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Extended Abstract

On Agent's Codes of Conduct in Social Media: A Philosophical Investigation in the Context of the Source of Moral

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Abstract

Communication and morality are two essential human features. While communication tries to make one's existence meaningful in society; morality is concerned with one's values and merit. Both concepts naturally imply action. If both come side by side, they form the combination implying existence's meaning and merit that in this point, we confront philosophy. Today, the nature of media, as well as the nature of communication, has been changed through new media technologies. New media, also known as digital media, brings ethical problems with it. It seems that the debates on new media and ethics have been performed mostly within the framework of old media's criteria. In this paper, while attempting to touch on these disputes philosophically, so have we attempted to examine the ethical codes of individuals' actions and behaviors in the context of the source of morality in social media, which constitutes one of the most important parts of new media. Some theories concerning the source of morality directly entail analysis of the human being, itself. In this respect, two different approaches have arose, Kant's and Hume's philosophical analyses; which of these philosophers' perspectives is more explanatory will be scrutinized in the context of this topic.

Keywords

Ethics • Morals • Source of morality • Code of ethics • New media • Social media • Hume • Kant

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The term *new media* refers to its natural difference from the traditional concepts of media. In this case, revealing the fundamental characteristics of conventional media helps one understand the basic features of new media. The basic nature of classical or traditional media (newspapers, radio, television, and cinema) is that their framework is certain. At the same time, having a clear framework refers to the possibility of being able to control it; therefore, it also marks the activity area of professional groups. Another feature of traditional media has been to provide unilateral and vertical information. Also, other features are its slow rate of change and information flow, as well as of form and content. If new media were to be defined against these three characteristics, new media firstly has almost no clear boundary, nor does it have a collection of discourses on it; parallel to this, its possibility of being controlled is extremely difficult.

As Binark (2007b, p. 21) indicated, new media was created by computers, the Internet, cell phones, game consoles, and iPods, by handheld data bank recorders and communicators; all of these digital technologies have gradually penetrated into every aspect of daily life, have significantly transformed the applications of life, and have almost come to a point where it performs a role as if it were a part of the human body. As it has a digital coding system, the interactive features of new media simultaneously bring multi-layered dimensions to the communication process. Indeed, this media has been characterized as “from now on, the fifth plane” (Ward & Wasserman, 2010, p. 282). This is because media has a wide area of impact from its macro-level effects (cultural, ideological, traditional, and economic); at the micro level, it is concerned with the private existence of individuals, privacy, property, and so on. As Castells expressed, this situation literally means “...the end of the distinction, even the difference, between conviction and education, between entertainment and being informed, and between popular culture and learned culture;” this means it is the creation of a symbolic mainstream media (as cited in Binark & Sütçü, 2007, p. 169).

Naturally, the nature of ethical discussions and warnings has also changed with the culture of new media. Thus, the conceptualization of “clear ethics” is related to this (Ward & Wasserman, 2010, p. 281). In addition, the growth of new media means that journalism has been exposed to a shift from the traditional professional ethics to a complicated media ethics. Professional and citizen journalists have attempted to explore media ethics again and have discussed how they will adapt the existing criteria, such as righteousness, confirmation, and objectivity, to the new media environment. Although value conflicts were the first to occur, online and offline journalists have entered into the effort of improving a media ethics that will integrate new and traditional media ethics (Ward & Eid, 2009).

An Overview of the New Media and Ethics Debate

The debate between new media and morals has been located among a number of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) works since the 1990s. UNESCO has organized conferences on information (INFO) ethics in 1997, 1998, and 2000; it has established a commission to prepare a Report on Information Society Ethics in 2001. In the 2003 meeting of this commission, digital-access inequality, and linguistic and cultural diversity issues were also discussed in addition to the issues of privacy, confidentiality, and security in the Internet environment. In the World Summit, which was held in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005, taking precautions was discussed for the development of a multicultural information society, knowledge economy, and inequality. Ethical choices about the control of cyberspace, such as ethics issue in cyberspace, applications of access, filtering, and so on appeared on the agenda. In Turkey, the *IT Professional Moral Principles Document* (1998) was formed by the Information Ethics Work Group with the approval of the Board of Directors and the Executive of the Turkey Informatics Foundation. In this context, as related to the re-defining of ethical responsibilities for media professionals who work in the new media environment, Ruhdan Uzun's (cited in Binark, 2007a, pp. 8–9) study, *Virtual Space and Ethics* [Sanal Uzay ve Etik] is found in the scope of her study on communication ethics.

In terms of content, James and his friends' (2009, pp. 27–76) project report for the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (2009, pp. 20–76) on youth and the new digital media seems worth mentioning. According to this report, five basic ethical fault lines were identified: identity, privacy, ownership, credibility, and participation.

