

Towards 'mindful journalism': Applying Buddhism's Eightfold Path as an ethical framework for modern journalism

Religious codes of morality have informed professional ethical principles, particularly with regard to fairness, truth and honesty. Buddhism has a growing relevance in Western societies, prompted by migration and a developing interest in Eastern religions and philosophies. This paper considers Buddhism's 'Noble Eightfold Path' and explores its applicability to Fourth Estate journalism in the modern era. It takes each of its elements – understanding free of superstition, kindly and truthful speech, right conduct, doing no harm, perseverance, mindfulness and contemplation – and uses modern examples to illustrate their potential usefulness to the journalist seeking to practise responsible truth-seeking and truth-telling. It assesses whether such an approach would allow the reporting of such topics as celebrity gossip and official corruption and examines the ethics of subterfuge, deception and treatment of vulnerable sources in this light.

Keywords: journalism, ethics, Buddhism, mindful journalism, philosophy, Eightfold Path

Introduction

This article explores the possibility of applying the fundamental precepts of one of the world's major religions to the practice of truth-seeking and truth-telling in the modern era and asks whether that ethical framework is compatible with journalism as a Fourth Estate enterprise. The recent inquiries into media ethics and regulation in the UK, Australia and New Zealand have necessarily involved a deeper exploration of the role of the news media in society and

appropriate press regulatory systems to control the ethical behaviour of journalists. These have prompted a re-examination of sacrosanct principles such as 'freedom of the press' and 'free expression', particularly in the context of converged and globalised communications and the damaged economic foundations of the so-called 'legacy' media. They have also forced a questioning of the morality of news reporting as a profit-making business model in the light of the unethical and illegal practices that prompted the closure of the *News of the World* and the Leveson Inquiry (2012).

It is broadly accepted that religious codes of morality have informed professional ethical principles, particularly with regard to fairness, truth and honesty. Buddhism has a growing relevance in former majority Anglo-Saxon societies, prompted by migration and a developing interest in Eastern religions and philosophies expressed by Western citizens. This paper considers Buddhism's 'Noble Eightfold Path' and explores its applicability to Fourth Estate journalism in the modern era. It takes each of its elements – understanding free of superstition, kindly and truthful speech, right conduct, doing no harm, perseverance, mindfulness and contemplation – and uses modern examples to illustrate their potential usefulness to the journalist or blogger seeking to practise responsible truth-seeking and truth-telling. It asks whether such an approach would allow the reporting of such topics as celebrity gossip and official corruption and examines the ethics of subterfuge, deception and treatment of vulnerable sources in this light.

The problem: The need for a new perspective

Journalism ethics has been viewed through many lenses, but most of the developed world's approach has drawn upon the thinking of Western philosophers and statesmen from the United States and the United Kingdom in the post-Gutenberg era. The very concept of the 'Fourth Estate' embodies Western libertarian notions espoused by such thinkers as John Milton (1608-1674), Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), often stemming from government attempts to license and muzzle the press.

Gunaratne (2005: 81-82) demonstrated how the originators of the *Four theories of the press* (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1963) anchored their theories firmly in Western philosophical thought and political history. They categorised press systems into 'authoritarian', 'libertarian', 'Soviet-Communist' or 'social responsibility'.

Even their 'social responsibility theory', which added an ethical dimension of social consciousness (to temper the 'publish and be damned' approach of their libertarian theory) was drawn from the report of the Commission on the Freedom of the Press (Hutchins 1947). Others have criticised the Siebert approach for its simplicity and outdatedness, with Denis McQuail (1987) adding two further categories: the development model and the democratic-participant model. Social responsibility theory in the mid 20th century added an ethical dimension to the basic libertarian theory and the concept of 'development journalism theory' evolved in Asia over the past 30 years seemed to excuse government intervention in press activities in the interests of national economic growth and societal stability (Dutt 2010: 90).

