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MEDIA ETHICS at WORK

True Stories From Young Professionals

LEE ANNE PECK | GUY S. REEL
editors

Media Ethics at Work

Second Edition

The editors would like to dedicate this edition of Media Ethics at Work *to the memory of media professor Daniel Reimold who died August 20, 2015. He and his contributions to student journalism will be missed.*

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True Stories from Young Professionals

Second Edition

Lee Anne Peck
University of Northern Colorado

Guy S. Reel
Winthrop University

Editors

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Peck's professional experience began as a correspondent for the Moline (Illinois) Daily Dispatch. After graduating with her bachelor's degree in technical journalism from Colorado State University, she edited, and then managed the Northern Colorado Choice Magazine of the Front Range. In the mid-1980s, she edited and wrote for publications in Indiana and Delaware; she has worked for the Fort Collins Coloradoan as an editor and a columnist and for the now-defunct Rocky Mountain News as a copy editor. Peck has also worked as an intern at the now-defunct Tampa Tribune's online product, Tampa Bay Online, and at Microsoft's now-defunct online publication, Denver Sidewalk. Peck continues to do freelance editing, writing and public relations work via her company Little White Dog Communications.

She holds a doctorate in mass communication from Ohio University, a master's degree in philosophy from OU, a master's degree in mass communication from the University of South Florida and a master's degree in English from CSU. She has been active both regionally and nationally with the Society of Professional Journalists for more than 20 years.

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Daniel Reimold died Aug. 20, 2015. At the time of his death, he was employed as an assistant professor at St. Joseph's University. Reimold was an adviser to The Hawk, the student news organization of Saint Joseph's, and founder of the influential blog College Media Matters, an Associated Collegiate Press resource on student journalism. Reimold's

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Preface

For instructors: During the first week of my media ethics courses, I show my students the class blog, www.iwantu2boutraged.blogspot.com,[1] and point out posts about recent ethical lapses by people working in the media professions.[2] As the semester progresses and I add new posts, a pattern emerges: Students show much more interest in the cases involving student media or young professionals than they do in the well-publicized cases involving experienced professionals at major organizations. As they're working to develop their own standards, students want to discuss the actions of their peers. The question "What would *you* have done?" leads to lively debate.

When Whitehouse and McPherson noted in a Journal of Mass Media Ethics article that media ethics casebooks "ask media ethics students to take the dramatic mental leap from being undergraduates preparing for their first jobs to becoming leaders of companies,"[3] co-editor Guy Reel and I thought they had a good point. We believe too many books present

1. You can create a free blog for your class via www.blogger.com. You act as the guest host and aggregate information on your site.

2. I receive daily Google Alerts for the terms "media ethics," "journalism ethics," "public relations ethics" and "advertising ethics" for finding current ethical dilemmas, both national and international, for my class blog. I also subscribe to daily e-newsletters from various media organizations such as Poynter's Morning Mediawire and MediaBistro's Morning Newsfeed.

3. V. Whitehouse and J. B. McPherson, "Media Ethics Textbook Case Studies Need New Actors and New Issues," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics,* 17, No. 3 (2002).

students with the kinds of ethics cases faced by experienced media managers rather than the kind young people are likely to encounter in school or in an internship or first job. "Students need cases reflecting issues faced by entry-level media professionals," Whitehouse and McPherson said in their conclusion. "They must know how to take responsibility for their own ethical decisions, and they must be able to express their views from low positions of power."[4]

This book provides those entry-level cases along with the tools to help students reason through them. In these pages, authors tell the true stories of young media professionals who struggled with an ethical dilemma early in their careers in public relations, advertising, and print, broadcast and online journalism. These young people face a wide range of difficult choices. Some are perennials, such as what to do when a source tries to "take back" what he's told you for a story or when you discover that your supervisor is manipulating publicity material. Others are permutations for the digital age: for instance, is it OK to go online pretending to be someone else? Should you remove a story from a web archive at a source's request?

Much has been written about the ethical lapses of young professionals in the fast-paced, increasingly competitive media world. Classic high-profile cases involved Jayson Blair, formerly of The New York Times; Stephen Glass, formerly of The New Republic; and Janet Cooke, formerly of The Washington Post. These young writers lied, fabricated stories, embarrassed their news organizations and damaged the credibility of everyone working in the media. They knew what they were doing was wrong, but they did it anyway.

In contrast to those cases, most of the young people featured in this book—like many young professionals—had good instincts. When confronted with an ethical issue, they wanted nothing more than to do the right thing. They just weren't sure what the right thing might be or when to trust their instincts.

The underlying issues in the dilemmas encountered by young professionals—dishonesty, bias, sensationalism, conflict of interest—are the same issues that continue to pose challenges throughout any media career. The difference is that younger professionals with their

4. Ibid.

limited experiences in the working world may not recognize the ethical dimensions of a situation before they act in whatever way seems appropriate at the moment.

Even when they do recognize an ethical dilemma, young professionals have fewer resources on which to draw. The issue may seem far too big to tackle—never mind resolve—from their entry-level position in the organization. They're not sure what questions they should ask, whom they should ask or when they should ask them. They may feel ill-equipped to brainstorm about options for action beyond the first ones that come to mind. Not wanting to look ignorant, they might not have the courage to speak at all.

That's where this book's true stories play a role. Written in a narrative style, the chapters take readers through ethical dilemmas as they actually unfolded—from the perspective of the young person involved and with only the information available to him or her at each point. Readers can stop at each stage and reflect on the questions "What would I do if this happened to me?" or "What alternative might have worked?" As they follow the case and discover how the young professional resolved the situation, readers will develop strategies and patterns of thought that will better prepare them for their own inevitable ethical dilemmas.

