

Ethical Space: Journal with a Difference

Richard Keeble & Raphael Cohen-Almagor

Ethical Space is a journal with a difference—based on the premise that many segments of the modern media are neglecting ethical concerns. In a reality of fierce competition, ratings, and economic considerations, ethics becomes a secondary, sometimes irritating issue. The idea, so to speak, is “Let me do my job of reporting and don’t trouble me with your morals.” As the media have grown in size, scope, and means of dissemination, so the academic interest in the media has grown. More and more departments of media, journalism, and communication have been established in North America, in Europe, as well as in other parts of the world. More courses on media ethics are being offered to evoke awareness to ethical media concerns that will accompany students in their future work in the field. And more pertinent journals have been established to entertain ethical concerns. But it is an unfair race. Often, economic and financial considerations triumph over ethical considerations. Many academic programs do not hire media ethicists and, if they teach media ethics, the courses are taught by scholars who are not specialists. Often, media ethics courses are not obligatory for all students. Thus they miss the only opportunity they may have to acquire awareness and knowledge of ethical concerns. The commitment of the academic journal, Ethical Space, is to examine significant historical and emerging ethical issues in communication.

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A Quarterly to Challenge Ethical Complacency

Ethical Space is an academic quarterly that challenges the ethical complacency within the communications industries. But, above all, it is a “journal with a difference.” These were the opening words of the journal’s first editorial in 2003, and since then,

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its six volumes have certainly lived up to that statement. *Ethical Space* constitutes a meeting point between communication academics and media professionals who highlight the practical concerns they have encountered during their work. The more practitioners *Ethical Space* is able to draw into its audience, the more influential it is in the lives of media professionals who wish to do better when they try to find the right balance between their work demands and their ethical conscience.

In the first instance, the journal, as the voice of the Institute of Communication Ethics (ICE), set itself the distinctly difficult task of drawing together contributions from an eclectic range of disciplines in the field of communications: politics, philosophy, law, health, education, public relations, business ethics and corporate social responsibility, theology, computing and information studies, research ethics, peace studies, life coaching and counseling, and alternative and mainstream journalism (both on- and offline).

The ICE was launched by Robert Beckett and others in 2001 as an eclectic gathering of academics, researchers, professionals, students, and citizens with many different ethical and political perspectives, all committed to promoting higher standards in the field of communication. As the section headed “Vision” on its website (<http://www.communicationethics.net>) stresses: “We share a common concern to re-connect with the deeper human values embedded in ethical communication, values held by the institute such as social justice, information integrity, organizational trust, group care and individual well-being.” The guiding principles are:

- independent integrity;
- international network: the editorial board of *Ethical Space* particularly reflects this internationalism—with academics and practitioners drawn from the UK, Australia, Bosnia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Malta, New Zealand, Spain, and the United States;
- interdisciplinarity;
- practitioner focus; and
- caring: significantly, as joint editor, Keeble commented in the introduction to a collection of *Ethical Space* articles (*Communication Ethics Now*, Troubador 2008): “It is this caring for people—the desperately poor, the inarticulate, the oppressed—along with a sense that honesty, integrity, clarity, respect for difference and diversity are some of the core principles underlying human interaction and, ultimately, communication that drive many of the writings in *Ethical Space*.”

Ethical Stance Defined Clearly—But Broadly

In an editorial in Vol. 3 Nos. 2 and 3 of 2006, the joint editor, Donald Matheson, of Canterbury University, New Zealand, stressed that ethics could be defined narrowly, as a matter of duty or responsibility, or ethics could be defined broadly “blurring into areas such as politics and social criticism.” *Ethical Space* stood essentially at the blurred end of the definitional range. Dr. Matheson observed: “As many

commentators have pointed out, a discussion of ethics that is divorced from politics is immediately unable to talk about some of the most important factors in shaping communication and media practices.”

