

## **Ethics for the New Mainstream**

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A media revolution is transforming, fundamentally and irrevocably, the nature of journalism and its ethics.

Our media ecology is a chaotic landscape evolving at a furious pace. Professional journalists share the journalistic sphere with tweeters, bloggers, citizen journalists, and social media users. Amid every revolution, new possibilities emerge while old practices are threatened. Today is no exception. The economics of professional journalism struggles as audiences migrate online. Shrinkage of newsrooms creates concern for the future of journalism. Yet these fears also prompt experiments in journalism, such as non-profit centers of investigative journalism.

The changes challenge the foundations of journalism ethics. The challenge runs deeper than debates about one or another principle, such as objectivity. The challenge is greater than specific problems, such as how to verify content from citizens (Friend and Singer 2007). The revolution requires us to rethink assumptions. What can ethics *mean* for a profession that must provide instant news and analysis; where everyone with a modem is a publisher?

Journalism ethics is troubled by a tension among values on two levels.

The first level is due to online journalism. The culture of traditional journalism, with its values of accuracy, pre-publication verification, balance, impartiality, and gate-keeping, rubs up against the culture of online journalism which emphasizes immediacy, transparency, partiality, non-professional journalists and post-publication correction. The second level is due to the emergence of a global journalism. If journalism has global impact, what are its global responsibilities (Ward and Wasserman 2010)?

Whither ethics in a world of multi-media, global journalism?

Journalism ethics must do more than point out tensions. Theoretically, it must untangle the conflicts between values. It must decide which principles should be preserved or invented. Practically, it should provide new standards to guide online or offline journalism.

This chapter proposes a framework for understanding the revolution in journalism. I explain the current status of journalism ethics by using my theory of ethical revolutions. I argue that we are moving towards what I call an ethics for a new mainstream media, an ethics for multiple media platforms. The old mainstream consisted of professionals working for large newspapers and broadcasters. The new mainstream is a hybrid of professional and amateur, working for both media outlets that integrate old and new forms of journalism. I conclude by showing how an ecumenical ethics is one approach to constructing a new ethics.

## **Section One: Ethical Revolutions**

### **1. From conflict to integration**

Journalism ethics is applied ethics. It is the articulation and analysis of the aims and principles of responsible journalism and their application to situations. Journalism ethics attempts to answer the practical question, “What should journalists do in general, and in situations  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$ ?” Should a photojournalist invade the privacy of a politician? How graphic should images of war be? How much verification does a damaging story need? Do journalists best serve democracy by being objective or partisan?

Over the centuries, journalism values have been articulated by codes of ethics, editor’s statements on controversial stories, and ethics textbooks. Journalists also have helped to

construct entire theories (or systems) of journalism ethics, from the liberal theory of the press in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the ethics of professional journalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

What is a revolution in journalism ethics? A revolution is “any fundamental change or reversal of conditions.”<sup>1</sup> During political revolutions, a system of governance is replaced by another. In scientific revolutions, a conceptual system is superseded by another, e.g. Newtonian physics gives way to the relativistic physics of Einstein. In an ethical revolution, a system of norms replaces another. A revolution in journalism ethics, then, is a fundamental change in the prevailing ethical system. Principles are reinterpreted or they give way to new principles. Value change does not occur *ex nihilo*. It is caused by changes in the socio-economic, technological, and political environment. For example, the 1960s social revolution with its stress on peace and equality – not to mention “sex, drugs, and rock and roll” – was prompted by a growing economy and education system, communication technology, the civil rights movement, and resistance to the Vietnam War. Revolutions create new opportunities, new attitudes, and new problems. Existing norms may fail to express the spirit of the times and seem irrelevant. This shift in values is captured by slogans, from the 1960’s “Make Love, Not War” to today’s “Broadcast Yourself.” Yet, the far-reaching implications of this shift may go unrecognized.

By analogy, revolutions in journalism ethics are caused by changes in the socio-economic, technological, and political environment which create new opportunities, new attitudes, and new problems. The far-reaching consequences of the shift for journalism are difficult to ascertain.

