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

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

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

1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 Multiculturalism as theoretical pluralism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Although these reflections are not conclusive, they are reasonable and will ground the analysis in the rest of this chapter. It will presume that it is possible and worthwhile to unify normative thought about the media to some real extent and that such unification is not true merely in relation to a given society's extant beliefs. This combination of views entails that the variegated moral theories to be encountered throughout the world disagree with each other about a common subject matter, that some are probably more accurate than others (even if all have some share of insight), and that it is worth trying to ascertain which handful of theories have the most insight or which parts of them are accurate. Call this epistemic condition "pluralism", the view that many theories have some truth in them, in contrast to relativism, the view that all theories are equally true (and in contrast to monism, the view that only one theory has any truth to it[4]).

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

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

3 The media in relation to self-government

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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5 For the historical background to these documents, and discussion of their status in the Islamic world, see Masud (2007: 94–98).
6 The following paragraphs borrow from Metz (2014).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 The media in relation to self-expression

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

The term "self-expression" means taking those parts of one's identity that are not easily or directly accessible to others[9] and making them more so. It characteristically consists of linguistic, artistic, bodily, or other actions by which one intends to display mental states such as one's feelings, emotions, judgments, and imaginings. Good examples include saying "I love you" to a beloved, publishing a novella that conveys one's attitudes about a certain group in one's society, wearing a certain shirt because it suits one's aesthetic sensibilities, and posting a photograph onto Facebook or Instagram because one likes it.

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

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

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

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

degree or in the same way. Consider, for example, the World Values Survey (n.d.), which contrasts self-expression values[10] with survival values, the latter of which are focused on physical and economic security. It indicates that African, Confucian, and Islamic societies score low for the former and high for the latter, with Euro-American societies exhibiting the reverse orientation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5 Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

Further reading

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

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

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

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

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

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