

**MORAL ARGUMENTS FOR MEDIA REFORM:
A STUDY IN THE ETHICAL UNIVERSE OF THE WORLD
ASSOCIATION FOR CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATION**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers moral arguments for media reform developed by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and asks whether some of the arguments and values might be useful for a North American media reform movement. Chapter one examines the core values of WACC – mutuality and equality – and discusses how they are similar to and different from the political theory of liberalism. The second chapter concerns WACC’s four primary arguments for media reform – inclusion and access, diversity and community, democracy and reconciliation – and discusses what the arguments are aimed at. Chapter three considers two different American media reform movements – public journalism and radical democratic structural change – and their respective moral arguments. The final chapter addresses the ways in which WACC’s approach may or may not be applicable to a secular, national media reform movement in the United States.

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INTRODUCTION

Circumscribing the Topic

The idea that media constitute an important field of study, that they have, over the past century, become central to understanding the nature of our social world, is not new. Media package, create, construct and disseminate all realms of cultural activity; they work, in Todd Gitlin's (1980) apt phrase, to "certify reality as reality" (p. 3). The idea, though, that citizens are actually content with the reality with which they are presented is increasingly held suspect. For those who wish to reform media practices and structures, a major focus has been, and continues to be, on political problems, questions such as: what is to be done to change the situation? Equally important, though, are concerns that are moral in nature: why are certain existing media structures and/or practices right or wrong?

This thesis looks at moral arguments; that is, the way in which particular groups of people *argue* about media reform, the values they use in making their arguments and the judgments they make with those values. I want to explore this world – the world in which people argue about the relationship between the role of the mass media and what communication scholars call the public – as an important sphere of activity in its own right. In doing this, I set aside other important concerns – issues concerning political strategies and strategic trajectories of existing movements – with the hope that in studying arguments, we may find a way in which to explain to ourselves, and to others,

why we are dissatisfied with media performance and what sort of performance we would ultimately prefer.

The principal aim of this project is to look at whether a particular Christian moral and political philosophy that was developed for use in the developing world might be of use to a secular, national media reform movement in North America. Religion has been actively studied at least since Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and, with the help of sociologists, we are increasingly able to better understand the mechanisms that govern religious belief. Secular social and political theorists have been less quick, though, to look at the ways in which religious beliefs might be put to secular use for positive social change. My aim is this latter point – the secular uses of religious belief – though I will no doubt need to draw upon some of the findings of the former.

My task is eased due to the nature of the group being studied. The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) is involved, as we shall soon see, in the work of both Christian and secular initiatives to challenge existing media structures. I want to analyze their moral argument comparatively, by showing how it overlaps and differs from two other moral arguments. To do this, the project is broken into four parts:

In the first part, I study the core values that underpin the moral and political philosophy of WACC. It is from these core values that we are able to better understand their more specific moral arguments concerning media reform, as well as understand their foundational belief in the necessity of a human right to communicate. I contrast these values with the primary values of liberalism, the dominant political theory in Western liberal democracies today, to make a comparison between the two.

In the second part, I look at how the core values help shape the particular arguments for media reform. There are four principal arguments for media reform: the first is the argument for inclusion and access; second, the argument for both diversity and community; the third argument is one premised on democratic principles; and the fourth is an argument for reconciliation. I outline and explain these arguments and, by drawing on the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas, discuss who and what these arguments are aimed at.

Having studied their philosophical values as well as their political/moral arguments, I turn in chapter three to discuss two different types of national media reform movements that have developed in the United States: radical democratic structural media reform and public journalism. These are not the only two reform movements we have seen in the past 15 years but they are (or, in the case of public journalism, were) two of the most powerful forms media reform has taken. More importantly, though, is that they are also the two movements to which, as we shall see, WACC is most pertinent. My aim in this chapter will be to look at the moral argument that each group makes for media reform.

Having studied the moral arguments of WACC and two national media reform movements, I turn in the final chapter to ask how WACC's approach is similar to and distinct from radical democratic structural media reform and public journalism. I ask whether the approach of WACC bridges two distinctly different approaches to media reform. In doing this, I highlight some of the cultural and political factors in the contemporary United States that create both obstacles to and opportunities for the implementation of WACC's approach.

Before going further, though, I should anticipate two early criticisms pertaining to my selection of national media reform groups. The first objection is that I neglect what might be considered a third branch of media activism in North America: alternative media. This is true. The movement for alternative media has grown in the United States (though how much it has grown, and to what effect, remains to be seen) but it cannot be called a movement for media reform. Reform implies change from within existing structures, either through alterations to the existing structures or to the practices within those structures. Alternative media, while powerful, do not actively look at reforming media; they look at constructing their own.

The second objection I can anticipate is that public journalism has receded in recent years, both from newsrooms and academic discussions. This is, again, true. By the time of the 1996 presidential election, the movement for public journalism had begun to decline, due in part to the perceived poor quality of election coverage, but also because much of the funding for it had run out. However, the ideology that accompanied it was a powerful one and a good deal of its force had to do with how well its moral argument was able to resonate with both journalists and citizens. I suggest in the third and fourth chapters that the moral argument that public journalism offered is still compelling and that its failure has more to do with its inability to look at market forces and government policy (that radical democratic structural media reform looks at directly) than with a loss in the force of the argument. My aim is not to revive the public journalism movement, but to ask whether some of the ideas that went into it may still be made useful, especially when reformulated and combined with arguments for radical democratic structural media reform as well as WACC's approach. It may be that we need to piece together the

fragments of these different arguments to create a more powerful, more creative argument for media reform.

Such is my hope. Whether it is feasible is a question I should try to answer at the end, not the beginning.

Moral Arguments

What is a moral argument? Before giving an overview of what WACC is, I want to discuss, briefly, what a moral argument is by identifying its parts. The language in which we make moral arguments is distinct from the language of law, according to political theorist Michael Walzer, because it is a non-professional activity in which citizens can, and do, regularly participate (Walzer, 1977).¹

A moral argument is a judgment rendered about a particular action or arrangement based on ethical values that serve to guide and evaluate conduct. As such, moral argumentation is locked in a symbiotic relationship with political distribution: if it is in the political world that we arrange and distribute things, then it is in the moral world that we argue about those arrangements and distributions. The actions and arrangements discussed within this thesis will revolve around arguments that discuss the relation between mass media and a democratic public. In studying those judgments, the task is to trace out the basic structure of the argument, test it for cohesion and highlight its limits. In doing this, we will come across all the moral terms that are so frequently invoked in arguments: words like equality, liberty and justice. My task is not simply to repeat these

¹ For a good general discussion of moral arguments, see Michael Walzer's (1977) *Just and Unjust Wars*.

words, but to try to define what they mean in a given circumstance. What the term equality means for WACC, for example, will be a major question in chapter one.

The foundation of ethics is a controversial topic, and there is much disagreement among philosophers as to the basis and justification of these foundations. If I were to attempt to elucidate the foundations of these ethics, it is doubtful that I would ever be able to discuss media reform as a moral issue. I will try to explain and underscore what the foundational ethics for WACC are, but I will spend much more time on the arguments they make with those ethics. Using moral terms in arguments is a common everyday activity, a healthy component of any form of social criticism. It is the moral arguments and claims that I want to inspect here, not the foundations.

But there are problems with studying moral arguments within the contexts of groups that I should acknowledge. The danger lies largely in the fact that not all the individuals within a group will necessarily come to the same conclusions. This leads to two pitfalls: First, the analysis of the moral arguments can be too broad, making them useless, because they tell us too little about the group and how it differs from other groups. An example would be if I were to say “*Group X believes that murder is wrong.*” We would not know what constitutes murder for this group. We can all, in principle, agree that murder is wrong but whether or not something like, say, abortion, is murder is an entirely different, and rather contentious, question.

The second pitfall comes from being too concerned with each individual’s judgments. Its error is in being so particular that no conclusions can be drawn. In walking amidst the trees, we lose track of the forest.

Seymour Martin Lipset, a political sociologist, makes a useful distinction for our purposes between values and attitudes. Values, writes Lipset (1996), “are well-entrenched...sentiments produced by institutions or major historical events” while attitudes “are much more malleable; they vary with events and contexts” (pp.24-25). Lipset says that while a group of people may share the same values, that does not necessarily mean they will reach the same decisions on particular issues.² I try, then, in the first chapter to look at the values of WACC, and turn, in the second chapter to look at specific attitudes or arguments on more specific issues.

WACC: A Brief Overview

Because I am interested in the current state of WACC’s moral argument and not its historical development, an in-depth history of WACC is unnecessary.³ What is necessary, though, is a general overview of the group being studied. The following is intended to be a brief orientation.

The origins of WACC can be traced to the end of the Second World War, when Christian church groups gathered to deal with both the physical and moral damage from the war (Lee, 2000; 2004). It is important to make clear, though, that WACC itself did not come into being in its present form until later. Because WACC came into being during the post-war era, in what is known as the “First Development Decade,” when many former colonies gained their independence and were in need of reconstructing their

² Lipset is open to criticism on the grounds of ascribing values to institutional patterns. My use of his distinction here is not to suggest the necessity of such a relationship, but, rather, to suggest that some values tend to be more commonly shared among peoples, even while they have disagreements over certain issues. Political parties are a good example here, as members of a party generally profess to agree on a shared platform, while often disagreeing on approaches to particular issues.

³ And it has already been done. See Philip Lee (2000), *The World Association for Christian Communication, 1975-2000: a labour of love*.

economies and their social structures, the historical mandate of WACC reflects this time period and was developed for use in the so-called underdeveloped world (Lee, 2000).

It is perhaps useful to think of WACC as a Protestant Christian United Nations, in the sense that, as a political body, it was initially structured to create an institutional responsiveness between the main body of WACC and its members.⁴ Writing in 1970, the first General Secretary of the organization, Philip A. Johnson, said, “In the last analysis, it [WACC] can do nothing itself, nor should it. It works through its members throughout the world, with resources provided by churches and agencies concerned with Christian communication and the responsible use of media in society” (quoted in Lee, 2000, p. 14).

The event that put WACC on the global map for communication-related issues was the debate during the 1970s concerning the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The NWICO debates looked at questions related to perceptions of a relatively new form of domination exerted by Western countries on the underdeveloped countries of the South: the idea of cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1976; Lee, 2004). This imperialism, it was argued, could be seen largely through media and communication infrastructures, like the dependency of Third World countries on rich industrialized countries for communication technologies and skills (Lee, 2004).

The debates took place in UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), a branch of the United Nations, which commissioned a committee to study communications issues. The committee was chaired by Sean MacBride and it published the well-known, and controversial, report, *Many Voices, One*

⁴ The metaphor is not meant to be taken literally but is used to evoke the general structure of the WACC’s governing body. The intention here is not to imply that it directs all Christian social work on a global level, which is certainly not the case.

World: Communication and Society Today and Tomorrow (Traber & Nordenstreng, 1992).

By 1984, the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom and Singapore withdrew their membership from UNESCO, partly in protest against the report and its findings, which suggested that the richer, more industrialized nations should consider the imbalance of communication flows between the countries of the First and Third World.

While WACC followed the developments of the NWICO debates throughout, it was not until 1988, when copies of the MacBride Commission Report had run out, that WACC made its largest contribution to the legacy of the debates. UNESCO's hesitancy to re-publish the report was considered by WACC to "be problematic because its conclusions and recommendations had yet to be discussed or implemented. For this reasons, and to strengthen its advocacy of communication rights, WACC stepped in the breach and was given permission to reprint *Many Voices, One World*" (Lee, 2004, p. 10).

The NWICO debates, and WACC's support of the MacBride Commission, was their first major global contribution to issues relating to media reform, concentration and communication rights. From 1996 to the present day, WACC has been working with other non-governmental organizations to be included in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). This movement is known as the CRIS campaign (Communication Rights in the Information Society) and seeks to "use the right to communicate to enhance other human rights and to strengthen the social, economic and cultural lives of people and communities" (Lee, 2004, p. 11). Some of the major goals of the CRIS campaign are to ensure "affordable access to, and effective use of, electronic

networks in a development context;” to institute “democratic and transparent governance of the information society from local to global levels;” to “support community and people-centred media” (p. 12).

Whether or not the CRIS campaign succeeds remains to be seen;⁵ it is a movement too large for the scope of this thesis. I will, however, draw on some of WACC’s contribution to the CRIS campaign, most notably their 2004 publication, edited by Philip Lee, *Many Voices, One Vision: The Right to Communicate in Practice*.

Something more, however, needs to be said about the current structure of WACC organization and its funding sources. WACC is set up as an explicitly non-denominational ecumenical organization, and it seeks to work with “individuals and communication agencies of all churches: Protestant, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Evangelical” (WACC, 1997, p. 32). Its funding, however, comes mostly from Protestant Churches of North America and Europe, as well as some development and government agencies (WACC, 2005).

The structure of WACC is de-centralized. It has over 850 members in 115 countries, which are represented by eight regional associations. WACC headquarters are in London, where the Central Committee meets annually to discuss “needs and activities” (WACC, 2005).

There are two basic divisions in the work of WACC. In the first division, WACC is mostly an NGO in the developing world, funding small, grassroots projects for community development of communication related issues (e.g. community radio). In the

⁵ For background on the CRIS campaign, and a list of its goals, see Philip Lee (2004), “Introduction” in *Many Voices, One Vision: The Right to Communicate in Practice*. See also Media Development’s 4/2002 issue on “Communication Rights in the Information Society.”

second division, WACC is a forum for academic discussion concerning media and communication issues. This second division is done mostly by the Global Studies Programme, which is based in London and publishes the quarterly journal *Media Development*, as well as book series (Lee, personal communication, October 18, 2004).

Also in London is the Women's Programme, which is a mixture of research and advocacy work. The current major project of the Women's Programme is the Global Media Monitoring Project, which aims to document portrayals of women throughout the world on a single day (Turley, personal communication, October 13, 2004).

WACC has several publications: the aforementioned *Media Development* is a quarterly, it also publishes a bi-monthly *Action* newsletter, as well as the *Media and Gender Monitor*, which addresses communication and gender related issues. Additionally, WACC has in the past published, and continues to publish, books on various media and communication issues (WACC, 2005).

Circumscribing all this different work for WACC is an ethical framework that seeks to legitimize and defend the notion of a right to communicate. It is a framework that they have created by making new arguments about values and about what communication, and a mediated communication system, ought to be. It is to these values and arguments that I now turn.

CHAPTER ONE: CORE VALUES: EQUALITY, MUTUALITY AND THE HUMAN RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE

Introduction

All values have particular social meanings, though social meanings are often lost, or not adequately explained, when arguments are put forth. We tend to take social meanings for granted precisely because they are social, by assuming that everyone means the same thing when they express a given value. When forced to explain the positions that underlie our arguments, a difficulty arises: what does justice, or respect, or equality, mean?

I want in this essay to explore and explain the core values that underlie the political and moral philosophy of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) – equality and mutuality – and to trace their origins. It is from these values that we can better understand their specific arguments concerning media reform. While these two values are intimately interconnected, it is analytically useful to inspect them independent of one another. At the end of the chapter, I will try to show how they work together to create the fundamental ethical framework for WACC – the notion of a human right to communicate – and will explain what that right means.

WACC's political and moral philosophy is not only a critique of the contemporary communication order, it is also a normative sketch of the sort of world they hope to create, a vision of a world more just than the one in which we now live. To best

comprehend it, we need to grasp how this particular understanding of equality and mutuality is different from the understanding offered by the dominant ideology of our time: liberalism. This is useful also because it helps us to understand why equality and mutuality *are* the two core values of WACC's political and moral philosophy. When asked about their core values, many group members made reference to the right to communicate as the ethical framework in which they operate. This response is, at least initially, perplexing because the way in which WACC talks about the right to communicate is much different from the way in which liberal thinkers generally tend to talk about rights. In trying to understand this puzzle, it becomes increasingly clear that the right to communicate is based not only on the value of equality but also on another, equally important, value that (as we shall soon see) is foreign to liberal thought: mutuality.

Since the history of liberal thought is diverse, vast and contentious, I limit my own discussion of it to two very broad forms it has taken, which, following Gerald Gaus (1983; 2003), we may refer to as classical liberalism and revisionist, or reform, liberalism.⁶ The two share common philosophical conceptions of the nature of the individual, though they differ significantly on the role of that individual in society, as well as the role society should play in the life of that individual.

David Miller (1999) suggests that any political theory contains “two analytically separable elements” (p. 172). The first element, he says, is an account of the human person, a “philosophical anthropology,” with a “general account of the human person...the conditions of moral agency...[and] the nature of human relationships” (p.

⁶ Revisionist liberalism is also referred to as ‘new liberalism’ (Freeden, 1978) and welfare state liberalism (Macpherson, 1973, chap. 4).

172). The second element inherent to every political theory, he says, is a “set of prescriptive principles, principles specifying how social relationships are to be ordered, how the state is to be constituted and so on” (p. 172). The view created by the philosophical picture, he says, helps to create a certain political doctrine. It would be erroneous, though, to assume that the philosophical conception leads logically and directly to the prescriptive principles. Historical experience, social meaning and material bases all exert an important influence on the actual political prescriptions (pp. 172-174).