There are already a number of excellent journals providing scholarly critiques of communication ethics. For instance, the *Journal of Applied Ethics*, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *Studies in Ethics, Law, and Technology*, and the *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*. *Ethical Space* has particularly close links with the Boston-based *Media Ethics* journal edited by John Michael Kittross (see <http://www.mediaethicsmagazine.com/>). Publisher Tom Cooper contributed an exclusive report on his major survey of ethics teaching in higher education to the Vol. 6. No. 1 issue of 2009, while Keeble had an article examining mainstream coverage of Somalia published in the spring 2009 volume of *Media Ethics*. Keeble’s editorial on the implications of the “Deep Throat” revelations for our understanding of the ethics of investigative journalism was also reproduced in the same issue. Cohen-Almagor has published with the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* whose editor, Jay Black, sits on the editorial board of *Ethical Space*.

While the above-mentioned journals continue to plug away at their central priorities, *Ethical Space* occupies its unique, interdisciplinary, and highly practical place—believing that ethics needs to be made relevant “through its collision with a range of ways of producing knowledge about communication.” As Cees J. Hamelink, Professor Emeritus of the University of Amsterdam, has pointed out:

Moral questions are often couched in terms of dilemmas for which solutions must be found from deontological, utilitarian, or discursive methodologies. The solutions are unusually ambiguous and unsatisfactory. Ethical inquiry needs to be more creative and deconstruct situations that look like dilemmas into configurations of a wide variety of moral options and challenges. That is why we are very fortunate to have such important platforms as *Ethical Space* for this exercise in new forms of reflection!

Unique Range of Genres

Ethical Space is also unique in the ways in which it carries contributions in a range of genres:

- News items feature at the start of every issue. For instance, Vol. 3 Nos 2 and 3 of 2006 included six news pieces: the results of a survey comparing for the first time journalism practice in 20 European countries in a systematic way; a professional objection by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication protesting at President Bush’s anti-press policies; advance information about a conference; the results of a study of errors in U.S. newspapers; a campaign to promote media literacy in Europe; and a report by Stephan Russ-Mohl of the Lugano-based European Journalism Observatory on German television ownership changes. The news section also provides a space in which ICE’s activities (such as annual conferences and workshops) and publications are publicized.

- “Views” are lively, often controversial, and always topical “think pieces” of around 1,500–2,000 words.
- “Articles” are more substantial pieces, referenced, and of around 3,000 words.
- “Face-to-face” interviews—conducted by blogger and media commentator Kristine Lowe.
- “Papers” are 5,000-word academic pieces (all rigorously peer reviewed), which form the intellectual backbone of the journal.
- Reviews: the journal conventionally ends with reviews of books and websites. Vol. 1 No. 4 did something different, having six internationally acclaimed academics (Valeria Alia and Anne Gregory of Leeds Metropolitan University; Claude-Jean Bertrand of Paris 2; Cheris Kramarae of the University of Oregon; Sarah Niblock of City University, London; and Ian Richards of the University of South Australia) revealing their favorite texts (and there were a few surprises!).
- Book presentations: from time to time, authors are invited to present their new books to the *Ethical Space* community. For instance, on the occasion of publishing *The Scope of Tolerance: Studies on the Costs of Free Expression and Freedom of the Press* (Routledge 2006), Cohen-Almagor was invited to explain the rationale for his trilogy on the boundaries of freedom of expression (Vol. 3 No. 1).

Journalism at the Heart of *Ethical Space*

Given the preoccupation of the joint editors, it is perhaps not surprising that journalism is the discipline at the heart of ICE’s activities. And both practitioners and academics have made significant contributions to *Ethical Space* debates. For instance, Roy Greenslade, *Guardian* blogger and Professor of Journalism at City University, London, asked: “Does ethical journalism inevitably mean dull journalism?” Nicholas Jones, for 30 years a BBC political and industrial correspondent, argued that there was a “window of opportunity” to change the way the government communicated with the media following the Hutton Inquiry into the death of weapons inspector David Kelly. Michael Foley, top Dublin journalist and head of journalism at the Dublin Institute of Technology, explored the complex issues surrounding the use of confidential sources by reporters; while broadcaster, *Times* columnist, and novelist Libby Purves wondered why ethical idealism faded with age.