Because the issues these young professionals encountered cross over all media professions, the chapters are arranged not by profession but by theme: honesty, sensitivity and balance. The cases can be assigned in any order; create your own path through the material by following the connections you want your students to make. For instance, you can look for cases that resemble something currently in the news or choose a case to discuss via the philosophical theory recently discussed in class.

I recommend during the first week of classes pointing out recent ethical dilemmas being reported in the news before tackling theory. (Creating a blog as I did provides an easy place to continually post news of dilemmas as you learn about them.) Most students don't realize how widespread these issues are and how damaging they can be to their chosen profession. In my experience, they become more willing—even eager—to tackle the decision-making tools that will help them with their own dilemmas in the future.

Depending on how you teach the media ethics course, this book can work as a primary text or a supplement. As a stand-alone text, it offers enough content for a semester-long course with its explanations of the Western ethical theories typically taught in media ethics courses, discussion of what ethics codes can and can't do and examination of moral development. It also offers more than 25 cases involving young people, something no other media ethics textbook does, many of them addressing the ethical complications resulting from new technology. Because you can choose the cases you want to discuss as a class, the book can be a good supplemental text for a media ethics course, backing up whatever primary text you might use. If this is the first time you have taught the course, all the parts that make up each chapter will help you create class discussions, quizzes and essay tests or reflection pieces.

In introductory courses, such as media writing or public relations, the book can work as a supplement. Although in these lower-level courses you might not cover all the decision-making tools discussed in the first chapter, exploring some of the cases will help alert students to the principles of their professions and to the situations they might encounter in the working world, providing fodder for discussion. Teaching the beginning skills of writing a press release or a news report is important, but it's also important to simultaneously begin students' understanding of ethics in their fields.

If you do use this as your main text, you'll find easy-to-understand explanations of Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean (virtue), Kant's Categorical Imperative (duty), Mill's principle of utility, John Rawls' theory of justice and more. Each theory includes examples of how it might apply today to the work of a media professional. You may want to spend more time on some sections of the decision-making chapter, asking students to read the original texts by the philosophers mentioned. Many websites provide these readings at no cost, and putting copies of original readings on reserve at the library is always an option.

Codes of ethics are discussed in this chapter as a good starting point for young professionals. You can also opt to work through any case with your students by choosing an ethical theory and showing how it can provide a deeper answer than the principles stated in a code. "Tool for Thought" boxes highlight a certain code or theory, showing one way to deliberate the case.

However you approach ethical theory, we do not recommend covering all the theories in one class session or sitting—or even in one week of classes. Discuss a theory, then choose a case in the book, and the chapter does not necessarily have to cite that specific theory. Work through the case using the theory recently discussed and those previously discussed; keep building from there. Chapter 2 takes you through the stages from early ethical decision making to moral sophistication, as illustrated by the story of a young reporter who found herself in a clash between her own ethics and those of the profession, ultimately creating an opportunity for self-reflection and moral growth. The example helps students see themselves in her dilemma.

Within the case chapters, additional features offer more perspectives. "Thinking It Through" questions help students review the case and the actions of the young person involved. In some chapters, a "Tool for Action" box provides practical tips such as how to use blog posts in information gathering. Chapters also include related web links for more information, and an appendix lists the web addresses of all the ethics codes referred to in the case chapters. Finally, "What If?" scenarios offer a related situation designed to push readers' thinking about the issues further. Unlike the true stories that are the center of each chapter, these "What If?" cases have no resolution, leaving the decision making to the reader.

All the stories told in the case chapters are true; the chapter authors obtained the information, including a summary of the thinking process, directly from the young professional involved. When we began soliciting contributions for the book, we planned to use only real names of people and companies. Doing so, however, did not prove possible in every chapter. In some cases, the young professional still works with some of the people who made questionable decisions and, thus, must be cautious about reflecting on these decisions publicly. In others, the entry-level employee was not in a position to know the full reasoning behind a company's or individual's chosen course of action, and the people involved have left; thus, background could not be checked to the degree required to eliminate libel concerns. In each chapter in which names have been changed, a note at the end of the introductory summary clearly says so and explains the reason. If you see no such note, the names are all real.[5]

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5. If instructors would like a sample syllabus or sample essay test created by Peck, contact her at leeanne.peck@unco.edu or call her at (970) 351-2635.

We hope this unique book helps your students find the guidance and courage they need to make ethical decisions and thus do their part to maintain high standards in the news and persuasion media. With the basics in hand and with the practice the book offers, students and young professionals can connect what's learned from reading and class discussion with the changing realities they'll face.

Today's fast-paced, ever-changing media scene makes finding the ethical course of action more difficult—not just for new professionals but sometimes for their bosses as well. If young people can enter the workforce with an ethical framework built on sound theory and moral reasoning, they won't instantly know what to do in every situation, but they'll be confident enough to reason through it.

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Peck would like to thank her mentors for being influential in the way she teaches media ethics today. They include Garrett Ray, former media ethics professor, Colorado State University; Bob Steele, Poynter Institute's values scholar; Jay Black, former Poynter-Jamison Chair in Media Ethics, University of South Florida; and Clifford Christians, media ethics scholar, University of Illinois. She would also like to thank her professors in Ohio University's graduate philosophy program for helping her understand ethical theory more thoroughly.

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Introduction

Andie Peterson, a 2015 journalism school graduate, really wanted to do an internship during the summer between her junior and senior years of college. Her work interest? Anything to do with advertising. Peterson, a Colorado native, had already worked as an account representative for the university's student newspaper during her junior year, but now she hoped to intern at a Denver ad agency. During spring semester of her junior year, she applied for many openings she found listed through the Denver Egotist website. Finally, at the end of the semester, a small agency offered her a position for the summer. She was ecstatic—especially because alumni from the business school of her university operated the business.