By separating political theory into these two components – philosophical anthropology and prescriptive principles – we are better able to see how the moral and political philosophy of the WACC is different from, and in some cases similar to, the liberal tradition. Briefly, though, we may say that WACC challenges the philosophical anthropology of both classical and revisionist liberalism, while accepting some of the prescriptive principles of reform liberalism. I will try to explain why this is so.

Classical Liberalism

The philosophical conception of the human person in classical liberalism is fairly straightforward. Each individual is seen as a rationally bounded and cohesive unit who seeks to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. Self-interest, on this account, motivates an individual to act. Gaus (1996; 2003) calls freedom the “fundamental liberal principle,” which posits the notion that “freedom is normatively basic, and so the onus of justification is on those who would limit freedom.”

The individual, then, is the basic unit with which classical liberal theory contends. Any social order must justify its existence by explaining why the life of the individual is

better in a social atmosphere than it would be in a mythic state of nature.⁷ It is important to note the radically individualist nature of this philosophical conception; it is from this idea that classical liberals derive a good deal of their prescriptive principles. The social order they justify is one that holds a highly sceptical view of the role of the state and a primary role for a system of private property. It is also important to note that in dealing with the individual in liberal theory, we arrive at the first, and most basic form of equality: moral equality. This form of equality derives in large part from Enlightenment and religious conceptions of all human beings as possessing inherent “natural” rights, which are deemed to be inalienable and universal. It is for this reason that someone like the English political thinker Thomas Hobbes, who arrived at profoundly illiberal conclusions, can be considered a liberal thinker: he recognized that each person had certain natural rights (Pitkin, 1968).

For classical liberals, of whom James Bentham and James Mill were perhaps the most forceful spokesmen, freedom and a system of private property were intimately connected (Gaus, 2003; Macpherson, 1977). It is from this connection that classical liberalism offers its prescriptive principle of equality. Gaus suggests that classical liberals make use of two arguments in stressing a connection between freedom and private property. In the first, they suggest that private property is the very essence of freedom, for it is only when people are free to make their own contracts and sell their labour, to save their money and spend it in whatever manner they like, that they exercise their freedom.

⁷ The state of nature is the philosophical idea of a “human condition without government” (Lloyd, 2002), a “state of perfectly private judgment, in which there is no agency with recognized authority to arbitrate disputes and effective power to enforce its decisions” (Lloyd, 2002). The initial idea is traced to Thomas Hobbes and was expounded upon later by John Locke.

Any attempt to regulate or shape this system of private property is seen as an unnecessary and unfair attempt to curtail the freedom of individuals.

The second argument classical liberals make use of is the idea that “private property is the only effective means for the protection of liberty” because the state cannot be trusted to ensure liberty when left to its own devices (Gaus, 2003). Where the first argument is concerned with the putatively inherent freedom found in a system of private property, this argument creates the liberal conception of the state, which C.B. Macpherson (1977) calls “protective” (chap. 1). “Its advocacy is based on the assumption that man is an infinite consumer, that his overriding motivation is to maximize the flow of satisfactions, or utilities, to himself from society, and a national society is simply a collection of such individuals” (p. 43). The state must be guarded against, according to classical liberals, and the best guard is to guarantee that the state will not interfere in the outcomes of the market.

The classical liberal conception of the human, then, is one of freedom from any form of social coercion unless the individual consents to it. Equality here does not mean anything close to material equality; it was widely understood that equality would not reduce class difference (Macpherson, 1977). Rather, equality refers to an imagined equality of opportunity; its form is procedural at best and is expressed negatively, as articulated famously by the English political theorist Isaiah Berlin (1969):

I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity. Political liberty in this sense is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others. If I am prevented by others from doing what I could otherwise do, I am to that degree unfree; and if this area is contracted by other men beyond a certain minimum, I can be described as being coerced, or it may be, enslaved...

You lack political liberty or freedom only if you are prevented from attaining a goal by other human beings (p. 122).

Berlin's last remark is especially telling: a person can only be coerced by another person, not by a system of structural arrangements. This is the nature of equality in classical liberalism: coercion is not permitted from other persons but systems of coercion, like the market itself, are left undisturbed, primarily because they are not recognized as a form of coercion. It is from the classical conception of liberalism, which Berlin articulates above, that many of our contemporary political and civil rights are drawn (even if all these rights took longer than classical liberalism's lifespan to come into effect): legal rights, property rights, equal franchise, free expression, etc.

Mutuality, a concept that we shall soon see plays an important role in the ethical framework of the WACC, is absent from any classical liberal formulation of ethics. The closest value it has is what we might call reciprocity and it can be seen in Berlin's above remarks. The idea of reciprocity is not that one has to respect every other human person but, rather, that each person has to respect that every other individual holds the same rights as he or she does. Reciprocity is derived from the respect of this recognition, not from a necessary social attitude of solidarity and mutuality.

Reform Liberalism

Revisionist, or reform, liberalism leaves intact the basic philosophical anthropology of the human person. Individuals are still seen as bounded, cohesive units seeking to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. It can be said that both classical and reform liberalism share a broadly similar philosophical conception of the human person, as suggested by Miller (1999) in the following passage:

A certain widely held form of liberalism [both classical and reform]...does have a natural affinity with individualist anthropology. People who are liberals...characteristically defend their political positions by invoking an individualist view of the self...Liberalism typically involves such doctrines as the priority of rights (rights as trumps), the notions that the principles of a just social order should be established by reference to a hypothetical social contract, and the idea that the state should preserve its neutrality, as between conceptions of the good life. These doctrines are very often defended by appealing to the picture of the individual as a freely choosing agent, and society as a set of arrangements designed or evolved to permit such individuals to pursue their ends (p. 173).

What changes, though, is the liberal conception of the role of the state, through a questioning of the putatively intimate connection between freedom and private property (Gaus, 2003).

Reform liberalism took hold in the early part of the 20th century, a period, according to Gaus (2003), in which the capacity of the free market to maintain freedom was increasingly being questioned. Whether market rights of private property could actually be called freedom, particularly when they created drastically unequal forms of liberty, led to a conception of the state as a more effective arbiter of certain necessary material and economic needs. What reform liberalism did was reinterpret the prescriptive principles of the liberal tradition, while maintaining the basic philosophical conceptions of individualism (Gaus, 2003; Freedman, 1978).

The relation of the state with regards to society became less antagonistic in reform liberalism, as it was increasingly recognized that the state could often times provide goods and services more efficiently and effectively to its citizens (Gaus, 2003; Freedman, 1978). The arguments of reform liberals were less about changing the mental attitudes of its citizens and more about changing the actual patterns and mechanisms of distribution:

public goods could, in some instances, be delivered more quickly to individuals than private goods sold on the market.

Equality, under reform liberalism, goes beyond the classical liberal conception of equality of opportunity to displaying a new concern – to varying degrees in different countries – for some form of equality between citizens, which involves providing for those who do not succeed in the market economy. The features include subsidies for food, provisions for health care and services to locate new employment. C.B. Macpherson (1977) nicely captures the essence of reform liberalism by drawing on John Stuart Mill's assertion that the state can move from being solely a protective entity to one that seeks to help each individual reach their greatest capacity for development.

With the ideology of reform liberalism comes the existence of a welfare state, which is reform liberalism's most important contrast to classical liberalism. Whereas the latter was concerned chiefly with the idea of liberty (and it was through the concept of liberty that equality was first endorsed), reform liberalism attempts to reconcile freedom and welfare (Freedon, 1978, chap. 1). This not only redefines the concept of equality and the role of the state in its achievement, as we have seen, but it also requires a stronger definition of reciprocity, one which comes closer to the idea of mutuality but still falls significantly short. Welfare is seen as a question of distributive justice; it is defended, however, with a moral argument that understands the basis of citizenship to be the idea of shared fate (Freedon, 1978, chap. 1). Reciprocity here is something slightly more than recognition of equal rights but something significantly less than an interpersonal attitude. The values that reform liberals share (e.g. commitments to welfare entitlements) are premised on a recognition that the state can, and should, be used to lessen the harmful

effects of the market for individuals, but they are not premised on an inherent valuation of social relations.

To sum up: classical liberalism and reform liberalism share a similar broad philosophical conception of the nature of the human person through an “individualist anthropology” but differ significantly in terms of their prescriptive principles. Classical liberalism argues that equality is procedural and is based on the basic normative ideal of freedom, while reform liberalism seeks to reconcile the classic liberal notion of freedom with the idea of welfare by redefining the role of the state from a minimal role to a more active and enabling one. The primary political difference here is between a protective state, which uses negative rights to keep people *from* doing certain things to one another, and a developmental state, which uses positive rights to give people the means *to* exercise their rights effectively.

The Philosophical Anthropology of WACC

The philosophical conception of human personhood, for WACC, revolves around a belief that human persons exist only in social relations, which is to say that society exists prior to individual personhood and that society itself, through social relations, is the enabler of individual personhood (Lee, 2004). Social contracts and mythic states of nature, essential features of the liberal doctrine, are simply non-existent in this account of personhood.

This conceptualization of human personhood is driven largely by a strong belief in the value of mutuality, which I shall try to develop as an idea by tracing its origins in WACC philosophy, principally through their foundational document concerning their

beliefs and works: the “Christian Principles of Communication” (WACC, 1997). It is important to keep in mind that arguments *like* mutuality have been developed by secular social and political theorists (the old socialist argument for fraternity comes to mind) but it is important to note that in WACC’s use of the term, its origins are profoundly religious.⁸ When human personhood is said to exist in social relations, this is not a denial of God’s existence, but, rather, a statement that affirms God’s existence in relations between persons.

Communication is itself the starting point of WACC belief, and it is seen as “God’s great gift to humanity, without which we cannot be truly human, reflecting God’s image” (WACC, 1997, p. 5). The seminal point suggests that communication is ultimately important because it is not only the necessary glue for social solidarity, but also because communication is an act of communion with the Creator. The source of true communication is the teaching of Jesus Christ, who announced the Good News of the Gospel to all people; the enabler of the Good News is the Holy Spirit, which promises to enable human beings to relate the teachings of Christ to others. “It is the Spirit that can change the Babel of confusion into a Pentecost of genuine understanding” (p. 5).

Two things are worth noting here. First, the conception of the Holy Spirit is not only an affirmation of a belief in the Christian Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit: three persons existing in one God); it is what theologians refer to as a Hellenic conception of the Holy Spirit (Vance, 2003). The Holy Spirit, on this account,

⁸ While I suggest that the origins are deeply religious, this does not mean that WACC does not also talk about this in a secular way. The reasons for this are many: as an NGO, WACC needs to find a way to work with groups that do not necessarily share their religious beliefs; as an organization, WACC does not hire only individuals who profess Christian beliefs, nor does it require a belief in Christianity to be a member. What this suggests, importantly, I think, is that the religious belief may have the ability to be an interesting secular value.

carries the truth itself, of which people on earth can, through communication with one another and with God, come to a 'genuine understanding.' Second, and perhaps more importantly, WACC conceives of the Holy Spirit as a non-controllable, non-static deity, bound to no single church. The Christian Principles offers a passage from the Gospel of John (3:8), which says that the Spirit "blows where it pleases" and, in their (WACC's) own words, "no-one, neither church nor religious group, can claim to control it" (p. 5). While the Holy Spirit is that which enables humans to carry out the task of proclaiming the Good News, there is no claim, on the part of WACC, to ownership or eternal understanding of the Spirit itself. This last point makes sense for a group that is ecumenical in origin; its theological conceptions tend to be broad enough to accommodate different Christian denominations: Catholics and Protestants of all creeds (Naylor, personal communication, October 19, 2004). The claim is that it is "God's Kingdom rather than our divided churches" which lays proper claim to being the source of truth (p. 5).

While the Holy Spirit rests on metaphysical claims of truth, it is important to note that the message it carries and enables others to understand – the Good News – is, at its heart a social Gospel, one that carries both material and spiritual messages. "For Christian communicators, the material and the spiritual are part of each other" (p. 5). Communication, being a gift from God, is ultimately intended to be used to glorify him, in the sense that "all Christian communication is an act of worship, a praise of God through the shared word and action of a community living in the consciousness of God's presence" (p. 6).

This conception of the Christian Trinity as both a social and spiritual deity is the central theological interpretation that helps to form the theological and social bases for the value of mutuality. WACC explicitly condemns excessive individualism: “The lives of Christians, as well as the work of communicators, need to be set free from the individualism which characterizes some cultures and traditions” (p. 6). Mutuality, then, for WACC is an emphasis on the social and spiritual nature of human personhood: we exist in God’s image and we are always working to better understand what that image is. Philip Lee (2004) gives a definition – it is important to note here that this can be seen as either a secular or religious definition – of the ultimate aim of mutuality: “The act of temporarily becoming another person, of seeing with their eyes, of feeling (embodying) their needs, anxieties, joys, is the ultimate logic of all attempts at true dialogue” (p. 7). It is this goal of mutuality, I want to suggest, which pervades the ethical framework of WACC and which creates a radical separation between their view of personhood and the one typically offered in liberal thought.

This draws, I think, an introductory picture of the concept of mutuality, but it points only to its essence; it does not provide us with a complete picture. To do that we need to look both at the philosophical origins of this belief, as well as get a better sense of what sort of prescriptive action mutuality requires.

Mutuality as a Core Value

The philosophical roots of mutuality can be located in the thought of the Hasidic Jewish moral philosopher Martin Buber, a thinker to whom many of WACC’s articles concerning mutuality refer. Buber developed a philosophy of dialogue that views the essence of human existence occurring in relations, as indicated by his oft-quoted dictum:

“in the beginning was the relation” (Christians, 1993, pp. 62-64). According to Clifford Christians (1993), a frequent contributor to various WACC publications, Buber’s dialogical philosophy contains two components: an I-it relation and an I-thou relation. The I-it is the normal everyday relation of the human person to the world around him. In this conception, the individual views all other individuals as its, as people who exist at a distance, like objects, as casual components of the environment we encounter randomly. Its opposite, the I-thou relation, is a relation where an individual enters in the dialogical relationship with another person and, in doing so, with God. It is in the relation between persons that individuals are able to close the gap between man as mortal and God as infinite.

The challenge facing Clifford Christians and WACC is to find a way to translate an ethic that was developed for interpersonal dialogue into a social value. To expand the concept, mutuality takes on three necessary features, which are discussed at length in a WACC publication edited by Clifford Christians and Michael Traber (1997), *Communication Ethics and Universal Values*. The three features are a common moral vocabulary, truth as a master norm and the shift from direct to indirect (e.g. structural) subjection in power relations. The third component introduces the concept of equality, so I will discuss the first two in greater depth and deal only briefly with the third at present and will return to it during the discussion of equality, as well as in the discussion at the end of the chapter on what the human right to communicate means.

Antonio Pasquali (1997) develops the idea of a common moral vocabulary in his chapter contribution to *Communication Ethics and Universal Values*, a WACC publication. Morality, he argues, exists not because we can all agree on specific values

but because we can all agree to enter into argument with one another. What is your morality, for Pasquali, is not a possible question because morality is ontologically given because we exist, not because of some sort of epistemological knowledge that we develop. He calls this a “morality of intersubjectivity” (pp. 24-45) and characterizes the relational experience of dialogue as its primary element.

To develop a morality of intersubjectivity is to assert that a collective moral vocabulary is necessary on various levels in order to create not only individual identity and personhood but also to create collective identities. Hence, the Christian Principles of Communication (WACC, 1997) states that a “community must not be seen as a local community alone. A community of peoples and nations, as well as a community of different churches and religions, has to emerge if mankind is to survive” (p. 6). The construction of a common moral vocabulary rests upon a principle that is fundamentally opposed to the classical liberal notion of negative rights, though he makes no specific reference to reform liberalism. Christians (1999) asserts that liberal rights are well adept in handling individual claims *against* communities and other individuals (e.g. when they are coerced by others to do something that inhibits their freedom, they claim that their ‘rights’ are being violated) but are unable to work in claims *for* community. “Rights,” he says, “are a friendly companion but vapid and unhelpful in complicated matters. They serve as a bodyguard against moral bullies but are inarticulate and boring” (p. 70). The idea of a common moral vocabulary is the ideal of social solidarity; it is an argument for membership and belonging. It is, however, a vague argument in its practice, as we shall see in the following chapter, because while it sets out a principle for belonging, it does

little to define the different places to which a person belongs (e.g. family, community, nation, world, etc.)

The substantive activity required in a moral vocabulary is the master norm of truth telling. Truth telling can be differentiated from the ideology of objectivism, which according to Christians (1995) is an epistemological category that views people as being “impersonal transmitters of facts” (p. 84). Truth telling, conversely, is a moral activity, one of judgment, which exists beyond a single individual person and where truth itself is seen as being non-negotiable, meaning that truth exists ‘out there’ in the world and can be discovered by active human agents (p. 88).

But while truth exists outside of one’s self, Christians says, it is still rooted in human existence.