Clifford Christians, arguably the world’s leading authority on communication ethics with a host of publications (e.g., *Teaching Ethics in Journalism Education*, *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning*, *Good News: Social Ethics and the Press*, *Communication Ethics and Universal Values*, and *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies*) and academic honors to his name, has been a prominent supporter of ICE since its launch. Christians has contributed to *Ethical Space*, helping to identify its underlying philosophy and aims. In a seminal paper entitled “The Media and Moral Literacy,” he argued: “Our social existence is conjoined linguistically and because the lingual is not neutral but value-laden, social bonds are moral claims. Therefore, given that our public life is not merely functional but knit together by social values, the various technologies of public communication

should engender moral literacy.” Christians maintained: “Rather than developing rules for experts our pre-occupation is the moral dimension of everyday life. Professionals committed to moral literacy do not establish codes of ethics for themselves but reflect the same social and moral space as the citizens they report.”

More academic studies of journalism have included John Tulloch, of the University of Lincoln, looking at the British press’s coverage of torture and the human rights of terrorist suspects, and Chris Atton, of Napier University, Edinburgh, exploring ethical issues in alternative journalism. *Ethical Space* also helps and encourages young scholars at the start of their career, providing them with an opportunity to make their first steps in academia. Thus, for instance, Angelika W. Wyka, a Ph.D. candidate at the Frankfurt Graduate School, Germany, examined journalistic standards and democratization of the mass media in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. Indeed, the work of excellent postgraduate students such as Florian Zollmann and Dean Ritz has been an important feature of *Ethical Space*.

A number of *Ethical Space* issues have been guest edited. This has helped expand the range of contributors and perspectives in the journal and allowed for the publication of the proceedings of significant conferences and workshops. For instance, Martin Conboy, of Sheffield University, chaired a seminar at the 9th conference of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas at the University of Navarra, Pamplona, entitled “Popular ethics in journalism: Individual burden or collective responsibility.” The talks at that seminar were drawn together in a special “Pamplona Papers” issue (Vol. 2 No. 1). They included: Jane Chapman, of the University of Lincoln, on “Republican Citizenship, Ethics and the French Revolutionary Press 1799–1802”; Karen Sanders, Professor of Journalism at San Pablo University, Madrid, on “Ethics in journalism: False dichotomies, uncertain goals”; and Jane Taylor, visiting lecturer at Roehampton University, on the “binary oppositions” in the representations of Carole Caplin in the *Daily Mail* and *The Mail on Sunday*.

In his editorial, Conboy asserted:

Ethical journalism can only be developed through a dialogic engagement between individual responsibility (of journalist, educator and reader) and the collective burden of institutions and social and political groupings. It also needs to define itself within or against the prevailing pragmatics of the market. Such journalism needs to be popular in the broadest sense of the word for it to provide a suitably critical model for intervention in the contemporary world.

His own contribution to the seminar focused on the radical journalism of Thomas Wooler’s *Black Dwarf* (1817–24), highlighting its carnivalesque mix of parody, satire, and libertarian rhetoric, which both exposed the limitations of journalism fixed within a capitalist system and offered a more radical and popular engagement through its textual experimentation.