Revolutions are exceptional events. Therefore, we should distinguish between what Kuhn (Kuhn 1962) called, with respect to science, revolutionary and normal periods. During normal periods, scientists share a paradigm of methods, assumptions, and theories. During revolution

periods, the paradigm comes under attack and new conceptual schemes are put forward. A crisis occurs. Confusion reigns until a new paradigm is constructed and signals a new normal period. Adapting Kuhn's views to journalism, we can say that, during normal periods, journalists share a common understanding of their aims, values, and methods. Ethical issues are discussed by reference to this paradigm. However, over time, the paradigm may come under criticism while new forms of journalism emerge. A crisis occurs. Journalism enters a revolutionary phase of conflicting values, methods, and practices. Eventually a new consensus is established around a new paradigm, a new normative system. Journalism ethics returns to a normal phase.

The normal-revolutionary scheme provides an abstract framework for understanding some forms of revolution. We can deepen our understanding of revolution in journalism ethics by noting two other features: One, in a revolution, the relationship between journalists and their public changes fundamentally. Two, the revolution typically passes through three stages: conflict, rapprochement, and integration. Let's consider each of these two points.

What is this relationship between journalist and public, and why is it important to journalism ethics? The relationship is the manner in which journalists communicate with, and serve, their public. The journalism-public relationship has three elements: (a) the journalists, (b) the public, and (c) how the two groups communicate, such as the technology used by journalists to deliver the news. For brevity's sake, let's call this relationship the "j-c-p" (journalists-communication methods-public).

In different eras, different forms of journalism create different relationships. The relationship of the 17<sup>th</sup> century London editor and his readers is vastly different from the relationship of 20<sup>th</sup> century professional journalists and their mass audience. Embedded in the j-c-p is a set of expectations that constitute a social contract. The public recognizes the freedom of

the press. In return, they expect journalists to perform certain information functions according to certain norms. Like any successful relationship, there must be trust and credibility on both sides.

Historically, journalism ethics grew out of the journalist's need to maintain a healthy j-c-p. Editors claimed to reliably report the truth or to be objective to maintain public confidence in their publications, to explain new practices, and to defend controversial decisions. Journalism ethics in any given era are the norms that define the journalist-public relationship.

A revolution in journalism ethics occurs when technological and social changes alter journalism and the journalist-public relationship.

A revolution in journalism ethics tends to follow a three-step process of conflict, rapprochement, and integration.

During a period of conflict, social and technological trends prompt new forms of journalism. But not just any new forms will do. The new forms need to be so different as to alter substantially the j-c-p and create a crisis – a clash of values.<sup>2</sup> The conflict destroys the ethical consensus of the previous normal period. Many journalists divide into two camps – the mainstream versus the non-mainstream. A war of rhetoric ensues between the practitioners of the old and the new journalism. Traditionalists accuse the new journalism of being irresponsible or of not being journalism at all. The new journalists claim the traditional journalism is doomed. They are the “real” journalists of a new, bold era. Meanwhile, citizens change their media habits. They become accustomed to the new media and use journalism in new ways. The j-c-p begins to change and the public itself debates the ethics of the old and the new media.

As the ideological battle runs its course, economic and other realities encourage a rapprochement between traditional and new media. Mainstream media do not disappear. They evolve, if slowly and awkwardly, by incorporating new forms of media and their editorial and

publishing techniques. The journalists, who now use both old and new media, begin to seek common ground. The conflict between old and new media abates, the hot rhetoric cools, the line between old and new media blurs.

Eventually, rapprochement leads towards integration across the media system. What emerges after a difficult transition is journalism that is a synthesis of old and new practices, guided by a new system of ethics that is a synthesis of old and new norms.

## **2. From partisan to objective journalists**

Examples of ethical revolutions in journalism can be found across the 400-year history of modern journalism. In this section, I examine only one – the creation of a professional ethics for the mass commercial press of the late 1800s and early 1900s. I select this revolution because it created the ethics currently challenged by new media.