When truth is articulated in terms of the moral order, we can mould its richly textured meaning around the Hebrew *emeth* (trustworthy, genuine, dependable, authentic) [and] the Greek *aletheia* (openness, disclosure)...Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics* contends correctly that a truthful account lays hold of the context, motives and presuppositions involved (Bonhoeffer, 1955, chap. 5). Telling the truth depends on the quality of discernment so that penultimates do not gain ultimacy. Truth means, in other words, to strike gold (pp. 85-86).

In the next chapter, we will see the applications of the principle of truth telling, particularly with regard to issues of media reform. For the present moment, it is more important to note the idea as a value in its own right, and not the particular judgments rendered. Truth telling carries with it an obligation, which Cees Hamelink (2004) discusses in a recent lecture. Part of mutuality, he says, is the obligation that comes with it to tell people when they are wrong. On an individual level, he says, this requires telling

people when they violate some of our values; on a social level it requires condemning structural influences that force people to take part in untruthful actions.

Thus far, I have argued that mutuality for WACC is based on a radically different conception of the human person and his/her moral agency than the view formulated by the classical and reform traditions of liberalism. It is based upon a concept of the human person as being socially embedded in social relations and it is the relation itself – the space that God himself is believed to exist in – that receives primacy. It is not clear, however, what sort of politics this philosophical conception will lead us to. In fact, if we are to look at the first two components of mutuality that have been discussed – a common moral vocabulary and truth-telling as a master norm – we might, not unreasonably, wonder if the group in question was a member of a conservative family values coalition. For it is the above two arguments that conservative groups tend to make successfully: that moral order is in disorder and that people need to follow their values as received truths. What makes the WACC significantly different, both politically and morally, from such groups, though, is a third component – a shift from concerns of direct subjection to concern with indirect, or systemic, subjection – that is understood not only through mutuality, but also through equality.

Equality as a Core Value

If mutuality is the value that primarily gives shape to WACC's philosophical conception of personhood, it is equality that primarily gives shape to its prescriptive principles. In the previous section, I looked at theological notions of mutuality, which I will also do here for equality. Following that, I will inquire into the essential components

of WACC's definition of equality and will close by demonstrating how it is that equality and mutuality work as checks and balances on one another.

Where mutuality is based on a Hellenic conception of metaphysics, equality is based on a more Hebraic vision of social justice. In theological terms, WACC's Christology, their perception of the nature of Jesus Christ, is a 'low' one. A low Christology focuses less on the Resurrection of Christ and more on the prophetic work of Jesus in terms of social justice (Vance, 2003). WACC (1997) refers to this directly in the Christian Principles of Communication:

Christ's own communication was an act of self-giving. He "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7). He ministered to all, but took up the cause of the materially poor, the mentally ill, the outcasts of society, the powerless and the oppressed. In the same way, Christian communication should be an act of love that liberates all who take part in it (p. 5).

While liberal arguments for equality often rest upon ideas of procedural equality or an equality of opportunity, it is important to note that the idea of moral equality in liberalism is very much present in the work of the WACC. Philip Lee (2004) writes: "Communicative freedom presupposes the recognition that all human beings are of equal worth" (p. 5).

The origin of equality, like mutuality, is found in God. Each person is created in "God's image" (WACC, 1997, p. 5). Paul Soukup (2000), a theologian writing for WACC's *Media Development*, argues that equality is based on the Christian concept of original sin: we are all born equally with the same Sin passed down from the actions of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Circumscribing both approaches is the idea that humans are inherently equal because each one possesses a soul.

While the inherent equality of all human persons is assumed, the practice of equality is based on three crucial elements. The first is the idea of seeing coercion as both direct and indirect; the second is based upon an idea of re-interpretation and social change; the third is based upon a belief that equality only exists if it is participatory.

The idea of being concerned with indirect coercion is simple but important. It is easy to miss, too, in the *Christian Principles of Communication*, as WACC (1997) considers direct and indirect coercion to be part of the same injustice that blocks ‘genuine communication:’

One aim of our work is the breaking down of all kinds of barriers which prevent the development of communities with rights and justice for all – particularly such barriers as race, sex, class, nation, power and wealth. Genuine communication cannot take place in a climate of division, alienation, isolation and barriers which disturb, prevent or distort social interaction (pp. 6-7).

I will deal in greater depth with this in the second chapter, but it is important to note that WACC sees indirect subjection as a particular problem for media regulation. What we need to know for the moment is that indirect subjection – subjection based on a person’s lack of success in areas like the market – is something of a bridge between mutuality and equality. Mutuality colours it through an understanding that people exist in social relations and the systems in which they live are their creations. Equality works as a corrective to the systems, arguing that current civil and legal rights, like freedom of expression, do not help people to fully develop their God-given communicative capacity.

The second idea, the idea of re-interpretation, exerts a balancing pressure on the master norm of truth telling. Truth exists but, as was suggested with the earlier quotation

from Christians, it changes; getting to the truth of the matter requires reaching at its heart, towards its very essence. Equality, then, requires re-interpretation:

The Gospel, being the Good News for the poor, needs to be constantly re-interpreted from the perspectives of the poor and the oppressed. This challenges church hierarchies to disassociate themselves from power structures which keep the poor in a position of subservience. In this sense, the Good News of the poor embodies genuine reconciliation by means of which the dignity of all people can be confirmed (WACC, 1997, p. 5).

This element of continual re-interpretation, while based on a theological conception of the Holy Spirit as shifting and ‘blowing where it pleases,’ leads to a practical understanding of the need to work, first and foremost, in favour of those who are most oppressed, while respecting different cultural make-ups (Lee, 2004, p. 5). Carlos Valle (2002), former general secretariat of the WACC, makes this point nicely: “To aim at equality, unequal situations require unequal treatments” (p. 123).

The third element that is crucial to understanding the WACC’s conception of equality is the idea that equality is participatory. Valle (2002) argues that equality cannot exist without participation: “In a small town, every word finds its echo in community. The growth of cities has made that echo disappear and has turned it into an illusion. The street cry resounds nostalgically” (p. 122).

Philip Lee (1995) makes a similar claim:

Genuine democracy demands a system of constant interaction with all the people, accessibility at all levels, a public ethos which allows conflicting ideas to contend, and which provides for full participation in reaching consensus on socio-cultural, economic and political goals (p. 3).

Equality, then, is not simply a value based on theological or social principles; it is a substantive activity in which people take part. Its main concern is with democratic

activity and the conferral of power. “A functioning democracy,” writes Cees Hamelink (1995), “is in fact a communication process of a special quality. Its basic feature is interactivity” (p. 16). Accordingly, Hamelink (1996) regards the liberal idea of freedom of information to be unrelated to the principle of equality because of the asymmetrical power relationships that exist between different countries.

Equality here not only looks at, and critiques, visible power relationships between individuals but also at systemic power relationships that serve to coerce and silence large groups of people. It (equality) is a principal element not only of their moral and political philosophical basis but a primary component of their moral argument for a human right to communicate, which we shall see shortly.

Mutuality and Equality

Mutuality, I have argued, is a value that cannot be found in the liberal doctrine, in either classical or reform variants. Its premise is that human beings exist in social relations. While WACC argues that mutuality is itself liberating – as in the earlier quote from Lee (2004): “The act of temporarily becoming another person, of seeing with their eyes, of feeling (embodying) their needs, anxieties, joys, is the ultimate logic of all attempts at true dialogue” (p. 7) – it is difficult not to notice that mutuality is first an obligation: it requires a person to think of someone other than himself.

Mutuality is also an attitude, which makes it further distinct from the liberal doctrine. The latter tends to think, as Miller (1999) suggests, in terms of state neutrality with regards to the substantive ends of legislation. WACC’s value of mutuality is concerned with both process and product.

Equality works as a check on mutuality. Mutuality, by itself, is neither inherently democratic nor progressive; it can be used as a form of self-discipline. What makes it both progressive and democratic is that the principle of equality demands that all persons – not just those who are poor and oppressed or those who are rich and privileged – are subject to the demands of equality. This equality is based on a notion of participation, which requires democratic governance: it views people not only as the beneficiaries of liberal rights, but also as active participants in the construction of social, political and economic life.

By arguing that equality is participatory, WACC establishes an important principle concerning the idea of domination. In looking at equality as participatory, it seeks not only to eliminate unjust person-to-person domination (hatred, coercion, etc.); it also seeks to remedy unjust systemic domination. These principles, when taken together, form the basis of the idea of the human right to communicate, an idea that is at once the ethical framework under which WACC operates, as well as its primary prescriptive principle.

The Human Right to Communicate

Rights are a central part of the liberal framework, so why would a group so critical of liberal individualism invoke the concept of a human *right* to communicate? The notion of a human right to communicate is significantly different than the liberal idea of free expression because of its aim. Freedom of expression is intended to be an individual right, but the right to communicate is, in principle, neither individual nor group oriented, it is a right that creates, in the words of Philip Lee (personal communication,

October, 18, 2004), an “ambience or an environment” in which people are able not only to express their views, but are also willing to listen to the views of others.

The idea itself, closely related to the idea of a cultural environment formulated by George Gerbner (1995), can be seen as a social extension of the interpersonal idea of the relation. A right to communicate between two persons, however, would guarantee only that two people would be involved. The idea of a human right to communicate as an environmental right stresses both the ethical attitude of everyday communication as well as the structural regime that governs media and communication systems in contemporary societies. The heart of WACC’s ethical framework is this right, which sees the values of equality and mutuality as interdependent and inseparable.

There is a single limitation to this right and it stems from an awareness of interpersonal dialogue. “The right to communicate,” writes Lee (2004) “affirms the possibility of asserting a different point of view, of claiming a different individual or communal history, of articulating a different identity – with the sole proviso that no one suffers as a result” (p. 7).

But the right is not only, perhaps not even principally, about dissent. One of the fundamental notions in the Christian Principles of Communication (WACC, 1997) is that communication itself should be used to build communities. Both community building and dissent from community action are key parts of the right to communicate and are drawn in large part from the concept of mutuality.

Randy Naylor (personal communication, October 19, 2004), general secretary of WACC, comments on the right to communicate and its uses for refugees. In explaining the difference between freedom of expression and the right to communicate, he says that

refugees are unable to communicate any of their needs simply because there usually is no one, aside from the Red Cross, there to listen to them.

If mutuality is the value that, generally speaking, governs interpersonal and local communication, equality is the value that is used to effectively socialize the interpersonal concept, to make it work on a larger social scale. And while the right to communicate is intended to help the plight of refugees, it is also intended for more ordinary uses. This requires a shift in the way power relations are construed, from visible relations between people to less visible structural ones that help shape social relations.

The less visible structures are non-democratic market forces that create systems of communication in which people without social, political or material wealth are unable to get their views across, or to correct wrongheaded assumptions about their views that get promulgated by those whose views are publicly expressed. Carlos Valle (2002) captures this part of the right to communicate nicely, saying that the right to communicate is:

the human right to free expression of ideas, promoting the use of media by those who do not own them. The human right for communication systems to be at the service of the integral development of the community, with a sense of participation and growth for community life, which must necessarily be translated into a more just distribution of media ownership (p. 124).

While structural concerns generally highlight material inequalities, there are also social and political concerns related to structure, which the right to communicate addresses. Lee (personal communication, October 18, 2004) discusses this in an interview through a story told to him about an immigrant to Germany who became a qualified citizen, not a full one, and was imprisoned. During the length of his imprisonment, his status as a citizen was changed and the documentation that had previously allowed him to

live and work in Germany had expired. When officials came to deport him, he claimed that was unfair because he was never allowed to telephone the immigration office to tell them about his current circumstance. According to Lee,

it's not that he doesn't have the right to freedom of expression, it's there all the time. What he lacked was the right to communicate in that particular circumstance at that particular time. Now, that's [an important] difference. Freedom of expression allows you to say what you like in public, within reason, about a number of institutions and so on, as long as it is not defamatory and does not incite hatred and so on. You're allowed to do that, you can publish it. But you're not necessarily free to communicate as an individual and, I think, by extension, as a community, or perhaps there's even a wider scope for this (personal communication, October 18, 2004).

This criticism of structural inequality, when taken with the idea of mutuality, creates a comprehensive view of the normative values that are entailed in WACC's idea of a human right to communicate. It does not, however, provide specific arguments about specific media reform issues: questions of ownership, content and censorship, for example. These are specific moral arguments, each of which is informed by the values discussed in this chapter. It is to these more particular moral arguments concerning media reform to which I turn to in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: FOUR MORAL ARGUMENTS FOR MEDIA REFORM

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that the values of equality and mutuality can be seen as the World Association for Christian Communication's (WACC) core values and that the right to communicate is derived from the interaction between the two. In this chapter, I present the more specific moral arguments WACC makes for media reform, drawing upon books, essays, editorials and interviews with WACC members and contributors.

The chapter is divided into two primary sections. In the first section, I outline and explain the four principal arguments for media reform given by WACC members and contributors. They are: (1) the argument for inclusion and access, (2) the argument for diversity and community, (3) the argument for democracy and (4) the argument for reconciliation. These four arguments do not exhaust the possibility of other arguments; however, they are the most commonly used and best explained.

It should be emphasized that the arguments are not mutually exclusive; the moral world is not so neat as to allow simple separations between them. There is much overlap and many of the arguments anticipate – some even hinge upon – the others. There are, however, both important similarities as well as crucial differences between each and I shall try to highlight what they are, respectively.

Having explained what the moral arguments are, in the second section I discuss *who and what* the arguments are aimed at. Drawing on the work of Jürgen Habermas, I argue that there is an ambiguity surrounding the question of whether media reform is a political-economic issue or a broader cultural issue and that this ambiguity can be better understood using Habermas's critical social theory model of system and lifeworld.

The Argument for Inclusion and Access

The first argument for media reform is the argument for inclusion and access. At its heart, the argument stems from the recognition of the personal experience of being excluded from or lacking access to media processes and systems. What is important, though, is that while the experience of exclusion may be felt on a personal level, the criticism and solution to exclusion is not a personal matter but, rather, a structural issue. The focus here is on political arrangements, not social attitudes – it is the argument for the material preconditions of a vigorous public sphere. Put simply, the argument for inclusion and access is the value of equality applied to issues concerning media and the public.

Anna Turley (personal communication, October 13, 2004), coordinator of the Women's Programme and Editor of the Media and Gender Monitor, makes an important distinction between two types of inclusion: inclusion *in* the media and inclusion *through* the media.

What I mean by that is that it's not only about gender equality in the media in terms of numbers of women and men working in the media, at what level they're working [and] how much access into decision making and power they have... It's also about gender equality through the media, so it's about those who work to promote gender equality [in society at

large]... [It's about those who] use the media as a tool for the promotion of gender equality... [and] equal representation in the media.

Turley's explanation can be broadened from a focused discussion of gender and media to a discussion of media and its relation to the public; the argument remains the same. The importance of the distinction she makes is that it recognizes media both as a site of activity (e.g. workplace conditions, hiring and firing practices in the newsroom, etc.) and also as an activity with important ramifications on the lives of those who are not actively involved with the production process on a day-to-day basis.

To best understand what the argument for inclusion is arguing for, it is best to first understand what it is arguing against. The criticism of contemporary media structures is that they create situations of exclusion and lack of access due to concentrations of economic, social and political power. What makes media concentration so worrisome is that the concentration of power reaches across different sectors, both within media (across media types, e.g. radio, television, print, Internet) and across society at large (political power, economic power, social power, etc.). "Increasingly media ownership is not merely about dominance in a particular sector but is centrally about achieving cross-sectoral dominance" ("Media Ownership", Media Development, 4/1998). Media concentration, because of its relation both as a site of activity (as Turley's distinction makes clear) and as an activity with important public ramifications, is *always a merger of different types of power*: economic (ownership across media types), social (the capacity to choose what gets heard and what does not, the capacity to present information in a particular fashion) and political (the necessity of media coverage for political figures and the dependence of the public on it for news).

Turley (personal communication, October 13, 2004) anticipates two additional arguments for reform (the argument of diversity and the argument for democracy) in her rejection of contemporary media structures:

I actually do believe that it is morally wrong to have that kind of power concentrated in the hands of the few because I think that in doing that you are leaving out the majority. And I think that would probably be my key argument: that that is inherently wrong and that the media's responsibility is to reflect the complex diversity of the society in which it exists.

This criticism strikes at the heart of the moral aspect of the argument for inclusion. The exclusion of certain groups (whether they be gender, ethnicity, religion or class-based) is not the result of any inherent inequality between peoples but is the result of a *structural dominance* that can be regulated through a reform of structural relations. On this account, Rupert Murdoch is not any better than any other person because of his wealth; he is, rather, the product of a set of social relations that privilege his wealth and that allow him, with such wealth, to be not only an economic power but a social and political one.⁹ Equality, in this context, is an argument used to combat relations of concentrated power; it seeks to correct the arrangement that permits this exploitation of power to continue.

In this case, the exploitation of power refers to the concentration of media and the “cross-sectoral” power that is gained by such concentration. The solution to this problem is to argue, on the basis of equality, against the structural possibility of such systems of power. It is not an argument against all forms of power but, rather, specific forms of power in specific instances.