Peterson worked three days a week for the Christian-centered company with two other interns. After a couple weeks, though, she realized that the internship for which she had paid summer tuition was not only a waste of money but also a waste of time. Peterson got lunch for her supervisors and wrote social media posts for clients that her supervisor OK'd. To make matters worse, she and the other interns realized that the members of the so-called God-based agency seemed to be hypocrites. For instance, the agency represented an alcohol company, promoting one of its new products, a spiced rum; Peterson was also asked to "create" positive reviews for clients on the rating sites of Yelp and Google. The ultimate goal: More stars! Her bosses had boasted the agency could improve ratings on these sites. Under little direction, Peterson created seven different Gmail identities.

Toward the end of her internship, she noticed her fake reviews were not anywhere to be found on Yelp or Google.

"When I first noticed, I didn't say anything because I was thinking I could probably fix this or maybe I wasn't seeing them published because there was a system error or something," Peterson says. "I told my supervisor

after a little while, saying I couldn't see my comments anywhere. He didn't say or do anything at first, but then one client realized nothing was being posted and that's when he approached me." Peterson emailed Yelp first. This is the response she received:

"Hi there,

I'm writing to let you know about our Support Team's decision to close your user account. Your account has been closed because of Terms of Service (http://www.yelp.com/violations), including creating multiple accounts."

She had been "caught."

"If you fake anything," Peterson says, "they will kick you off the site—forever."

In the meantime, another intern who was fed up with the shenanigans had already quit. The graphic design intern quit mid-July. The three were getting no constructive experience or feedback, and the promised networking was nonexistent. Peterson, however, persevered.

All in all, Peterson says, she learned nothing of any value—except the consequences of pretending you are someone whom you are not. "The final slap in the face was when I had to advertise for my own replacement."

Did Peterson do the right thing by staying—even if she felt uncomfortable with what she was asked to do? If you think she did do the right thing, how would you justify her actions to others? If you think Peterson made a bad decision by staying, what might she have done instead?

These are the kind of questions you'll be asking yourself, and learning to answer, as you read this book. They're also the kind you might encounter—if you haven't already—while working in student media, doing an internship or at your first job as a young media professional. As your career begins, you might face issues similar to these:

- What do I tell an editor who wants to sensationalize my copy?
- What if a PR client wants me to omit facts or lie in a press release?
- What if I'm asked to stretch the truth in ad copy?

Of course, people who have worked in the media for years face similar dilemmas. The difference is that when you're new to a job, it's harder to recognize an ethical challenge when you see it and harder to know what to do. You're just learning about your profession in general and your employer in particular. If you want to voice your concerns, whom do you talk to and when? Being new to a profession means you're learning new skills—and moral reasoning needs to be one of those skills.

This book presents stories of young people who had to wrestle with an ethical dilemma at the beginning of their careers in the news or persuasion media. By following along as these young media professionals make their choices, you'll begin to understand how to ask yourself questions, envision alternatives and justify the decisions you make.

All the stories in the book are true. The authors of the chapters know the individuals involved and have interviewed them to get details on what they thought and did as they tried to resolve their ethical dilemma. We had hoped to use real names throughout the book, and about half the chapters do use them. However, ethical issues involve debate and controversy, and sometimes it's not possible to tell a complex story from one person's point of view without making others look bad in ways that may not be fair. Therefore, in some cases, including the story of Andie Peterson in this introduction, the young media professional has asked us to change the names of people and companies.

As you read each chapter, ask yourself how you would have responded in that situation. Right now, you have the luxury of deliberating cases in the classroom with your peers. Practicing ethical thinking now will better prepare you for making decisions later in the craziness of deadlines at a news organization, ad agency or PR firm.

Before you get to the book's cases, you'll find a chapter that covers philosophical theories and codes of ethics. These decision-making tools will help you not only with your discussions of how the young professionals in the cases acted but also with your future deliberations in the workplace. We encourage you to explore original readings of philosophers mentioned and to read the entire codes. Chapter 2 then offers insight into how one builds character via moral development; it includes the story of a young woman who had to make tough choices about the way she approached her job.

Because the problems encountered by the young professionals in the book—including dishonesty, bias, sensationalism and conflict of interest—could happen in any media workplace, you'll find the chapters organized not by profession but by types of issues. Even if you don't plan to be a public relations practitioner, you can learn from the situations a PR professional encounters and how he or she handles them. Plus, it always helps to get acquainted with the tasks done in other professions as you enter the working world.

Within the case chapters, you'll find "Tool for Thought" boxes that show how certain theories or codes could be applied to the situation in the chapter. Sometimes the boxes use a combination of tools because when you deliberate a dilemma, more than one way of thinking may help. You'll also find a variety of other features among the chapters, including discussion questions, web links and quick tips on practical matters such as whether it's OK to use information you found on Facebook.

This book will help you build professional character, and part of building character is realizing that you're going to make mistakes. For example, Peterson, who now works as a personal banker, wondered if she should have left with the other interns. The fall semester after her internship she took her required media ethics course. Because she hadn't taken the course yet, she believed she "didn't know how to talk" to her supervisors about doing tasks that made her uncomfortable.

"I should have stuck up for myself. I wanted more experience in advertising, but what I got was something different," Peterson says. "I also learned that bosses aren't always right." And that last comment is key.

Young people who encounter a work-related ethical dilemma usually recognize that what they're doing isn't right but often do it anyway for a variety of reasons: not wanting to look stupid, not having the courage to confront or confide in supervisors or just not knowing how to think through the dilemma or explain their reasoning. Helping you learn to deal with these roadblocks is why we compiled this book—and why Andie is a more confident employee today.

From your first day on the job, you're as responsible as anyone for the work your organization produces. Professionalism includes taking that responsibility. When you're the intern or the "new kid," obviously you

don't want to lecture people who have twice your experience about how to do their jobs. But if you have questions, it's your responsibility to ask them. It's never safe to assume the questions will be asked and answered somewhere higher up the line.