The creation of mass commercial newspapers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a radical change in journalism, the prevailing j-c-p, and journalism ethics. In the nineteenth century, prior to mass commercial papers, the press in Europe and Canada fought a long battle to secure the right to publish free from undue restraint by law and censor. A liberal press, with its emphasis on a free marketplace of ideas, was established. By the end of the century, the small liberal newspaper, based on subscriptions and political support, gave way to a large mass commercial newspaper based on mass circulation and mass advertising. Yet no sooner was the mass commercial newspaper, published by Pulitzer, Hearst and others, ascendant on both sides of the Atlantic, then doubts were raised about its ethics. The commercial press was accused of being

sensational, irresponsible, and controlled by press barons and business interests. A rhetorical war ensued between the old elite journalism and the new “yellow” journalism.

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, conflict began to give way to rapprochement and integration. Journalists formed associations that created a new ethics that demanded accuracy, balance, and “just the facts.” These demanding norms were thought necessary to reduce the blatant bias and lack of independence of journalists. The partisan libertarian approach to journalism was replaced by a professional model that stressed objectivity and impartiality. More and more newsrooms practiced the new objective journalism until it became the new mainstream. The professional ethics was a synthesis of old and new. Freedom of the press became part of an ethics that called for verification, independence, and minimizing harm.<sup>3</sup>

The new journalism changed fundamentally the j-c-p. Journalists became powerful gatekeepers within large profit-seeking ventures. The public came to rely on newspapers as sources of information on most areas of society from the legislature to the sports arena. Reporters were asked to provide accurate news for a public that demanded less partisan journalism. The j-c-p became a one-to-many, hierarchical form of mass communication.

## **Section Two: Where Are We Today?**

### **1. Normal and revolutionary periods**

The ideas of normal and revolutionary periods, the j-c-p, and the principle of integration are tools for understanding revolutions in journalism. It tells us that we know that we are entering a revolutionary phase when a consensus on the existing ethical paradigm starts to break



down, and changes in technology and other factors radically change the relationship of journalists to their public. What does this theory say about journalism today?

It tells us that we are indeed in the middle of ethical revolution. In fact, we are in the middle of the fifth revolution in journalism ethics since modern journalism began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> The rise of internet-based media is a revolutionary event because it substantially alters the prevailing professional model of the j-c-p. The journalistic element of this relationship is transformed to include, for the first time, ordinary citizens in great numbers. It becomes a sphere of professionals and non-professionals of varying ability, training, and motivations. The communication element has been revolutionized by interactive and global media. The public term of the relationship is altered almost beyond recognition. Citizens are no longer the passive, dependant consumers of professional media. Citizens have the technology to be active members of the j-c-p by creating content and using media tools to evaluate reports. Increasingly, citizens *are* the media.

Journalism occupies an increasingly smaller portion of the public sphere which is being enlarged by a chaotic and expanding media universe. This media universe has led to a period of conflict, a clash of values between the professional and new media models.

The professional model values well-trained journalists who make sure their stories are accurate, verified, and well-researched before publication. The story is the end product of an editorial process. Its authority depends mainly on the capabilities and character of the individual professional journalist. The ethical mantra is “Filter, then publish,” or “Get it (news) first, but first get it right.” In contrast, new media value the speedy posting of information by anyone, even if there is uncertainty about its source or accuracy. The slogan is: “Publish, then filter.” As a correction to inaccurate or bogus stories posted in haste, new media journalism recommends

pre-publication warnings about the uncertain verity of material. New media ethics emphasizes the remedial function of post-publication assessments of stories by a “community of interest” – the people who regularly visit a web site or blog. The posted story is not the end of a process. It is the start of an online dialogue whereby everyone is free to critique the story and to enrich its sources, facts, and perspectives. Ideally, the authority of a new media story is not individual but communal. It must pass the scrutiny of online readers and experts around the world.

For the professional model, the role of the public is to be an audience – to receive the completed story. For the new media model, journalism should be a more co-operative project of citizens and journalists. The professional and new media models also differ on what sort of journalism democracy needs. The professional model thinks objective news reporting and well-informed analysis are essential for informed public decisions. The new media model favors a participatory model of democracy which is libertarian in spirit. A free and many-voiced marketplace of ideas, using the interactive medium of the internet, is sufficient for democracy. What is crucial is the free expression and sharing of voices. New media communication is inclined towards opinion journalism and is suspicious of the ideal of objectivity. Rather than maintain an objective stance, new media journalists are transparent about their biases.