Identity

Theorists interested in human development see identity, especially in the modern Western world, as the most important task of youths. During this process, individuals re-think the concept of self in their own lives because they also realize a wider community that contains values, norms, and expectations. Psychologists describe this discovery as a key mechanism that allows young people to test how they are accepted by society through different identities and experiences.

Privacy

This indicates how someone uses others' personal data and informational property in the social context. As previously stated, online communities are fertile grounds for identity development because these environments encourage self-expression, self-reflection, and feedback. The most relevant thing about privacy is that, as online disclosure takes place anonymously, it services positive, comforting, and reinforcing feedback. Young people feel empowered while explaining their thoughts and stories about how they cope with the challenges they face in life through blogs and virtual environments.

Ownership

Other online platforms such as Wiki and proprietary documents convert authorship and ownership to the corporation and blur the line between author and audience. Comments related to a blog can affect authors' content, and changes that are made to the program codes can be used by the company in the next version. Therefore, the rights an author owns for ideas and writings, which is a matter of copyrights and was a provision in traditional media, has become a problem.

Credibility

Two dimensions of credibility are mentioned here. First is the criteria of youths for their own reliability; in other words, they install their own competence. The second is that youths consider themselves as having the ability to evaluate others' competence. How do youths decide to exhibit their qualifications, skills, and motivations to different people in different contexts? [Spence and Quinn \(2008, p. 265\)](#) stated that this environment is an anonymous global environment where everyone is a manufacturer and consumer of content. Additionally, another point to consider is how the news is made.

Participation

This is said to be the final point that ethical problems in the new media have come to and are based on. This is said to cover identity, privacy, ownership, and reliability. Participation focuses on the responsibility that a person has in a community, a society, and the world. There are many forms of participation that involve the use of knowledge and information from all strata of life, such as communication, production, sharing, politics, economy, and society. Firstly, participation in social, economic, and political life in traditional (offline) communities is limited to people who have many resources, such as age, class, gender, qualifications, geographical regions, capital, and so on. Youths have a limited say in these areas because of these properties. Anyone who has the technical and social skills to search and be able to use new media instruments is a participant in the new (online) society.

In a similar study, the Canadian Association of Social Workers ([CASW, 2014](#)) also listed the ethical codes that set out the values and principles shared by those who practice a profession as follows: respecting the fundamental values and dignity of people, maintaining social justice, serving humanity, being honest in professional practice, respecting privacy in professional practice, and being competent in professional practice.

The ethical issues that [Ward and Eid \(2009, p. 1\)](#) have pointed out in this context can be summarized as follows: Using new media and social networks has a nature that promotes research in many topics, such as social identity; privacy; distance

learning; social capital; the social and psychological effects of the internet; the misuse of cyberspace; diasporas; and achieving social status and information for society, culture, and politics. These facilities give rise to various facts when they are used poorly. Many ethical problems are faced, from political manipulations of the electorate, to suicide, violation of privacy, cybercrime, harassment, and sexual abuse.

Philosophical References on the Moral Sources of Failed Behaviors on Social Sharing Sites

In Turkish, *ahlâk* is the plural of the word “hulk” or “huluk” in Arabic, and it means nature, temperament, and character (Cürçani, 1997). The English equivalent is *morals*, derived from the Latin *moralis*, and it means character, condition, and motion. Morality as a term is generally observed to be used in three ways: (i) public lifestyle, (ii) a group of behavioral rules, and (iii) an intellectual survey performed on lifestyle and the rules of conduct (Kılıç, 1998).

However, even classifications that are performed are not exactly the same. Every philosopher has faced some specific approach when they are examined in detail (Heinemann, 1997, pp. 366–367). An analysis will be made in this study by placing two important philosophers on the axes of rationalist and empiricist attitudes, which are two fundamental paradigms that have been found to be important. First is the Scottish philosopher, David Hume, who can be considered as the pinnacle of empiricism; the other one is Immanuel Kant, who can be considered as the pinnacle of the rational explanation of morality.

Hume saw morality as a part of human nature and consequently concluded that all people should be similar in mind, feelings, and actions (Hume, 1985b, p. 626). This is because human nature is a common and universal experience to all. Hume developed moral theory under this main idea.

According to Hume, morality does not occur through any factual issue that can be discovered through touch, as he was certain it was not composed of the clear relationships that are the object of science. In this case, one can prove that morality is not a result of the mind. Virtues and vices can be derived from factual issues through reason. For example, one cannot find anything aside from certain passions, motives, will, and thoughts when all aspects of an intentional murder are examined. In this case, there is no other factual topic. But when the reflections are turned inwards, one realizes that the feeling of disapproval against this action exists. This is a factual situation. But this is an object of emotion, not the mind. This action occurs as a feeling, not as an object (Hume, 1985a).