The pace of change in today's media means that when ethical issues arise, even your boss may not be sure what to do. Each professional is the architect of his or her own credibility, and each individual's credibility is key to establishing the credibility of the media as a whole. If you can build your ethical framework on sound theory and moral reasoning, you won't instantly know what to do about every situation that develops, but you'll be agile enough and confident enough to reason through it.

CHAPTER 1

Tools for Ethical Decision Making

Lee Anne Peck

"This doesn't seem right," you think. You're the youngest and newest person in the office, but all your instincts tell you that something about the story or the project you've been assigned is not quite, well, ethical. Whom should you talk to? What should you do?

Not to worry. You're not alone. You have colleagues, professional associations and their codes, plus centuries of ethical theory on which to draw. Exploring tools and ethical theory now will help you reason through the dilemmas you'll face in the future. Otherwise, you might jump into decision making with only a gut feeling. Learning to think through a dilemma will not only make you more confident and comfortable with your decision; it will also help you justify to others why you acted the way you did.

The Western philosophical theories shared in this chapter include many that students tend to embrace. That doesn't mean you and your instructor or colleagues should not explore others, such as the Judeo-Christian perspective and the Golden Rule, but these will get you started. Along with each philosopher's theories in this chapter, you'll find examples of how their ideas might apply to situations that today's media professionals face.

The chapter begins with some basic definitions, followed by a discussion of ethics codes. It continues with the beginnings of Western ethical

thought and then moves into concrete theories you might use while reasoning through a dilemma. You'll see that many of the theories embrace similar key concepts, such as justice, fairness, empathy and equality. You may just find yourself using them in your personal life, too. Who knew you were an Aristotelian?

Terms to Know

Some of you have taken a philosophy course or two, so this will be a review, but for those who haven't, let's start with the basics. The study of philosophy can be broken into three areas:

1. What is being? (ontology)
2. What is knowing? (epistemology)
3. How should one act? (ethics)

This book, of course, focuses on how one should act—and in particular, how one should act while working in one's chosen profession. Based on the Greek word ethos, ethics explores the philosophical foundations of decision making. When you reason through dilemmas, you think about morality, which comes from the Latin word mores. Morality refers to the way in which people actually behave or act. Therefore, ethics is an examination of morality.

Ethics, in turn, can be broken into three subareas:

1. Metaethics analyzes the meaning of moral language. What do the words you use signify?
2. Normative ethics considers the norms that act as principles of ethical behavior.
3. Applied ethics, or casuistry, applies normative theories to specific ethical dilemmas.

This book asks you to explore both normative ethics and the principles of your chosen profession. It then encourages you to do applied ethics, as defined above, with the book's cases. Please note that these true stories of young professionals concern media ethics, not media law. Sometimes

a society's morality may be transformed into law; a connection can exist, but remember, the two are not the same. The law tells you how to act while ethics tells you what you should do.

Codes for the Media Professions

Henry Watterson (1840–1921), longtime editor of the admired Louisville-Courier Journal, lamented at the end of the 19th century that journalism had no code of ethics and that its "moral destination" seemed confused. This worried Watterson and other U.S. newspaper editors and publishers. Journalism was now a profession instead of a trade and those who worked in that profession faced a lot of criticism. At the beginning of the 20th century, other media professions—such as advertising, radio broadcasting and press agentry (public relations)—also began coming under scrutiny for their "morals." Slowly, all media began creating codes of ethics. Some of those codes are still used today, but updated, of course.

As you learn about your chosen profession, you'll want to read and understand that profession's codes of ethics. Web links for codes from different organizations—from the Society of Professional Journalists to the Public Relations Society of America—are listed in the appendix, and some authors also share links to codes within their chapters. In addition, some media organizations have written their own codes, so you should always ask which code your new employer follows. Also, for transparency's sake, an increasing number of media organizations post their codes online for the public to see.

Media ethics codes are guidelines, though, not rules or laws. Because media professionals are not licensed the way lawyers and doctors are, they cannot "lose their licenses," so to speak, for violating an ethics code. They can, however, be fired. Getting fired doesn't mean a media professional can never work in the field again, but it does make finding another job difficult. Most important, violating a code of ethics can hurt people and damage the reputation of your entire profession.

Although codes remain a good place to begin your understanding of media ethics, it's important to be able to move beyond codes by using thought and analysis when a dilemma arises. Ethicist Bob Steele, the Poynter Institute's values scholar, stresses media professionals must go

beyond gut feelings and "rule obedience," trusting instead in reflection and reasoning.[1] In other words, you can turn to codes for initial guidance when making an ethical decision, but usually you'll need to go further in your deliberations if your situation is not blatantly black and white. Few ethical dilemmas are clear-cut.

Philosophical Theories

When you're working to resolve an ethical dilemma, don't discount those who came before you—way before you. The ethical theories of philosophers such as Aristotle and Immanuel Kant can help in your deliberations as can the ideas of contemporary ethics scholars. Sometimes a single theory or professional code will be enough to point you toward a solution; other times you'll need to combine various theories and tools. It depends on the dilemma. The important thing is to start building your resources now before you're facing an ethical question on deadline.

SOCRATES

We begin with Socrates. He taught Plato, who taught Aristotle. Socrates, the son of a stone mason, lived in Athens from 469 to 399 B.C. He believed in following one's principles and being independent in thought. Because Socrates did not write "lecture notes," Plato wrote many of Socrates' philosophical teachings into dialogues with Socrates as the main character. Socrates believed that he could best help Athenians by asking them to examine their moral lives. He has been quoted as saying, "The unexamined life is not worth living."[2]

Socrates tried to convince Athenians that each of them was responsible for his or her own moral actions and that unethical behavior came from ignorance or a lack of knowledge. Remember this as you read the cases in this book; often the young professionals encountering an ethical dilemma did not have the information they needed in order to make a

1. http://www.poynter.org/uncategorized/1758/the-ethical-decision-making-process/

2. Plato, *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo,* translated by G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981), 41.

sound decision. Back in Athens, Socrates believed his calling was to correct this ignorance in citizens.

