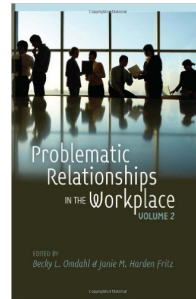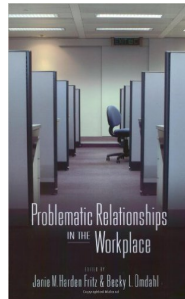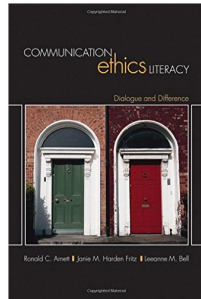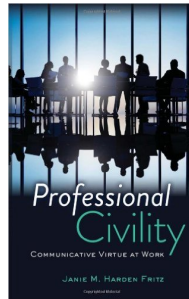Janie Harden Fritz
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Virtue Approaches to Communication Ethics

- Virtue ethics focuses on character, or dispositions toward right or good actions.
- "What kind of person should I be?" (vs. "What should I do?")
- Virtue: Disposition linked to human flourishing
- Analogy to excellent craftsmanship: Excellent work is what excellent craftsmen do, and virtuous action is what virtuous persons do.

- Virtue is connected to a philosophical framework defining the human person and what "human excellence" is (the *telos* for human beings)
- E.g., Homeric virtue system based on roles; Aristotelian based on good for human beings in general (MacIntyre, 2007)

- Communication ethics involves significant choice regarding means and ends
- No formulas; discernment needed
- Hence the value of virtue ethics, based on character rather than duty (although these approaches can be fruitfully combined, from some perspectives)

Journalism and Media

- Early work
  - Klaidman and Beauchamp (1987): *The Virtuous Journalist*
  - Lambeth (1990): Assessment of MacIntyre's work for journalism ethics
- Impetus for turn to virtue
  - Need for philosophical framework (e.g., Christians & Ward, 2013)

- For practitioners
  - Increased commercial pressure
  - Quick decision making
- For context of global media ethics
  - Pluralism in context of universals
  - Potential for some minimal agreement
- Interdisciplinarity
  - Holistic understanding of context beyond duty-based ethics
  - Moral psychology provides promising insights
- Representative Scholarship

Sandra Borden (2007): *Journalism as Practice: MacIntyre, Virtue Ethics, and the Press*

- Characteristics of a practice, including elements of MacIntyre's definition and two additional ones:
  - coherent and complex,
  - socially established,
  - cooperative in nature,
  - possessed of goods internal to that form of activity
  - make those goods real as a natural outcome of trying to meet suitable standards of excellence in realizing its internal goods,
  - systematically extend human conceptions of the ends and goals involved in the practice as a result of realizing its internal goods
  - overriding purpose that distinguishes the practice and
  - a moral community that can effectively maintain the kind of relationships needed to achieve the practice's internal goods

Journalism's Practice-Sustaining Virtues

- Courage and ingenuity protect journalism against corruption by external goods, such as market competitiveness
- Stewardship sustains journalists as institutional bearers of the practice by supporting the excellence in news reporting necessary for success of news organizations
- Justice, courage, and honesty support collegial relationships needed to achieve journalism's goals through constructive criticism and recognition of excellence, including mutual verification of information
- Integrity and a sense of legacy preserves journalism's link to its tradition by socializing practitioners and encouraging them to embrace the tradition as part of a whole life
- Accountability and modesty support journalism's capacity for regeneration through a discipline of confirmation, requiring openness to correction and recognition of epistemic limits—a willingness to cooperate with nonjournalists to confirm the reliability of information and tentativeness about one's conclusions (pp. 66 –80)

Nick Couldry (e.g., 2010, 2013)

