Sensibility and Self-denial: A Christian Evaluation of Journalistic Care Ethics and Traditional Ethics

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Abstract

Traditional ethical models within journalism have upheld truth and objectivity as the highest standard, based on a conglomeration of Western ethical traditions. However, as the age of subjective moral reasoning ushered in skepticism and independently subjective philosophies, ethicists have examined the application of care ethics to the field of journalism. Scholars have viewed care ethics and traditional ethics as conflicting theories, but both contain elements of God's nature as revealed in the Bible. Both models also harbor secularized elements. In a biblical analysis of the two systems and their underlying assumptions, this thesis identifies crucial biblical differences in their views on human nature, truth, social relationships, and the purpose of journalism. It concludes that traditional ethics adequately deals with a biblical view of human nature, while care ethics leaves itself vulnerable in a fallen world. By combining the positive aspects of the two systems, this thesis is able to suggest a basic profile of Christian ethical practice in journalism.

Keywords: care ethics, traditional ethics, biblical, Christian, journalism

Sensibility and Self-denial: A Christian Evaluation of Journalistic Care Ethics and Traditional Ethics

Journalism as it is known today, marked by truth-seeking and objectivity, dates back more than a century (Ward, 2005) and is deeply steeped in the various ethical systems that comprise Western culture. For the purposes of this discussion, this ethical framework will be referred to as traditional ethics. America's Christian tradition permeates these underlying ethics—a 2001 survey of American and Canadian journalists revealed that "religious values are imbedded deeply, if not always consciously, in the moral and ethical values of journalists and that journalists of varying religious orientations tend to endorse a core group of moral and ethical principles at the heart of the religious heritage of the United States and Canada" (Underwood, 2001, p. 33).

But as other ethical philosophies arise, ethicists have proposed alternative ethical frameworks to guide journalistic practice. Care ethics is one such system, criticizing traditional ethics for an apparent lack of care, an inadequate ethic to make moral evaluations, and an inability to consider the complexities of everyday moral decision-making (Steiner & Okrusch, 2006).

As proponents have wrestled through what care ethics might look like when applied to journalism, they have rejected many of traditional journalism's foundational principles and assumptions.

> Care and public journalism challenge the notions of objectivity, neutrality, and detachment, each favoring the more nuanced stance that the moral agent's role is necessarily subjective. Likewise, care and public journalism eschew the ideal of

> neutrality, believing instead that citizens are inextricably bound to each other and thus obligated to act for the common (public) good. (Steiner & Okrusch, 2006, p. 117)

Ethicists often view traditional ethics and care ethics as in tension with each another, but many of the fundamental values undergirding both—truth-telling, impartiality, treating the vulnerable with care, and an interconnected humanity—seem to find commonality in a single source: God's character as revealed in the Bible. At the same time, elements of both systems also seem to reflect aspects of a secularized ethical understanding, standing in conflict with Christian ethics.

For Christian journalists attempting to navigate the changing landscape of journalism, a biblical analysis of both systems can help shed light on which elements to retain or discard from their personal journalistic ethics, granting the peace of mind that comes with a biblically justified understanding of media practice. The following analysis overviews the ethical systems, identifies underlying assumptions, evaluates those assumptions through a biblical lens, and suggests ideas for how a Christian journalist can harmonize traditional and care ethics.

An Overview of Care Ethics

Care ethics is a relationship-oriented theory for ethical reasoning. It sees humanity as relationally interconnected and mutually dependent, with individuals serving as caregivers and care-receivers at different points throughout their lives. In the context of care ethics, care is a sentiment and an action—caring about a person, as well as caring for

a person. The theory particularly focuses on taking action on behalf of the needy and vulnerable.

Care ethics is subjective and situational, rejecting universal principles for moral obligation (Noddings, 1984). Care ethicists have felt that relying on abstract principles of justice and fairness, for example, lead people to dehumanize others and treat them inhumanely (Vanacker & Breslin, 2006). Instead, they propose that the originating point for ethical duties is specific relationships (Vanacker & Breslin, 2006). The system relies on context and takes into account the complex situations of everyday life. Because context is such a fundamental component of care ethics, care is necessarily limited in scope—a caregiver has less and less context the more distant a care-receiver is.

History and Founders

Psychologist Carol Gilligan and philosopher Nel Noddings pioneered the ethics of care in the early 1980s. Gilligan argued that traditional forms of ethics flowed from a male perspective that sees human beings as autonomous and independent (Gilligan, 1982). Care ethics, she affirmed, is an alternative means of moral evaluation that takes into account a female perspective that sees humanity as interdependent and interrelated.

Noddings also approached the theory from a feminist perspective, especially from one of nurturing motherhood. She developed the distinct ethical stages of caring about people and caring for them (Noddings, 1984). The first refers to a state of harboring caring ideas and intentions toward a person, while the second refers to the application of those intentions through caring service.

Defining Care

Care is nebulous in definition because it depends on the context of practical situations, and because care ethicists differ among themselves on its precise nature. Care ethicists often divide care into two categories: the disposition of caring about someone and the action of caring for them (Pech & Leibel, 2006). The two work together—by caring about someone and intentionally immersing oneself in them and their needs, the caring person is ready and willing to offer care in tangible ways. Selma Sevenhuijsten (1998) describes care as "an ability and a willingness to 'see' and to 'hear' needs, and to take responsibility for these needs being met" (p. 84). Held (2006) adds that "in addition to being the meeting of objective needs, care seems to be at least partly an attitude and motive, as well as a value" (p. 33). Some, like Diemut Bubeck (1995), offer more detailed specifications of care, stressing face-to-face interaction and meeting the needs of people incapable of meeting those needs themselves. While most view care as inherently relational, others, including Joan Tronto and Bernice Fisher (1990), have seen care primarily as a form of labor that includes "everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (p. 40). When acting out of an ethic of care, caregivers are to avoid projecting themselves onto those they are caring for; rather, they enter the other person's world and care for that person on his or her own terms (Noddings, 1984).

Care Ethics in Practice

Several authors have proposed ways to apply the system to journalism. Because care ethics tends to reject strict rule-following in favor of situational decisions guided by

a moral framework, many of the proposed harmonizations emphasize a changed mentality rather than a change in specific practices. However, several authors have also offered specifics in certain hypothetical case studies.

Pech and Leibel (2006) take a harmonizing viewpoint—neither replacing the traditional value matrix nor merely tacking care ethics onto an already developed network of values and practice. They believe that care ethics can be added in such a way as to "promote solidarity and mutual concern among community members" (p. 142). Instead of a social contract model that views traditional journalism as "a kind of conduit or portal that supplies citizens with reliable information about events and issues of the day, information they are not able to acquire (or easily acquire) themselves" (pp. 145-146), they propose that each news organization develop its own "caring for" telos which orients how its members think and act (p. 148).