There have been many developments of such theories over the past six decades, most of which have also been Western-centric, and it is not surprising that even most recent reviews of media regulation in the UK (Leveson 2012), Australia (Finkelstein 2012) and New Zealand (Law Commission 2012) were driven by Western approaches to media given their briefs to review the mechanisms in place in those jurisdictions. Each of them found shortcomings with the *status quo* libertarian approach to publishing at any cost. The Finkelstein report detailed the shortcomings of the libertarian model and the refinements of the social responsibility model in its second chapter 'The democratic indispensability of a free press' (Finkelstein 2012: 23-54). That inquiry decided there was a 'gulf' between the ethical standards of the news media and those of the public, a perception central to the actions of *News of the World* and other London tabloids that triggered the Leveson inquiry in the UK: 'In particular, there is a wide difference in what the media and the public consider ethically acceptable concerning privacy and deception' (Finkelstein 2012: 124). This necessitates a discussion of the ethical frameworks for journalism impacting upon the ways in which journalists investigate, report, and comment upon news. Communication scholars' theories of press systems provide mechanisms to help us contextualise journalism ethics and to help explain why actual media laws and regulatory frameworks condone or prohibit certain news media practices. However, those very ethical codes of practice were born of an Anglo-American approach to journalism, shaped largely by the libertarian positioning of the press in those countries (truth, the public's right to know and source confidentiality) and refined somewhat by the

social responsibility pressures of the latter half of the twentieth century (with concerns over privacy and discrimination).

The problem is that a predominantly Western libertarian model of journalism and its accompanying ethical guidelines may be an anachronism in a 21st-century context of an increasingly globalised media era where large scale immigration has forced cultural re-evaluation within former colonial powers, traditional media are commercially vulnerable, and Web 2.0 has put publishing technology in the hands of millions who do not ascribe to journalistic values. In such a changed context, where do we turn for guidance in reinventing journalism ethics to accommodate more universally accepted cultural values and new publishers or 'citizen journalists'?

Useful work has been conducted in this regard. Romano (2010) has considered journalism practices and ethics in an international context with her compilation of models of civic engagement. This builds upon decades of important contributions by Jay Rosen in the field of 'public journalism' (Rosen 1999) and 'citizen journalism' (Rosen 2003-2013) and by numerous others in the domain of 'peace journalism' (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Lynch 2010) and its application to other cultures (Robie 2011). These hold great promise and are, indeed, complementary to the attempt here to map a new ethical framework of 'mindful journalism' which might be applied by anyone with a motivation to incorporate core human moral values into their truth-seeking and truth-telling endeavours – whether journalists, citizen journalists or bloggers – reporting in times of peace or conflict, at home or abroad.

Why Buddhism's Eightfold Path?

Professional ethical codes are not religious treatises, and holy scriptures were not spoken or written as codes of practice for any particular occupation. This paper aims to build upon the work of Gunaratne (2005, 2007 and 2009) to explore whether the foundational teachings of one religion focused upon living a purer life – Buddhism – might inform journalism practice. At some junctures it becomes apparent that some elements of the libertarian model of journalism as we know it might not even be compatible with such principles – particularly if they are interpreted narrowly. The teachings of other religions might also be applied in this way. Within Christianity (via the *Bible*), Islam (the *Koran*), Hinduism (the *Bhagavad Gita*), Judaism (the *Torah*) and the Confucian

canon you can find common moral and ethical principles journalists might reasonably be expected to follow in their work, including attributes of peace journalism identified by Lynch (2010: 543): oriented towards peace, humanity, truth and solutions. The Dalai Lama's book – *Beyond religion: Ethics for a whole world* (2011) – explored his vision of how core ethical values might offer a sound moral framework for modern society while accommodating diverse religious views and cultural traditions. It is in that spirit that this paper explores the possibilities of applying some of Buddhism's core principles to the secular phenomenon of journalism. It also must be accepted that Buddhist practices such as 'mindfulness' and meditation have been adopted broadly in Western society in recent decades and have been embraced by the cognitive sciences, albeit in adapted therapeutic ways (Segal et al 2012).

