so pervasive that, in the 1956, press theorist Theodore Peterson said objectivity was “a fetish” (Peterson, 1956, p. 88). The second half of the century is a story of challenge and decline due to new forms of journalism, new technology and new social conditions.

The pillars of truth and objectivity show serious wear and tear due to a post-modern skepticism about objective truth and a cynicism about the claims of profit-seeking news organizations to be impartial informers. Therefore, any discussion of journalism ethics must include the *problem of*

truth and objectivity in journalism, and the decline of the traditional doctrine of news objectivity to the point where it is, today, a spent ethical force (Ward, 2005a, pp. 261–264). There have been three types of complaint against news objectivity: First, objectivity is too demanding an ideal for journalism and hence objectivity is a “myth.” Second, objectivity, even if possible, is undesirable because it forces writers to use restricted formats. It encourages a superficial reporting of official facts. It fails to provide readers with analysis and interpretation. Objectivity ignores other functions of the press such as commenting, campaigning and acting as public watchdog. Finally, objectivity restricts a free press. A democracy is better served by a non-objective press where views compete in a marketplace of ideas.

Objectivity was challenged from its inception. The magazine muckrakers of the early 1900s rejected neutrality in reporting. The emergence of television and radio created more personal forms of media. In the 1960s, an adversarial culture that criticized institutions, opposed war and fought for civil rights was skeptical of objective experts and detached journalism. Other writers, from Norman Mailer to Truman Capote, practiced a journalism that looked to literature for its inspiration.

In academia, philosophers, social scientists and others have challenged the notion of objective knowledge and objective science. Thomas Kuhn’s influential writings were interpreted as showing that scientific change was a non-rational “conversion” to a new set of beliefs (Kuhn, 1962). All knowledge was “socially constructed” (Hacking, 1999). Philosopher Richard Rorty attacked the idea that objective knowledge was a “mirror of nature” (Rorty, 1979). Post-modernists such as Lyotard and Baudrillard questioned the ideas of detached truth and philosophical “meta-narratives”—large historical narratives that make sense of human experience (Connor, 1989). Butler describes the illusive sense of post-modernism as a “realism lost” where people live in a “society of the image” or “simulacra” (Butler, 2002). Some media scholars have treated objectivity as the tainted dogma of corporate media (Hackett & Zhao, 1998).

The questioning continues within journalism. Journalist Martin Bell rejected objectivity for a journalism of “attachment” (Bell, 1998). A lead article in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, entitled “Rethinking Objectivity,” repeated the complaints cited above (Cunningham, 2003). A public policy center in the United States published a “manifesto for change” in journalism, which noted how objectivity is “less secure in the role of ethical touchstone” while norms such as accountability are increasing in importance (Overholser, 2006, pp. 10–11).

Yet skepticism about journalistic objectivity has not solved any serious ethical problems. It only leaves a vacuum at the basis of journalism ethics. If objectivity is abandoned, what shall replace it? Three options loom: Abandon objectivity and replace it with other principles; “return” to traditional objectivity in newsrooms; redefine objectivity. Returning to traditional objectivity is unrealistic. Abandoning objectivity, without a replacement, is not an option. A reform of news objectivity must explain how a non-positivistic notion of objectivity is possible if journalism is active inquiry into the world, involving choices, selection and interpretation. The central question is: If a news report involves (at least some) interpretation, how can it be objective? One option is to re-conceive objectivity as the testing of interpretations. On this view, objectivity is neither the reduction of reports to bare facts nor the elimination of all interpretation. Rather, objectivity is the testing of journalistic articles, regarded as interpretations, by a set of agreed-upon criteria appropriate to a given domain.⁹

Critical Theories of Media

Beyond the criticism of news objectivity, there are broad critiques of news media as social and political agents. These perspectives can be loosely collected under the term “critical theories,”

with one important type being post-colonial studies (Ahluwalia & Nursey-Bray, 1997; Shome & Hegde, 2002; Young, 2003).

The common starting point is a disenchantment with Western notions of rationality, universality, objective knowledge and progress. Wasserman (2007, p. 8) writes: “Postcolonialism shares with postmodernism the engagement with the failure of modernity to live up to its own ideals and ambitions.” Critical theories resist attempts to impose a hegemonic system of Western ideas and values on other cultures, especially “neo-liberal” ideas. For some writers, the attempt to speak about universal values is suspect, since it suggests an “essentialism” that denies “difference.”