Pech and Leibel propose that the first step in carrying out this telos begins with determining which facts and events are reportable. They view traditional considerations such as the psychological impact on an audience as insufficient for evaluating ethicality, and instead recommend focusing on whether the news element would uphold and promote corporate solidarity. As a case study, they evaluate publishing photographs of suicide. They assess the potential for dehumanization of the individual reported on, exploitation of agony and suffering, feeding viewers' voyeuristic tendencies, and opening individuals to ridicule. They argue that this type of evaluation would be impossible to execute by utilizing a set of definitions or rules because it relies on a journalist's "sensibility, being able to experience on behalf of others whether a certain course of

action will or will not promote solidarity, or whether it violates our sense of human connectedness" (p. 152).

If in this scenario the journalist chose to proceed with publishing the photos, Pech and Leibel recommend anticipating unhealthy audience reactions and crafting a story that attempts to mitigate them, potentially explaining why the photos align with the organization's telos. They suggest that journalists might even comment on how, in circumstances such as these, collective humanity can objectify the victim through curiosity, exposing them to ridicule, or enjoying the horror of the situation. They conclude that "journalism, on this model, is unavoidably self-reflexive and self-conscious in its actions" (p. 154). Pech and Leibel acknowledge, however, that these applications of care begin to blur the lines between news and editorial reporting.

Vanacker and Breslin (2006) also promote a harmonizing viewpoint by stressing vulnerability as a key consideration. They acknowledge that care primarily functions within a framework of personal relationships and does not easily carry over on a public and institutional level. However, by defining vulnerability as "a feature that arises when one's interests are dependent on the decisions or behavior of another person," they suggest that a care ethic based on this vulnerability could extend into the public domain (p. 204). They view care as a limited resource to be spent on certain people in certain cases when the potential to affect the interest of another is large. Examples include children, crime victims, or those who did not seek the media spotlight. "We believe that such an intermediate position is the only way that a care ethic can have any practical relevance for journalism," they conclude (p. 203). Singling out the vulnerable as special

recipients of care in journalism, Vanacker and Breslin went so far as to propose that "the more vulnerable a person is, the more the value of compassion should trump values such as objectivity and truth telling" (p. 210).

Vanacker and Breslin cite several specific examples of care applied to the vulnerable. They note the recommendation of Stanford University professor William F. Woo that when reporting on poverty, journalists can feel free to provide a meal or take up a collection in the newsroom for poverty-stricken sources (McBride, 2002), relying on care and emotion to guide their conduct instead of abstract or justice-based rules like refraining from paying sources. They also suggest that a public official's right to privacy might in some cases take precedence over the public's need to know. They propose that care is especially relevant in crime reporting, where victims are especially vulnerable. Journalists should therefore be careful to avoid exploiting so-called body bag footage or embarrassing private details not relevant to the crime (p. 208). They recommend obtaining the victim's informed consent before publishing details about the victim and ensuring that publicizing those details would support the victim's best interests, because in a state of trauma, victims might not understand the full implications of their consent. Finally, Vanacker and Breslin recommend avoiding moral decisions based on categorizations (whistle-blower, corrupt official, etc.) and urge journalists to individually assess the vulnerability of each figure.

Steiner and Okrusch (2006) note that care ethics is "theoretically rich but practically poor," whereas traditional ethics is the opposite (p. 117). They suggest that

applying care ethics would not so much involve creating new rules and as providing a guiding framework.

> Indeed, the development and articulation of an ethic of care in journalism is less about radically changing journalists' behavior than revising journalism mythology in ways that give them permission and validation to do what they, as human beings, already may want to do and even try to do—to care about problems and to acknowledge that they care that their work has impact, produces caring responses and actions. (p. 115)

Nevertheless, they propose several specific points for application. They believe journalists should listen more carefully to people, especially the powerless or marginalized. Additionally, by ethical obligation, journalists should "evaluate and help readers evaluate claims to caring and suffering and to evaluate policies and proposals to ameliorate suffering" (p. 114). Journalists should demonstrate their own care in every aspect of their practice—in the stories they tell, in how they tell them, and in their treatment of sources and subjects. The goal is for care to become contagious: "Stories that reveal respect for caregiving (at the society and global level) may encourage other people, other sources, to speak in this register. Stories written in this register may literally permit other reporters to attend to caring" (p. 115). They acknowledge the difficulty of such an undertaking, however, citing Taylor (1998), who observes that the ethic of care is more labor- and time-intensive than traditional justice ethics that simply follows formal rules.

Most relevantly to this thesis, Craig and Ferré (2006) attempt to harmonize care ethics with traditional ethics using the biblical concept of *agape*—the self-sacrificial love portrayed in the New Testament. Along with self-sacrifice, it contains connotations of commitment and the unique characteristic of love for enemies, according to Craig and Ferré. In application, it would serve as "a challenge to pursue the best of journalism steadfastly—especially journalism that serves the ill-treated and those lacking power—in the face of market pressures or desires for professional self-advancement" (p. 127). They propose writing regular follow-up stories to maintain public interest on important issues. Secondly, it entails an increased commitment to fairness, especially toward sources, treating them with equal worth and respect. This means extending fairness to aggravating sources and striving to keep assumptions about disliked officials from causing positive material about them to be downplayed. At the same time, it involves revealing a source's worst for the sake of preventing public harm. Finally, the *agape* ethic would serve as "a beacon when strong feelings make true fairness difficult, and it asks hard questions whenever it encounters estrangement and exclusion" (p. 130). Craig and Ferré also suggest that journalists might need to depart from pure objectivity to include moral judgements—for example, when policy choices fail those who are suffering. But they note the subjective problem of determining which policies are in humanity's best interest and which should take priority. They also acknowledge that reporters could develop emotional attachments to certain issues, skewing their reporting. Craig and Ferré ultimately suggest that rather than calling for an overhaul in practices, "the narratives of

religions may provide additional motivation for the best of what journalists already do" (p. 138).

Several common themes emerge from these recommendations. Newsrooms should maintain an extra consciousness of how reporting will affect audience, sources, subjects, and even other journalists, all with the goal of promoting care and solidarity. Conversely, they should avoid any reportage that would disrupt human connectedness and care. They should specifically highlight their own care and tease out threads of care with the goal of influencing others in that direction. This may at times involve intermingling editorial content with straight news content. They should particularly elevate the voices of the marginalized and powerless. Finally, they should refrain from blind rule-following and instead allow the ethical framework of care to guide each decision.

An Overview of Traditional Ethics

While a care ethics perspective on journalism upholds care as the primary virtue, a historically ethical view has elevated truth and objectivity as the central virtues of journalism for the last century (Ward, 2005). This emphasis stems from a combination of normative philosophical influences, including consequentialist ethics, deontological ethics, and virtue ethics.

Consequentialist ethics evaluates an action's ethicality by focusing solely on its outcome. Falling within this ethical branch is utilitarianism, which affirms that the best action is the one that results in the greatest happiness or well-being for the greatest number of people (Benn, 1998). Journalists often rely on consequentialist ethics when

they must determine whether to publish sensitive or possibly harmful information. When covering a death, for example, they weigh informing the public against the possible trauma of relatives who have not yet heard of the tragedy. When covering the latest hacking incident, they balance informing the public against informing other rookie hackers who might replicate it. In scenarios such as these, reporters place positive and negative outcomes on the scales of two imperfect choices and generally choose the option that harms the least number of people.