⁹The Murdoch example is based on an example given by Robert A. White in an interview.

Robert A. White (1995), both a member of WACC and a contributor to WACC's publication, *The Democratization of Communication*, suggests two principles for the argument of inclusion and access: the right of access to the process of constructing the public cultural truth and the expression of the right to communicate at the institutional, structural and societal level (pp. 95-96).

White (1995) defines the public cultural truth as “the dominant consensus about what is true and what is the meaning of the history of the group or society at any given moment in time” (p. 93). He sees the concept as a continually shifting one and, as such, one that requires access on the part of all citizens to help in its construction. The right of access refers to the *process* of constructing a public cultural truth. “The most fundamental dimension of the democratization of communication,” writes White, “is to guarantee all the information which is necessary for the basic human needs of education, health, personal development, occupations, and for significant participation in local or national public decisions” (p. 95).

The right of access, then, is an argument for all individuals to be included within a larger public. Such a public has certain pre-conditions, such as access to useful information to make informed decisions about public matters, as well as access to the necessary resources to enable people to become producers.

White's second principle – the expression of the right to communicate at the institutional, structural and societal level – is an extension of the right of access. Where access refers to the resources and information that are pre-conditions to meaningful public participation, expression refers to the ability of a communication system to allow for “all sectors of a population to contribute to the pool of information that provides the

basis for local or national decision-making and the basis for the allocation of resources in society” (p. 96).

It is important to note that White’s two principles, as well as Turley’s criticisms of contemporary media, are based upon an understanding of the importance of political arrangements. The idea of a public – well informed, provided for and active – can only be realized when communication systems allow for greater inclusion and access. Under the current arrangements, individuals are seen as objects of the forces that shape their lives. The argument for inclusion and access is fuelled by the belief and hope that when the arrangements are changed, people will be better able – as individuals and members of a larger public – to become subjects of those forces governing their everyday lives. It is in becoming a subject of such forces that White (personal communication, October 30, 2004) argues that individuals are better able to “recognize themselves in their cultures.”

The Argument for Diversity and Community

Where the ideas of inclusion and access are arguments for the construction of a public sphere that cuts across social lines of ethnicity, gender, religion, class and politics, the argument for both diversity and community is a set of ideas that promote the value of smaller, more familiar and more intensely-felt forms of community life. The value of mutuality – the belief that human existence exists in the social relations of communities – animates much of the argument and applies itself to issues of media and communication. The concepts of diversity and community, it should be noted, are not necessarily referring to the *concepts* of diversity and community as equivocal. However, the *argument* for the two concepts, as articulated by WACC, is the same.

It is perhaps surprising, then, that the argument begins not with a defence of mutual understanding but with an argument familiar to liberal doctrines: a defence of individual and group autonomy. Pradip Thomas (personal communication, November 4, 2004), director of WACC's Global Studies Programme, refers to this as the "let a thousand flowers bloom approach." The argument here is for a valuation of pluralism (Valle, 2002) that affirms not only the inherent dignity of other people and their beliefs but also recognizes the vital nourishment people gain from being in smaller, more locally situated forms of association. Where the argument for inclusion concerned itself with a 'general public,' the argument for both diversity and community are focused on what Nancy Fraser (1997) would call "subaltern counter-publics." Carlos Valle, former general secretariat of WACC, makes the point for pluralism in a quote taken from Ulrich Beck:

There is a cartoon of the Spanish conquistadors making their entrance into the New World, their arms shining. 'We have come,' we read in the speech bubble, 'to speak of God, of civilization and of truth.' And a group of perplexed natives replies, 'OK. What do you want to know?' (Beck, quoted in Valle, 2002, p. 25)

Valle is perhaps the most forceful exponent within WACC's organization of the need not only for religious tolerance but respect and admiration for religious diversity. "The concept of a world divided between Christians and the rest," he writes, "reiterates an old way of thinking in which people defined themselves for the themselves. All virtues were their own, while all ills originated in others" (Valle, 2002, p. 14).

Both Valle and Thomas go beyond the affirmation of dignity in others and their right to autonomy and it is here that the value of mutuality can begin to be viewed. The 'let a thousand flowers bloom' approach helps to create smaller communities where people learn to be part of a history and a culture. There are limits, however, on the extent

of this diversity. Several members of WACC mentioned the use of radio in promoting genocide in Rwanda (Thomas, personal communication, November 4, 2004; Turley, personal communication, October 13, 2004; Hamelink, personal communication, December 14, 2004; Naylor, October 19, 2004). The limit applied here is the same limit that will be applied to the argument for democracy in the next section: diversity can be accommodated in all forms with, to quote Philip Lee (2004), “the sole proviso that no one suffers as a result” (p. 7). Suffering here is undefined but Lee (personal communication, October 18, 2004), in an interview makes clearer that he is discussing suffering as the existence, or threat of the imminent existence, of physical pain.

The argument for diversity and community is distinctly different in form from the argument for inclusion and access. Where the inclusion argument is seen as a matter of political arrangement, the diversity and community arguments are seen as a set of learned social attitudes.¹⁰ It does not make the assumption that democratic and tolerant attitudes will necessarily follow easily from the proper political arrangements. Hamelink (personal communication, December 14, 2004) is explicit:

Even if you create the right structures, there’s no guarantee that people will behave in accordance with those structures. You can create a political structure that would provide the basic conditions for people to be listened to but you also need, on top of that, to create the democratic attitude where people will take it seriously. Because in the end – and here you have another basic point of debate – some people would identify democracy with certain institutions and say once you create the institutions, like free media and independent judiciaries, then you have democracy. I would argue not, that the core of democracy is the notion of citizenship, which is more a mentality, which needs to be learned.

¹⁰ One interesting difficulty is the idea of minority language rights, which would logically seem to be part of a diversity/community argument. These sorts of rights require both attitudes and arrangements. In this regard, it seems to me that WACC struggles through many of the same difficulties as liberal theory concerning issues with regards to how these sorts of special cases should be dealt with. The argument for reconciliation, to be discussed later, tries, in some sense, to work these issues out.

The idea of learning is central to the argument for diversity and community; it is a bedrock principle that follows from the attempt to turn mutuality – an ethic first used for interpersonal communication – into a social norm. Education and mutuality are linked in the sense that they are a part of a new set of rights that cannot easily be distributed through political systems.¹¹ Jan Servaes (2004), in a chapter contribution to a WACC publication, *Many Voices, One Vision: The right to communicate in practice* (pp. 149-162), argues that these rights are part of a “third generation” of human rights: the first generation being freedom rights spawned by the American and French revolutions, the second being material rights spawned by the socialist revolutions at the turn of the 20th century, and the third being cultural rights spawned by the anti-colonialist movements following the Second World War (p. 150).

What is different about this third generation of rights is that they are dialectical and cannot simply be implemented by way of force or political mandate. Philip Lee (personal communication, October 18, 2004), Assistant Director of the Global Studies Programme, discusses the link between education and mutuality:

It does seem to me that in many places, the idea of mutuality – of the Other – needs to be explored at very basic levels in education, and then throughout one’s learning curve, if you like. For example, it’s not a textbook thing. It’s certainly not something where you say, ‘Well, there are Muslims and here’s a book that will tell you about Muslims. This is what they believe, this is where they live, this is what they eat.’ No, it’s not that, it’s setting down a kind of communication paradigm where people talk face to face, or converse and dialogue with each other, about common issues. So if it sounds too crude and too basic in a sense, if it is at the level of sitting down and saying, ‘Look, you know, we are Muslims, we are Christians.’ Whatever you want to say, we don’t care what the grouping is. And this is the issue that is affecting both of us: how do we discuss it? How do we resolve it? The idea of doing that about any subject

¹¹ I am speaking here of the substantive activity of education, not systems of public education.

– whether it’s capital punishment, abortion, bombing Iraq, whatever – can be done in, I think, in school situations and then go upwards.

Lee’s explanation of the link highlights the spirit of argument for the sake of learning, for reconstructing beliefs. The criticism of contemporary media is that they do not promote the spirit of mutuality or argument for the sake of community because the logic of profit does not aim at social gain but economic gain. Communication is seen under this paradigm not to be a substantive activity but an instrument to be used to exert a form of power (Lee, personal communication, October 18, 2004).

The criticism, however, does not focus entirely on profit motives but on the relation between such a motive and the influence it wields on other spheres. Hamelink (personal communication, December 14, 2004) points to the case of Iraqi media, which have been systematically privatized in the months after the US-led war, saying that the negation of the existence of so many different ethnic groups’ need for community media is a negation of their need for community.

The argument for diversity and community is an argument that seeks to affirm WACC’s (1997) ideal that “communication creates community.” The thrust and form of the argument are different from the argument for inclusion and access. Where the latter looks at arrangements in the hopes that extraordinary change will occur, the former looks at attitudes and asks whether it might also be useful to see what sort of extraordinary changes will occur when humans are allowed to live peacefully with one another, simply as humans.

The Argument for Democracy

The argument for democracy is, in many ways, the combination of the two previous arguments; both the value of equality and mutuality are present in the discussion. But the democratic argument is not, at least not neatly, the summation of the arguments for inclusion and the arguments for diversity. It incorporates principles from both, while leaving out others, in an attempt to draw a clearer picture of the relation between the media and the public.

The argument for diversity and community began with a defence of autonomy, a position not unfamiliar to liberal doctrines. The present argument concerning democracy begins differently: it accepts the ideal of diversity and the necessity of community but argues against the principle of group autonomy in favour of the principle of democratic community. The principle of autonomy, the argument posits, does not ensure anything other than the existence of a particular community as it already is. If change is wanted, the first principle must be that the community is democratic (Hamelink, 1995).¹²

What is the nature of a democratic community? Cees Hamelink explores this question at length in his essays for WACC publications as well as in an interview; I will draw largely, though not exclusively, on his argument.

Hamelink (1995) begins by arguing against a distinction between the “democratic organization of public communication” and “the contribution of public communication to the democratic organization of society” (p. 15):

¹² It is important to note that I am addressing group, not individual, autonomy. David Held (1995) has suggested individual autonomy as the most fundamental and widely shared democratic principle. My own argument does not rely on this formulation, for several reasons: first, concepts of media and democracy require social concerns, not just ideas of individual autonomy. Second, the concept of individual autonomy is too flaccid to be useful here: anarchist theorists suggest individual autonomy as fundamental, as well. We require something more specific and inherent to the process of democratic decision-making.

A functioning democracy is in fact a communication process of a special quality. Its basic feature is interactivity. If the process of public communication in a society is monological, it obstructs the intersubjective discourse without which democracy cannot function. Consequently, we have to reflect on what a democratic arrangement of world communication would look like, since only such an arrangement could contribute to the democratization of world society (p. 16).

Hamelink (1995; personal communication, December 14, 2004) argues that two principles – political equality and public accountability – serve as the basis for the democratic argument. At its root, the idea of political equality is a negative argument. Hamelink quotes political theorist Carole Pateman, who argues for a community where “each individual member of a decision making body has equal power to define the outcome of decisions” (as cited in Hamelink, 1995, p. 19).

The moral motivation here is not governed by a vision of what such a community will entail, but rather, by a vision of what it will *not* entail. Unequal power is the target at which political equality takes aim; we have no democratic equality if my ability to say ‘no’ to something is overridden by someone else’s ability to say ‘yes’ to the same things simply because he or she has accrued more wealth, more fame or more prestige: in short, more power. It is similar to the argument for inclusion and access in that it claims that inequality is not a reflection of some innate differences between human persons. Where the inclusion and access argument, however, focuses primarily on the necessary political arrangements required, the democratic argument focuses on the democratic process (and what Hamelink (personal communication, December 14, 2004) calls the “democratic attitude” that goes along with it). The difference between the two is important: political arrangements focus, among other things, on the allocation of resources and legislation of social norms; the democratic process, or attitude, is concerned with the substantive

activity of civic deliberation as an important realm in its own right (and not just as a means to arrive at other ends, like political arrangements).

Hamelink (personal communication, December 14, 2004) says that political equality is often seen through an institutional lens: the logic of one person, one vote. This, however, is insufficient. He argues for a political equality that can extend beyond politics into other social domains. “Participatory democracy should therefore apply to policy-making in the sphere of the production, development, and dissemination of information, culture and technology” (Hamelink, 1995, p. 19).

The vision here is of citizens as creators of cultural goods; the value of mutuality – in citizen deliberation, in citizen creativity – is at work throughout the argument. Hamelink recognizes the impossibility of direct participation in all activity, though, and introduces the principle of public accountability to complete the argument for democracy. With the accountability principle, we return again to the argument for inclusion and access. That argument, avowed that a merger of power relations across spheres is always dangerous. The accountability argument is similar but addresses a different question. The idea here is not whether political and economic powers have merged (as they do in instances of media concentration) but whether the power exercised is a public or private power. What it says is that when a decision must be made that affects the general welfare of all, everyone involved ought to be allowed to contribute to the decision-making process (though the mechanisms for decision-making, full of questions concerning representation, are not generally discussed).

The basis of the media reform argument for public accountability is that media are public goods because, as Hamelink (1995) notes at the beginning of his essay, the

democratic organization of public communication is interlinked with the contribution of public communication to the democratic organization of a society. They are public precisely because they affect the general welfare of the society. We should note that the argument is directed at *mass media* much more so than alternative media, principally because the former – mass media – exercise such a large influence over the general population. Hamelink (1995) explains in more detail:

Decision-making that affects the daily lives of people around the world takes place on matters like the quality of information, the diversity of cultural products, or the security of communications. The decision-makers are increasingly private parties which are neither elected nor held accountable. As a matter of fact the worldwide drive towards de-regulation of social domains tends to delegate important areas of social life to private rather than public control and accountability (p. 23).

Carlos Valle (2002) makes a comparable claim in his book, *Communication and Mission*, from which I quoted in a more abridged form earlier:

It is not enough to maintain the importance of living in a democracy so that everyone has the right to say what he or she feels or wishes. In a small town, every word finds its echo in the community. The growth of cities has made that echo disappear and has turned it into an illusion. The street cry resounds nostalgically (p. 122).

We see, in the two above quotations, a comparable argument for the public accountability of public goods. Since a city cannot operate entirely on the basis of direct participation by the entire citizenry, it must operate upon the principle of public accountability. The nostalgic cry is not only the cry for meaningful community life, it is an argument for the extension of that meaning into mediated community life; that is, life as we see it through the media. This is the extension of the principle of truth telling as discussed in the first chapter.

What, though, are the normative bases for the democratic argument for media reform? Using Hamelink's arguments, I have demonstrated that the ideals of political equality and public accountability combine the values of equality and mutuality. For Hamelink, though, the values do not answer the question: why democracy? Why is it necessary to insist not only upon a democratic political process but a larger, more pervasive, democratic culture?

The justification for Hamelink (1995; personal communication, December 14, 2004) is that political equality and public accountability – the characteristic traits of the democratic culture he describes – are more effective in securing and defending human rights than non-democratic and non-egalitarian arrangements.

At the core of the defence of human rights is a speech situation with specific requirements: the defence of human rights implies that all people can speak up in defence of their own rights or in defence of the rights of others, that reports about rights violations and their perpetrators are not silenced, and that there is public debate about human rights. This demands the absence of all forms of censorship: one of the gravest obstacles for the defence of human rights (1995, p. 29).

Democracy, he insists, is the only political arrangement that is capable of producing the 'speech situation' necessary for the defence of human rights (p. 31). Whether Hamelink is correct in this assertion, it seems impossible to know with any certainty.

The criticism of contemporary media structures and practices is that they are run, in some sense, as private governments with no accountability. "The global reach of these forces is not matched by their acceptance of global responsibility" (Hamelink, 1995, p. 31). It is not solely the lack of accountability, though, that spawns criticism. Hamelink is not alone amongst WACC members and contributors (White, personal communication,

October 30, 2004; Thomas, personal communication, November 4, 2004; Lee, 1995, personal communication, October 18, 2004; Naylor, personal communication, October 19, 2004) in criticizing these ‘private governments’¹³ as exacerbating social inequality, promoting a worldview of social Darwinism and privatization. Those who support this are what Hamelink refers to as the “enemies of the democratic ideal” (p. 33).

The Argument for Reconciliation

The argument for reconciliation is perhaps the most difficult of the four arguments for media reform to understand. Where the first three have criteria and general structures that can be examined, the reconciliation argument is more difficult to locate because it is both an arrangement and an attitude, both mutuality and equality are involved. Reconciliation is an argument that arises from concrete historical situations, particularly situations of post-conflict (*Media Development* has dealt with issues concerning post-conflict societies on several occasions). Where the three preceding ones are certainly affected by historical events, they begin as philosophical concepts. Reconciliation, on the other hand, arises from a specific historical need.

While the structure of the reconciliation may not be as straightforward as the structure of the previous arguments (limits are more difficult to find here, principles are more difficult to articulate), there is an idea underlying it. Stated plainly, the argument for reconciliation is concerned with the quality of actors and actions involved in a given situation and seeks to assess – on a case by case basis – which actors should be empowered by changes in media policy and practice. WACC contributor Genevieve

¹³ Philip Lee was the first to use the term ‘private governments’ in the interviews I conducted (personal communication, October 18, 2004).