The Noble Eightfold Path attributed to the Buddha – Siddhartha Gautama (563 BCE to 483 BCE – but disputed) – has been chosen because of its longevity as a moral code, its relative brevity and the fact that its core elements can be read at a secular level to relate to behavioural – and not exclusively spiritual – guidelines. Former *New York Times* reporter and blogger Doug McGill (2008) has suggested Buddhist ethics sit comfortably with journalism as an endeavour:

Indeed, in its relentless quest to observe without filter or distortion the nature of daily human existence – the fact and flavor of the simple ordinary present, the living now – Buddhism seems, in a certain way, quintessentially journalistic.

Gunaratne (2005: 35) offered this succinct positioning of the Noble Eightfold Path (or the 'middle way') in Buddhist philosophy:

The Buddhist *dharma* meant the doctrine based on the Four Noble Truths: That suffering exists; that the cause of suffering is thirst, craving, or desire; that a path exists to end suffering; that the Noble Eightfold Path is the path to end suffering. Described as the 'middle way', it specifies the commitment to *sila* (right speech, action and livelihood), *samadhi* (right effort, mindfulness, and concentration) and *panna* (right understanding and thoughts).

It is also fruitful to explore journalism as a practice amidst the first two Noble Truths related to suffering (*dukkha*), and this is possible

because they are accommodated within the first step of the Eightfold Path – 'right views'. The Fourth Noble Truth is also integrative. It states that the Noble Eightfold Path is the means to end suffering. Here we consider its elements as a potential framework for the ethical practice of journalism in this new era.

Application of the Noble Eightfold Path to ethical journalism practice

Each of the constituent steps of the Noble Eightfold Path – understanding free of superstition, kindly and truthful speech, right conduct, doing no harm, perseverance, mindfulness and contemplation – has an application to the modern-day practice of truth-seeking and truth-telling – whether that be by a journalist working in a traditional media context, a citizen journalist or a serious blogger reporting and commenting upon news and current affairs. Smith and Novak (2003: 39) identified a preliminary step to the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path that he saw as a precondition to its pursuit – the practice of 'right association'. This, they explained, acknowledged the 'extent to which we are social animals, influenced at every turn by the "companioned example" of our associates, whose attitudes and values affect us profoundly' (Smith and Novak 2003: 40).

For journalists this can apply at a number of levels. There is the selection of a suitable mentor, an ethical colleague who might be available to offer wise counsel in the midst of a workplace dilemma. There is also the need to acknowledge – and resist – the socialisation of journalism recruits into the toxic culture of newsrooms with unethical practices (McDevitt et al 2002). Further, there is the imperative to reflect upon the potential for the 'pack mentality' of reportage that might allow for the combination of peer pressure, competition and poor leadership to influence the core morality of the newsgathering enterprise, as noted by Leveson (2012: 732) in his review of the ethical and legal transgressions by British newspaper personnel.

We will now concentrate on a journalistic reading of the steps of the Eightfold Path. Kalupahana (1976: 59) suggests its constituent eight factors represent a digest of 'moral virtues together with the processes of concentration and the development of insight'. Mizuno (1987: 160) argues that, although the precepts were originally portrayed as the path to liberation for a sage, they could apply equally to an ordinary person as guidelines for moral living.

Right views

Smith and Novak (2003: 42) explained that the very first step in the Eightfold Path involved an acceptance of the Four Noble Truths. Suffice it to say that much of what we call 'news' – particularly that impacting on audiences through its reportage of change, conflict and consequence – can sit with Smith and Novak's (2003: 33) definition of *dukkha*, namely 'the pain that to some degree colors all of finite existence'. Their explanation of the First Noble Truth – that life is suffering – is evident when we view the front page of each morning's newspaper and each evening's television news bulletin:

The exact meaning of the First Noble Truth is this: Life currently is dislocated. Something has gone wrong. It is out of joint. As its pivot is not true, friction (interpersonal conflict) is excessive, movement (creativity) is blocked, and it hurts (Smith and Novak 2003: 34).