Deontological ethics focuses on the action itself and its ethicality in comparison to a moral rule or standard. Individuals are agents bound by duty to these standards and are obligated to conform their actions to them. Kantianism fits within this branch of ethics, stating that individuals should unconditionally follow certain rules, called "categorical imperatives," regardless of outcome or personal feelings, such that they only follow actions they are willing to see become universal law (Roth, 2005, pp. 804-805). Deontological ethics also includes divine-command theory, which holds that God's commands are right and obligatory (Roth, 2005). Deontology has heavily influenced journalistic theory and practice—as early as 1922, journalists such as the American Society of News Editors were creating ethical codes to govern their conduct (ASNE, n.d.). Thus, journalists were encouraged to adhere to these external and universal codes to the best of their ability. A journalist's hierarchy of allegiance exemplifies this duty-

oriented mindset: their first loyalty is to members of the public instead of to their own personal beliefs or to the sources they interact with.

Virtue ethics, associated with Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates, focuses on the acting agents and their moral character or virtue (Crisp, 2010). An action is evaluated based on whether a virtuous person would perform that action under the same conditions, according to Lawler and Salzman (2013). Of all the virtues, truthfulness has most strongly guided reporters. Because of it, journalists have so highly prized objectivity and therefore attempt to remain detached from the people and topics they cover.

Traditional Ethics in Practice

One of the best sources for discovering how these ethical systems have shaped journalism is the Society of Professional Journalists' (SPJ) Code of Ethics, likely journalism's most widely-used code of ethics. The code's specific points fall under four main categories: "Seek truth and report it," "Minimize harm," "Act independently," and "Be accountable and transparent" (SPJ, 2014, paras. 4, 24, 33 & 40).

Specifically, journalists direct their action in service to the public. The code states that serving the public is the "highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism" (SPJ, 2014, para. 35). This does not equate to treating other individuals as lesser; in fact, the code also states that "ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect" (para. 25). However, the journalist is expected to put the interest of the public above the interests of sources, subjects and colleagues.

If truth exists to be uncovered and reported, then the goal of journalists is to access and distribute it in an as unmediated form as possible—in other words, in an objective way. Protecting objectivity dominates a large focus of the SPJ Code. It advises

journalists to “avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived” and to “disclose unavoidable conflicts” (para. 35). Ethical journalists “refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and avoid political and other outside activities that may compromise integrity or impartiality, or may damage credibility” (para. 36). They should not give special interests favored treatment and resist “internal and external pressure to influence coverage” (para. 38). In a position paper attached to the code, the SPJ expounds upon retaining the appearance of objectivity by recommending that “reporters not take a position on an issue, or in a candidate race, that they are covering. They may do so privately, but they definitely should not do so in a public or visible way” (Brown, n.d., para. 17). The SPJ also draws a hard line between news and advocacy reporting, allowing analysis and commentary only when specifically labeled as such (Brown, n.d.).

Journalists operating under the traditional ethical model tend to value and protect their autonomy. This includes maintaining professional boundaries with sources rather than developing friendships. In a certain sense, they attempt to even remain autonomous from themselves—trying to avoid acting out of their biases and preferences, even if they feel strongly about them. This includes biases as fundamental as a personal sense of religious morality. According to Ryan (2011),

> Objective journalists make every effort to ensure that all relevant information is obtained and disseminated—even that which they or powerful interests would prefer to see suppressed—for reports must be complete if they are (a) to describe (as they must) both the event or issue and the context within which persons act

> and events occur and (b) to help audiences decide which of several truth claims are, in fact, most compelling. (p. 4)

Achieving objectivity takes on numerous practical forms, five of which Mindich (1998) identified as detachment (using neutral language), nonpartisanship (inclusion of all relevant sides of a story; fairness), the inverted pyramid style of writing (presenting facts in order of importance), naïve empiricism (factual accuracy), and balance (lack of distortion, such as by omission of relevant facts), according to Figdor (2010). Adherence to traditional ethics also encourages a firm adherence to codes, precedents, and law, and generally rejects subjective or situational decision-making that might contradict these previously-established markers for conduct.

Underlying Assumptions of Care Ethics and Traditional Ethics

Discerning the difference between traditional ethics and care ethics lies in examining their underlying assumptions that tend to conflict: the purpose of journalism and the nature of social relationships, truth, and human nature.

Traditional Ethics

Purpose. In traditional ethics, journalism takes on a very specific function: reporting facts. Figdor (2010) summarizes news as "a means for acquiring belief about states of affairs not experienced or otherwise known firsthand" (p. 22). Similarly, Ryan (2001) states that the primary value for objective journalists is "the collection and dissemination of information that describes reality as accurately as possible" (p. 3). Journalists and their work act like a pane of glass, allowing those standing outside a closed room to view its inside as clearly as possible.

As a derivative purpose, journalism informs the public so that they can make informed decisions (Mencher, 2011). According to Ryan, this type of objective reporting allows audiences to examine multiple truth claims and decide which is most compelling. Conversely, he argues that when these varying perspectives are unavailable, good decisions are inhibited. This perspective hearkens back to the thought of John Stuart Mill, who argued against censorship on the basis that even wrong claims can contain elements of truth (Mill & Alexander, 1999). Therefore, journalism exists to provide an avenue of expressing all ideas—even wrong ideas—rather than attempting to editorially identify so-called right ideas and suppress the public exposure of so-called wrong ideas.

Due to its specific purpose, journalism becomes a highly specific job. Traditional journalists tend to lump advocacy into a job category distinct from the job of informing (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). Similarly, if elements such as friendship, relational bonding, partisanship, and activism fall outside of this function, they fall outside the bounds of the job. Ryan (2001) conveys this sentiment, stating that "[objective journalists] do not worry because their job is not to persuade or to privilege but to report objectively" (p. 15).

Social relationships. Traditional journalists affirm the basic concepts of free will and autonomy. They assume that audience members function as individuals and do not need to rely on others to discover truth through observation. Thus, journalists do not provide opinion or guidance—they assume the audience can, or perhaps should, arrive at their own conclusions. Further, journalists assume readers can make good decisions if equipped with the proper information. From this perspective, the individual is also in the

best position to decide what is best for his or her own interests. Traditional journalism recognizes that even though absolute truth exists, the free will individuals possess to hold their own opinions also exists. By providing an open avenue for these ideas, traditional journalism upholds the expression of free will rather than attempting to limit that avenue to one particular standpoint.

Truth. Traditional ethics assumes the existence of absolute truth and its inherent power. The notion of objectivity assumes "the existence of a 'real' world about which humans can be right or wrong" (Ryan, 2001, p. 5). That reflected reality carries the power of its attachment to reality—something that no illusion, no matter how grand, can boast as its foundation. In the words of Ryan (2001), "It is cliché, but the facts do speak for themselves. If one side is more compelling, that is apparent from the objective journalist's report" (p. 7). To a certain degree, understanding the power of truth mitigates the urge to mix persuasion into journalistic work. Traditional journalists are activists in presenting truth, but they allow the facts to do the work of persuasion.