## **2. Signs of Rapprochement**

This clash of values has received extensive comment in the media. What has received less attention is the fact that journalism ethics is emerging from this conflict. It is entering a stage of rapprochement.

One sign of rapprochement is the sense that new media are no longer new. They are part of our daily lives. At the same time, the line between new and old media blurs. Newspapers and major broadcasters are online and their web sites are popular. They have their own bloggers, citizen journalists and content, podcasts, web sites, Twitter feeds, Facebook pages, and interactive online forums. New media journalists write for traditional media. Successful bloggers attract large numbers of readers, resembling the influential newspaper columnists of a previous era. The distinction between big mainstream media and small, iconoclastic new media fades as the leaders of the new mainstream are large, corporate, online enterprises, such as Google. Citizen journalism sites become a permanent part of the media landscape. Partnerships between citizens and newsrooms are increasingly common. Citizens provide story ideas, video, eye-witness accounts and other information. Non-profit centers for investigative journalism are collaborative in nature. Their newsrooms combine the talents of many types of journalists.

A rapprochement in ethics is also underway. We are moving towards a new system of ethics, a mixed media ethics that defines responsible public journalism across media platforms. Recently, traditional news media such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *BBC*, *The Associated Press* and *The Washington Post* have developed guidelines on how their journalists can responsibly use social media. Their guidelines encourage journalists to use social media, such as Facebook, but also to respect traditional values such as avoiding conflicts of interest. Bloggers and online journalists form associations and construct codes of ethics, engaging in the same ethics-creating exercise that occupied newspaper journalists a century ago.<sup>5</sup> The online codes are an interesting synthesis of old and new elements, reinterpreting – not rejecting – many of the major principles of professional journalism, such as truth seeking and independence.

The motivations for rapprochement are the same as in previous revolutions. Traditional media need to adapt to survive, and to serve the changing media habits of the public. Everyone wants to figure out how to make money from the public's appetite for online content and love of interactivity. Also, journalists and citizens grow increasingly critical of the rumors and misinformation on the internet. They seek to carve out a media sphere where journalists can work according to appropriate standards.

Finally, integration appears as a worthy goal because no one form of journalism has all the virtues and another form has all the vices. The virtue of the professional system is that, ideally, it supports reliable, professionally trained journalists dedicated to the public, thus maximizing accurate, unbiased news while reducing misinformation. The vice is that it places enormous influence in the hands of a privileged class of citizens (journalists) who work for powerful news organizations who may not care about ethics. The virtue of new media is that it places the freedom to publish in the hands of countless citizens. This reduces the power of mainstream journalists and media owners. The vice is that new media causes both misinformation and information overload. The power of journalism can be exercised by anyone with any ethics and any motivation. Good journalism and reliable information become lost on a sea of unreliable voices. Weakening the economics of mainstream journalism results in layoffs for experienced journalists, reducing journalism's ability to act as watchdog on power.

For these reasons, the ethical task is to construct an ethics for the new mainstream which combines the virtues of both models.

### **Section Three: Shape of a Future Ethics**

## **1. Layered journalism**

What would an integrated ethics look like?

It will be the ethics of the integrated newsroom, a newsroom that practices layered journalism. Layered journalism brings together different forms of journalism and different types of journalists to produce a multi-media offering of professional-styled news and analysis combined with citizen journalism and interactive chat.

The newsroom will be layered vertically and horizontally. Vertically, there will be many layers of editorial positions. There will be citizen journalists and bloggers in the newsroom, or closely associated with the newsroom. Many contributors will work from countries around the world. Some will write for free, some will be equivalent to paid freelancers, others will be regular commentators. In addition, there will be different types of editors. Some editors will work with these new journalists, while other editors will deal with unsolicited images and text sent by citizens via email, web sites, and twitter. There will be editors or “community producers” charged with going out to neighborhoods to help citizens use media to produce their own stories.

Horizontally, the future newsroom will be layered in terms of the kinds of journalism it produces, from print and broadcast sections to online production centers.