The government of Athens saw things differently. In 399 B.C., it imprisoned Socrates and sentenced him to death for allegedly corrupting Athens' youth with his ideas and introducing false gods. Plato explained Socrates' situation in the dialogue "Crito" in which Socrates' friend Crito tries to persuade Socrates to escape prison. Socrates refuses, explaining his reasons to Crito. In this dialogue, Plato emphasizes Socrates' principles: independence, justification for one's actions and social responsibility—all important principles upon which media professionals should agree.

Socrates explains to his friend that he has been a citizen of Athens all his life, so why would he want to break the law and escape? That would be both disrespectful and unlawful. Socrates asks Crito what kind of message he would be sending to the people of Athens if he escaped from jail. Could he truly teach virtuous behavior somewhere else, somewhere outside of Athens? He would be a hypocrite. He has two sons. What message would he be sending to them?

Socrates believes if he remains in prison and is executed, he would actually enhance Athens' morality. Socrates uses his own independent reasoning to come to this conclusion, and he justifies his decision, which he believes to be socially responsible. Crito now understands why Socrates will stay in prison; he says nothing else.

Plato was one of the Athenians who learned Socrates' technique for finding the truth, called the Socratic method today. The speaker or teacher asks respondents a series of questions that eventually shows them they need to do more reasoning and reflection about their beliefs and actions. At your place of employment or at your university, you may find a "go-to" person whose mind works in ways that complement yours and who is good at asking questions when an ethical dilemma arises.

PLATO

After Socrates was put to death, his student Plato (428/7–348/7 B.C.) became conflicted about Athens' political atmosphere. Plato had wanted a life in politics but decided instead to continue his philosophy studies,

so he left Athens. During his 12 years away, he is thought to have spent time in Italy at the colony, or commune, created by the Greek philosopher Pythagoras, and he also spent time at an agricultural community in Egypt. Some scholars believe that Plato incorporated his travels into his work *The Republic* (360 B.C.), which describes a utopian world where philosophers have positions of power.

After returning to Athens, Plato started the Academy, often considered to be the first university. The subjects studied were the sciences, mathematics and philosophy, which included Plato's writings with Socrates as the narrator. Plato taught that the virtues of moderation, courage and wisdom combined to create the highest virtue: justice. *Justice* had a broader meaning than it does today; it meant "the good life" with morality as the final "good." In other words, to have a good life was to have a moral life.

Plato's book the "Republic," specifically the section titled Allegory of the Cave, can help beginning media professionals understand their position in the world and how to achieve "the good life."

After reading the "Republic," you will come to understand that Plato did not have much faith in humankind to act morally. He thought that if given the chance, and if they could get away with it, many people would act immorally. Plato believed that being ethical comes from using reason, and those who truly had a grasp of reason could be the philosopher king and the guardians in the "Republic."

In the book's short passage the Allegory of the Cave, Plato shows how the masses sometimes do not reason well. Because some believe the passage to be the most influential in Western philosophy, it's important to understand its symbolism.

To summarize, in Plato's cave, men have been chained by their necks and legs to a wall all their lives; they can only look straight ahead. Behind the prisoners, a fire burns, reflecting light above them. Between the fire and the wall is a passageway where "puppeteers" walk, holding artificial objects above their heads. These items make shadows on the wall above the prisoners, and for these prisoners, the shadows become their reality. However, one prisoner escapes from the cave. He sees the real world outside and returns to the cave to tell the other prisoners the truth—that the shadows they see are not reality. They do not believe him.

As a media professional, you could consider the prisoners to be a society composed of people who believe everything they see or hear such as rumors blasted through the internet. Consider the puppeteers to be the information manipulators, controlling what society sees and keeping it entertained. Outside of the cave sits reality or the truth. The prisoner who escapes is you, the media professional, returning to the cave to educate the other prisoners. In other words, if you become a member of the media, you need to educate society—but, first, you must educate yourself and have the courage to speak the truth.

ARISTOTLE'S VIRTUE ETHICS

Socrates and Plato both had an influence on the philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.). Born in Macedonia, north of Ancient Greece, and the son of the doctor Nicomachus, Aristotle later created a decision-making tool, the Doctrine of the Mean, which can still be useful to us today. In 367 B.C., Aristotle moved to Athens and studied at Plato's Academy for 20 years. After Plato died, Aristotle left Athens for several years. He returned in 335 B.C. and created his own school, the Lyceum; Plato's nephew Speusippus had taken over the Academy after his uncle's death.

Although Aristotle died in his early 60s, he left many writings that read like lecture notes; scholars believe that what exists today is only about one third of his writings. His work differed from Plato's in that Aristotle used no comedy or irony as Plato sometimes did, and he studied diverse topics, which included biology and physics. Aristotle's writings on ethics include "Eudemian Ethics," edited by his student Eudemus, and "Nicomachean Ethics," edited by his son Nicomachus and thought to be the work written closest to his death and, therefore, to be the closest to his beliefs.

Aristotle believed that ethical decision making is a skill (a *tekhne*) and that ethical behavior cannot be an exact science; no formula fits every situation. Aristotle didn't give his decision-making tool a name, but many call it the Golden Mean or the Doctrine of the Mean. (The latter is preferable so as not to be confused with the Golden Rule.)

Although Aristotle believed no specific right action exists for any ethical situation, he did believe you should avoid the extremes. He saw virtue as a middle state between excess and deficiency. For instance, he said the virtue of courage, or being courageous, sits between two

extremes—one being foolhardy and the other being cowardly. Finding the perfect point between these two extremes may be different from person to person or from case to case.