Human nature. Perhaps one of the most understated but influential assumptions in traditional ethics is humanity's bent toward self-interest and corruption. According to Bivins (2009), "ethical action often comes into conflict with our instinct to act in our own self-interest" (p. 15). Correspondingly, traditional journalists seek to protect the public from the abuses of others and also protect themselves from abusing the public. From this mentality flow practices such as not accepting gifts or payment from sources, maintaining a degree of personal detachment, and abstaining from covering stories or events which involve conflict of interest. This understanding of human nature also explains the need to

avoid personal bias in coverage, because the public understands that passion can easily distort perspective and compromise action. While traditional codes of conduct can appear undesirable and even at times harsh and unnatural, traditional journalism assumes that they will adequately counteract temptation when personal desires overshadow vague and less compelling notions of duty. Thus, traditional journalism clings to external codes while feeling correspondingly nervous about situational decision-making guided by an internal ethical compass.

Care Ethics

Purpose. Care ethics, on the other hand, subscribes to a significantly different set of assumptions. According to Vanacker and Breslin (2006), "in an ethic of care, moral development of the cared for is just as important as that of the caregiver. … The relationships that define a care model of ethics create a sense of moral responsibility toward those with whom one is connected" (p. 119). This attitude stems from Nodding's (1984) position that "contrary to Kant, who insisted that each person's moral perfection is his or her own project, we remain at least partly responsible for the moral development of each person we encounter" (p.15). Under care ethics, journalism takes on a moralized purpose "to promote in others the range of virtues that constitute a care orientation" (Pech & Leibel, 2006, p. 148). Under this paradigm, the institution of journalism would be "committed not only to providing information to its community, but also to doing so in such a way that its practices promote solidarity and mutual concern among community members" (Pech & Leibel, 2006, 142). Since journalism's purpose moves beyond simply

providing facts and information, they claim advocacy and editorializing can, at times, become acceptable.

Social relationships. Care ethics sees humanity in interdependent relationships with one another, considering this a natural state of being (Noddings, 1984). This means acknowledging a position of personal vulnerability, according to Tronto (2009).

> This is not an idea that most people easily accept. … It assumes that we abandon the feeling of full autonomy. And it requires that we stop thinking that 'individual autonomy' is the solution for all of society's problems. In effect, true acknowledgement of our profound vulnerability and that it is what ties us to others can very well change the way we think about social responsibilities. (p. 51)

Vanacker and Breslin (2006) imply that a greater state of vulnerability should correspond to a greater sensitivity for care toward that person (i.e., the level of care adults show to infants versus to other adults.) They argue that "a care-based approach is more paternalistic and assumes that the best decision for the care recipient emerges from the dual relationship between caregiver and receiver" (p. 209). What follows is the view that individuals are not always well positioned to make decisions autonomously—trauma, sickness, or other debilitations can inhibit their ability to accurately assess their best interest. Providing them with information or obtaining consent is not ethically sufficient if their judgement is compromised. Under care ethics, individuals implicitly have the responsibility to protect and elevate those subjugated in a vulnerable state. This includes giving a voice to the voiceless, for example.

Truth. One of the major differences between care ethics and traditional ethics is that care ethicists do not operate on the basis of absolute truth. According to Vanacker and Breslin (2006),

> Care ethics are situationalist ethics and criticize the tendency of the imperialist tradition to formulate general laws and principles that need to be followed by everyone under all circumstances. In doing so, care theorists claim, imperialist ethics ignore the nuances and complexity of specific situations. What is morally right or wrong has to be determined individually in every situation and no abstract general rules can determine what course of action to take. (p. 205)

This basic assumption flows into the assumptions journalists carry into reporting. According to Steiner and Okrusch (2006), care challenges "the notions of objectivity, neutrality, and detachment, … favoring the more nuanced stance that the moral agent's role is necessarily subjective" (p. 117).

> The idea of value-neutral knowledge has come to be seen not only as empirically unlikely but perhaps even conceptually incoherent. Critical literatures provide strong support for the claim that both the process of choosing and creating news are inevitably framed in particular, substantive ways, either implicitly or explicitly. There is no "view from nowhere," no perspective without framing. There is no simple process of providing value-free facts. (Pech & Leibel, 2006, p. 141)

Truth does not possess inherent power in this view, leaving the work of persuasion to the individual presenting it. Interestingly enough, despite departing from absolute truth, the

system is far from chaotically uncertain of its beliefs. Care ethicists passionately feel the value of relationships, caring, and so on, enough to want others to embrace them as well. But perhaps lacking confidence in their absolute qualities, they call attention to these things and persuade and influence others toward them. Hence the restlessness against self-denying restraints; according to Glasser (1984), "objective reporting has denied journalists their citizenship; as disinterested observers, as impartial reporters, journalists are expected to be morally disengaged and politically inactive" (p.15). Care ethicists instead assume that journalists should embrace individual beliefs and passions in their work to the extent possible.

Human nature. The care ethics model implicitly views humanity as capable of caring purely for others, but explains those who do not as either uninformed, suppressed, or shaped by the wrong influences. Care ethics is a call to become more human, to awaken the inner care that resides in each person. Thus, by embracing the care ideal and seeing it modeled by others, journalists can release their inner care. Steiner and Okrusch (2006) reflect this attitude when they conclude that introducing an ethic of care in journalism

> is less about radically changing journalists' behavior than revising journalism mythology in ways that give them permission and validation to do what they, as human beings, already may want to do and even try to do—to care about problems and acknowledge that they care that their work has impact, produces caring responses and actions. A caring ethic enables journalists to be ethical decision makers as well as moral agents. (p. 115)

Pech and Leibel (2006) propose that journalists must possess this inborn sense of care in order to navigate journalism's complex ethical decision-making processes. Prescribed standards or even an intellectual understanding of care or human solidarity will not prove sufficient.

> Rather, in many cases this understanding is the result of a certain sensibility, being able to experience on behalf of others whether a certain course of action will or will not promote solidarity, or whether it violates our sense of human connectedness. This suggests that journalists will need to have this sensibility, this capacity for emotions, feelings, and attitudes that serve to reveal the presence or lack of solidarity, as an important avenue of understanding that notion. (Pech & Leibel, 2006, p. 152)

Certain individuals seem to naturally embody care, but for those who tend toward a so-called rational and justice-based mentality, care is still considered achievable. Steiner and Okrusch (2006) acknowledge that care may not come easily—it is not a "natural and intuitive quality so much as an acquired and motivated disposition, presumably learned by being modeled" (p. 103).

Biblical Analysis of Care Ethics and Traditional Ethics

Having understood each system's overall tenets and their underlying assumptions that tend to conflict, a biblical analysis can provide insight into where the two systems align with or depart from biblical principles.

Overview of the Christian Worldview

In this system, God is the only true good (Mark 10:18, New American Standard

Bible), though he has been consistently misunderstood and rejected. He created the world and humanity in perfection as a reflection of his goodness. His goodness, wisdom, truth, etc. permeate tangible reality and form *all* of the goodness, wisdom, truth, etc. in the world. When humanity first acted in opposition to God's instructions, they turned away from the only good in the world, introducing evil to the previously utopian world (Gen. 3). It manifested itself in physical death and a newly dangerous creation. This evil also changed the inclination of human nature—hence the term sin nature. From then on, humanity followed the precedent of choosing "not God" (Rom. 3:11), with their ultimate post-death destination a place where a relationship with God, and therefore all goodness, is absent.