To be sure, newsrooms in the past have had vertical and horizontal layers. Newspaper newsrooms have ranged vertically from the editor in-chief at the top to the cub reporter on the bottom. Horizontally, large mainstream newsrooms have produced several types of journalism, both print and broadcast. However, future newsrooms will have additional and different layers. Some news sites will continue to be operated by a few people dedicated only to one format, such

as blogging. But a substantial portion of the new mainstream will consist of these complex, layered organizations.

Layered journalism will confront two types of problems: vertical and horizontal. First, there will be ‘vertical’ ethical questions about how the different layers of the newsroom, from professional editors to citizen freelancers, should interact to produce responsible journalism. For example, by what standards will professional editors evaluate the contributions of citizen journalists? Second, there will be ‘horizontal’ questions about the norms for the various newsroom sections.

## **2. Ecumenical ethics**

The layered newsroom calls for an ecumenical approach to ethics. I borrow “ecumenical” from its original Christian context, which is a desire to find unity among the sects of Christianity. Ecumenicalism does not seek to impose a unity that ignores (or is intolerant of) differences. It recognizes differences within a common framework of values.

By analogy, ecumenicalism in journalism is the search for a unifying set of values that are realized in different ways by varying forms of journalism. Ecumenical ethics has two parts: (1) general aims and principles for all forms of journalism, and (2) specific standards and rules of practice for particular forms of journalism. Different forms of journalism will have different practices and express different values. However, these distinct practices and specific rules must be consistent with the general aim and principles of (1).

What aims and principles might form the ethical basis of a new ethics? An ecumenical ethics must provide a unifying conception of the aims of democratic journalism. I believe the

unifying aim is this: All participants in the new journalism should promote a free and just democracy in which citizens flourish.<sup>6</sup> A new ethics must explain journalism's role in a media-linked global world. It needs to update well-worn phrases such as "journalism in the public interest." It should explain how serving the public interest now includes facilitating online deliberation, empowering citizen to participate in media and in civic life, and building bridges of understanding among groups in pluralistic democracies.

The aim of democratic journalism implies several fundamental beliefs. One belief is that a healthy public sphere should be as free as possible, and populated by many forms of communication and a diversity of communicators. Different forms of journalism fulfill different public functions. Differences in practices and values are expected, given the different aims and methods of communication.

Ecumenical ethics affirms the continuing need for, and central role of, journalism ethics. Ethics provides the aims and principles that restrain and channel the freedom to publish. Ecumenicalism is liberal but not libertarian. It believes that a free marketplace of ideas is a necessary but not sufficient condition for good journalism. It is not enough for democracy to have "many voices" linked by a sophisticated media system. Democracy depends on the quality of information exchanged, the manner in which citizens speak to each other, the knowledge and skills of their journalists, and media "spaces" where reasonable citizens can deliberate. Journalism ethics is about how journalists should use their freedom to publish to maximize reliable public information, informed commentary, and reasoned debate.

Ecumenical ethics should articulate a number of principles that all integrated newsrooms should embrace to promote the aforementioned aims. What might those principles be? Despite the current conflict of values, there is substantial common ground. I believe that reconstruction in

ethics begins with a reaffirmation of truth and objectivity in journalism, although our conceptions of truth and objectivity must be recast to apply to layered journalism. Mainstream and new media journalists both agree on the goal of truth and its two parts – truth seeking and truth telling. Online and traditional journalists may disagree on how journalists should seek truth. But few journalists would claim to not care about the truth. The principle of objectivity is more contentious. For objectivity to apply to mixed media, the traditional idea of news objectivity as a strictly neutral reporting of just the facts must be abandoned and replaced by pragmatic objectivity. Journalists practice pragmatic objectivity when they adopt a critical stance towards their own beliefs, and evaluate their stories for empirical validity, coherence, and other virtues of good journalism.<sup>7</sup> Objectivity as testing of interpretations is a flexible method that can apply in various ways and in various degrees to a wide range of journalism online and offline. Without a reaffirmation of truth and objectivity, journalism will lack the critical, independent, and non-partisan character that constitutes good public journalism.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond truth and objectivity, there are other areas of common ground to explore. The strong professional emphasis on editorial independence and the avoidance of conflicts of interest is not far from the ubiquitous stress on transparency among online writers. There is a good chance that rules for revealing and minimizing conflicts can be formulated that apply across media platforms. By integrating the values of professional independence and online transparency, journalists will advance another common value – media accountability.