This is at once an endorsement of accepted news values and a denial of the very concept of there being anything unusual about change. As Kalupahana (1976: 36) explains, a fundamental principle of Buddhism is that all things in the world are at once impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) and nonsubstantial (*anatta*). News, too, is about the impermanent and the unsatisfactory. It is premised upon identifying to audiences what has changed most recently, focusing especially on the most unsatisfactory elements of that change. Yet given Buddhism's premise that all things are subject to change at all times and that happiness is achieved through the acceptance of this, it might well erode the newsworthiness of the latest upsetting accounts of change in the world since we last looked. In some ways this step supports the model of 'deliberative journalism' as explained by Romano (2010: 11), which encourages reports that are 'incisive, comprehensive and balanced', including the insights and contributions of all relevant stakeholders. Most importantly, as Romano suggests:

Journalists would also report on communities as they evaluate potential responses, and then investigate whether and how they have acted upon the resulting decisions (Romano 2010: 11).

Thus, the notion of 'right views' can incorporate a contract between the news media and audiences that accepts a level of change at any time, and focuses intention upon

deeper explanations of root causes, strategies for coping and potential solutions for those changes prompting the greatest suffering.

Right intent

The second ingredient relates to refining and acting upon that very 'mission', 'calling' or drive to 'make a difference' which is the very human motivation for selecting some occupations. For some, it is a religious calling where they feel spiritually drawn to a vocation as a priest, an imam, a rabbi or a monk. But for others it is a secular drive to aid humanity by helping change society in a positive way – a career motivation shared by many teachers, doctors and journalists. It becomes the backbone to one's professional enterprise. Smith and Novak (2003: 42) describe it thus:

People who achieve greatness are almost invariably passionately invested in some one thing. They do a thousand things each day, but behind these stands the one thing they count supreme. When people seek liberation with single-mindedness of this order, they may expect their steps to turn from sliding sandbank scrambles into ground-gripping strides.

In journalism, this might necessitate a change in mindset from bringing news 'first' in a competitive sense to 'best' and most meaningfully to an audience in a qualitative sense. Of course, it would not be 'news' if it were not delivered relatively soon after its occurrence, but in this era of instant communication this step reinforces the notion of 'responsible truth-seeking and truth-telling' – authoritative and credible news, obtained ethically, and delivered as soon as possible to retain its relevance and utility without losing its veracity.

Right speech

This step relates to both truthful and charitable expression and, interpreted narrowly, that second element of 'charitable expression' could present a fundamental challenge to the concept of journalism as we know it. It certainly poses serious questions about the celebrity gossip orientation of many news products today. The notion of telling the truth and being accurate lies at the heart of journalism practice and is foremost in most ethical codes internationally. While a single empirical fact might be subject to scientific measurement and verification, any conclusions drawn from the juxtaposition of two provable facts can only constitute what a scientist would call a 'theory' and the

rest of us might call 'opinion'. In defamation law, collections of provable facts can indeed create a meaning – known as an 'imputation' – that can indeed be damaging to someone's reputation (Pearson and Polden 2011: 217). Thus, it becomes a question of which truths are selected to be told and the ultimate truth of their composite that becomes most relevant.

Smith and Novak (2003: 42) suggest falsities and uncharitable speech as indicative of other factors, most notably the ego of the communicator. In journalism, that ego might be fuelled in a host of ways that might encourage the selection of certain facts or the portrayal of an individual in a negative light: political agendas, feeding populist sentiment, peer pressure and corporate reward. They state:

False witness, idle chatter, gossip, slander, and abuse are to be avoided, not only in their obvious forms, but also in their covert ones. The covert forms – subtle belittling, 'accidental' tactlessness, barbed wit – are often more vicious because their motives are veiled (Smith and Novak 2003: 42).

This calls into question the essence of celebrity journalism for all the obvious reasons. Gossip about the private lives of the rich and famous, titillating facts about their private lives, and barbed commentary in social columns all fail the test of 'right speech' and, in their own way, reveal a great deal about the individual purveying them and their employer, discussed further below under 'right livelihood'. Taken to its extreme, however, much news might be considered 'uncharitable' and slanderous about an individual when it is in fact revealing their wrongdoing all calling into question their public actions. If the Eightfold Path ruled out this element of journalism we would have to conclude it was incompatible even with the best of investigative and Fourth Estate journalism.