The world is not divided into so-called good people—the average person—and so-called bad people—the criminals, the corrupt, and the puppy-kickers of the world. Rather, the Bible reveals that each person has an essential nature that ultimately prioritizes self-interest before the interests of others and before God and his directives to humanity. The actions of criminals are merely an extreme symptom of the same metaphorical disease that infects each person. And while humanity at large recognizes that something has gone terribly wrong with the world when destruction, suffering and betrayal occur, they often fail to identify that same disease in themselves that manifests itself in smaller instances of harm. When they do identify it, the instincts to justify, conceal, or shift blame rise to protect the self, because it is one of the most terrifyingly unnatural feelings to embrace the horror that something is inherently wrong and evil within one's very essence. The problem intensifies when individuals discover that no

matter what they do—no matter how much virtue they learn or how much good they do for other people—they cannot jettison this sin nature hopelessly rooted in their essence and inclinations (Rom. 6:6). It eventually will reveal itself in thought, word, or deed, no matter how staunchly repressed or denied. This nature inclines individuals to temptation (James 1:14), and they regularly and—consciously or subconsciously—willingly succumb to it to varying degrees.

God now is the only hope for the restoration of the human essence back to God's standard as measured by his nature—the defining qualities that humanity often instinctively recognize as good. He accomplished this through Jesus, who, in a mysterious merging of humanity and divinity, lived for a time on the earth as the only human to ever successfully live life in perfect goodness (Hebrews 4:15). In his death as an innocent man and his subsequent return to life, he vicariously atoned for all the evil humanity brought into God's world (1 John 2:2). On the basis of his life, he became the means by which humanity could be restored to life with God after death (John 14:6) and introduced the possibly of humanity possessing a pure essence that would no longer perpetually introduce more destruction and pain into the world but would rather be infused with God's own good essence (Rom. 6:4). For those who believe that Jesus is who he said he is and entrust themselves to him, God promised in the Bible to begin that process of restoring them—changing their nature and inclinations (Ezekiel 36:26). He places his own spirit within them to guide them, expose their inner corruption and enable them to leave it behind, and give them understanding for how to live in a life-producing way, among other ministrations (John 14:26; 16:7-15, Gal. 5:22-23). This process is not

instant, but is a gradual and internally-conflicted process of phasing out the formerly dominant nature and phasing in the new one (Rom. 8:13). Although those who have believed in Jesus have the capability to act apart from selfish ways, the sin nature still influences and tempts them to choose to act in accordance with it, and all do with varying degrees of regularity (1 John 1:8, Rom. 7:14-25).

Biblical Analysis

Against this biblical backdrop, the systems of traditional ethics and care ethics can be critiqued and harmonized.

Human nature. Traditional ethics implicitly acknowledges the sinful condition of the human nature, one of the largest points of separation between care ethics and traditional ethics. While Christian traditional ethicists affirm the genuine, God-produced altruism Christian journalists can bring into their work, this does not mean those journalists will not still succumb to the temptation to act in their own interest at the expense of others. Additionally, human finitude—the lack of a complete perspective, for example—inevitably guarantees a certain amount of imperfection and harm. Therefore, traditional ethics does not trust its agents to remain virtuous at all times, and correspondingly establishes checks, balances, and safety nets to minimize potential harm.

Care ethics, on the other hand, implicitly sees humanity as basically good but with a need for the right ideals, a need to learn the right sensibilities, and a need for the right influences. Under these conditions, individuals should be able to navigate the complexities of real-life decision-making by referencing their correctly calibrated internal moral compass. But although care ethics acknowledges evil from without, it fails to

adequately understand and embrace the existence of evil from within, leaving the system vulnerable to internal abuse.

However, care ethics does correspond with several aspects of the biblical view on human nature. Identifying moral ideals, attaining to them, and seeing others model them can help people begin to embody those ideals. They need not possess an inherent affinity for a virtue—patience, compassion, and so on—to have a hope of learning it. After all, given the broken human condition, it would be unreasonable to expect these godly virtues to come naturally. Care ethics also identifies the need for a genuine core to this behavior—not just mimicry or a literal adherence to a set of rules, but an inborn sensibility and understanding from which the qualities flow. While realizing these qualities in their purest form is doubtful without the enablement and transformation of the Holy Spirit, God's work in people who have demonstrated traits antithetical to those qualities offers hope for genuinely embodying them.

Embracing and embodying the biblical virtue of care adds valuable clarity to Christian journalists seeking to live in a way consistent with God's nature. Exploring, understanding, and holding care as a standard can help them achieve biblically ethical journalism, and, as Pech and Leibel (2006) note, serve as a reminder that caring-for does not occur organically.

But ultimately, this strategy is not robust enough to counteract the sin nature. From a biblical standpoint, looking to the self to determine right or wrong choices instead of looking outside the self to God's directives will ultimately lead a person into unethical ground. And relying on the self in the context of a man-made system of morality is

doubly dangerous. The combination of sin and finitude guarantees abuse and limitation within that system—only God has the pure nature and full perspective sufficient to create a functional and ethical system of morality.

Practically, situationalism and a reliance on pure virtue ethics is unsustainable. Levy (2004) identified journalism as a "morally dangerous profession," partly because it constantly requires journalists to make decisions when the ethically correct action is unclear (p. 113). He criticized a reliance on virtue alone, identifying three conditions that lead to a near-certain overwhelming of situational character: reassurance that an action is ethically acceptable, a figure of authority and experience offering that reassurance, and a process of crossing ethical lines so gradual that the individual cannot identify why any one step was acceptable and the next was not. Under these conditions, journalists can find themselves participating in unethical practices, knowingly or unknowingly.

Attempts to counteract the sin nature. Traditional ethics employs multiple tactics to account for the sin nature, including following external guidelines, avoiding partisanship and activism, refraining from editorializing, and remaining independent.

Following external guidelines provides several advantages. Journalists can have reasonable assurance that they are acting ethically when they lack complete information or face a snap decision they have not mentally prepared for—others have already deeply considered the matter and have prescribed an ethical action. External guidelines also provide a point of reference in gray areas and make self-deception and self-justification more difficult. During a period of temptation, they provide something tangible to cling to. External rules inform ethical conduct when the truly ethical action feels unethical. They

may serve as a starting point for education—journalists can learn to adopt the values behind them as they think through why each rule exists. Lastly, they provide a clear standard for evaluation, allowing others with clearer perspectives and less biased perspectives to hold journalists accountable.

However, care ethics is right to identify the futility in relying solely on law. No code or set of rules can cover every circumstance—they are inherently limited (Bivins, 2009). Care ethicists point out that real-life complexities require subjective moral reasoning (Vanacker & Breslin, 2006). Another problem arises when the letter is followed but the spirit is neglected, whether due to ignorance or corruption. According to Bivins (2009), "All media, at one time or another, have used the 'It's not illegal so it must be all right' dodge" (p. 18). Lastly, overregulation can become a problem when the probability for abuse is minimal, creating cumbersome procedures that hamper individuals' capability to responsibly make ethical decisions.