Jacques (Media Development, 4/2000, p. 29) provides a definition: “Working for reconciliation means striving for radical transformation which will allow broken communities and divided nations to re-learn how to live together in peace and mutual trust.” In terms of media practice, the argument suggests a shift from objectivity as a primary value for journalists to case-by-case assessments by journalists and news workers about the values and merits of each particular story.

Randy Naylor (personal communication, October 19, 2004), president of WACC, discusses this idea with regards to practices of news production. He says that “content neutrality” is a rejected value for WACC; in their work, they are interested in taking sides based upon the situation (the principles influencing which side WACC ends up on can be derived in part from the three preceding moral arguments). However, taking sides, according to Naylor, does not mean driving conflicting parties further away from one another.

The argument for reconciliation is both a practical argument and a normative one. To understand why this is so, I will try to trace out its origins here, as well as demonstrate its different uses.

The morality of the reconciliation argument can be traced to what Pradip Thomas (personal communication, November 4, 2004) refers to as the “Christian calling to discipleship.” Unlike the three previous arguments, the argument starts with the world as it is, not as one would like it to be. It begins with the recognition of the need for Christians to respond to the inequalities and injustices of the contemporary world. Again, the basis of the argument is historical in its roots, not philosophical:

In the past 40-50 years the church has taken a confessional [stance] on a number of issues related to injustice: for example in relation to militarization and the debt crisis and biodiversity and racism and so on and so forth. Similarly, I think there is a need for an ecumenical covenant on global communications. It really is, I think the most important source of power in our world today (Thomas, personal communication, November 4, 2004).

Recognition is the key factor here and it relates importantly to the subject of media reform. Surrounding all the forms the reconciliation argument takes is the idea that recognition is a necessary first step. In Thomas' above case, the argument is that Christian communicators need to recognize, and be willing to re-evaluate, the role of global communications in relation to global inequality and injustice. It can also be seen in the Manila Declaration, signed at a WACC Congress in Manila in 1989.

Communication workers live with the responsibility to meet high professional standards. Such standards, however, need constant examination. Established professional rules for the mass media may serve to legitimize the maintenance of unjust power structures. This Congress regrets the preoccupation of many journalists with the politically and economically mighty while neglecting the efforts of people's movements for freedom and justice (WACC, 1997, p. 12)

Reconciliation, then, is an argument for recognizing and finding a way to offset what the problem at hand may be.¹⁴ Chris Arthur (Media Development, 4/2000), a WACC contributor, suggests that a "rule of media literacy should be that we compare the pictures offered by small-scale, personal communication (letters, postcards, conversations) with those that emerge from large-scale, impersonal corporations (television, radio, newspapers). Balancing immediate coverage of acts of violence with a close listening to their continuing consequences...might also be recommended" (pp. 4-5).

¹⁴ Genevieve Jacques (Media Development, 4/2000, p. 30) suggests that forgiveness and repentance are key requirements for reconciliation.

Thus far, the reconciliation argument has been presented largely as one dealing with attitudes. Its articulation is not, however, found only in dealing with the moral valuation of reconciling differences; it is also an argument that begs the question of what to do about such conflicts and differences. It is here that the WACC shifts from discussing reconciliation as a Christian concern to reconciliation as a broader, secular issue.

Hamelink (1995) is the strongest articulator of this position. He does not use the phrase 'reconciliation,' preferring the term 'remedial action.' Regardless, the two make the same argument (the same principle applies to what socialists call redistributive justice). Note that in discussing implementation, he makes direct reference to the three preceding arguments: inclusion, diversity/community and democracy:

It is a crucial consideration for the implementation of rights to equal entitlement, participation and accountability that there can be no rights without the option of redress in case of their violation...The old adagium of Roman law states...where there is law there is remedy...People should be able to seek effective remedy when states or private parties obstruct their democratic rights (p. 24).

Hamelink goes on to argue that remedial action must be seen as a requisite for media and communication issues and that proper institutions – he suggests the European Commission of Human Rights as an example – must be set up and made binding. While the actual implementation of such an institution is not explained in-depth, the argument for it is based entirely on the idea of reconciliation. The importance of this is that it introduces reconciliation as a concept for non-post conflict societies. When we consider the issue of minority language rights, which did not fit easily into the diversity and community argument, we can see that the reconciliation argument tries to work in a way

to reconcile the need to ‘remedial action’ against past injustice, which may require political arrangements of one sort or another, while also emphasizing that for a true reconciliation to occur, something more than just a political arrangement must be reached.

Reconciliation is, in some sense, the final argument for media reform: it stresses the particularity of each individual case. Perhaps more importantly, though, it suggests the implausibility of reconciliation’s completion in total. The Christian Principles of Communication (WACC, 1997) suggest that while individual situations can be corrected, that correction itself can never be perfected, that the struggle for a just world is a perpetual one that requires not only just reconciliation but inclusion, diversity, community and democracy as well.

The Aims of the Arguments

In the above sections, I have described and explained the four primary arguments for media reform. Now I want to shift from a discussion of what the arguments *are* to a discussion of who and what the arguments are aimed at. This means that it is necessary to look at what nature the media reform argument takes. The question I am posing here is: what sort of project is media reform for WACC? In what direction do their moral arguments point? Is it a political-economic argument – one that seeks institutional change – or is it a broader cultural argument that extends beyond institutions?

It was only through the course of interviews with WACC members and contributors that I became aware of the importance of this question. Several members of the WACC suggested that their work was mostly a project in political economy – that is

to say a project in restructuring the political economic arrangements of existing mass media. Others, however, suggested that media reform was part of larger cultural project.

Robert A. White (personal communication, October 30, 2004) explained:

I would prefer to see conflict moved to the cultural level where the struggle is over the meanings and solutions to conflict which are more culturally inclusive. My feeling is that political economy solutions, if they are not open to the kind of cultural debate that Stuart Hall and others have emphasized, tend to turn into extremely exclusive cultural definitions. I think that the 20th century communist conceptions of reform got caught in that trap.

I want to suggest that the moral arguments for media reform are aimed in both ways: political-economic and cultural. The aim of the arguments, I believe, is dual. This duality is, however, by no means clearly articulated in WACC literature; in fact, its lack of articulation results in a general sense of ambiguity surrounding the work of WACC. The moral arguments they develop are well explained and explored but what remains largely unexplored is whom the arguments are intended for.¹⁵

This ambiguity can be at least partially clarified through the lens of social theory. To get a sense of this dualism between political-economic and broader cultural contexts, I draw upon the work of German social theorist Jürgen Habermas, as well as a re-interpretation of key elements of Habermas's theory by Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato. Not all the ambiguity, however, can be removed; I will try to indicate why this is so.

In his *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, Habermas (1987, chap. 6) presents a dualist model of society as system and lifeworld. The systems side of the model refers

¹⁵ Why the ambiguity exists is not entirely clear, either. I suggest two reasons: first, WACC, being an ecumenical organization, articulates many positions, some which might be thought to lead to radical political conclusions. Their conclusions are not always supported by the churches funding them, though, which may temper some of the claims. Second, there seems to be disagreement amongst members as to how best to enact social change, some suggest cultural means, while others focus on political-economic understandings.

to the bureaucratic state and the economy, while the lifeworld contains both the public sphere and the private (e.g. family) sphere. The process of modernization contributes to the paradoxical formulation of the public sphere as differentiated from the state (meaning that social activity is allowed to take place outside of system activities due to the development of institutions for a public sphere), while also going through a process of a ‘deformation’ of the *principle* of free public communication (Habermas, 1987; Cohen & Arato, 1992).

The development of the public sphere, pertaining to mass communication, is institutionally differentiated from the system by the establishment of basic rights (e.g. freedoms of expression, speech, assembly, religion, etc.)(Cohen & Arato, 1992). However, the same differentiated public sphere is colonized and ‘deformed,’ according to Habermas (1989) by the system. How is this so? Rather than be approached as citizens with the capacity for rational deliberation, individuals are increasingly approached as consumers (Cohen & Arato, 1992).

The task of media reform, then, is to reconstruct this public sphere, to de-colonize it from both the economic and bureaucratic forces that currently preclude the possibility of deliberation (Habermas, 1989a). In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas uses the example of elections and the use of political propaganda by parties to present voters not with specific policies but, rather, issues of “symbolic identification” (pp. 218-219).

It is not in any way clear, though, *how* the public sphere is intended to be re-built. Habermas, for his own part, suggested in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* that it was possible to construct a public sphere that did not differentiate between

state and civil society. This suggests the political and economic nature of the struggle to de-colonize the lifeworld. Based on the ambiguity surrounding such a project among WACC respondents, we do not appear to be any further away from the ambiguity with which we started.

Habermas provides an additional theoretical development that proves useful, when considered alongside the system-lifeworld model, which is the moral theory of discourse ethics. This theory has two aims: to define the conditions necessary for coming to rational agreement as well as the possible contents of such an agreement (Cohen & Arato, 1992). In this theory, Habermas develops the notion of an ideal speech situation, which refers to the “rules that participants would have to follow if they were to strive for an agreement motivated by the force of the better argument alone” (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. 348). The rules here are quite similar to the rules governing the values of equality and mutuality developed by WACC that lead to the right to communicate:

What is to be understood as rationally motivated agreement...has rather demanding pre-conditions. In order that all those affected have an ‘effective equality of chances to assume dialogical roles,’ there must be a mutual and reciprocal recognition, without constraint, of each by all as autonomous, rational subjects whose claims will be acknowledged if supported by valid arguments. But, in order that the dialogue be capable of producing valid results, it must be a fully public communicative process unconstrained by political or economic force (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. 348).¹⁶

When we view discourse ethics along with the system-lifeworld model, the argument concerning the public sphere and its relation to media reform comes into better view. The argument for inclusion and access suggests the criticism of the increased role

¹⁶ Habermas understands that these difficult pre-conditions are rarely met: thus, he distinguishes between “rational” and “empirical” consensus, the former meaning the preconditions have been met, the latter meaning that they have not (Cohen and Arato, 1992, p. 349).

of the economy in the public sphere, which has led to a deformation of the democratic culture. The criticism, in its most basic sense, is of the market; however, the aim of the argument in this instance is the state, which is being called on to regulate the role of the economy in the public sphere. It is important to note, though, that the call for the state to regulate the market is *not* a call for the de-differentiation between state and civil society. The aim is for the state to pull back the colonizing forces of the market so that the public sphere can become social again.

But WACC's argument makes no assumption that such a state action would lead immediately to a better, more vibrant public sphere. Here we see the use of discourse ethics, to address both the conditions and contents of public discussion in the public sphere. When seen from the vantage point of discourse ethics, the reconstruction of the public sphere is also dependent on the substantive activity that goes on in the public sphere and not just on ridding it of the colonizing forces of the system. This suggests that WACC's aims are two-fold. On the one hand, the arguments for inclusion and access (as well as the arguments for democracy and for reconciliation) are directed at the system while the arguments for diversity and community (as well as the arguments for democracy and for reconciliation) are intended to democratize the activities that go on in the lifeworld itself. Cohen & Arato (1992) refer to these as defensive and offensive strategies: the former being concerned with the protection and development of the lifeworld and the latter being concerned with social change in the system (pp. 530-532).

Several WACC members (Lee, personal communication, October 18, 2004; Turley, personal communication, October 13, 2004; Naylor, personal communication, October 19, 2004) made a different, though tangential, distinction. Rather than referring

to media reform as solely a political economic struggle or solely a cultural one over meaning, they suggested that media reform – defined as the attempt to influence policy making by states and international bodies with regards to media and communication, as well creating lasting institutional change in the rules and regulations shaping media systems – is a smaller branch of the larger struggle for the realization of communication rights.

What makes WACC fairly unique among NGOs (and very unique among NGOs working on issues of media and communication) is that they bridge two fairly distinct camps: church groups and secular NGO groups focused more specifically on issues concerning communication (Naylor, personal communication, October 19, 2004). But this also can create difficulties with regards to both their organizational work and their arguments, which lead to an ambiguity that cannot be resolved – only highlighted – by Habermas' work. According to Habermas, a fully developed public sphere would, at least normatively, be capable of discussing matters pertaining to the private realm of the lifeworld, thus allowing for critical self-reflexivity on historical and cultural norms (Cohen & Arato, 1992). But there is a lack of discussion about the relation between private morality and the public sphere. Why this is so is not entirely clear, as it does not appear that they lack a Habermasian discourse ethics. It might not be unreasonable to suggest that because WACC works with both religious and secular groups, that developing arguments concerning private morality might alienate crucial partners.

I have argued that the aims of the WACC's four moral arguments are dualistic: they seek to expand and develop the democratic culture of the public sphere while also working to pose offensive challenges against system forces of state and economy. The

ambiguity surrounding the question of whether media reform is a political-economic struggle or a broader culture one recedes slightly, as it can be acknowledged that media reform is the political branch (and the offensive strategy) of a broader cultural movement for communication rights (Lee, personal communication, October 13, 2004). One major ambiguity remains, however, and that is the relationship between public sphere and discussions of private lifeworld concerns. The importance here is not that we are concerned with the actions involved in the private sphere itself, but, rather, with the public discussions concerning rules affecting private conduct. I am referring then, to the discourse surrounding issues like gay marriage and reproductive rights, and not with the actions themselves. The view of the public sphere that WACC provides is insufficiently developed, as it does not confront these, obviously important, issues.

CHAPTER THREE: THE MORAL ARGUMENTS OF PUBLIC JOURNALISM AND RADICAL DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURAL MEDIA REFORM

Introduction

Public journalism and radical democratic media reform have, over the past fifteen years, been two of the most powerful movements for progressive media reform inside the United States. While both, in a general sense, profess a vaguely similar goal – the improvement of civic life through a more democratic media – the principal exponents of each side appear unwilling to grant that the other viewpoint may offer an intelligent set of ideas that, while not entirely compatible, might have points of overlap. Indeed, it sometimes appears as though each side is more interested in ignoring, or worse, distorting, one another’s claims rather than supplementing them. Radical democratic structural media reform advocate Robert McChesney (1999) charges that public journalism works “toward the sort of boringly ‘balanced’ and antiseptic newsfare that could put the entire nation into a deep slumber” (p. 301). Conversely, Jay Rosen (1999), one of the founders of public journalism, writes “the notion that corporations themselves had cultures, some portion of which might be ‘public’ ...would [strike] most of my academic colleagues as spectacularly naïve. The corporation was evil, or, if this was too strong, it was plainly one-dimensional: a profit machine that would tolerate within its borders only those activities that extended its reach or enriched its shareholders” (pp. 25-26).

While the two movements share the same ostensible goal, it should be apparent from the above quotations that they approach the goal with very different perspectives. We might assume, then, that not only are their political analyses different but their moral arguments are as well. My aim in this chapter is to find out to what extent this is so: Are the moral arguments put forth by public journalism radically different than those put forth by those involved in radical democratic structural media reform?

I will begin by assessing the moral claims of public journalism by looking primarily at the writings of the movement's primary explicators, Jay Rosen and Davis "Buzz" Merritt. The movement rose (and has since receded) before radical democratic structural media reform began to take strong hold and some of the arguments expounded by the latter can be seen, in part, as responses to the failing of the former. After presenting public journalism and its arguments, I will present the moral arguments of the radical democratic side through a reading of one of its best-known exponents, Robert McChesney. At the close of the chapter, I will attempt to highlight the differences and similarities between the arguments, so that we may be in position in the subsequent chapter to see where the philosophy and arguments of the WACC can be located in relation, and whether they might be able to reconcile some of the differences between the two.

Public Journalism

The origins of public journalism can be traced back to 1989, though its trajectory advanced most rapidly in 1993 when Jay Rosen, professor of journalism at New York University, became director of the Knight Foundation-sponsored Project on Public Life and the Press, and Buzz Merritt, then editor of the Wichita Eagle, joined him as an

“unofficial advisor” (Rosen, 1999, p. 73). Begun through a consortium of concerned newspaper editors and journalists, as well as interested academics and a few sponsoring foundations (Pew Charitable Trust, Knight, American Press Institute, Poynter Institute), public journalism grew quickly as a small movement with a large, general aim: “to restyle the work of the press so that it supported a healthier public climate” (Rosen, 1999, p. 4)

Inside this expressed general aim were two claims that helped shape the perspective of public journalism as a movement. The first claim was that public life in the United States was in disarray due to widespread cynicism and apathy surrounding the political process and that public life could be renewed along civic lines by becoming more meaningful, by creating more avenues for participation and debate on issues of public concern. The second claim of public journalism was that journalism had also lost much of its authority in the eyes of the public and that it could – and should – work to bring public life back, while in the meantime regaining some of its lost legitimacy (Rosen, 1999).

The two claims, as James Compton has demonstrated nicely, are “locked in a symbiotic relationship” (Compton, 1996, p. 5), meaning that the idea of an active public and a healthy state of journalism are intertwined; the vitality and success of one depends upon the vitality and success of the other. As such, public journalism argued for a reworking and rethinking of the craft of journalism. The criticisms made and the solutions offered by Rosen and Merritt reflect this symbiosis.