Indeed, many uncomfortable truths must be told even if one is engaging in a form of 'deliberative journalism' that might ultimately be for the betterment of society and disenfranchised people. For example, experts in 'peace journalism' include a 'truth orientation' as a fundamental ingredient of that approach, and include a determination 'to expose self-serving pronouncements and representations on all sides' (Lynch 2010: 543).

Right conduct

The fourth step of 'right conduct' goes to the core of any moral or ethical code. In fact, it

contains the fundamental directives of most religions with its Five Precepts which prohibit killing, theft, lying, being unchaste and intoxicants (Smith and Novak 2003: 44). Many journalists would have problems with the final two, although the impact upon their work would of course vary with individual circumstances. And while many journalists might have joked that they would 'kill' for a story, murder is not a common or accepted journalistic tool. However, journalists have often had problems with the elements of theft and lying in their broad and narrow interpretations. The Leveson Report (2012) contains numerous examples of both, and the extension of the notion of 'theft' to practices such as plagiarism and of 'lying' to deception in its many guises have fuelled many adverse adjudications by ethics committees and courts.

Importantly, as Smith and Novak (2003: 43) explain, the step of right conduct also involves 'a call to understand one's behavior more objectively before trying to improve it' and 'to reflect on actions with an eye to the motives that prompted them'. This clearly invokes the strategic approach developed by educationalist Donald Schön, whose research aimed to equip professionals with the ability to make crucial decisions in the midst of practice. Schön (1987: 26) coined the expression 'reflection-in-action' to describe the ability of the professional to reflect upon some problem in the midst of their daily work. The approach was adapted to journalism by Sheridan Burns (2013: 76) who advised student journalists:

You need a process for evaluating your decisions because a process, or system, lets you apply your values, loyalties and principles to every new set of circumstances or facts. In this way, your decision making will be fair in choosing the news.

Even industry ethical codes can gain wider understanding and acceptance by appealing to fundamental human moral values and not just offering a proscriptive list of prohibited practices. A recent example is the *Fairfax media code of conduct* (undated) which poses questions employees might ask themselves when faced with ethical dilemmas that might not be addressed specifically in the document, including:

- Would I be proud of what I have done?
- Do I think it's the right thing to do?
- What will the consequences be for my colleagues, Fairfax, other parties and me?

- What would be the reaction of my family and friends if they were to find out?
- What would happen if my conduct was reported in a rival publication?

While this specific approach seems to focus on the potential for shame for a transgressor, it offers an example of a media outlet attempting to encourage its employees to pause and reflect in the midst of an ethical dilemma – what Schön (1987: 26) called ‘reflection-in-action’. Such a technique might offer better guidance and might gain more traction if it were founded upon a socially and professionally acceptable moral or ethical scaffold, perhaps the kind of framework we are exploring here.

Right living

The Buddha identified certain livelihoods that were incompatible with a morally pure way of living, shaped of course by the cultural mores of his place and time. They included poison peddler, slave trader, prostitute, butcher, brewer, arms maker and tax collector (Smith and Novak 2003: 45). Some of these occupations might remain on his list today – but one can justifiably ask whether journalism would make his list in the aftermath of the revelations of the Leveson Inquiry (2012). That report did, of course, acknowledge the important role journalism should play in a democratic society, so perhaps the Buddha might have just nominated particular sectors of the media for condemnation. For example, the business model based upon celebrity gossip might provide an avenue for escape and relaxation for some consumers, but one has to wonder at the overall public good coming from such an enterprise. Given the very word ‘occupation’ implies work that ‘does indeed occupy most of our waking attention’ (Smith and Novak 2003: 44), we are left to wonder how the engagement in prying, intrusion and rumour-mongering for commercial purposes advances the enterprise of journalism or the personal integrity of an individual journalist who chooses to ply that trade.