A Biblical perspective tends to agree with both systems: rules cannot generate morality, but they are essential for maintaining and cultivating it. Because God's rules flow from his nature, some overarching rules are true at all times for all people—not murdering the innocent and caring for one's children, for example. On a functional level, however, many gray areas exist where subjective reasoning is necessary and broad rules apparently do not suffice. For example, the Hebrew midwives lied to Pharaoh to save babies' lives, at least appearing to violate God's directives against falsehood (Proverbs 6:17; 12:22; Psalm 101:7), yet God treated them favorably because they acted out of respect for God's values instead of Pharaoh's (Exodus 1:16-21). Whether the midwives

were right or wrong to lie is debatable and beyond the scope of this discussion, but one could conclude that lesser rules sometimes practically give way to higher rules for the sake of ethicality. Navigating these issues without situational ethical judgment would be impossible.

But the Bible is also not structured as a comprehensive list of rules. Certain specifics are identified, but many of the biblical laws and directives serve to illuminate the values and principles behind them that correspond to God's nature. Because God's nature is cohesive, none of the rules are arbitrary and ultimately separate—they interrelate. The collection of rules and laws can interpret one another without fear of conflict since God's nature does not contradict itself. Thus, the Bible provides overarching principles and values that will apply to every situation, if properly interpreted. For example, Jesus said the entirety of the Old Testament Law could be summed up by the commands to love God and love neighbor (Matt. 22:37-39). In other words, if a person could perfectly love God and perfectly love neighbor, that person would naturally follow all the other laws, because those laws are subcategories and practical outworkings of love. Understanding these major values and principles can aid Christians in situational decision-making, just as it led the Hebrew midwives to disobey Pharaoh (because he was asking them to violate the command of a higher authority) and lie (because they understood that God did not endorse the taking of innocent life).

From God's perspective, all is unified; however, human access to that unification is another matter. Due to a finite or warped perspective, people often fail to interpret God's rules correctly or fail to understand the values and principles behind them. The

Holy Spirit guides Christians in their understanding, but this too is not the ultimate solution—Christians differ constantly on matters of interpretation.

The problem becomes even more complex when a Christian journalist is attempting to create, interpret, or follow man-made rules. These rules are two steps removed from God, so there is more room for misinterpretation. Confidence in ethical conduct is less certain. However, if those man-made rules exist as subcategories and specific applications of all of God's values, a journalist can be reasonably confident that they will support biblically ethical outcomes.

While care ethics is right to address the need for caring intent and a genuinely virtuous character, this alone is also insufficient. To broadly reject universal rules and attempt to determine right and wrong on a case-by-case basis is antithetical to biblical teaching and highly unwise since only God can grasp and account for all variables of human existence. His system runs with optimum functionality in a sinful world where nothing functions the way it was originally intended. A truly ethical Christian journalist will need rules, as well as the Holy Spirit, wisdom, and biblical understanding in order to navigate the real-life complexities and gray areas of journalism. These will not perfectly counteract finitude and sinfulness, but they certainly will mitigate it more effectively than any other system available.

Beyond employing external rules and codes of conduct, traditional ethics attempts to deal with the sin nature and finitude by following the biblical approach of fleeing temptation. The rationale behind this approach is to avoid situations that are technically navigable but introduce such a high level of temptation the individual has a near certain

probability of falling into unethical practice. Within this category emerge the practices of refusing to editorialize, abstaining from activism, and maintaining detachment.

Traditional ethics limits opinion to clearly labeled editorials, while care ethics is comfortable inserting it when it serves a higher moral good. From a biblical standpoint, one wants to side with the care ethicists—after all, the Bible has no qualms about structuring historical narrative around theological and moral lessons. It represents the true version of events—a peek into God's perspective on the world, which is the clearest, most factual perspective of reality that exists. Journalists who are certain of theological truths may feel the urge to convey them in news to more accurately portray the truth. But traditional ethics understands humanity's limited and warped perspective and recognizes that opening the floor to one person's truth means opening the floor to all peoples' truths. Similarly, traditional journalism is wary of framing its news because the public requires access to information that is as frameless as possible. Even though biblically-speaking a single, true frame exists, Christians are not always capable of identifying it correctly, and it creates the opportunity for individuals with unbiblical frames to become gatekeepers through which all facts are framed. Instead, traditional ethics seeks to preserve frameless and opinion-free news while still providing a channel for opinion and framing through editorial columns.

Similarly, avoiding partisanship and activism also takes the same approach of fleeing temptation, recognizing the power of temptation and the distorted perspective personal investment can create. Again, this limitation can be difficult for a morally-minded journalist to embrace amidst a deluge of pressing social and moral causes. To

many care ethicists, it seems to equal revoking one's citizenship (Glasser, 1984). Two points bear noting. First, people routinely deny themselves certain rights and expectations for the sake of fulfilling others. For example, an FBI agent lays aside the right to speak freely about work with close relatives. This sacrifice is unfortunate but necessary to maintain a functional system in a broken world. Transmitting the truth requires willingly taking up a difficult call that comes with self-sacrificial limitations. Second, journalists may set aside their rights to varying degrees. Some go so far as refraining to vote, while others merely avoid publicly disclosing their partisanship.

What care ethicists label detachment is another of traditional ethics' mechanisms for combating temptation. Journalists must try to remain as impartial as possible regarding sources and issues in order to convey the truth as closely as possible. In hard news, it may mean battling the urge to side with one position or another. This attitude can feel profoundly wrong, because it seems like a requirement to be morally disengaged (Glasser, 1984). As Pech and Leibel (2006) express, this behavior requires "a kind of institutional dissociation … where journalists' most profound human values have no place in shaping the concepts that make up the institution" (p.150). However, attempting to report impartially is not an attempt to "purge *ourselves* of values," according to Figdor (2010, p. 23). Rather, it is the self-restraint of personal values from influencing coverage for the specific goal of reporting tangible, observable happenings. An attitude of detachment can also feel wrong in source relationships, remaining detached from sources can also feel wrong, almost a call to detach from humanity. It need not be a complete detachment, however, only so much as to avoid conflicts of interest. Judges face the same

sacrifice—remaining impartial while making value judgments requires detachment (evident in the need for recusal when detachment has been compromised), because clarity diminishes when an outside perspective ceases to be outside. Cultivating friendly, professional relationships without the ties associated with friendships—this line each journalist must draw according to personal conviction.

From a Christian standpoint, there is, perhaps, biblical merit to the idea of detachment—the Bible emphasizes impartiality (Lev. 19:15, Rom 2:11). Detachment serves as a tool in achieving impartiality against the pressures of temptation. It does not mean relinquishing values regarding those issues—if anything, the Bible calls Christians to hold tightly to a single view on many issues. Nor does it mean ignoring the higher callings of making Jesus known or helping people in need. For example, if a source opens up about a personal spiritual need, a Christian journalist might decide to lay aside an ethically professional relationship, because filling that need would become a matter of pointing that person to God. This is an area of discernment on the part of the journalist.