These principles are not new. What is new is how they are to be understood and applied in the integrated newsroom. In the end, there may be deep differences over other principles, such as objectivity or restraining one's reporting to minimize harm. However, this overlap in major principles is a good start for the construction of a new ethics.



### 3. Ethics of difference

Agreement on general aims and principles would not solve all problems. Integrated journalists would still face perplexing questions caused by different practices. Recall the vertical and horizontal issues of the layered newsroom. Even if all journalists subscribed to common principles such as truth seeking, should they cover stories in a similar manner, according to the same protocols? Should online journalists be allowed to publish stories before print reporters because of the speed of the internet? Should a newspaper allow anonymous commentators on its web site but refuse anonymity in its letters to the editor in the printed paper? When news reporters “tweet,” can they be more opinionated than when they report for their paper?

These difficulties raise the following question: Is it ethically permissible for sections of layered newsrooms to operate according to different guidelines because of the distinct nature of their media platforms?

The answer to this question, in general, is yes, as long as: (a) the protocols reflect the nature of the medium; (b) it is clear to the public what form of journalism is being practiced, including an understanding of its aim and its limits; and (c) the protocols do not violate the general aims and principles mentioned above. If conditions (a) to (c) are honored, then ecumenical ethics allows different rules for distinct areas of journalism.

Why do I qualify my answer by insisting on conditions (a) to (c)? I qualify the answer because the question is difficult and there are dangers. One doesn't want to say that any practice is valid just because the medium makes the practice possible. For example, I do not see how the reckless online posting of a false and damaging rumor could ever be ethically justified, even if the internet makes possible the instantaneous circulation of rumors. As we develop ecumenical

ethics, we will have to work carefully, going from case to case, until we reach a deeper understanding of how the new mainstream ethics should allow diversity within unity.

There are cases where conditions (a) to (c) are satisfied, and old and new practices integrated. Consider the vexed question of how newsrooms should use information supplied by citizens. It might appear that there can be no rapprochement between the practice of traditional journalism to not publish without verification and the practice of new media to post unverified video and text from little-known sources. Yet, rules for responsibly integrating these different practices can evolve. For example, mainstream news coverage of demonstrations in Iran after the June 2009 presidential election indicate how it is possible to develop protocols for using unverified information from citizens. In Iran, professional foreign journalists were forbidden to cover “unauthorized” demonstrations. Meanwhile, Iranian citizens used the new media of twitter, YouTube, cell phones and text messaging to circulate pictures and commentary around the world.

Major broadcasters, such as the BBC and CNN, used the information carefully. News anchors repeatedly explained to the public the limitations on their own journalists and why they were using citizen-generated information. They warned viewers that they could not verify the veracity of many of the images, or the identity of the sources. Although bogus and erroneous information was circulated by these means, vital information was also made public. The Iran coverage shows that the ecumenical search for combining old and new forms of journalism is possible and developing.

On what principle is ecumenical tolerance towards differences in editorial rules based? It is what I call the “principle of communicative intention”:

The norms of practice for any specific form of communication, including forms of journalism, is influenced by the nature and intent of the communication, as well as by what the public expects of this form of communication. So we should seek to shape the ethics of journalism to fit the communication form.

The validity of this principle was recognized, if implicitly, by traditional journalism ethics. Even at the height of news objectivity in the 1940s and 1950s, newspapers recognized the difference between reporting and column writing, between satirical journalism and news analysis, between investigative journalism and fashion reporting, and between feature writing and hard news reporting. Mainstream codes of ethics recognize these differences. For instance, the codes for broadcasters contain protocols for approaching certain types of stories, such as broadcasting live from hostage takings, that are not found in newspaper codes of ethics. Nothing is amiss as long as readers are alerted to different forms of journalism by labeling them “analysis,” or “opinion,” and the protocols do not violate basic principles, such as truth telling. Similarly, we can argue that nothing is amiss if new media journalism follows different practices so long as the forms of journalism are clearly labeled, the public understands the communicative intent of the journalism, and the forms of journalism do not violate basic principles.