From a critical perspective, the model of professional journalism ethics shares the same biases and limitations as the liberalism upon which it is based. Liberal press theory is said to be grounded in Enlightenment forms of thought that are male, Eurocentric, individualistic, and universal. Ethical discourse is not politically innocent but can be a political act of power, just as journalism can propagate Western propaganda (Chomsky, 1997). Critical theories warn that Western ideas can be used to justify imperialistic and “colonizing” purposes. Fourie writes: “It starts from the view that institutionalized knowledge and theories about issues such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and the media are/were subject to forces of colonialism” (Fourie, 2007, p. 4).

What are some specific implications of critical theory for journalism ethics? One implication is that scholars should “de-Westernize” journalism ethics. For example, some writers have examined whether the African tradition of *ubuntuism* should be the fundamental ethical value for African journalism, since *ubuntuism's* communal values are more in line with African society than a Western stress on a free and individualistic press (Fourie, 2007). De-Westernization also means using cross-cultural comparisons when discussing the principles of media ethics, and giving due weight to African, Indian and Eastern ethical systems.

Another implication is that journalism ethics should place more emphasis on the representation of others since mis-representation can spark wars, demean other cultures and support unjust social structures. Such issues go beyond factual accuracy. They require journalists to have a deeper cultural knowledge and a deeper appreciation of how language can distort “the other.”¹⁰ Paying attention to issues of representation also means questioning the everyday news practices that routinely exclude less powerful voices. This means defining “news” to include issues of social justice and their historical context, not just daily events and facts. It means seeking a greater diversity of sources in stories, and telling such stories from the perspective of non-dominant groups. Critical theories suggest that journalism ethics requires a commitment to social change that is more at home in the traditions of interpretive and activist journalism. In addition, journalism education should supplement the traditional emphasis on reporting skills and fact gathering with a more ethnographic approach that stresses cultural and international knowledge (Alia, 2004, p. 23, 26). The imperative to “seek truth and report” is transformed from a stenography of fact to an informed interpretation of the place that events have within a larger cultural and global context.

Finally, critical theories imply that the Western project of “media development” has to be re-thought. Western nations spend millions of dollars annually to send their journalists to struggling countries to develop their news media, as a step toward democracy (Coman, 2000; Howard, 2002, 2003). Many journalists attempt to teach the Western professional model, described above, to indigenous journalists, without sufficient consideration as to how appropriate these Western principles are to different cultures and different media systems. If such efforts are to be successful, and not accused of Western colonization, media developers need to re-consider their aims and guiding principles in light of the above discussed critiques of media theory.

In summary, these critical perspectives call for an enlargement of the conceptual base of journalism ethics. This entire range of thinking—feminist, post-modern, communitarian, and post-colonial—changes the basic discourse of journalism ethics and needs to be incorporated

into ethics textbooks. The key theoretical debates extend beyond the traditional debate between liberal and social responsibility theory. The debate now includes such issues as the relationship of ethics and power, media representation and dominant cultures, the social construction of identities, differences in ways of knowing and valuing, and the relationship of the local and global. These far-reaching critiques expose a lack of theoretical depth in journalism ethics. As an applied discipline, journalism ethics too often falls back on simplistic appeals to general concepts such as “truth-seeking,” “freedom,” “serving the public,” and “democracy.” Recent academic and critical theories of news media note that such terms are contested (Berger, 2000). Clarification and reformulation of basic concepts is necessary.

However, something *more* than conceptual clarification is required. Journalism ethics should conduct its own critique of critical theories. The critical ideas canvassed above should not be accepted *verbatim*. These media critics have their own biases and blind-spots. Some theorists may set up an unproductive opposition between Western and non-Western cultures, or attack notions of truth and objectivity to the point where they undermine their own claims to truth. Critical theories may “romanticize” non-Western traditions or over-emphasize communal values at the expense of freedom of speech. Journalism ethics in its fifth stage needs to avoid a “stalemate” between Western and non-Western ideas by developing an ethical model that incorporates valuable norms from both traditions.

CONCLUSION: INTO THE FUTURE

Given this debate, whither journalism ethics? Positively, it is possible to regard the current media revolution as prompting a much-needed re-thinking of journalism ethics. The clash of ideas may lead to the invention of a richer journalism ethics.

The future of journalism ethics appears to depend on the successful completion of two large projects: (1) development of a richer theoretical basis for journalism ethics; (2) development of a “mixed media ethics”—a more adequate set of principles and norms for a multi-platform journalism with global reach.

As we have seen, the first project requires a more adequate epistemology of journalism, with a “believable concept of truth” and objectivity (Christians, 2005, p. ix). It also requires the enrichment of liberal theory with other approaches to media theory. Ethicists need to show how new theoretical approaches might change newsroom practice and journalism education.