Purpose. All of this hearkens to the question of journalism's purpose from a Biblical standpoint. Do journalists serve a highly specialized function or a more holistic purpose? Compartmentalization—giving up a truly good thing for the sake of pursuing another good thing—finds a biblical precedent. This seems to be how Jesus lived, fulfilling a specific mission from God to the exclusion of bringing civic peace or healing every sick person, for example. He was preoccupied with a higher, more loving call. Similarly, if journalists must lay aside good things such as friendship with sources or participation in godly causes in order to fulfill the service of providing others with

unbiased information, they are still working faithfully toward God and others. The service may feel as ethically empty as shoemaking, but without a shoemaker, people would suffer. Journalism is truly a high and godly calling. It is also a highly unique vocation, strange to the human experience, in which a journalist is to serve as a pane of glass through which others may view otherwise obscured happenings. But in serving as that glass that attempts to become as invisible as possible to allow observers to see as clearly as possible, the glass is serving people in a crucially active way. It is just a very specific way that comes with inherent self-sacrificial limitations.

Truth. The call to report objective truth corresponds to the biblical view that absolute truth exists. The Bible assumes a single version of reality—the truth—with God as the only party who understands it in its full scope. Since it corresponds to an extant reality, truth has inherent power, whereas lies have very few or no substantial elements undergirding them. Finitude, a warped perception from the fall, and Satan's deceptions makes it difficult for humanity to access reality in its fullness, especially when many similar but false explanations of reality exist. But the Bible's revelation offers humanity the most comprehensive glimpse of God's clear, unbiased perspective on reality, along with his correct interpretation of unfolding events. Because human beings enter the world knowing nothing and accumulate knowledge in an environment of mixed truth and false perceptions, their perceptions about truth easily become subjectively unreliable. However, the existence of absolute truth and the divine identification of parts of it allow legitimate hope for accessing real truth. Additionally, the Bible treats truth as accessible,

despite acknowledging that humanity sees through a warped lens (Rom. 1:20; 1 Cor. 13:12).

In the overarching biblical narrative, God consistently reveals truth and Satan consistently lies and obscures it. History flows toward the day when God will reveal the full scope of his truth. In the meantime, truth tends to emerge, even though it may be obscured for a long time. As imitators of God, Christians engaged in truth-telling mimic God's nature—especially in the area of investigative reporting when corruption has obscured truth to the harm of innocents.

To address the problem of subjectivity, Christians can start by recognizing that they will rarely access the truth perfectly, but they can reasonably expect to access it functionally by following the practices of objective reporting. They can also confidently access universal truths from the Bible, with problems only arising from an improper understanding of what those truths mean. But in an interesting dilemma, journalists must restrain themselves from airing biblical truths in journalism, not because those truths are suspect, but because allowing them would also mean allowing false versions of reality to be aired for the sake of equality. Ultimately, inserting this type of value judgement in hard news eliminates the public's ability to access value-free facts and interpret them on their own.

So a Christian journalist can fulfill journalism's function by merely reporting what is—empirically observable facts and occurrences. But another dilemma arises when news includes socially accepted frames that derive from value judgments. Hard news has no qualms with reporting a murder as a tragedy, because the majority agrees upon it so

overwhelmingly that it is considered fact. However, when society is divided or has settled against biblical views on issues such as homosexuality or abortion, for example, framing becomes a problem. Christian journalists could not in good conscience frame the story as a cultural good, feeling the need to not misrepresent God's truth. In this case, reporters can attempt to keep the story as factual and morally neutral as possible. It can feel frustrating because reporters understand the divinely objective viewpoint on the matter—a genuinely fuller picture of the unfolding event—and desire to expose the "fruitless deeds of darkness" (Eph. 5:11). Happily, the traditional ethical system provides this opportunity by allowing journalists to seek out sources who present relevant, opposing viewpoints. While they must follow journalistic sanctions, Christian journalists can air the truth through the voice of another.

Care. Many care ethicists or care-inclined journalists chafe at the constraints of traditional journalism, viewing care as a fundamental, overarching aspect of humanity that should not be separated from it. They feel torn between their human and vocational identities (McBride, 2002) and yearn for what they call a journalism of attachment—"a journalism that cares as well as knows; that is aware of its responsibilities; that will not stand neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, the victim and the oppressor" (Bell, 1998, p.19). It appears that they yearn after the biblical concepts of care that ought to stand behind journalistic behavior and rules—taking interest in others, putting their needs first, and desiring to alleviate pain and spur others on to well-being. They seem to cry out for the spirit behind the law—perhaps even the love that is supposed to biblically undergird every aspect of human life (1 Cor. 16:14).

Many of these principles align with biblical teaching. Every person is to act out of selfless love toward others, self-sacrificially placing the needs of others above one's own (Phil. 2:3-8) and putting on hearts of compassion (Col. 3:12). The type of biblical *agape* love as described in 1 Corinthians 13 involves not just feelings, but commitment, choice, and faithfulness, among other things. Noddings' (1984) conception of care reflects many of these biblical elements: "I am impelled to act as though on my own behalf, but in behalf of the other. Now, of course, this feeling that I must act may or may not be sustained. I must make a commitment to act" (p. 16). Additionally, the strong theme of caring for the vulnerable and providing a voice to the voiceless, thereby recognizing their equal status with the more prominent in society, thoroughly mirror the biblical call to care for the weak and vulnerable (Ps. 82:3-4), to recognize universal equality (Prov. 22:2), and to "open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy" (Prov. 31:9).

Care ethicists rightly sense that some of these elements are missing from traditional journalistic practice. The reason for serving can be forgotten, leaving actions without a heart. Journalism can become a self-serving job just carried out to make money. It can foster abuses such as exploiting the vulnerable for the sake of a sensational story. And journalists can treat sources as a means to an end, manipulating them to wring out information.

But appearances can also be deceiving. Biblical care or love embodies very versatile expressions, due to its overarching nature of "fulfilling the law and prophets"

(Matt. 27:37-40). In other words, certain actions *are* the love or care. For example, 1 John 5:3 equates obeying God's commandments with loving God. Similarly, in journalism, providing quality information to the public *is* loving and caring for the public, although it does not seem overtly loving. Camponez (2014) alluded to this dynamic, proposing that journalism

> requires sensitive professionals concerned about the world around them (*care about*), competent professionals when addressing public issues (*care giving*), and professionals concerned for their trade and actively committed to self-regulation, while enjoying the protection of social institutions and law (*care receiving*). (p. 133)

This conception of love and care dispels some of the urge to make care the primary and overt goal of journalism. In this light, objective journalism is itself an act of care and self-sacrificial service to the public.

Part of the care ethics directive to avoid disrupting corporate solidarity also aligns with biblical teaching. Christians are instructed, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Eph. 4:29). Additionally, the Bible denounces the whisperer—someone who goes about revealing secrets or slandering. Similar to sensationalism, the words of the whisperer "are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body" (Prov. 18:8). News that delves into celebrity gossip, for example, most closely falls within these categories and disrupts the corporate solidarity shared by humanity. Christian journalists may biblically reject writing this type of story, even though it may

be factually true, if it serves no larger purpose than sensationalism and money-making. This is not to be confused with open communication on rumor-fraught issues that sheds light on the issue and prevents a gossipy handling of it. Of course, journalists must carefully avoid the temptation to omit information they believe would damage a certain cause or goal, even if it is a noble one. For example, if Christian journalists decline to cover the construction of a pagan place of worship for fear that the piece would raise awareness and inspire the community to attend, they could also be denying the Christian community the awareness needed to pray for the pagan members. As a rule, traditional ethics avoids trying to predict how audiences will react to information and then trying to steer them by providing or withholding that information, except in very specific cases such as suicide. And it is noteworthy that suicide is still covered, although with key details omitted.