In highlighting the moral claims involved in the arguments for public journalism, I want to argue that the strength of those claims rests upon Rosen and Merritt’s

impressive capacity to re-imagine the everyday craft of journalism and its relationship to the public. Its source of strength, though, is also its primary source of failure. Rosen and Merritt focus too narrowly on the substantive aspects of a reconstructed public sphere while ignoring the structural implications of contemporary media (both state and economic forces: what Habermas calls ‘the system’). However, I want to show that this is *not* necessarily because of a conceptual failure on the part of Rosen and Merritt but, rather, due to an unwillingness or inability (I do not speculate on which) to extend the moral principles they formulate beyond the everyday workings of the public sphere and journalism into the larger realm of the state and the economy.

The Moral Argument for Deliberative Democracy

The argument for deliberative democracy, as formulated by Rosen and Merritt, runs on similar lines to Cees Hamelinks’s ideas of political equality and accountability, though the terminology is different. The public journalism argument subsumes several WACC arguments into one: the argument for inclusion, the argument for community and the argument for democracy. The democratic argument is, in some sense, the overarching master argument upon which public journalism is based. The difference between the WACC’s and public journalism’s arguments exist in part because the argument of the WACC addresses human rights as its foundation, while public journalism addresses fraying communities and civic life, with a focus on the role of journalism in such deteriorations. The operative principle – that what affects all should be decided by all – is the same. To get at the arguments of public journalism, it is necessary to begin with its criticisms and work towards its positive and normative formulations of what the role of the press should be in relation to the public.

The first argument that public journalism provides for democracy is for a re-conceptualization of the relationship between journalists and the public. The contemporary relationship, according to Rosen, between the two is one of “information provider” and “information consumer” (as cited in Compton, 1996). Under this scheme, the job of journalists is simply to provide accurate and fair information; upon providing information, their task is assumed to be finished. What the public does with the information when it comes into their hands is not of primary importance to the journalist. Rosen (1994a) argues instead for a “civic partnership” to emerge between journalists and the public, where the former acknowledges the importance of his or her role in the democratic process.

The concept of civic partnership requires journalists to re-think, among other things, the ethos of objectivity in their craft. Rosen argues that journalists too often use objectivity –the idea of disinterested detachment – as a shield to protect themselves from criticism. If all sides are upset, the argument goes, then they must be doing their job well. In formulating an argument for a new set of values, he argues that journalists need to be more aware not just of the decisions they make but, also, *who* the actors are in the decision-making process:

If we describe it [news writing] simply as providing facts, we’re going to miss a lot of what the institution [of journalism] does...The political drama given to us by the press is dominated by professionals in politics, by insiders, by discussions of strategy and technique and manipulation. It is almost exclusively a story of conflict and controversy within the political class, and it is increasingly out of touch with the rest of the country and out of step with the problems we face as a democracy (as cited in Compton, 1996, p. 12).

Objectivity is not the only aspect of the craft that gets called into question: the practice of covering elections as horse-races (who is ahead and who is behind, who the major players are, what the locker room talk entails) is questioned, as is the “cult of toughness” whereby journalists act only as watchdogs against governments. The motivating principle behind these values, say Merritt and Rosen, is to create conflict and drama, something of interest to the information consumer which is inspired by an instrumental view of relations, but not something that is always particularly helpful for civic debate and dialogue.

The role of the press in the philosophy of public journalism, however, should be to help “make public life go well,” a line from political philosopher Michael Sandel that Rosen and Merritt often quote (Compton, 1996, p. 18). To do this, journalists need to foster public discussions on issues concerning citizens and communities, not just markets and consumers; this implies that better journalism will lead to better civic life: more open and reasonable debates, though there is no detailed discussion of equality offered by Rosen or Merritt.

We can better understand both the criticism of contemporary practice and the reformulation of journalism based on different normative principles by looking at two examples: one based on criticisms of news coverage and the other based on remarks Rosen himself gave at a forum with Gannett Company editors and reporters in 1995. What both stories demonstrate is the dialogical principle upon which the idea of public journalism is founded, as well as the recognition of the difficulty of dialogue in the actually existing world.

The first example is taken from an article written by Rosen in 1994 where he discusses, among other things, the notion of framing a story with regards to the first Iraq War. Rosen says that television network coverage sought commentary on the war from virtually all the same people – “retired military men and academic specialists who commanded technical expertise” (1994b, ¶ 44). The result of framing the story this way was to privilege the roles of technical and military experts.

Watching this pattern unfold on my television screen, I asked myself what other way of knowing about war ought to be visible on the public stage. And I tried to conduct a little experiment. I chose one alternative to the technical frame, and I tried to make the case, with every TV journalist who would hear me, for including this alternative in discussions of the war. The lens I chose was a moral lens. I knew there existed a lively discourse among historians, philosophers, theologians and clergy about the concept of a “just war.” There were interesting arguments on several sides about how to determine a just from an unjust action, and these arguments proceeded from different ethical and religious traditions. The concept of a just war had obvious applications to the Persian Gulf, and would make for a compelling dialogue--compelling especially to viewers at home who can relate more easily to a moral discussion than they can to a lecture on military hardware (Rosen, 1994b, ¶ 46-47).

Rosen admits to failing in his attempt to get networks to include this alternative frame in their coverage of the war. He remarked that the existing framing strategy was “too strong” and that the alternative strategy of discussing just and unjust war was “too novel” (Rosen, 1994b, ¶ 48). His remark at the end of this discussion, however, is surprising and reveals a critical flaw in the application of his concept of what public journalism is in relation to democratic principles. Rosen (1994b) closes by saying that it is the networks’ “right” to choose the frame they have chosen (though he does not disclose any reasoning as to why it is their right), and says simply that they “ought to realize what kind of choice it is” (¶ 48).

Contrast Rosen's criticism and surprisingly permissive tone towards the "rights" of the news company with his defence of the idea of public journalism in a pamphlet introduction co-authored with Merritt¹⁷:

Today, the only way for journalists to protect [the public] trust is to strengthen, through journalism, America's civic culture, by which we mean the forces that bind people to their communities, draw them into politics and public affairs, and cause them to see "the system" as theirs – public property rather than the playground of insiders or political professionals. At the level of national affairs and in the life of the local community, the press remains an influential force; and while it is not as powerful as some of its critics suggest, it retains a unique franchise. No other institution reaches as widely across the community in such a regular fashion, focusing daily attention on areas of common interest (Rosen & Merritt, quoted in Rosen, 1999, p. 74).

When Rosen and Merritt talk about seeing the "system" as "public property," they are making the same democratic argument made by the WACC, with the same basic maxim: what affects all should be decided by all. Why, then, is Rosen so willing to permit that the networks broadcasting instrumental frames during the Iraq War have a "right to choose" the frame as they wish? Surely the decision to use force, to make war on another country, is one of the most important collective moral and political decisions citizens make? Why should the strong frame (motivated by entertainment and money factors) be allowed to trump the argument for democratic deliberation? If Rosen is to argue against frames that privilege the political class, why is he willing to permit the economic class to reserve the right to decide how things get framed?

We can begin to see here the heart of a blindspot in public journalism's notion of democratic deliberation. If we are to recall Habermas' notion of the lifeworld, we can see that public journalism offers an impressive argument for the substantive activity of what

¹⁷ Whether this permissiveness is part of a strategy to stay on good terms with media owners, on whom much of public journalism depends, is unclear and beyond the scope of this chapter.

ought to go on within the public sphere of the lifeworld. Rosen and Merritt want a more vibrant public sphere, they even point to some of the essential conditions for making this happen (reconnecting with citizens, re-thinking the ethos of the journalist's craft, trying to think in different frames and narratives, seeing the public as a collection of citizens, not consumers) but they do not extend their argument to look at the structural factors affecting the activities of the public sphere.

Why is this so? A major reason, I want to suggest, is that Rosen (borrowing a distinction from Robert MacNeil of the MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour) differentiates between the media – “a rising industry” – and journalism – “a craft in trouble” (Rosen, 1999, p. 284). In making this distinction, he is able to focus more explicitly on the aspects of the craft and its relation to the public. What he is unable or unwilling to see is the forces of what Habermas calls the colonization of the lifeworld (e.g. the public sphere) by the forces of the system (state and economy). Conversely, what he is able to see is the scope for agency within the profession of journalism: public journalism can, in some sense, be understood as a movement that does not look at the colonization of the lifeworld because that sort of analysis does not focus on a journalist's agency for change. Whether the two analyses must necessarily be in opposition is a question I will ask in chapter four.

Critics of public journalism (McChesney, 1999; Compton, 1996) argue that its proponents are indifferent to structural factors influencing the news (like media concentration). The charge of indifference, though harsh, seems correct, though it might perhaps be more prudent to charge public journalism with failing to extend its moral principles for democracy in practice. The argument for deliberative democracy, governed

by a democratic principle of what affects all should be decided by all, should logically extend beyond the everyday practice of democratic decision making to the practice of deliberating and deciding on policies that affect the make-up of the lifeworld. If we are to argue for a democratic public sphere, we should argue that it is necessary to see political-economic factors as anti-democratic. Journalism may indeed, as Rosen and MacNeil contend, be different than the media, but they are subject to the same systemic forces.

We should not, though, be so quick to discredit public journalism because of its inability to extend its practice from its principles. Leaving aside this important flaw concerning structural influences (to which we will return), we can see that there are important dialogical principles being proposed in the model that resonate closely with the dialogical principles of WACC. The values of civic partnership and deliberation, the moral hope of helping to make public life “go well:” these are all ideas that can be linked to the value of mutuality. In fact, even though the starting point for public journalism’s argument for democracy is different (fraying communities rather than a defence of human rights), it begins with the same philosophical anthropology of human beings existing not in solitude but in social relations. Its work is focused primarily on the particular relationship between journalism and the public and it offers, perhaps more so than any other contemporary discourse on journalism and the public, a lengthy discussion on what sort of substantive activity should go on between the two.

The Moral Argument for Resolution

The argument for deliberative democracy, I suggested above, rests on a basic maxim that declares that what affects all should be decided by all. This is not the only democratic principle, but it is the idea most often used by Rosen and Merritt in talking

about public journalism. The failure of public journalism is to not extend the principle beyond the everyday activity of journalism and consider the structural forces shaping it. While the democratic argument subsumes several other moral arguments within it (most notably the arguments for community and deliberation, respectively), there is another argument that public journalism offers. I call this argument the argument for resolution.

The argument for resolution is comparable to the argument for democracy but focuses more specifically on the notions of public judgement and public opinion. Where the democratic argument looks more broadly at the role of the journalist and his/her relation to the public, as well as the conditions necessary for democratic agreement, the argument for resolution looks to go beyond the roles of the democratic argument, beyond simply making people aware of conflicts and into a realm where journalists can help to resolve conflicts.

James Compton (1996, chap. 3) has demonstrated the link between Rosen and Merritt's conception of public opinion with the work of Daniel Yankelovich, particularly his ideas concerning what he calls public judgment. Like Rosen and Merritt, Yankelovich takes aim at the "culture of technical culture" (his terminology for technical instrumental rationality) that governs modern society, saying that it does not provide citizens with a set of values that can guide them in making decisions concerning public life.

Arriving at public judgment, according to Yankelovich, involves three crucial steps. In the first, there is a raising of public consciousness on issues of public concern (a task that Rosen and Merritt quickly assign to journalists). In the second step, journalists, among other public figures, help the public to "work through" the problems involved with raised consciousness through deliberation and argument. Finally, in the third step,

the public achieves resolution on matters of public concern. “This involves,” writes Merritt, “the realization that the problem must in fact be resolved, then sorting out and compromising competing core values to arrive at democratic consensus” (as cited in Compton, 1996, p. 57).

The argument for resolution, like the argument for democracy, reconceives the role of the journalist as a participant, not just an observer, of public deliberation. But how can diverse societies hope to reach a point of resolution and democratic consensus? Merritt suggests in the above quotation that it is necessary to explore the core values contained in competing interests. He discusses the issue of crime, saying that some of the competing core values that need to be explored are “personal safety versus individual rights; the purpose of the penal system; punishment versus rehabilitation” (as cited in Compton, 1996, p. 57). What is required, then, is for journalists to add “shades of grey to polarized issues that are sometimes portrayed in black and white terms” (Compton, 1996, p. 57).

For his part, Rosen adds four more ways for journalists to be more self-reflective and work towards resolution. First, they can be more aware of how they frame their stories. Second, they should make a forceful attempt to include the public. Third, they should be aware of how they position the public within a given story. Fourth, they should be cognizant of the master narratives they use in a particular story. Rosen argues for the public journalist to frame stories not through conflict but by using the “values of conversation, participation and deliberative dialogue” (as cited in Compton, 1996, p. 58).

The resonances are strong between this approach and Robert A. White’s idea of public cultural truth. Both seek to shift conflict from a political-economic realm into a

larger cultural realm. The approach is often criticized as being utopian and idealistic. The criticisms, like the earlier criticisms surrounding the argument for democracy, are accurate in that they expose a blindspot in the application of the concept of both democracy and resolution (e.g. failing to consider structural components). But we should not misinterpret Rosen and Merritt's fundamental argument with regards to resolution. They do not mean, as Rosen (1999) has tried to explain over and over again to critics, that all endeavours concerning public interest will always end in happy resolution. The argument for resolution is an argument for ways to reach a point of possible resolution *but* where that is not possible, to point to *where the differences between competing ideas are exposed*.

If we re-consider Rosen's argument surrounding the narrative frame of the first Iraq War, the argument for resolution comes into better view. In proposing that television networks shift away from the framing of the war as a technical-instrumental frame to one that looks at the theory of just war, Rosen is not claiming that everyone would come to an agreement that the war was wrong or right. What people would be able to see far better, though, is *why* (and for what reasons) people think a particular war is just or unjust. The theory of just war, unlike the approach of technical-instrumentalism, provides a vocabulary (what WACC would call a common moral vocabulary) in which citizens can debate the uses of force. The argument for resolution is not a belief in the ability of debate to eliminate disagreement and arrive at consensus, as some contend, but a way in which to make the different conclusions reached by different people to be mutually intelligible to one another. Resolution is not an attempt to get rid of the paradoxes that

riddle us, but, rather, an attempt to bring them to light so that we can see what our differences are.

I have been arguing in the past two sections that public journalism is a powerful moral argument that attempts to reconstruct and re-imagine a vibrant public sphere. In doing so, public journalists draw primarily on two arguments – the argument for deliberative democracy and the argument for resolution – that are based on dialogical principles similar to the ones we have seen in previous chapters with the WACC. The strength of the public journalist’s argument, though, is also its primary source of weakness. The power of a journalist’s agency stems in part from Rosen and Merritt’s fairly benevolent view of corporations and media owners. In Rosen’s (1999) book, *What are journalists for?*, he suggests – without explaining – that the model of the press based on private ownership trying to maximize profits while also helping to nurture democratic publics are not in any necessary tension. This view is challenged by radical democratic structural media reform, who argue that profit-maximization and democratic principles are in serious tension with one another and need to be analyzed closely. It is to this argument that I now turn.

Radical Democratic Structural Media Reform

There is no current movement that answers to the name radical democratic structural media reform. I use the term here to refer to the developed, and still developing, perspective of media scholar Robert McChesney with regards to media activism in the United States. The perspective he develops is an attempt to build what he and journalist John Nichols refer to, in an a 2002 article in *The Nation*, as simply “a media reform movement.” It will become clearer as I explain McChesney’s arguments

why I call it “radical democratic” but it should be made clear from the start that his work is an attempt to fuse disparate groups working independently of one another into a broader, more cohesive, movement.¹⁸

McChesney traces the origins of contemporary media activism in the United States to the mid-1980s, when progressive groups critiqued US reporting of events in Central America and began to recognize the role media played in harmonizing consent for government activities there. “The critique” he writes, “has gone well beyond complaints about shoddy journalism to broad expressions of concern about hypercommercial, corporate-directed culture and the corruptions of communications policy-making by special interest lobbies and pliable legislators” (McChesney & Nichols, 2002, ¶ 3). The formulators of the critiques, he writes, have been media watchdog groups like Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), the Institute for Public Accuracy and Media Alliance, as well as public broadcasting advocates like Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting and local media watch groups who fight to limit billboards in public spaces and commercialism in public school systems. In addition to these groups, McChesney & Nichols include independent and alternative media, like the Indy Media Centers, but limit alternative media’s potential in realizing a radical democratic goal: a media reform movement that is part of a broader movement to democratize the major institutions of the United States (McChesney, 1999).¹⁹

¹⁸ McChesney is clear about this in the same article, co-authored with Nichols, in *The Nation*. They write: “The problem is that the whole of the current media reform movement is significantly less than the sum of its parts.”

¹⁹ McChesney & Nichols (2002) write: “...there are inherent limits to what can be done with independent media, even with access to the Internet. Too often, the alternative media remain on the margins, seeming to confirm that the dominant structures are the natural domain of the massive media conglomerates that supposedly ‘give the people what they want.’”