Examples of extremes follow:

Extravagance----------Stinginess

Buffoonery----------Boorishness

What is the most virtuous action between two extremes? To know what to choose, according to Aristotle, you must be working from the right character, which he said can't come just from reading. What's learned from a book, Aristotle called intellectual virtues; for instance, learning your profession's code of ethics by reading the code would be an intellectual virtue.

Aristotle believed you need to learn moral virtue through action, by actually practicing virtuous behavior. Moral virtues must be lived or be habits, he said. To use his Doctrine of the Mean, you must have the correct character. Aristotle would say that his mean can be understood and used by those who have grown up practicing the correct virtuous habits.

Character building should start with your parents and other adults involved in your early years. The people at your church might be included as well as your grade school and secondary school teachers. In college, university professors should be taking on the task. When you graduate and get a job, co-workers and supervisors should be mentors. Character building becomes an ongoing process. Adults should take on that responsibility, Aristotle said, and as you become older, he would ask that you do the same for the next generation.

To practice using his Doctrine of the Mean, let's say you work for a local news organization. The scanner announces a bad single-car accident in which a high school student has died. A photographer/videographer from your newsroom goes to the scene and takes a variety of shots—from gory images of the body to faraway shots showing just crime scene tape with authorities standing around. You and your colleagues need to choose a photo to use for the daily print product and to put online.

As in every such situation, additional information comes into play. In the past 30 days, four other high school students have died in automobile accidents in your community, and all of them involved underage

drinking. The police say they suspect alcohol may be a factor in tonight's accident as well. People in the community have become increasingly concerned. Given this information, how could Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean help you decide which photo to publish and whether video is appropriate? Crime scene tape photo? Gory photo? Those are the extremes, and you need to choose something in between. Would the recent cluster of accidents push you more toward the "gory" extreme because you'd reason the situation should not be sugar-coated?

Each person in each situation may come up with a different decision, a different point between extremes. The Doctrine of the Mean helps you and your colleagues make a choice after reflecting on the facts. Aristotle wrote in his "Nicomachean Ethics," "Virtuous behavior is to experience emotions at the right time, toward the right objects or people for the right reason in the right manner in accordance with the mean."[3] As you build character, finding the mean will become easier—and it will become "habit."

KANT'S DUTY-BASED ETHICS

We now move a few centuries ahead from Aristotle and Ancient Greece. Modern philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was born in Konigsberg, East Prussia (now Kaliningrad, Russia), the son of a harness maker. At age 16, he began attending the University of Konigsberg, where many of his professors emphasized individual moral behavior. After his studies, Kant became a professor at the university, where he taught for most of his life.

Kant believed following a society's laws is necessary, so order can be maintained. However, he also believed all men are equal, and no one should be treated as a means to an end. Kant's duty-based categorical imperative asks us to act in a way that everyone would agree upon; thus, everyone, following laws, would live in a free and equal society. In his "Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals,"[4] Kant writes that the

3. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, revised by J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 38.

4. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981), G421. (Citations from Grounding are cited G with page number from the Prussian Academy edition; original work published in 1785.)

categorical imperative is the supreme principle everyone should follow in all areas of life.

Take note: For Kant, your will should be influenced only by reason; you can control your will, but you can't control the consequences of your actions. His "supreme" version of the CI states, "Act only on a maxim that you can at the same time will to become a universal law."[5] (A maxim is a principle upon which everyone can agree. "Do not plagiarize," for instance, could be considered a maxim to keep in the media professions; it should be universal.) Therefore, people should follow, or create, maxims that they trust all reasonable people would follow. Kant believed people have the capacity to reason, and reason should always come before desire. According to Kant, only a good will is moral, and a good will is determined by duty—not desire.

If you can't ask that everyone act on a maxim you have created, you should not act on that maxim yourself. For instance, if a public relations professional constantly lies to make his client look good, Kant would urge him to ask himself whether he would want all PR professionals to behave this way. Of course not. This is not a maxim to keep because it would cause people to believe, incorrectly, that all PR professionals lie and are not to be trusted.

Kant's second "formula"[6] of the CI, the formula of humanity, states, "Act so as to treat humanity in oneself and others only as an end in itself, and never merely as a means." You would certainly avoid treating others with whom you deal in your job in a way that you would not want to be treated yourself. Let's say a reporter from your news organization doesn't like the state's governor. In the story she's writing, the reporter wants to use only quotes that make the governor appear incompetent—although she has other quotes that make him sound intelligent. "Choose quotes to fit your agenda." Is that a maxim you'd like all reporters to keep? No. Should all reporters use quotes judiciously? Yes. That would be the maxim to keep.

Kant believed our responsibility includes following maxims that make us law-abiding members of society—which, for the purposes of this book, includes being a responsible media professional. As he wrote in

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., G436.

another formulation of the categorical imperative, called the formula of legislation for a moral community, "Every rational being must act as if by his maxims he were at all times a legislative member of the universal kingdom of ends."[7]

Like Aristotle, Kant believed that if you don't have the appropriate moral education, you can't apply the categorical imperative. How do you learn which maxims to keep? Kant provides his opinion on moral education in his "Doctrine of Virtue: Part II of the Metaphysics of Morals" when he explains "the very concept of virtue implies that virtue must be acquired." For the media professional in training, university courses would be an appropriate place to begin. Kant believed in teaching his students using the case method as this book does, so they could learn to reason through ethical dilemmas already experienced by others.

UTILITARIANISM AND J. S. MILL'S PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY

The doctrine of basic utilitarianism says the best course of action is the one that creates the greatest benefit for everyone affected. The doctrine has been both expanded and refined over the years, and today it has many variations.