Whether the source of moral production is the mind or the emotions and which sensations are the principles of moral production must be investigated. According to Hume, the main

source or principle of the call to action in the human intellect is *pleasure* or *pain*. When these sensations are removed from one's thoughts or feelings, one can have neither great passion and action nor great desire and will (Hume, 1985a). What is the source of pleasure? The answer that can be found in Hume's (1985a, p. 352) system is as follows:

It can generally be stated in terms of our physical skills that everything we have that is useful, beautiful, or surprising produces pleasure as the object of one's own pride. Accordingly, pleasure is the cause of passion within the relationship to self.

After briefly summarizing Hume's views, now a brief look will be taken in consideration of the opposite viewpoint: Kant's moral justification.

Kant (2004) contemplated the existence of the reason as completing the human. *Theoretical reason*, in Kant's terminology, means the reason that deals with aspects of the human being and epistemological problems, while, *practical reason* deals with the practical dimension that is behavioral one, of human being. According to him, the pure reason is the practical in itself. Moral law supplies itself directly to the human being. There is no requirement of passion, happiness, emotion, and so on for any of its tools, it is inferred. That is the essence in action's moral value directly determines its moral law. There is no effect of will on its construction. The passivity of will is viewed the same as Hume. But unlike Hume, Kant also made feeling totally ineffective. An *autonomous* identity that completes morality is conferred and is a type of *existence in self*.

What is the source of morality itself, what is the human self; also, what is this one type of intellect and what are its indicators? Or how can these criteria be revealed? According to Kant (2009), in the world and even outside of it, nothing can be considered an absolute unconditional good except "good will". Therefore, the groundwork of the action of morals creates these qualities. For this, an action that is performed as a necessity of assignment or because of moral law does not find in intent that which achieves moral value with it; it finds in the maxim from which it decided to do it. This maxim is universal and can be applied universally; it is expressed as follows:

Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. The moral value of action is not found in any relation of the action that requires being sourced from the effect that is expected from the cause action; this is together with not being found in the effect that is expected from it because these effects may also arise from other causes (ensuring even someone else's happiness is gratifying in this case). Hence, having a mind that finds the most supreme and unconditional good but in itself is not the need to desire existence for these. Because of this, the unique good that has been called morality is obviously not that effect that is found but in the assets of the mind

or hoped for in its request; this design determinedly cannot create anything other than the self of its own design of law (Hume, 2000).

Now the search for the answer can begin to the question of which of the mentioned ethical concerns are effective at being behavior's generating principle.

In this context, it has been deemed important to create the groundwork for a discussion of Alan Gewirth's Principle of Generic Consistency. This principle reveals the nature of basic human rights, such as freedom and prosperity, through motion from the existence of deliberate agents and also offers a description and prescription for rational authority. The summary of Gewirth's argument is as follows:

- Independence and prosperity are mandatory features of an action with purpose.
- All rational, deliberate agents have natural rights to freedom and prosperity.
- As such, each deliberate agent states the normative structure of the action tends to have a mandatory, prudential, and moral restriction at the expense of contradicting itself.
- Deliberate agents, from their own personal perspective, must claim to have the right to freedom and prosperity, as logically their own agent has mandatory and practical conditions.
- At the same time, all deliberate agents have the right to freedom and prosperity because being an agent is a sufficient condition. These rights were originally just precautionary; now they are moral by reason of their relation to others.
- Every deliberate agent, as director of a deliberate action, is logically impelled to accept a superior moral principle. This principle is the Principle of Generic Consistency and refers to the following: All deliberate agents with the right to freedom and prosperity, including that person's self, must be respected (Spence & Quinn, 2008).

Who embraces Humean ethical theory, in the context of character virtues through emotion from the Principle of Generic Consistency, has voiced opinions in the form that everyone with a sense of morality will behave ethically. This is because goals such as the good, good life, happiness, and self-realization make it almost mandatory that people behave ethically, and these are rational implications (Spence & Quinn, 2008). However, when one asks the question "What is the source that is found in action on the basis of freedom and prosperity?" and it is looked at carefully, the response can be given in the form of "for our sense of pleasure and request of usefulness" through Humean terminology. Yet, there's no place for freedom in Hume's understanding of morality. Kant (2004) expressed moral freedom as a "condition of existence." In other words, it is impossible to perform any moral action in the absence of freedom. According to philosophers from the other side, however, one is conscious of freedom