The same argument applies to the sections of larger media enterprises who might sometimes produce journalism of genuine social value, but who on other occasions take a step too far with intrusion or gossip without any public benefit. This is where journalists working in such organisations might apply a mindful approach to individual stories and specific work practices to apply a moral gauge to the actual tasks they are performing in their work and in assessing whether they constitute ‘right living’.

Right effort

The step of ‘right effort’ was directed by the Buddha in a predominantly spiritual sense – a steady, patient and purposeful path to enlightenment. However, we can also apply such principles to the goal of ethical journalism practice in a secular way. Early career journalists are driven to demonstrate success and sometimes mistake the hurried scoop and kudos of the lead story in their news outlet as an end in itself. There can also be an emphasis on productivity and output at the expense of the traditional hallmarks of quality reportage – attribution and verification. Of course, all news stories could evolve into lengthy theses if they were afforded unlimited timelines and budgets. Commercial imperatives and deadlines demand a certain brevity and frequency of output from all reporters. Both can be achieved with continued attention to the core principle of purposeful reflection upon the ethics of the various daily work tasks and a mindful awareness of the underlying mission – or backbone – of one’s occupational enterprise – striving for the ‘right intent’ of the second step.

Institutional limitations and pressure from editors, reporters and sources will continually threaten a journalist’s commitment to this ethical core, requiring the ‘right effort’ to be maintained at that steady, considered pace through every interview, every story, every working day and ultimately through a full career. As the Dalai Lama wrote in *Beyond religion* (2011: 142): ‘The practice of patience guards us against loss of composure and, in doing so, enables us to exercise discernment, even in the heat of difficult situations.’ Surely this is a useful attribute for the journalist.

Right mindfulness

This is the technique of self-examination that Schön (1987) and Sheridan Burns (2013) might call ‘reflection in action’ and is the step I have selected as central to an application of the Eightfold Path to reportage in the heading for this article – ‘mindful journalism’. Effective reflection upon one’s own thoughts and emotions is crucial to a considered review of an ethical dilemma in a newsgathering or publishing context. It is also essential to have gone through such a process if journalists are later called to account to explain their actions. Many ethical decisions are value-laden and inherently complex. Too often they are portrayed in terms of the ‘public interest’ when the core motivating factor has not been the greater public good but, to the contrary,

the ego of an individual journalist or the commercial imperative of a media employer. Again, the Leveson Report (2012) detailed numerous instances where such forces were at play, often to the great detriment to the lives of ordinary citizens.

As Smith and Novak (2003: 48) explain, right mindfulness 'aims at witnessing all mental and physical events, including our emotions, without reacting to them, neither condemning some nor holding on to others'. Buddhists (and many others) adopt mindfulness techniques in the form of meditation practice – sometimes in extended guided retreats. The extent to which individuals might want to set aside time for meditation in their own routines is up to them, but at the very least there is much to be gained from journalists adopting the lay meaning of 'being mindful'. In other words, journalists might pause briefly for reflection upon the implications of their actions upon others – the people who are the subjects of their stories, other stakeholders who might be affected by the event or issue at hand, the effects upon their own reputations as journalists and the community standing of others, and the public benefits ensuing from this particular truth being told in this way at this time. Most ethical textbooks have flow charts with guidelines for journalists to follow in such situations – but the central question is whether they have an embedded technique for moral self-examination – a practised mindfulness they can draw upon when a circumstance demands.

There is a special need for journalists to be mindful of the vulnerabilities of some individuals they encounter in their work. Many have studied the interaction between the news media and particular 'vulnerable groups', such as people with a disability, those with a mental illness, children, the indigenous, the aged, or those who have undergone a traumatic experience. For example, Pearson et al (2010) reviewed that research and examined how journalists interacted with those who might belong to such a 'vulnerable group' or who might simply be 'vulnerable' because of the circumstances of the news event. They identified other types of sources who might be vulnerable in the midst or aftermath of a news event involving such a 'moment of vulnerability' and assessed the question of 'informed consent' to journalistic interviews by such individuals. Ethical journalists are mindful of such potential vulnerabilities and either look for alternative sources or take considered steps to minimise the impact of their reportage.