The ecumenical approach is inevitable, given the direction of journalism. It is unlikely that the vertical and horizontal questions of the layered newsroom will be resolved by insisting that the blogger, the tweeter, or the citizen journalist adhere completely to the more restrictive norms of practice that guide other forms of journalism, such as straight professional news reporting. Conversely, more traditional modes of journalism, such as verified reporting in quality papers, should not abandon the values that have long defined their medium. They should not

simply opt for the more free-wheeling practices of the internet. The challenge is to maintain common values while showing how norms of practice can vary according to the medium.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has interpreted the direction of journalism ethics according to a three-step theory of ethical revolutions. It concluded that journalism ethics is entering a stage of rapprochement that will lead to an ethics for a new mainstream media, characterized by layered newsrooms. The chapter suggested that ecumenical ethics is one possible approach to the construction of a new ethics for multiple platforms.

In the end, what is the future of ethical journalism in an expanding media world? What can we reasonably hope for? What should we work towards? The future of ethical journalism depends on the creation of a core of public informers across all media platforms who are dedicated to responsible journalism in the public interest. This group will be an ethical anchor for a media system in danger of drifting further out onto that sea of misinformation and partisan propaganda. This core must provide deliberative spaces where in-depth, unbiased, important journalism is produced by all forms of journalism.

It is unrealistic to assume that all communicators will use their chosen medium in an ethical manner, especially not in an age where the number of citizen journalists and media producers grows exponentially. But if deliberative democracy is to be possible, a substantial group of practitioners across media platforms must remain committed to ethics, and more particularly, committed to the creation of an ethics for the new mainstream.

### **Questions for discussion**

1. Do you think the trends in journalism, offline or online, are leading to a new mainstream media. What trends support this view? What trends don't support it?
2. What values do online and offline journalists share? Do you agree that they have enough in common to agree on a code of ethics?
3. If citizens are increasingly the media, what ethical principles should apply to their use of media?

### **Web sites suggestions**

1. [www.journalismethics.info](http://www.journalismethics.info) Ethics web site for the Center of Journalism Ethics at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
2. [www.j-source.org](http://www.j-source.org) Web site for The Canadian Journalism Project.
3. [www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org) Web site on journalism, journalism trends, and ethics for the Poynter Institute.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> This is the ordinary dictionary definition of revolution (Barber 2004).
- <sup>2</sup> This is why I do not think the advent of radio and television news prompted a revolution in ethics. It extended the professional model. Broadcast news followed the main principles of existing codes of ethics created by the newspapers a few decades before.
- <sup>3</sup> The classical example of this professional synthesis is the influential code of the Society of Professional Journalists which emphasized truth telling, objectivity, independence, and the news-opinion distinction. A revision of the code in the 1990s added accountability.
- <sup>4</sup> In (Ward 2005), I identified five ethical revolutions: the invention of journalism ethics in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the “public ethic” of the Enlightenment press, the liberal theory of the press in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a professional ethics for the mass commercial press of the late 1800s, and the current mixed media ethics.
- <sup>5</sup> Increasingly, there are attempts to systematically discuss and codify the practices of online media, through the creation of associations such as the Media Bloggers Association (<http://www.mediabloggers.org/>), and the Online News Association (<http://journalists.org/Default.asp>). A well-known code by Jonathan Dube ([www.cyberjournalist.net/news/000215.php](http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/000215.php)) extends the principles of the Society of Professional Journalists to online journalism.
- <sup>6</sup> Elsewhere (Ward, 2010, Chap. 3), I argued that the type of democracy needed is deliberative democracy, promoted by a deliberative journalism.
- <sup>7</sup> In (Ward, 2005, Chap. 7) I presented the idea of pragmatic objectivity.
- <sup>8</sup> For my views on the reaffirmation of truth and objectivity, see “Reaffirming Truth and Objectivity,” (Ward, 2010, Chap. 4).