Public Relations Ethics

Another field of particular interest to *Ethical Space* is PR ethics. Anne Gregory, the UK’s only full-time Professor of Public Relations, has been closely involved in ICE’s

activities from the start, and has contributed a number of essential papers to the journal, for instance, on government communications and on the public relations of a large Mental Health NHS Trust. Simon Goldsworthy, Senior Lecturer in PR at the University of Westminster, has also appeared regularly at ICE conferences and contributed often witty pieces and reviews to *Ethical Space*. In a piece entitled: “PR Ethics: Forever a Will o’ the Wisp,” he wrote:

Nourished by the understandable desire of a commonly derided industry to prove itself respectable, plenty of lush moralistic vegetation flourishes. Indeed, well-known PR educators have described the role of PR as one of promoting “loving” relations, and given the impression that “Nelson Mandela and Mother Theresa [sic] would have struggled to qualify for admittance to the Institute for Public Relations.”

ICE has developed close links with a number of UK and international organizations, and this is reflected in the contents of *Ethical Space*. One of them is the Radical PR group, and the proceedings from their conference in Stirling during the autumn of 2008 formed a special issue (Vol. 6 No. 2), guest edited by Johanna Fawkes. In this issue, Margalit Toledano, of the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand, examined PR practitioner self-images and cultural values in Israel, while Patricia Curtin, of the University of Oregon, USA, reported on her study of Millennial Generation employees’ perspectives on work and workplace ethics. In her own paper, Johanna Fawkes argued that professional ethics could benefit from considering the ideas of Carl Jung (1875) regarding wholeness instead of goodness as the goal of the integrated psyche: “The whole self then becomes the basis for ethics in contrast to the ideal-typical self at the heart of many approaches to professional ethics.”

Health, Care, Communication, and Teaching Ethics

Another special issue (Vol. 3 No. 4 of 2006), guest edited by Gavin Fairbairn, of Leeds Metropolitan University, focused on health, care, and communication ethics. Between them, the papers covered a wide range of highly complex issues, including the nature of ethical communication between doctors and their clients and the challenges facing professionals who care for dying children—such as truth telling, informed consent, and the right of dying children to receive spiritual care. For those particularly interested in communication ethics and the Internet, a special issue (Vol. 4 No. 1/2 of 2007), edited by Donald Matheson, was devoted to this subject.

ICE annual conferences have also provided a rich source of copy for *Ethical Space*. The 2005 conference explored the impact of communication ethical theory on teaching practice. Cohen-Almagor examined the concept of compromise through a discussion of teaching about abortion—drawing on personal experience of running a series of seminars on this subject in the United States. John Strain, director of the Centre for Applied and Professional Ethics at the University of Surrey, in a paper entitled “The Importance of Caring: Ethics, Communication and Higher Education,” highlighted the importance of communication in the ethics of all professions, and identified the scope for collaboration across the different professions; while Brian

Hoey, of Northumbria University, identified ways in which arts tutors could use life coaching to enhance their professional skills.

The 2008 annual conference, “Whistleblowers and Mischief-Makers: The Ethics of Scandal,” proved a terrific success. The range of issues covered—from the politics of sleaze coverage by top investigative reporter Tessa Mayes to the psychological origins of scapegoating by Karen Sanders—was utterly fascinating. Alan Lane, of VASGAMA, argued that PR practitioners had to face a harsh new reality: no longer could they claim innocence of corporate corruption. They were now as accountable as any chief executive for any wrongdoings. Michael Ford, a BBC ethics specialist, argued that journalists needed to be more aware of the psychological subtleties of a person’s sexuality when covering gay stories.

Success for *Ethical Space*

This overview has given only a brief idea of the rich miscellany of articles that have made up *Ethical Space* to date. Volume 1 appeared in book form as *Communication Ethics Today* (Troubador, 2005), while Volume 2 was titled *Communication Ethics Now* (Troubador, 2008). Plans are underway to have Volumes 3–6 published by Arima of Bury St. Edmunds.

John Mair, senior lecturer in journalism at Coventry University, and Keeble jointly edited a special *ES/ICE* book, *Beyond Trust: Hype and Hope in the British Media* (Arima Publishing, 2008). This drew together the often controversial views of a host of top British journalists and academics—such as Anthony Arblaster, former *Tribune* reporter, Stephen Whittle, former controller of editorial policy at the BBC, Dorothy Byrne, head of News and Current Affairs at Channel Four, and Bob Satchwell, executive director of the Society of Editors.