- Global media ethics
- "Communicative virtues" of accuracy and sincerity connected to the need for human beings to rely on others to provide reliable information about the environment,
- Media as a type of MacIntyrean practice
- Two regulative ideals internal to the practice of journalism:
  - Circulating information contributing to individual and community success within a given sphere
  - Providing opportunities to express opinions aimed at sustaining "a peaceable life together" despite disagreements related to "conflicting values, interests, and understandings" (Couldry, 2010, p. 68)
  - Assumes relevance of media ethics for media consumers and producers
  - Later work on "living well through media" (Couldry, 2013) and Lovibond's (2013) "ethical living through media" together suggest a constructive approach to a media ethics grounded in virtue and duty and focused on care

Patrick Lee Plaisance (2015)*: Virtue in Media: The Moral Psychology of Excellence in News and Public Relations*

- Inductive approach based on human nature
- Philippa Foot's "natural normativity"—you can get an "ought" from the "is" of human nature
- Offers exemplars of virtue in journalism and public relations practice (Plaisance, 2015)

- Integrates virtue ethics and moral psychology
- Aims to develop theory accounting for virtuous practice and identifying factors that lead to or thwart practitioners' moral action
- Chapters on professionalism and public service, moral courage, and humility and hubris describe contexts within which the participants in his study developed "patterns of virtue" (p. 75) in their professional lives

Human Communication Studies

- Rhetorical connection to virtue ethics by way of Aristotle sustained throughout the centuries

- Virtue language retained but lost moorings in 1930s with rise of mental hygiene approach from psychology (Gehrke, 2009)
  - Same terms (e.g., sincerity, humility, confidence)
  - Mechanistic, reductionistic underpinnings

- Rise of existentialism, which denied any human essence or human nature, prompted revival of virtue ethics (Gehrke, 2009)
- Division of rhetoric from social science left ethics as province of rhetoric (Gehrke, 2009)
- However, philosophical approaches to interpersonal communication (e.g., phenomenological dialogue) provided openings for contemporary treatments consistent with virtue ethics
  - E.g., Arnett's (1981, 1989) critique of psychological approaches to dialogue connected with narrative work of Fisher, Hauerwas, and MacIntyre

- Arnett and Arneson's (1999) *Dialogic Civility* situated person within narrative as embedded agent
- Arnett, Fritz, and Bell (2009): "goods" (seat of virtues) situated within narrative
  - Communication ethics protects and promotes goods in various contexts
  - Character derives from narrative ground
- MacIntyre's influence significant
  - E.g., Fisher (1987)
  - See Hannan (2012); Taylor & Hawes (2012)

- Rhetorical approaches
  - Herrick (1992): Rhetoric as virtuous practice
  - Aberdein (2010): Virtue in argument
- Philosophy of communication
  - Fritz (2013): Civility as communicative virtue; professional civility as communicative virtue at work
  - Arneson (2014): Moral courage in civil rights efforts

- Positive communication and virtue ethics
  - Julien Mirivel (2012): Communication excellence embodies virtues in interpersonal communication
    - Gentleness requires restraining impulses toward violence and anger
    - Face needs met through deferential forms of address
    - Generosity: highlight what others have done well rather than faults
    - Aristotle, MacIntyre, Comte-Sponville

  - Nathan Miczo (2012)
    - Communicative virtue—excellence in words and deeds manifesting engagement
      - Politeness (providing space for expression and listening)
      - Compassion (helping bring forth others' responses)
      - Generosity (enriching conversation through contributions)
      - Fidelity (taking and endorsing a position)
    - Aristotle, Nietzsche, Arendt, Comte-Sponville

- Institutional level
  - Baker (2008): Virtue and vice in public relations and advertising
    - The Principled Advocate (humility, truth, transparency)
    - The Pathological Partisan (arrogance, deceit, secrecy)
  - Persuit (2013): Virtues as elements of a rhetorical approach to social media in integrated marketing communication
  - Seeger and Ulmer (2001)—virtue ethics and organizational crisis—exemplar CEOs

Q & A

Time for questions and answers

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