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Ethics for a Digital Age (Vol. II) [Book Review]

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The second volume of *Ethics for a Digital Age* edited by Bastiaan Vanacker and Don Heider (2018) highlights research presented at the fifth and sixth Annual International Symposia on Digital Ethics. The volume features ten essays organized under three banner topics that include 1) Trust, Privacy, and Corporate Responsibility; 2) Technology, Ethics, and the Shifting Role of Journalism; and 3) Ethics and Ontology. Together, the essays aim to invigorate conversations about ethical issues in professional and philosophical contexts. In this review, I first provide a synopsis of each section and its corresponding essays to give readers a sense of the depth and breadth of topics covered in the volume. I conclude the review by identifying themes that unite the essays and broadly contribute to this robust field of inquiry.

The first section of the volume explores the entanglement of digital and business ethics. Sivek's initial essay focuses on the long-standing practice of emotion analytics, arguing that the collection of data on consumer emotion is amplified in the current environment and requires close inspection about how data is collected, analyzed, and used. Sivek delves into issues of privacy and consent, claiming, "[a]n obvious ethical concern regarding all uses of emotion analytics is the collection and storage of emotion data from consumers who may not be aware of or consent to the use of these data" (p. 15). Furthermore, the author expresses concern about the impact of this data on creative media, as artists may be asked to alter their work to produce a desired effect on audiences. These potential practices raise serious questions about using emotion analytics to manipulate

audiences and constrain creative processes.

Jerome and Dambrine provide an additional perspective of data privacy in the context of the sharing economy. Airbnb and Uber serve as case studies for how companies offering peer-to-peer services manage their reputations through their handling of consumer data. Protecting user data is essential for generating trust in the company from those providing and using company services. The rewards of sharing data must outweigh the risks, and the authors point out that businesses in a sharing economy can increase perceived rewards through transparency, consumer access and control, and philanthropic sharing of data to improve public and nonprofit services.

McKee and Porter wrap up this section with a rhetorical approach to corporate social media missteps. They frame social media missteps as networked, rhetorical situations in which a rhetor (i.e., company leadership) must “speak well” by presenting themselves as credible in the collective (i.e., as a company brand) and also within a complex web of networked interactions. As their case studies demonstrate, social media missteps may blur the line between appropriate employee behavior and appropriate private citizen behavior. Therefore, the authors emphasize that “an ethical responsibility of any company is to ensure that policies—legal, ethical, specific to company culture—are in place [and] are communicated clearly to employees” (p. 67). Such practices generate an awareness of the environment affecting internal and external publics and the role of ethical corporate communication in clarifying employee/citizen behavior.

The essays in the volume’s second section are cohesive in their responsiveness to a changing journalism landscape. Culver’s essay on nonmilitary drones jumpstarts this section. As journalists and experts grapple with how to use drones ethically, Culver uses in-depth interviews to reveal that citizens and journalists perceive similar benefits and drawbacks of drones, but possess divergent opinions about the pursuit of profit in the industry and who should be at the table for these drone-related discussions. Indeed, interviewed members of the public expressed a desire and an expectation to be included in journalism’s decision-making processes, a perspective that indicates a shifting relationship between journalists and their readers.

Next, Painter and Ferrucci interviewed digital journalists about the nature of their work and compared their perceptions to normative journalistic roles (i.e., monitorial-disseminator, facilitative-mobilizer, collaborative-interpretive, and radical-adversarial) that traditionally define the profession. From these interviews, the authors deduce

that digital journalists no longer see the monitorial-disseminator role as relevant and, therefore, spend less time and energy on informing the public about day-to-day events. Journalists self-identify an expanded radical-adversarial role, which focuses on interpretative and meaning-making journalism. Additionally, the authors identify a new journalistic role, that of "marketing mobilizer" (p. 117). This new role expands the idea of journalist self-promotion to include the invitation of public participation in every aspect of the production process.

In an appropriate concluding essay to this section, Ward reflects on the traditional ethical framework guiding the practice and profession of journalism. Ward calls to replace this outdated framework—comprised by dualism, positivism, and parochialism—with a radical version of ethics the author names "pragmatic humanism" (p. 133). Pragmatic humanism provides a holistic framework that considers four notions: functional notions that investigate how journalism is practiced, epistemic notions that account for the imperfectionism of ethical decision-making, structural notions that consider the integrative nature of journalism, and critical notions that consider the global impact of journalism. Ward presents this framework as a step towards a "sophisticated mindset" that embraces plurality, thinks globally, expects change, and fosters human creativity (p. 138).