In his latest book, McChesney (2004) argues that what he calls the citizens' "uprising of 2003" can be seen as a foundational success for a broad-based coalition whose goal is structural media reform. Reacting against the proposed US Federal Communications Commissions (FCC) rules to further de-regulate media ownership, the events of the 2003 campaign, argues McChesney, can be seen be as an important foundational success: "Regardless of the outcomes of the media ownership fight of 2003, the episode was a remarkable and unprecedented moment in U.S. media history. For the first time in generations, media policy issues were taken from behind closed doors and made the stuff of democratic discourse and political engagement" (p. 295).²⁰

In what follows, I want to look into the argument that McChesney develops and not at the particular groups he is trying to rally together. His approach is significantly different than the public journalism movement's approach in part because they address different constituencies but in larger part, I suggest, because McChesney develops a moral argument for democracy that is significantly more radical than the argument developed by Rosen and Merritt.

The Moral Argument for Political and Economic Democracy

The basis of McChesney's argument is that political and economic realms are both subject to the democratic principle. His principle is the same as Rosen's (and the same as the WACC): the things that affect all citizens should be decided by all citizens.

"The core principle," he writes, "is that the economy should be subservient to democracy,

²⁰ A January 2005 Associated Press article reported that the Bush Administration, wary of irking the public, would not seek to appeal a verdict by a US Appeals Court to overturn the FCC's ruling. ("Administration Won't Appeal Rejection of FCC's Weakened Ownership Rules" Associated Press, January, 27, 2005). This was followed only days later by another AP article reporting that a newspaper trade group would ask the Supreme Court to consider the verdict ("Media Ask that Ownership Rules be Restored" Associated Press, January 31, 2005).

to the will of the people” (McChesney, 1999, p. 283). What makes McChesney’s argument for democracy so radical, and so different from Rosen’s, is that he extends the political argument for democracy *into* the realm of the economy, arguing that the two are not as unrelated as people might initially think. “Because democracy works best with as much political equality as possible, it works best when there is as little social inequality as possible” (p. 283).

The democratic argument here takes on two necessary features, following from the general principle of popular choice. The first feature is the elimination, or at least significant curbing, of the social inequalities of the market, by understanding that the economic system of capitalism is not synonymous, but frequently in conflict, with the political system of democracy (McChesney, 1999, p. 285). The second feature pertains more to what Rosen discusses: the democratic spirit. But even here, their analyses differ, as McChesney takes a materialist approach:

Democracy also works best when there exists a democratic spirit, a notion that an individual’s welfare is directly and closely attached to the welfare of the community, however broadly the community may be defined. Capitalism, with its incessant pressure to think only of Number One regardless of the implications for the balance of the community, is hardly conducive to building a caring, democratic culture (McChesney, 1999, p. 285).

McChesney makes his argument in a way that has an intuitive appeal to democrats not initially won over by his radical interpretation of democracy’s meaning. He begins by discussing liberalism, as discussed previously in Chapter One, as a political theory. He recognizes that the existence of a liberal democratic state is an achievement (particularly when contrasted with the prior system of feudalism, because it protects individual rights), but he is unwilling to grant that it is fully democratic, in large part

because many of the individual rights it protects are related to a capitalist system of private property:

There is very much that is commendable in liberalism – and it is impossible to imagine a democratic society without core liberal freedoms – but the fact remains that it is different from democracy. When democracy is defined as liberalism, the notion of popular rule, rather than being the heart and soul of democracy, drifts over to the margins. In contemporary U.S. society, citizens have precious little control over public decisions (McChesney, 1999, p. 5).

What McChesney posits as his idea of a democratic argument is a system where an egalitarian political system is supplemented by an egalitarian economic system. The two are mutually reinforcing and co-dependent. He wants to convince people that large corporations should be run on democratic principles as well because they “affect all citizens.” But where do media fit in with regards to this analysis? McChesney (1999) responds that they can be located “smack dab in the middle” (p. 288). He argues that if democracy is going to be genuinely interested in letting all citizens have equal influence over political affairs, then it must allow all citizens to have access to “a wide-range of well-formulated political positions on the core issues of the day.... Unless communication and information are biased toward equality, they tend to enhance social inequality, whether the society happens to be democratic or otherwise” (p. 288).

Note the contrast in forms taken in the democracy argument here with the form Rosen takes. Not only does McChesney extend the principle of popular decision-making, he also introduces an element of power relations that, in the argument, take a negative form. “The measure of a media system in political terms is not whether it creates a viable democratic society...Instead, the measure is whether the media system, on balance...challenges antidemocratic pressures and tendencies or reinforces them”

(McChesney, 2004, p. 17). The key here is that democrats should begin negatively, by *reducing* imbalances in power relations and social inequalities. The democratic argument is at first an abolitionist argument, and only after that an argument about what comes next.

How the media system gets set up (or, rather, *should* get set up) in a democratic society is a subject McChesney deals with at considerable length (1999, 2004; McChesney & Nichols, 2002). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to assess these broader arguments; what is important to note here is the moral rejection McChesney makes regarding ownership. In refusing to accept the moral premise of a private ownership system of goods that should reasonably be considered public entities, he inserts the democratic principle into the realm of the market economy.²¹

The Myths of the Media

In his most recent book, McChesney addresses some of the criticisms and barriers to having his viewpoint accepted. He calls these the “eight myths” surrounding media and tries to address them in order to make the case for democratic media policy making more plausible. The eight myths are: (1) that media do not matter much; that they reflect, and do not actively shape, reality; (2) that the commercial media system is natural; (3) that debates concerning media policy in the United States have reflected the diversity of available opinions; (4) that commercial media provide the highest quality journalism available; (5) that the media have a left-wing bias; (6) that media “give people what they

²¹ This is also why McChesney views structural media reform as part of a larger movement to democratize goods and services – like health care, for instance.

want;” (7) that technologies determine the nature of the media; and (8) that no alternative choices to a commercial media system could improve matters (McChesney, 2004).

Not all of McChesney’s responses to the eight myths are moral arguments. The response to the first myth is empirical; he argues that media saturate our daily lives and demonstrates how they work to actively shape reality. Similarly, the fourth myth is addressed through a political argument as to why commercial media do not provide the highest quality journalism available. The fifth myth invites a similar political response, while the seventh myth draws on historical and sociological readings concerning the implementation of technologies to show the social causes of such implementation.

The remaining myths invite, in large part, moral responses. While they also require historical and sociological responses, they require a deep foundational belief in a certain sense of what democracy entails and, as such, take the form of moral arguments. I want to go over McChesney’s criticisms of these myths, as they strengthen our understanding of the radical democratic position with regards to structural media reform.

The myth that the commercial media system is “natural” is an attack on the democratic principle in the realm of the economy. What it posits, first and foremost, is that media ownership is a natural phenomenon that exists outside the realm of politics. McChesney’s primary aim in the first chapter of *The Problem of the Media*, then, is to show the deep connection between markets and politics. He shows historically that media concentration has become what it now is because of active, anti-democratic decision-making by the leaders of industry and politicians. What is important here is that McChesney (2004) discredits the “position that freedom of the press means strictly the right of private individuals to do as they please in the realm of the media” (p. 30).

Drawing on a decision written by former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, he makes the case that freedom of the press is social right because (quoting Brandeis) “public discussion is a political duty” (p. 31).

McChesney is arguing two things here: first, by drawing on historical examples, he is demonstrating that a free press is not “naturally” a privately held one. Second, and more importantly, he is denying the claim that a privately held press can be democratic.

The third myth – that debates on media policy have reflected the diversity of public opinion – follows a similar line of reasoning as the sixth – the myth that media give people what they want.²² What is interesting in these arguments, from a moral perspective, is that, unlike the overall argument for democracy, which seeks to constrain media, these arguments seek to set media content free from the “structural constraints” of contemporary media structures. Behind this argument lies an important moral vision of humans as creative beings. Concentration of media, McChesney (2004) argues, produces a concentration of wealth and can lead to outstanding productions but it also makes media produce “far less than it could or should” (p. 199).

Why is this the case? McChesney (2004) furnishes his moral vision of diversity and creativity with a materialist argument: markets are predicated on a system of “one dollar, one vote rather than one person, one vote” (pp. 199-200). He demonstrates his argument on the constraints of the market through a discussion of foreign film and classical music in the United States:

²² McChesney claims that media do *not* give people what they want, saying that they offer a limited range of choices. Whether or not the media *should* give the people what they want is a more difficult question, one that McChesney does not deal with directly. Rather, he tends to operate on the assumption that once the stated problems are taken care of, then media will work better.

In both cases, media giants would claim, accurately, that foreign language films and classical music evoke little demand...But the lack of exposure – the low supply – eliminates the basis for demand....This is no surprise because there is no incentive over the long term for commercial media to cultivate tastes or develop interests in new material. Having a commitment to generating new cultural genres and ideas may be good for society, it may be something people value, but it is bad business. People can't reasonably express their desire for an alternative in the marketplace if the choice does not exist... (pp. 201-202).

The moral arguments offered by radical democrats like McChesney return constantly to these themes of creativity, equality and the extension of democratic principles. The structures of the arguments are simple and the logic is straightforward.

It is important to note, however, the focus of the arguments. Where public journalism looks intently at the everyday activities of journalists, radical democrats take a structural perspective. The focus here is on the political arrangements necessary for a more democratic media system. (McChesney (2004) refers to media reform as a “political problem with a political solution,” by which he means that the problems can be fixed through democratic policy making (p. 18)). Whether or not this perspective can be said to be complementary or opposed to the perspective offered by public journalism is a question I address in the remainder of this chapter.

Comparing Public Journalism and Radical Democratic Structural Media Reform

When looking at the arguments of the two movements discussed here – public journalism and radical democratic structural media reform – it is easy to tell that they address different concerns. Habermas' conception of system and lifeworld are useful tools here in understanding the different concerns. Public journalism is a movement focused almost exclusively on what sort of activity should go on in the public sphere of

the lifeworld. State politics are seen as important, but not in a way that invites examination of the influence of the system's colonizing force on the lifeworld.

Conversely, radical democratic structural media reform looks directly at the colonizing forces of the system, particularly market forces and their relationship to antidemocratic tendencies.

In some sense, the movements focus on two distinctly different worlds; it is curious, then, that the moral argument each uses – democracy – takes the same starting point: the principle that what affects all citizens should be decided by all citizens. Public journalism does not offer a response to the radical democratic charge of extending the principle to the economy. Rosen's (1999) only remark is that these critics fail to see corporations as cultures, places that have logics all their own that can be understood and worked within. Public journalism demonstrates (or demonstrated) this effectively, for they were able to penetrate the world of the journalist much quicker and deeper than McChesney has been able to thus far. But we should not confuse the effectiveness of penetration with the argument itself. When Rosen refers to corporations as cultures, he is correct: there is much to be learned about corporate culture by studying it sociologically, and there is also scope for journalistic agency within media corporations (something McChesney seems unwilling to admit). Radical democrats do not make the assertion that media corporations are not cultures, they simply maintain their democratic principle. Rosen, on the contrary, abandons his. This abandonment is rejected as illogical and untenable by radical democrats; the cleavage and friction between the two movements is as much a moral one over extending the democratic principle into the economic realm as it is a political argument about actually creating a more democratic society.

CHAPTER FOUR: WACC IN RELATION TO PUBLIC JOURNALISM AND RADICAL DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURAL MEDIA REFORM

Introduction

Thus far, I have argued that WACC presents a moral philosophy different from both the classical and reform variants of liberalism by introducing the value of mutuality, which is based on a philosophical conception of human personhood that exists *in* social relations, along with the value of equality. These two values form the basis of a human right to communicate. I then looked at the four moral arguments that WACC most commonly provides for media reform. In the third chapter, I discussed and analyzed the moral arguments given by two U.S. based movements for media reform and suggested that the two disagreed on the extension of the principle of democracy. In this chapter, I want to build on the findings of these three previous chapters to try to answer the following questions: where can we place WACC in relation to these two movements? Can WACC work as a bridge between the two movements? Can a moral and political philosophy developed for historical use in the developing world be useful for a national media reform movement context in North America?

To do this, I want to look at three separate issues in this chapter. First, I will look at what WACC can provide, in terms of a moral argument, which is not often seen in contemporary American media reform discussions. Second, I will discuss what things WACC *cannot* provide, with reference to its moral arguments, for media reform in the United States. Third, I will try to situate WACC in relation to public journalism and

radical democratic structural media reform, suggesting points of abridgement between the two, while also highlighting some of the important differences and asymmetries between the three arguments for media reform.

What WACC Can Do

We can begin a discussion of what WACC might do for a national media reform movement by looking at the value of mutuality, a value that does not appear to hold a great deal of general acceptance in contemporary North America, particularly the United States. We are frequently told that American individualism, the private nature of American civic life and the long formulated anti-statist tendencies prevent, or seriously limit, the role of active and well-informed public discourse (Lipset, 1996; Walzer, 1990). I will begin by highlighting what these claims are and how they relate to the problem of media reform in the United States and will suggest two ways – one political and one more broadly social – that the moral value of mutuality and the arguments stemming from it may be useful for a national media reform movement.

The idea behind the claims of American individualism and the private nature of public discourse (what Alexis de Tocqueville famously called American Exceptionalism (Lipset, 1996)) is that American culture, for reasons both historical and social, tends to favour freedom of individual conscience over more socialized forms of unity. I am dealing here with a large, broad, and severely contentious topic, so I will try to steer away from any totalizing implications with regards to American history and society (as it not entirely true that America has always favoured an absolute freedom of conscience, nor that it has always opposed forms of social unity). What is important to note, though, is that its forms of social unity have, traditionally, been private in nature. Seymour Martin

Lipset (1996) convincingly argues that part of the reason for this is due to the peculiar development of religion in the United States: unlike most of other modern liberal democracies – Canada included – the U.S. had a strong sectarian religious tradition, though it never had a strong tradition dominated by a single church.

The importance of this is that there is an institutional preference given to private associations of groups, according to Lipset, and that there is a larger distrust of state action than in countries with established traditions of social democracy. Sociologist of religion, Robert Bellah (1998), argues, in addition to this, that this private nature can be seen quite clearly when Americans do act together: he says that in normal times (by which he means times when the country is not at war) the common culture is expressed largely through commercial enterprise and consumption.

My own analysis requires only this much: an understanding of the importance of sectarian, not institutional, religion throughout the history of American life as well as an understanding of the private nature of American public life. Where does WACC – and the larger question of secular media reform – fit into this?

I have two possible arguments that suggest the possible uses of the moral argument of WACC in the contemporary U.S. The first argument is focused on the rhetoric of mutuality. This value, at first glance, appears to be radically incompatible with individualism and privacy. However, I want to argue that this is not necessarily the case, in large part because of an important shift in the discourse of individualism in the United States. This shift has come from an interesting mix of academic work stressing the loss of important civic life in the United States (such as Robert Putnam's (2000) *Bowling Alone*

and Robert Bellah et al's (1986) *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*) and a political agenda of the political Right.

I should stress that this argument is based on the rhetoric of the political Right. One of the most impressive accomplishments of the Right is to gain the votes of people whom they actively seek to disempower by dismantling (an admittedly incomplete) welfare state. Consider the words of Michael Sandel²³, a political philosopher, who opens his 1996 book *Democracy and its Discontents* with the following observations:

The main topic of national debate – the proper scope of the welfare state, the extent of rights and entitlements, the proper degree of government regulation – take their shape from arguments of an earlier day. These are not unimportant topics; but they do not reach the two concerns that lie at the heart of democracy's discontent. One is the fear that, individually and collectively, we are losing control of the forces that govern our lives. The other is the sense that, from family to neighbourhood to nation, the moral fabric of community is unravelling around us. The two fears – for the loss of self-government and the erosion of community – together define the anxiety of the age (p. 3).

The Right's ability to capitalize on this second fear – the loss of community – has been impressive.²⁴ Consider the values debates, the inflammatory rhetoric to a putatively liberal media and the growing strength of conservative think tanks and foundations in influencing public opinion: the Right, in its rhetoric, has done well in capturing the sentiment.²⁵

²³ Sandel (1996) is a self-described philosopher of Republic persuasion, referring not to the political party of the same name but the political philosophy that adheres to the "common good" of the republic as its first principles and supports a more active citizenry, which can, on this account, be achieved by abandoning the liberal principles of freedom and state neutrality. He would no doubt criticize much of the work of the Republican party, though it is important to show the similarities between their respective rhetoric.

²⁴ The capitalization on this loss for political purpose is interesting, not only because it provides an example of right wing politicians using fear of something to invoke change that will ultimately bring about the social reality of those fears but also because it shows the Right's ability to capitalize on a larger theory of society, be it governed by markets or divine power.

²⁵ For a discussion of the roots of such sentiments, see Robert Putnam's (1996) *Bowling Alone*; for a socialist perspective of the same issues, see Michael Walzer's (1992) *What it means to be American*.