The second project is a more practical task. It is the construction of rules, norms and procedures for newsrooms that tell stories in print, broadcast and online. What do the principles of truth-seeking and impartiality mean for mixed media? Do the norms and public aims of journalism change when embedded in “social media,” that is, on Web sites where citizens share experiences, information and images (Friend & Singer, 2007). Is journalism ethics moving away from a professional emphasis on verification and gate-keeping to a non-professional emphasis on transparency, networking and unfiltered information?

Also, there is the practical question of how these ethical discussions are connected with the public monitoring of news organizations, and the reform of regulatory structures for media systems (Price, Rozumilowicz, & Verhulst, 2002). What new public mechanisms can be put in place to improve news media accountability, to make sure that journalism’s age-old desire to “self-regulate” comes to include “public-regulation”?

Finally, journalism ethics should become more cosmopolitan in theory and practice (Gerbner, Mowlana, & Nordenstreng, 1993; Ward, 2005b). Historically, journalism and journalism ethics have been parochial. Journalism ethics was developed for a journalism of limited reach,

whose public duties were assumed to stop at the border. The sufficiency of this parochial ethics has been undermined by the globalization of news media (Callahan, 2003). With global impact comes global responsibilities (Cooper, Christians, Plude, White, & Thomas, 1989; Morris & Waisbord, 2001). The violence that rippled around the world after the publication of the cartoons of Mohammed in a Danish newspaper is one example of global impact. Our world is not a cozy McLuhan village. News media link different religions, traditions and groups. Tensions propagate. A globally responsible journalism is needed to help citizens understand the daunting global problems of poverty and environmental degradation (Weaver, 1998; Price & Thompson, 2002; Seib, 2002).

Determining the content of a global journalism ethics is a work-in-progress. In recent years, ethicists have begun a “search” for the fundamental principles of a global media ethics.¹¹ This “search” faces the problem of how to do justice to both the particular and the universal (Ronning, 1994; Christians & Traber, 1997). Rao, for example, seeks ways to integrate “local” or “indigenous epistemologies” within global media ethics (Rao, 2007). But there are other questions, and other quandaries. How would a cosmopolitan ethics redefine the ideas of social responsibility or serving the public? Would a cosmopolitan ethics reject patriotism as a legitimate influence on journalists?

Despite these difficult questions and daunting problems, the future of journalism ethics requires nothing less than the construction of a new, bolder and more inclusive ethical framework for a multi-media, global journalism amid a pluralistic world.

NOTES

1. There are many ways to divide the field of normative journalism ethics. I divide the field into liberal, socially responsible, activist, and “care” because they identify fundamental ideas that are combined in all major forms of contemporary journalism.
2. See Milton (1951), Hume (1987), Mill (1965), and Foot and Isaac (1987).
3. Liberal theory is not identical with libertarian theories (Narveson, 1988). The latter is an extreme liberalism that argues that the press should have maximal freedom and few social duties.
4. For examples of pro-active and restraining principles, see major codes of ethics such as the code for the Society of Professional Journalists in the United States (www.spj.org) and the code for the Canadian Association of Journalists (www.caj.org).
5. For an example of a holistic approach to practical reasoning in media ethics textbooks see the “point-of-decision” model in Land and Hornaday (2006).
6. The core ideas of social responsibility theory were discussed years in advance of the Hutchins commission. See Cronin and McPherson (1992).
7. Code’s feminist epistemology of care starts from the “feminist commonplace that the epistemologies of modernity, in their principled neutrality and detachment, generate an ideology of objectivity that disassociates itself from emotions and values” (Code, 1994, p. 180).
8. Interest in theories of care is shown by the fact that in 2000, a group of ethicists, philosophers, and others gathered for a colloquium at the University of Oregon on “Caring and the Media.” The papers formed a special edition of the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 21(2&3), 2006.
9. I develop a theory of “pragmatic objectivity” in Chapter Seven of Ward (2005a). For the idea of objective and intersubjective restraints on interpretation, see Denzin & Lincoln (2000) and Gadamer (2004). For the related idea of “interpretive sufficiency,” see Christians (2005).
10. In his influential book, *Orientalism*, the post-colonial writer Edward Said (2003) critiqued Western culture’s representation of the East by studying nineteenth-century French and British writers, travellers, and colonial administrators. More recently, geographer Derek Gregory (2004) has used Said’s work to analyze how media mis-represent the Iraq war and other events (and ideas).

11. See "In search of a global media ethics," special edition of *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 2002, 17(4).

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