Vanacker prefaces the third section of the book with the claim that increasing digital technologies "force us to rethink some of our deeply held beliefs about how we relate to our environment, to each other, and—ultimately—to ourselves" (p. 147). In the first essay of this section, Klang and Madison wonder whether or not cybervigilantism is a legitimate response and/or an accurate application of the original term, vigilantism, which is traditionally defined as "taking the law into their own hands" to achieve a greater good (p. 158). Using six features of vigilantism to frame several case studies, the authors conclude that online "naming and shaming" activities require little effort and gratify the vigilante more than redress community injustices. Furthermore, there is evidence that third parties intervene and encourage cybervigilantism, leading the authors to conclude that such online action only tenuously fits with the features of vigilantism, and further investigation into concept of cybervigilantism and its moral legitimation is needed.

In the next essay, Gunkel argues that previous discussions of machine rights narrowly focus on the intrinsic properties of machines and, in doing so, miss the ethical imperatives brought by the relationships humans build and sustain with machines. In other words, the author asks if we treat machines as possessing social status, then shouldn't we also accord them rights relative to that

social position? In reframing the qualifications for machine rights to include relational and social dynamics, the author also revitalizes the parameters of the discussion.

Engström also considers the relationship between human and nonhuman technologies in an analysis of “the computational turn on the production of knowledge” (p. 180). Much like early conceptions of photography that mistakenly viewed the production of images as an objective and impartial endeavor, Engström argues that too often we evaluate what technologies produce without considering who or what produced them. The author argues that governance should be expanded to mean “a nonoperational space where the assumptions of an operation (whether a business operation or a software operation) are made available for deliberation, for intervention, for potential revision by policy” (p. 191). The author emphasizes that the production process needs deliberate attention and scrupulous oversight in order to fully understand its ontological implications.

Allen’s essay on “the spatiality of public life” wraps up the original research presented in this volume (p. 196). Ideas of the public forum have changed along with public culture, but dominant interpretations of the public forum share the view that “space is something that is *used* by citizens and exists independent of citizens” (p. 203, emphasis theirs). Allen eschews the idea that the space is used for a given end and argues instead for a framework that sees space as something created through interactions with other citizens. The author concludes the essay with specific ethical concerns about the control of space (i.e., online interactions) and the effect of control measures on public discourse.

Initially, the three topics organizing the essays in this volume appear inductively or conveniently chosen, but a deeper read of the essays reveals some common themes that unite the authors’ admirable work and extend their research beyond business practices, digital journalism, and philosophical debates. In addition to the nuggets of insight found in each essay, I want to conclude this review with a few of the broader strokes that the volume offers.

First, all of the essays illustrate how past ways of doing, being, and knowing are tenuous and incomplete in current digital environments. Many of the essays implicitly ask, “What questions are we *not* asking, but should be?” Companies must construct new policies that protect and serve their constituents, journalists must adapt to changing public expectations, and we all must rethink our relationship to the technology we use. As a reader, it is clear that traditional frameworks and established practices no longer fit the bill.

The future orientation of the essays constitutes the second wide-

ranging contribution of the volume. This orientation provides a refreshing reprieve from the reactive and doomsday analyses that often appear in media studies. Optimism, it seems, depends on the degree of curiosity and earnestness in which we approach our changing world. McKee and Porter state this clearly in their essay:

Rather than regretting or opposing this change, the emerging field of digital media ethics (of which our work is a part) strives first to understand the changing scene and then to propose new standards and best practices that take into account the distinct cultural dynamics of social media and its distinct ethical dilemmas (p. 53).

All of the essays embrace this forward-looking attitude and invite readers to engage in analytical processes with them.

A third and final contribution of the essay is the attention the authors give to relationships: consumers and producers, employers and employees, journalists and the public, human and nonhuman. Technology affects how we relate to others and to ourselves, and the authors in the collection give these relationships sustained focus and germane research. Although designed for an interdisciplinary audience, this reviewer was pleased to see relationships—one of the cornerstones of the Communication discipline—well represented in the collection.

In sum, there is much to like in the second volume of *Ethics for a Digital Age*. The essays are refreshing, relevant, multifaceted. In the process of writing this review, I have found opportunities to incorporate ideas and examples from the book into my classroom and into conversations with my colleagues. To me, this is a good metric of success, and I'm eager to see what a third volume might bring.

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