through movement before one has first knowledge of morals. Namely, morality emerges in order to know freedom, but it is not a principle that produces action. Therefore, it is extremely clear from our discussion that Gewirth's principle, on one hand, means to place freedom and prosperity in the same groundwork as two ultimate objectives that express the precursor to a moral action, as these are compulsory and put forth as a right of freedom and prosperity. Is it possible for people to be free if they don't behave ethically? Do people have the possibility of ethical behavior in order to have freedom? Reality manifests in favor of the second question. Additionally, freedom cannot be evaluated as a feeling. Freedom is an ontological right. With the restriction of freedom, morality, and hence responsibility, disappear. Yet the same thing can be said of character virtues or benefits like welfare, happiness, and so on for ultimate objectives. Because to say that humans are those who are found in virtue in order to be happy or to live in prosperity shows the necessity of performing appropriate actions as a way to be happy or live in a good situation. Said another way, actions that are appropriate for this ultimate objective must be moral actions (or these actions produce happiness and are moral). Consequently, they meet at a point as both the ideal and the source. Yet the same cannot be said for freedom. Indeed, Hume called freedom imaginary in this context. This is because according to him there is no place for freedom in actions that are performed as a necessity between character and behavior, as freedom is not a necessary element of human nature. The request for prosperity, the second element in the above principles, can be the manufacturing principle of moral actions in terms of Hume's philosophy; through sympathy, it acquires the actions of others and the validity of morals.

At this point, we believe the ethical fault lines can be in a different form of the formulating agent in this context.

Identity, Ownership, Credibility, and Privacy

Modern humans have many, quite different identities and affiliations in the macro and micro levels, such as religion ethnicity, geography, culture, sects, modesties, and congregations. People attach importance and prefer these affiliations naturally. Being a party to and in favor of these things creates a direct emotional state. Because the offering of information that comprises social networking sites can be turned to one's favor, distorted, and used, the freedom mentioned above corresponds to a situation that forms the groundwork of these behaviors: failure to comply with even a measure of morality has become practically commonplace.

Another motive that triggers the formation of identity is ownership and the desire to be an owner (Jaspers, 2010). Ownership here has a wide variety of uses, from owning any goods or items to as much as owning power. This is because there is a close relationship between power and being an owner. The driving force is the feeling

of being a property owner, the feeling of identities wanting to be on top of each other. Or it is people wanting to fortify their identity as an owner of property. Hence, the demand to have macro or micro affiliations, if one wants to ontologically have the processes of identity construction, can be said to be a basic motive of the feeling of being capable and intersects with property over this mode. Privacy and reliability as the other fault lines can also be associated with ownership in this context.

In reality, the view of behaviors that occur based on feeling gains weight when considered in the context of Hume and Kant's approaches to morality that were offered in the questions on ethical fault lines shown above. The mind, in Hume's statement (1985a), has the function of rationalizing only the result of the imposition of passion when it becomes a near slave of passion. Albeit, if one draws the ideal framework for Kant's approach to morality, it can also be said that too much counterbalance does not exist in practical life. Additionally, the need that suggests itself is to question the source of immorality rather than the source of morality when it comes to social media; at this point, the Humean approach can be said to be more descriptive.

Results

The origin of ethical issues in new media was analyzed from a limited philosophical perspective in this study. Understanding human actions by ignoring the basic properties of human nature is almost impossible. However, talking about the standards, absolutes, and universal human nature that connects all individuals should also be considered as an extreme commentary. It is possible to say that the common codes of moral and non-moral behaviors can be determined to a great extent without neglecting that the private world of the individual may be philosophically different before scattering both ends.

The ethical understanding of Kant and Hume, which was investigated in the context of this study, showed differences in terms of what constitutes the motives of behavior. When looked at with motion from the daily problems or events one has experienced, our opinion is that Hume's ethical understanding is more descriptive. The point that should be emphasized here is the necessity to determine the motive or primary principle of immoral behavior, not just moral behavior. This is where Hume's paradigm was most beneficial. That the virtues or vices of human character have an emotional foundation seems useful in explaining ethical violations in social media. On the other hand, these thoughts cannot be divorced from both philosophers' epistemological approaches. At this point, the subject of what kind of measures can be epistemologically taken in addition to existing measures in order to prevent moral violations in the media should be opened for discussion.

Indeed, some thinkers (Ward & Wasserman, 2010) have also made the same point. If information is knowledge, especially if it's accurate, it must comply with the conditions

of epistemology. If information hopes to be spread on the ground of honesty and reliability even minimally, it must carry the criterion of accuracy; those who spread this knowledge should be widely aware of epistemic criteria. S. J. Wulf (2000) established a direct relationship between virtue and Hume's epistemology. According to Hume, in order to possess virtuous behavior, one must have a desire and tendency towards virtues. This encourages the virtue of moderate or mitigated skepticism.

Consequently, one may not be able to find solutions to ethical problems by moving from mere moral analysis now that people are as whole as they are complex in their being. In this context, we think it is important to restructure all aspects of the education system (cultural, religious, and philosophical) that has the potential to contribute to the creation of an ethical atmosphere. Inherently, the need for philosophical groundwork and analysis is clear.

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