This concern for others also invokes the notion of compassion for other human beings, a tenet central to the teachings of all major religions, and a hallmark of Buddhism. The Dalai Lama has explained that it is often mistaken for a weakness or passivity, or 'surrender in the face of wrongdoing or injustice' (Dalai Lama 2011: 58). If that were the case, then it would be incompatible with Fourth Estate journalism which requires reporters to call to account those who abuse power or rot the system. However, the Dalai Lama explains that true compassion for others requires that sometimes we must do exactly that:

Depending on the context, a failure to respond with strong measures, thereby allowing the aggressors to continue their destructive behaviour, could even make you partially responsible for the harm they continue to inflict (Dalai Lama 2011: 59).

Such an approach is perfectly compatible with the best of foreign correspondence and investigative journalism conducted in the public interest – and is well accommodated within the peace journalism model explained by Lynch (2010: 543).

Right concentration

Some have compared 'right concentration' to being in 'the zone' in elite sporting terminology – so focused on the work at hand that there is a distinctive clarity of purpose. Smith and Novak (2003: 48) explain that concentration exercises – often attentive to a single-pointed awareness of breathing – are a common prelude to mindfulness exercises during meditation.

Initial attempts at concentration are inevitably shredded by distractions; slowly, however, attention becomes sharper, more stable, more sustained (Smith and Novak, 2003: 48).

It is such concentrated attention that is required of consummate professionals in the midst of covering a major news event. It is at this time that top journalists actually enter 'the zone' and are able to draw on core ethical values to produce important reportage and commentary within tight deadlines, paying due regard to the impact of their work upon an array of individual stakeholders and to the broader public interest. It is in this moment that it all comes together for the 'mindful journalist' – facts are verified, comments from a range of sources are attributed, competing values are assessed, angles are considered and decided

and timing is judged. And it all happens within a cool concentrated focus, sometimes amidst the noise and mayhem of a frantic newsroom or a chaotic news event.

Towards a secular 'mindful journalism'

This paper does not propose a definitive fix-all solution to the shortcomings in journalism ethics or their regulation. Rather, it is an acknowledgment that the basic teachings of one of the world's major religions can offer guidance in identifying a common – and secular – moral compass that might inform our journalism practice as technology and globalization place our old ethical models under stress.

Leveson (2012) has identified the key ethical and regulatory challenges facing the British press and Finkelstein (2012) has documented the situation in Australia. One of the problems with emerging citizen journalism and news websites is that their proponents do not necessarily ascribe to traditional journalists' ethical codes. The journalists' union in Australia – the Media Alliance (MEAA) – has attempted to bring them into its fold by developing a special charter of excellence and ethics and by the end of April 2013 had 12 news websites ascribe to its principles, which included a commitment to the journalists' code of ethics (Alcorn 2013). This might be a viable solution for those who identify as journalists and seek a union affiliation, but many do not, and in a global and multicultural publishing environment the challenge is to develop models that might be embraced more broadly than a particular national union's repackaging of a journalists' code. However, codes of ethics have often failed to work effectively in guiding the ethics of the traditional journalists for whom they were designed, let alone the litany of new hybrids including citizen journalists, bloggers, and the avid users of other emerging news platforms. Core human moral principles from key religious teachings like the Noble Eightfold Path could form the basis of a more relevant and broadly applicable model for the practice of 'mindful journalism'.

The recent inquiries triggered by poor journalism ethical practices have demonstrated that journalism within the libertarian model appears to have lost its moral compass and we need to explore new ways to recapture this. We should educate journalists, serious bloggers and citizen journalists to adopt a mindful approach to their news and commentary accommodating a reflection upon the implications of their truth-

seeking and truth-telling as a routine part of the process. They would be prompted to pause and think carefully about the consequences of their reportage and commentary for the stakeholders involved, including their audiences. Truth-seeking and truth-telling would still be the primary goal, but only after gauging the social good that might come from doing so.

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