WACC is able to address that sentiment in a similar way with the value of mutuality, by expressing a need for community life where spiritual matters are seen as important and necessary topics of discussion. However, as I discussed briefly in the first chapter, it introduces the value of equality concomitantly with mutuality, making the two more democratic and demanding. It is important to remember that these values are separated for analytical purposes, when discussed in a notion of the right to communicate the principal idea is that the two stand best when they stand together, in unison. What the success of the Right may demonstrate is the attraction of a value like mutuality without the inclusion of the value of equality. For any type of progressive media reform to take place in the United States that includes mutuality as a value, there needs to be an explicit connection made with the value of equality.

Thus far, I have only suggested the rhetorical value of mutuality, as well as the necessity of equality's inclusion and extension in a media reform debate. This cheapens the value of mutuality, though, by stripping it of its rich underpinnings, only to use it for the sake of political effectiveness. But if we can imagine the usefulness and attraction of the value of mutuality, we can begin to imagine the possibility of my second argument, which looks at the right to communicate. What is necessary here is an understanding of the nature of the right to communicate as a right that exists on, to borrow a term that Habermas has used to describe a slightly different phenomenon, the seams of individual and collective, or social, rights.

What is suggested by thinking of the right to communicate as a value that can be located on the seams of individual and collective rights is that its language suggests the immediacy of dialogue, of listening to others, or respecting differing opinions. This part

of the right to communicate can be traced in WACC literature to the value of mutuality. However, the right to communicate is much broader than dialogical, interpersonal ethics: its principles extend outwards, to the realms of the state and the economy that affect the opportunities available for people take part in, and in some instances to produce, democratic public discourse. It exists on the seams because it addresses both individual and social concerns. Any established and developed right to communicate would work as a political tool to reform media from a structural perspective, working to redefine how it is that media are controlled and how people are able to democratically take part in public discussions.

One of the primary components of such a right would be the availability of common terms of reference, what Robert A. White (1995) would call a common moral vocabulary. When looking at the whole of the works of WACC – its books, journals, editorials and interviews – we can see the extensive intent on developing what some of the words in such a common moral vocabulary might mean. This does not mean they have developed a fully complete vocabulary (or that such a vocabulary is actually something that can in fact be completed; it is best to think in pluralist terms here). All the moral arguments WACC provides are partial attempts to create a vocabulary in which to discuss, argue and try to make mutually intelligible the competing claims inherent to democratic debate. But there are problems with this vocabulary, especially when we try to think about its possible relationship to a secular movement for democratic media reform. I will address these problems momentarily, but it is important to conclude here by remarking on the importance not only of the rhetorical use of mutuality but the

implications it carries with it, the need for it to work with equality and the powerful argument it provides for a more thoroughly democratic media system.

What WACC Cannot Do

There are three primary things that the moral philosophy of WACC cannot do; I call these problems the problem of unity, the problem of extension and the problem of effectivity. The first, the problem of unity, deals with the idea of a common moral vocabulary, which I have just discussed.

The positive aspect of a common moral vocabulary is that it provides citizens with a way in which to voice their concerns in a language that may be useful to them. WACC does not pretend to create absolute unity in their arguments (this is why we have both the argument for inclusion *and* the argument for diversity) but the term itself – common moral vocabulary – is so suggestive of unity that it is hard not to think of it as singular. I have tried to show that the feature of a common moral vocabulary is related to an ideal of social solidarity, a way in which people are effectively able to argue with one another and make differing claims mutually intelligible.

We should not, however, try to idealize these solidarities, or imagine societies of absolute harmonization. WACC leads us, to some extent, down this path, especially when it draws on the philosophy of Martin Buber. The approach is profound, but we should not limit our options to I-it and I-thou. The I-thou relation is one where individuals come into a spiritual existence with one another and Philip Lee (2004) captures the sense of awe involved in such a moment when he defines the ultimate aim of communication to be

“the act of temporarily becoming another person, of seeing with their eyes, of feeling (embodying) their needs, anxieties, joys...” (p. 7).

We need to make sure that there is more room in a communication system than just I-it and I-thou relations. Small talk, kibitzing, dissent, humour: all these are worthy forms of communication that lay somewhere between Buber’s two types. WACC does not disregard, or discredit, these forms of communication, but their discussions of mutuality can sometimes lead to an overly idealistic view of the nature and aims of dialogue. A mutuality that promotes all forms of communication, including small talk, can and should be a goal of dialogical ethics.

The next problem is the problem of extension. Public journalism had a problem of extension, too, but a much different one that was related to the principle of democracy. The problem of extension for WACC is related to the two sub-branches of the Habermasian lifeworld (public and private). While WACC does an impressive job of arguing about what the public realm of lifeworld will look like, it tends to be silent on issues originating in the private sphere of the lifeworld – issues like reproductive rights and gay rights – that have an important impact on the public sphere (and, by extension, on policy and lawmaking). The importance of this silence is communicative in nature; I am referring here to the *public discussions* and *laws* pertaining to these private issues.

In interviews with members of WACC, there did not appear to be an emergent consensus on why this was so. Several individuals suggested that it might be a problem of size, by which they meant that because WACC is so large, it has a difficult time addressing certain issues. This may be true, but it seems odd that they are able to do such an in-depth job on other issues but not on these.

Other individuals suggested that part of the silence was because of the nature of the relationship between the churches (whom WACC relies on for much of its funding money) and WACC as an organization. This seems more plausible.

One of the main points of concern for secular humanists when dealing with a religious group is whether or not the group has a hidden agenda for bringing their religious beliefs through the backdoor. This does not appear to be the case with WACC, for two main reasons. First, they are very upfront, from the beginning, that their values inform their work. I have tried in this thesis to demonstrate what those values are, where they come from and how they are applied to issues concerning media reform. However, the second reason is that there appears to be too much disagreement amongst the churches themselves about issues over reproductive rights and gay rights (among other issues). WACC is not a single church; it is part of a broad ecumenical movement. As such, discussing certain topics is probably too problematic, too sensitive for their immediate attention.

This should not, though, detract from the problem: issues starting in the private lifeworld that affect the public realm are important and need to be discussed. The problem of extension with WACC is that we do not know how their values and arguments will be shaped when turned to this area. As such, it remains unseen and unknown to the outside observer.

The third problem is very much related to the second and first and I call it the problem of effectivity. During the interviews, several individuals suggested that one of the major problems within WACC's organization was getting the churches sponsoring their research to actually take seriously some of the moral arguments they were making

about communication. Randy Naylor (personal communication, October 19, 2004) discussed this problem:

There really isn't anyone doing exactly what we do because we work ecumenically. We are unique in what we do and how we do it. The challenge for us is to interpret that to a broader range of people willing to fund what we do. So the pressure for us from a church side, at a denomination level, would be, 'we want to support what you're doing, but we want it to be about evangelism or that sort of thing.' It's easier for people to understand evangelism and building radio stations and that; it's harder for people to get around media reform and that. The idea-level of ministry is harder to sell than the application level.

This reveals an important problem when we think about the uses of WACC values and arguments in the North American context. It would seem reasonable to think that the churches currently funding projects in the third world would be its primary constituency. There appears, however, to be an asymmetry with regards to the sort of exchange occurring between the two groups. Many of the churches provide money in the hopes of spreading ideas of conversion in other parts of the world, while WACC accepts the money so that it can promote ideas very different from those expressed by the churches. It is not clear that WACC has been able to win over and convince its core constituency about the basic principles of mutuality and equality, as indicated by Naylor's above comments.

These three problems – unity, extension and effectivity – are important barriers that work against the possibility of WACC's approach in a national media reform movement. They do not make the approach impossible, though, in part because of the unique relation between the arguments WACC has developed for media reform and the positions developed by the movements of public journalism and radical democratic structural media reform. I turn now to make these comparisons.

WACC in Relation to Public Journalism and Radical Democratic Structural Media Reform

We are now concerned with trying to situate the arguments and values of WACC in relation to those we have seen in the arguments of public journalism and radical democratic structural media reform. I want to argue that WACC intersects and bridges the two movements in the sense that it looks to reconstruct the everyday activity of the public sphere (like public journalism), while also acknowledging the necessity of restructuring the relations between the public sphere and the control exerted on it by the economy and the state. It accomplishes this last point by arguing for a de-differentiation between economic and political power, saying that the two are not as different in a globalised world as once thought.

But how, exactly, does this work? How does WACC fall between the movements? When I began to study WACC, I first thought that the answer was that it was that they (WACC) did not make any distinction in their moral arguments between the ethos of everyday communication and the structural components that shape that communication. In a sense, this is true, especially when we look at the right to communicate, which combines both structural and ethical approaches to communication and media reform. But the right to communicate is more of a broad ethical framework, under which the WACC makes its more specific arguments.

In actuality, two different judgments are made: one concerning the structure of a communication system and another concerning the ethos of a given communication situation. Both judgments, though, are informed by the same set of values (equality and mutuality). The distinction is important here. It is plausible to discuss the moral

dimensions of communicating within the existing media system(s). When an ethnic minority group is put in imminent danger because of incendiary comments made on local radio stations, it is a moral imperative to condemn it. When a movement, like public journalism, arises that discusses the moral dimensions of communicating in the public sphere, it is important to join in the discussion. The success of such a movement, WACC would argue, is to some extent pre-structured (to borrow a phrase from political economy) by economic forces. It is necessary to be aware of these forces, but it is not permissible that we should dismiss the ethos of communication outright, because the ethos is the direct environment in which we live. This recalls Marx's famous saying to the effect that men make history, but not under the conditions of their choosing. This is an important element of WACC – a willingness to deal with the world as it is – that allows it to make two separate, though interconnected and intertwined, judgments. The distinction is a messy one – particularly when one considers how much of an impact structural forces can have on the ethos of communication – but it is one that WACC maintains.

To some extent, the rejection of public journalism by radical democrats is a rejection based on the belief that structural change must come prior to substantial change. This is drawn from a very old line of socialist thought: get the arrangements and structures right and the attitudes will follow. The same argument was made by Lewis Coser (1956) in a well-known book concerning social conflict and civic virtue: he argued that it was unfair to blame citizens for not being active in politics because the political system was not sufficiently open to citizens. For a re-politicisation of public life to occur, the socialist response is to open up more channels for participation. I don't mean to

disparage the idea, it may in fact be correct; it is certainly powerful. But WACC does not share the view (at least not entirely); it argues that attitudes need to be learned, argued about and fought for. Cees Hamelink (personal communication, December 14, 2004) refers to this as the democratic attitude in an interview I quoted from in the second chapter, “Even if you create the right structures, there’s no guarantee that people will behave in accordance with those structures. You can create a political structure that would provide the basic conditions for people to be listened to but you also need, on top of that, to create the democratic attitude where people will take it seriously.”

However, WACC does not negate the idea that structural reform of the media system is necessary; again, it is a separate judgement. In fact, it devotes much of its time to arguing in behalf of structural reform by publishing entire issues of *Media Development* devoted to Media Reform, Media Ownership and Control, etc.

In addition to all this, it is interesting to note that neither public journalism nor radical democratic structural media reform articulates the idea of a human right to communicate. I have argued the reason for this is in part because the right to communicate is a social/communal right, not an individual one. But the right to communicate is a different sort of right in another important way as well. Typically, rights are used as “trumps,” in the phrase of political philosopher Michael Ignatieff (2001), by which he means that rights are used as card to be played by individuals when democratic options are no longer viable. But the right to communicate is, by definition, a democratic right. It also works in exactly the *opposite* manner as rights that are used as trumps because the right to communicate is a demand to be allowed *into* discussions and negotiations, whether these are discussions in a small community or a large country.

I have also mentioned that WACC is largely silent on issues related to the private realm of the Habermasian lifeworld. Of the other two, public journalism is the more active in addressing these concerns. Rosen writes extensively about master narratives and ways of framing stories (we saw this in his comments about the Gulf War). There is an active interest on his part in trying to get a good public discussion going on important issues of the day. This sort of discussion is an important development and that would seem to be necessary for any sort of media reform movement.

McChesney tries in various ways to do this but his argument tends to be pre-figured by his overarching belief that unless media systems are reformed structurally, there will never be an opportunity for a diversity of viewpoints. He's allowed to hold these viewpoints, but we should not mistake his viewpoints for a serious attempt to talk about the everyday world of communication. As such, most of McChesney's arguments are criticisms (good ones, generally) of journalism (e.g. objectivity, professionalism, commercialization). He makes reference at times to alternative viewpoints (mentioning people like Noam Chomsky and Edward Said) but there is not much of a backup here as to why they should be heard. His criticisms are much stronger than his practical examples, at least in this case.

The importance of WACC's approach, when we think of how different the approaches of the radical democrats and public journalists are, is not that it resolves all the differences between the two movements. We may understand that the primary difference between the two movements is each one's respective understanding of the extension and scope of the democracy principle, but just because we lay out the differences does not mean we resolve the problems. The importance of WACC's

approach is that it does not force us to choose one movement over the other; it allows us to see each movement as a contributor of something, though not everything, valuable to a progressive media reform movement and, perhaps most importantly, it presents us with a language in which we can try to begin to talk about it: at first amongst ourselves and then, having done that, to turn to broader audiences, attempting to put the moral arguments we have developed onto a larger stage, first in hopes of swaying public opinion and conviction and secondly – and in a process that is much longer and more complex than the arguments I have put forth here – in an attempt for concrete social reform and change for a more democratic society.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have discussed the World Association for Christian Communication in four different ways. First, I discussed the core values of the group, which I identified as being equality and mutuality. The first value – equality – has a certain resonance with reform liberalism, in the sense that it seeks a more level playing field for citizens not only in the political realm, but also in the economic realm. The second value – mutuality – is significantly different from any core value of reform or classical liberalism, because it re-conceptualizes a philosophical anthropology of human personhood based not on mythic social contracts but on everyday social relations.

These two values work together to form the ethical framework of the World Association for Christian Communication: the human right to communicate. I have identified this right as being both an obligation (in the sense that citizens must take one another seriously) and a democratic entitlement (in the sense that structural adjustments must be made to the public sphere so that it can be made possible for a greater diversity of viewpoints and voices to be heard).

One of the major conceptual problems in arguing about the right to communicate is that the right has its origins in interpersonal communication (and, for WACC, especially in the dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber). Therefore, one of the major hurdles in arguing for a right to communicate is how to properly ‘socialize’ a right based on interpersonal ethics. I have argued that the WACC attempts to do this in three ways: through the construction of a common moral vocabulary, by stressing truth as a master

norm and by broadening the scope of equality so that it focuses not only direct subjection (as you might have between a master and a slave) but also on indirect, or systemic, subjection, which WACC identifies primarily with the economic markets.

The second way in which I discussed WACC was in relation to its more specific arguments concerning media reform. Using their core values as a starting point, I turned in the second chapter to inquire about the specific judgments they made on how to reform existing media. Through interview data as well as documentary analysis, I identified four different, though frequently overlapping, arguments for media reform. These four arguments are for inclusion and access, diversity and community, democracy and reconciliation. In dealing with each argument separately, I attempted to show what the basic features of each one was, what values (e.g. equality, mutuality, or both) animated the discussion and how it related to the contemporary revival of media practice or the structuring of media systems. I closed the chapter by asking what the aims of the arguments are and suggested that the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas, particular his system/lifeworld model, can be useful in explaining how WACC addressed media reform. Using the model, I suggested that WACC's arguments work in addressing both political and economic problems (system) as well as problems with the substantive activity of the everyday public sphere (lifeworld). Additionally, in looking at the Habermasian model, one important realm came to be seen as underdeveloped: the influence of the private sub-branch of the lifeworld on the public sphere.

The third way in which I discussed WACC was in relation to two media reform movements in the United States: public journalism and radical democratic structural media reform. To do this, I first looked at the specific arguments of public journalism and

radical democratic structural media reform in the third chapter. I suggested that the primary source of disagreement between the two movements was not only that they focused on different realms of social activism (public journalists being focused on the substantive activity of the public sphere; radical democrats being concerned with the structural forces, both political and economic, shaping the activity of the public sphere) but also a moral disagreement concerning the extension of the democratic principle that ‘what affects all should be decided by all.’ What makes a radical democrat a radical democrat is the idea that democratic principles should not only be used with reference to political democracy but should be extended to incorporate economic democracy.

In the final chapter, I discussed how the values and arguments of WACC come in relation to the two movements. I suggested that WACC is able to work as a bridge, in some sense, between the two movements by stressing that both the ethos of everyday communication in the public sphere and the structural set-up of media system are both important sites of discussion. More importantly, though, is the idea that WACC suggests that the two sites – while crucially influencing one another – require separate judgments: there can be ethical communication in an unethically structured media system and there can be unethical communication in an ethically structured media system.

The fourth way in which I dealt with WACC was to ask what use its values and arguments might have for a secular, national media reform movement. I suggested that the philosophical re-conception of human personhood – based on the value of mutuality – was an important idea that might be put to use by progressive movements, as was the idea of a common moral vocabulary, not because it provided any final unity to moral arguing

but because it provided a possible vocabulary in which competing claims can be made mutually intelligible.

In dealing with WACC in these four ways, I have tried to underscore the importance of how we argue about media reform. Discussions of political strategy and trajectory, though crucially important, have not been offered here. These are important fields, areas that certainly need to be studied as well, but the aim here was to reflect on the ways we might make better arguments about media reform.

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