The ability of *ICE/ES* to intervene influentially into major contemporary controversies was reflected again in the double issue of the journal, published in book form in September 2009, with the title *Playing Footsie with the FTSE? The Financial Crash of 2008 and the Crisis in Journalism*. Amongst contributors were: Sir Howard Davies, director of the London School of Economics; Hugh Pym, chief economics correspondent at the BBC; Peter Wilby, media commentator on the *Guardian* and former editor of the *New Statesman*; the Pulitzer Prize winner, David Cay Johnston; Robert Peston, the BBC’s business editor; top media blogger, Kristine Lowe; and Francesco Guerrera, New York correspondent for the *Financial Times*.

Conclusion

Of all the dilemmas in the operation of governments, the dilemmas of free discussion and of media freedom are among the most intractable. *Ethical Space* offers many recommendations for better, more ethical media. The journal is timely, relevant, interdisciplinary, international in character, and very open in its attitude to professional media. It excels in providing a meeting point for media experts, scholars, and professionals who come from different disciplines. Moreover, one of its

major strands is to problematize professionalism (for instance, by focusing on alternative, progressive media) and highlight many of its underlying myths.

Let us end by paraphrasing the words of Tom Kent, who headed the Canadian Royal Commission on Newspapers in 1980. The necessary motto for reformers, in this as in other matters, is: Be prepared for the day when some conjunction of circumstances creates a will for change. Then practical ideas will be handy.¹ If this is understood by some of the people who recognize democracy's need for a better information service from the media, the working principles and guidelines offered by *Ethical Space* will be of use.

- **Richard Lance Keeble** has edited *Ethical Space* since its launch. He is the author and joint editor of 17 books including: *The Newspapers Handbook* (Routledge, fourth edition, 2005); *Ethics for Journalists* (Routledge, second edition, 2008); *Secret State, Silent Press: New Militarism, the Gulf and the Modern Image of Warfare* (John Libbey, 1997); and, with Sharon Wheeler, *The Journalistic Imagination: Literary Journalists from Defoe to Capote and Carter* (Routledge, 2007). His books have been translated into a number of languages, including Chinese, Romanian, and Ukrainian. His research interests include the links between mainstream journalists and the intelligence services and the journalism of George Orwell. He has just co-edited a book on peace journalism for Peter Lang, and is writing a history of war reporting from 1945. Since 2003, he has been Professor of Journalism at the University of Lincoln.
- **Raphael Cohen-Almagor** (D.Phil., Oxon) has been an Editorial Board member of *Ethical Space* since its inception. He is Chair in Politics and Acting Deputy Dean for Research at the University of Hull, and has published extensively in the fields of political science, philosophy, law, media ethics, medical ethics, sociology, history, and education. He was Visiting Professor at UCLA and Johns Hopkins, and Fellow of the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars. He is also founder and director of the Center for Democratic Studies, University of Haifa (2003–2007); co-founder, general secretary and chairperson of “The Second Generation to the Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance” Organization (1982–1987); and a member of The Israel Press Council (2000–2003). Among his more recent books are *The Right to Die with Dignity* (2001), *Euthanasia in the Netherlands* (2004), *Speech, Media and Ethics* (2001, 2002 Turkish, 2005), *The Scope of Tolerance* (2006, 2007), *The Democratic Catch* (2007, Hebrew), and *Voyages* (2007, poetry, Hebrew). Web: <http://www.hull.ac.uk/rca>; Blog: <http://almagor.blogspot.com/>

Note

- [1] Tom Kent, “The Time and Significance of the Kent Commission,” in Helen Holmes and David Taras (eds.), *Media, Power and Policy in Canada* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p. 39.