Today, utilitarians often describe benefits and harms in terms of the satisfactions of personal preferences or in economic terms. Although utilitarians differ, most believe in the general principle that morality depends on balancing the beneficial and harmful *consequences* of their conduct. This idea is familiar to many media professionals. For instance, let's say that a state's director of disability services is not doing his job correctly, and thus dozens of developmentally disabled adults are not receiving the services they need. If the director asks a journalist why she thinks it's important to report on him, she might answer, "Look at the good a story could do" or "Look at the harm a story could prevent." The journalist is weighing the harm to the reputation of the agency and its director against the good the story could do for society—warning people about a problem and furthering the beneficial work of the social service agency.

7. Ibid. G431.

Enter John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). Rigorously educated in London by his father, James, and Jeremy Bentham (considered to be the father of utilitarianism and "the greatest good for the greatest number"), Mill was tutored in classic utilitarianism as a youth. (He allegedly learned the Greek language at age 3.) In his early 20s, Mill had a nervous breakdown from his intense schooling. After his illness, he re-explored Bentham's brand of utilitarianism and came to believe that merely using math (the calculus of felicity)[8] to decide the number of people who will benefit instead of the number who will be harmed was not enough when making a moral decision. Mill argued in the 19th century that "quality" was also essential to ethical decision making.

"It would be absurd that . . . the estimation of pleasure should be supposed to depend on quantity alone," Mill wrote in his "Utilitarianism."[9] For example, he said the act of reading poetry was better (quality-wise) than playing "push-pin," a silly game of the time, although lots of people played push-pin. Mill's theory goes beyond the catchphrase "the greatest good for the greatest number"; he believed quality should also be factored into the calculation of the greatest amount of happiness.

Mill feared that a literal application of Bentham's version of utilitarianism could, over a number of generations, erode culture; he believed it is part of our human heritage to have desires higher than those that lend themselves to Bentham's kind of analysis.

To understand the importance of including "quality" in your decision making, think of the extremes media professionals might go to if they believed "the greatest good for the greatest number" is an absolute. What's to stop them from using lies, coercion and manipulation, or even breaking the law, as they gather information? They could argue that their reported information would help more people than it would hurt, then poof! They would have a justification for almost anything. Obviously, you will need to moderate these actions with a sense of perspective. You know that deception by media professionals

8. This is Bentham's mathematical formula to precisely chart the pleasure and happiness factors of any activity.

9. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism,* edited by G. Sher (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1979), 8.

is permissible only in rare situations, when no other route exists to accomplish your goal, a goal that must be of extreme importance to the public. After all, why should anyone believe the information you present is true if you lied to get it?

Let's say you're a TV reporter who wants to go undercover to expose a carpet cleaning company whose practices have been a source of viewer complaints. You and a colleague rent a house on your news organization's dime and pretend to be married. After setting up your "household," you call the carpet cleaning company and ask for the advertised special: three rooms of carpeting cleaned for only $99.

The cleaners show up and tell you that because of a number of factors peculiar to your house, the cost will be much higher. Your hidden camera gets everything on tape, and you air the tape and story the following week. Although you believe you have benefitted viewers and kept them from harm, were you thinking of quantity rather than quality?

A carpet cleaning scam is not a life-or-death situation for the public. Using deceit to find the truth is justified only when the situation you're exposing is of extreme importance to the public's well-being and then only when there's no other way to get the information you need. Hiding cameras would not be virtuous behavior, according to Mill, and he certainly wouldn't consider "sweeps month" when stations hype coverage in order to increase viewership and advertising rates, an argument in favor of deception.

Mill would ask the broadcast journalists who are about to set up their undercover investigation the following: "How would you use my principle of utility in this situation?" He would ask the journalists to choose their means wisely, and this is where he differs from Bentham. Do the journalists have other means available to them? What about interviewing people who have been scammed by the carpet cleaning company—with social media and the complaints the station has already received, the aggrieved parties shouldn't be tough to find—then asking the company to respond to the allegations? People who watch a segment done this way would be just as protected from harm as people who watch a hidden camera exposé. No deceit is needed.

Similar to Aristotle and Kant, Mill believed people need to cultivate a love of virtue before applying his principles, and he said that habit is

the only thing that imparts certainty. A journalist, via habit, needs to rely on his or her own conduct when making ethical decisions. Therefore, merely following a quantitative approach to the greatest happiness, or greatest good, is no way to come to a reasoned decision. When decision making gets complex and you are on deadline, however, Mill said in "Utilitarianism"[10] that following the guidance of basic moral rules (for the media, think codes) can be appropriate. He called these the secondary moral principles.

ROSS' PRIMA FACIE AND ACTUAL DUTIES

Welcome to the 20th century and to philosophers who work from the ideas of earlier scholars. Scottish-born philosopher Sir William David Ross (1877–1971), a leading Aristotle scholar during his lifetime, translated many of Aristotle's works. He presented his own ideas on ethical decision making in his 1930 text "The Right and the Good." He was not a fan of utilitarianism (or consequentialism) and instead appealed to common sense or intuition.

Ross believed in prima facie duties—obligations that most people can understand and accept as important. Ross' prima facie duties include the following:

- Keeping promises (fidelity)
- Showing gratitude for favors
- Practicing justice
- Making others' lives better (beneficence)
- Avoiding harm
- Making amends when necessary (reparation)
- Improving yourself

Note that Ross didn't call these the only duties; he believed you could add to the list. In some ethical dilemmas, though, two or more of your duties will conflict. When this happens, Ross advises you to look at the

10. Ibid., 8.

duties on your list. Which one ranks highest for this particular situation? The duty that fits best is the one to choose. The prima facie duty that you choose is called the actual duty. Ross would say that moral principles are not absolute; principles, or codes, have exceptions. You should use your common sense.

For example, let's say that a PR professional has a client who is building a housing development on top of a former landfill. Environmental experts have determined that the site will pose no threat to future homeowners. The PR professional has promised her client, the developer, that she won't mention the landfill in press releases. After making this promise, however, she begins to weigh her duties again, and she decides that not mentioning the landfill to potential buyers will create more harm than good. The buyers might feel deceived. For this media professional in this particular case, the duty to avoid harm takes precedence over the duty to keep her promise to the client. The PR professional decides to tell her client that she can't keep the promise and to explain why.