Social relationships. The care ethics' concern over how one's actions will influence others—the understanding that human beings are in relationship to one another—finds strong biblical support. For one thing, God's model for human existence implicitly assumes a communal existence as a natural state. In Genesis, God created woman soon after creating man, because it was "not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2:18). Each subsequent human being is born into a family community and is designed to live in a physical community of Christians (Heb. 10:25) as a spiritual member of one unified whole in which all members suffer or rejoice together (1 Cor. 12:12-26). Ultimately this spiritual community will exist together for eternity with God, himself a

community of the three members of the Trinity. The Bible paints a picture of dramatic interdependence.

Within this communal context, the Bible supports the idea that the actions of one affect the many, even in terms of their moral development, and assigns responsibility accordingly. For example, God condemned king Jeroboam for his sin "which he committed and with which he made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 14:16). Similarly, Jesus told his disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble" (Luke 17:1-2). Yet the Bible also teaches that individuals ultimately bear responsibility for their own actions, good or evil (Rom. 14:12). According to Ezekiel 18:20, "The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself." The idea of free will undergirds it all—no person can actually control another's actions or beliefs.

All together then, the Bible presents a picture of free-will-based autonomy in personal accountability to God, but of corporate solidarity in relation to one another such that a person's actions can so strongly influence another that the other finds it nearly impossible to resist. Understanding corporate vulnerability and personal responsibility should alter the way people think about social responsibility, as noted by Tronto (2009). Acknowledging free will and personal autonomy also means that it is dangerous to question an individual's consent on the grounds that they might not know what is best for

them. The Bible calls people to show great care toward the vulnerable to make sure they are helped instead of taken advantage of, and at times they might truly require an outside agent to care for their best interests. But it is safe to default to allowing people to speak and act according to their own interest.

This delicate interplay works itself out in several aspects of reporting ethics. First, traditional ethics recognizes and respects the autonomy and free will of individuals by attempting to supply interpretation-free facts, allowing readers to arrive at their own conclusions. Whether they reach right or constructive conclusions with that information falls within their realm of responsibility—outside the scope of the journalist's function. Christian journalists, having legitimately discovered the true, single truth, or care ethicists with a strong sense of morality may feel a strong temptation to editorialize aspects of morality into the news. But if the news is supposed to represent fact, this crosses the line into attempted control of belief.

Second, each person has the biblical call to love and serve everyone they encounter (Luke 10:27-37). But limitations exist as a result of the journalistic vocation. It is easy to misunderstand this call and develop a savior complex, feeling responsible to care for everyone. But acknowledging the personal responsibility of each individual and God's position as caregiver for everyone shifts the paradigm. It allows journalists to contentedly embrace their personal responsibility and attempt to carry it out faithfully. This attitude recognizes personal finitude and understands the boundaries of authority God has assigned in varying measures to people in varying positions. Within the bounds of journalism's function, the realm of responsibility remains limited and specific. So

while Christian journalists are called to serve all people universally, the specific call of journalism limits journalistic responsibility to serving the public.

Discussion and Suggestions

Ultimately, Christian journalism cannot entirely dispense with either model. Traditional ethics acknowledges and deals with the crucial factor of the sin nature, operates on the basis of absolute truth, and looks to external guidance for moral decision-making. Care ethics calls for genuine and internal virtue that a rules-based system cannot provide. Similar to collectivistic ideologies that yearn after a pure and selfless community, care ethicists seem to seek the biblical love undergirding care that takes interest in others, puts them first, and desires to alleviate their pain and spur them on to wellbeing. But in the context of a fallen world where sin infects the heart of each individual and sabotages altruism, such a pure system cannot exist. Ultimately, a successful ethical model for journalism in a biblical world requires a pure and caring character as well as rules and codes to curb the human nature.

Both and more can be found in God's system: God's power to enable a right heart and pure conduct, biblical rules and principles from which situation-specific rules and codes can derive, and other elements as such as a commitment to God as the ultimate authority figure, God's own virtues developing inside the heart, and his Holy Spirit to provide wisdom and guidance in gray areas. God's system, if applied with understanding, will allow a Christian journalist to navigate a fallen world with optimum ethical success. As Christians seek to be in the world but not of it (John 17:15-16), the solution will not be to create a utopian Christian form of journalism as the industry standard, because this

is an impossible goal. Additionally, Christians must respect that not all of its members adhere to Christianity. Rather, they should seek to navigate the field within a less than optimal system that often feels constrained but nevertheless accomplishes the service in the best way available. And they can have confidence, knowing that they are carrying out God's work.

Suggestions for a Biblical Ethical Profile

Mindsets and expectations. Christian journalists should:

- *Understand journalism's limited purpose* of providing quality, value-free information to an audience that cannot experience it directly.
- *Know that airing objective news is a form of activism* because absolute truth carries the power of reality.
- *View journalism as sacrificial service to others and to God*, laying aside freedom to function under checks and balances.
- *Evaluate their ethical actions in light of how they affect others*, showing special consideration to the vulnerable.
- *Focus on managing their own work faithfully*, trusting God with the outcome it will produce in others.

Developing character and avoiding temptation. Christian journalists should:

- *Seek to grow a caring character*, asking God to develop it in them.
- *Avoid situational decision-making* by educating emerging Christian journalists in Christian journalism ethics, while encouraging them to preemptively examine their beliefs, study the Bible's rules and principles,

and study codes of ethics, understanding where they align with or depart from God's higher code.

- *Follow the spirit of rules and codes,* resisting loopholes and only breaking them when they depart from God's code.
- *Pray for wisdom in gray areas,* considering what higher biblical principles might apply.
- *Identify influential values,* seeking to counteract them or abstaining from the story.
- *Abstain from partisanship and activism* to maintain impartiality.
- *Prayerfully resist temptation,* holding onto the ideals of virtue and the standards of rules and codes.

Writing. Christian journalists should:

- *Consider employing Christian sources in news stories* in order to represent Christian values in their work.
- *Carefully consider Christian principles and ideas in editorial or opinion columns* to provide a biblical perspective on issues.
- *Refrain from sensationalist gossip* that would harm others.

Relationships with sources. Christian journalists should:

- *Maintain friendly, professional relationships,* avoiding attachment that jeopardizes unbiased service to the audience.
- *Meet spiritual needs,* laying aside the lesser codes of journalistic duty when necessary.

- *Treat sources fairly,* extending respect and fair coverage even to distasteful sources.
- *Refuse to manipulate the vulnerable,* declining opportunities like taking advantage of inexperienced sources.
- *Default to taking their word at face value,* avoiding a mentality of understanding their needs better than they do.

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