Sometimes called an intuitionist, Ross believes our duties should be obvious or self-evident. Although we use reasoning about our duties, common sense ultimately becomes the basis of Ross' theory. He's been criticized for believing that intuition makes a decision self-evident, but some embrace this "common sense" approach.

JOHN RAWLS' VEIL OF IGNORANCE

John Rawls (1921–2002), a contemporary philosopher and Harvard professor, created a concept of justice that many students find especially helpful in making ethical decisions. Rawls' 1971 book, "A Theory of Justice," provides a theory of justice as fairness, addressing personal rights. When you work through an ethical dilemma, Rawls does not want you to think about your place in society. Instead, Rawls wants you to get into "the original position." Instead, he advocates putting yourself behind what he calls a "veil of ignorance."

When you're behind this veil, you must forget who you are; only then can you step into the shoes of others who are involved in the dilemma. Forgetting who you are means not considering your class status, religion, ethnicity or values. You consider the viewpoints and welfare of everyone involved because everyone is equal. When the veil lifts after

the decision is made, you don't know what your identity will be; you could be master or slave, royalty or pauper.

Media ethics scholar Deni Elliott, the author of the next chapter, suggests taking the following steps when using Rawls' theory:[11]

- List all the people who will be affected by your decision, including yourself.
- Put yourself behind a veil of ignorance, giving up your identity, then assume one by one each of the identities of the people involved in the dilemma.
- Imagine a discussion taking place among the various players, with no one knowing what his or her ultimate identity will be when a decision is made.

Consider this situation: You work for an ad agency, and your supervisor has asked you to do a mockup for a print advertisement. In the ad photo and copy, he wants you to stereotype a certain ethnic group in a way that he thinks will be hilarious. You, however, do not see the humor; you believe the ad will cause harm.

Try working through this dilemma, preparing for a discussion with your boss about the inappropriateness of his idea, using the steps above. People to consider in this discussion are consumers; members of the ethnic group; your boss; you; and, finally, the client, who has hired the agency. Can you think of others?

Because all those involved are equal under Rawls' veil, "The principles of justice are the result of a fair agreement or bargain, and perhaps the question will be answered."[12] A discussion among equals leads to a "reflective equilibrium," he said. A consensus surfaces, a contract, and everyone's principles conform and everyone benefits.

For both Rawls and Kant (according to Kant's categorical imperative), an act is chosen because of a person's nature as "a free and equal rational

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11. Deni Elliott. 2001. Handout from Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Media Ethics Division workshop, Washington, D.C.

12. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1971), 120.

being." The word Rawls stresses is equal. Society as a whole will be better off if we allow for equality. Rawls' view can help us raise our social awareness when we make ethical decisions.

SISSELA BOK'S TEST OF PUBLICITY

Contemporary philosopher Sissela Bok, author of the book "Lying: Moral Choices in Public and Private Life," believes in the importance of justifying our actions to others—which means not only do you need to think through your decisions before making them, but you should also be able to make your decision-making process public.

Although her model "the test of publicity" addresses the question, "When is it OK to lie?" it can be used with other ethical dilemmas in the media professions. Lying aims to mislead or deceive—and if a media professional encounters a situation where it seems that misleading or deceiving the public might be appropriate, it's time to reason through the dilemma.

Bok's ethical decision-making model is based on these two principles: We must have empathy for the people involved in our ethical decisions, and we must maintain social trust. Once you've acknowledged those two things, she advocates analyzing your ethical decision making in three steps:

1. Consult your own sense of right and wrong. How do you feel about the proposed course of action that is creating the dilemma? (What exactly is bothering you?)
2. Seek advice on alternatives. Is there another way to accomplish the same objective without raising ethical issues? You can ask colleagues or consult a philosopher's theory.
3. How will this action affect others? If possible, have a discussion with the parties involved. If impossible, conduct the discussion hypothetically, with colleagues in your workplace representing various points of view.

If you go through all three steps before making a decision, Bok says, you'll be able to justify that decision—in other words, it will stand the test of publicity.

Let's say you're an editor for a news website. Rioting broke out in your city's downtown area last night after a concert. If you decide to publish on your site the video your reporter shot—a video that shows graphic violence with police officers and citizens who are clearly identifiable—will you be ready to answer the public outcry that's likely to follow? Will you know how to justify your decision to the police officer shown clubbing a student or to the family of the student lying bloodied on the ground? Will you survive the test of publicity?

The acceptable justification is that the issue you're investigating is crucial to the safety of the public. Poynter's Bob Steele has a valuable checklist, available at Poynter.org, relating to one specific kind of deceit, the use of hidden cameras. Steele's first guideline states that hidden cameras should be used only when the issue being investigated is of extreme importance to society. "It must be of vital public interest, such as revealing great system failure at the top levels, or it must prevent profound harm to individuals." Even then, he lists five other criteria that must be satisfied before the deception can be justified.[13]

AN ETHICS OF CARE

Another area of contemporary ethics, known as the "ethics of care," is based on feminist theory and takes into account both self and other. In other words, this idea puts relationships at the center of ethical decision making. The ideas of two notable "ethics of care" advocates follow.

Carol Gilligan's book "In a Different Voice," first published in 1982, points out that women tend to uphold an ethics of care in which taking care of others becomes most important in deliberations. Gilligan believes that women have a unique morality: They speak in a different voice from men, she says, because they have been taught a "language" of care and responsibility since childhood. People who develop a morality of care go from caring only about themselves to including the care of themselves and others—and, thus, being careful that no one is harmed.

In Gilligan's view, male scholars, including psychologist Sigmund Freud and educational psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, ignored the

13. http://www.poynter.org/uncategorized/744/deceptionhidden-cameras-check list/