

# DIGITAL MEDIA ETHICS

DGM 723

Prepared by:

Dr. Sherihan Mohamed

## Lecture 2



DMG 723

# DIGITAL MEDIA ETHICS

## Chapter 1

### Central Issues in the Ethics of Digital Media

Prepared by:  
Dr. Sherihan Mohamed



Lecture  
1

## Remember:

**\*\* Introduction.**

**\*\* (Ethical) life in the (post-)digital age:**

1. Digital media, analog media: convergence and Ubiquity.
2. Digital media and “greased information”.
3. Digital media as communication media: fluidity, ubiquity, global scope, and selfhood/identity.



Lecture  
2

## Outlines:

- \*\* **Digital Media Ethics:** How to proceed?
- \*\* **Is Digital Media Ethics Possible?** Grounds for hope
- \*\* How to do ethics in the new mediascape: Dialogical approaches, difference, and Pluralism.
- \*\* Further considerations: Ethical judgments.

Lecture  
2

## Digital media ethics: How to proceed?

Central Issues in the Ethics  
of Digital Media



Lecture  
2

## Digital media ethics: How to proceed?

In truth developing an ethics for digital media is both **possible** and **essential**. With the rapid expansion of **digital technologies**, creating **ethical guidelines** ensures responsible use, **protects users**, and **promotes trust**. These ethics can address various aspects

First of all, **digital media** often present us with strikingly new sorts of interactions with one another.



It remains uncertain whether existing ethical guidelines and approaches -already well- established for traditional media are applicable to digital media, and if they are, then how they should be adapted.

Lecture  
2

## Digital media ethics: How to proceed?

However, as highlighted by the term "**post-digital**," digital media fundamentally retain their **analogue nature** in many respects – for example, **the music** we hear is still **analogue**.

Consequently, the life worlds shaped by digital media are still intertwined with the analogue experiences of previous generations and cultures.

Additionally, as global media, digital media compel us to address culturally diverse perspectives, not only on basic ethical norms and practices BUT, more fundamentally, on the very way ethics should be approached.



Lecture  
2

## Digital media ethics: How to proceed?

In particular, **non-Western** views challenge traditional **Western** notions of the primary importance of the individual, and thereby **Western** understandings of ethical responsibility as primarily individual responsibility.



This means, more specifically, that **multiple actors** and **agents** must work together to make specific acts (both beneficent and harmful) **possible**.

Hence, in parallel with the distribution of information via networks, our ethical responsibility may be more accurately understood in terms of **A Distributed Responsibility**.

Lecture  
2

## Digital media ethics: How to proceed?

This understanding of distributed responsibility is, in fact, not an entirely new idea; rather, it is one shared with both **pre-modern Western philosophies** and **religions** and **multiple philosophies and religions** around the globe.



Certainly, this is a Very Good Thing: it suggests important ethical norms and practices that can be shared among the multiple cultures and peoples now brought into digital communication with one another. But it represents a major challenge, especially, to Western thinkers used to understanding ethical responsibility in primarily Individualistic Terms.

Lecture  
2

# Is Digital Media Ethics Possible? Grounds for hope



When we initially encounter the complexities of digital media ethics, the challenges may appear daunting and perhaps even insurmountable. However, our combined experience with past technological advancements, along with recent insights in information and computing ethics (ICE), demonstrates that despite the significant hurdles in crafting ethical frameworks for emerging technologies, we can indeed achieve this.

Lecture  
2

## Is Digital Media Ethics Possible? Grounds for hope

Indeed, this experience provides us with a number of examples of ethical resolutions that “**work**” both **globally** (as they involve discerning shared norms and understandings) and **locally** (as they further involve developing ways of interpreting and applying shared norms in specific cultural contexts).



Efforts to establish ethical controls over digital media have been ongoing for several years.

Within the last decades, numerous regional discussions have taken place in Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia in order to create a universal code of ethics for the information society.

Lecture  
2

## Is Digital Media Ethics Possible? Grounds for hope

One of the **core issues** in **developing** a **universal code** for media ethics is the **difficulty** of finding a **common ground** between **ethical principles** from one culture to another. Also, such codes may be interpreted differently according to various moral and legal standards.





As a primary example: **The European Union** has drawn up and now implemented more rigorous **privacy protections** than were defined under **previous data regulations**.

Lecture  
2

## Is Digital Media Ethics Possible? Grounds for hope

In 2015, the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) established an Ethics Advisory Group, assigned to develop a “new digital ethics” to help guide the specific implementations of the GDPR, including sustaining the rigorous EU privacy protections vis the emerging Internet of Things and growing uses of Artificial Intelligence (AI).



This new digital ethics, however, turns squarely on two ethical frameworks, deontology and virtue ethics.

For example, the EDPS Ethics Advisory Group (EAG) foregrounds the central importance of autonomy and freedom, including as these are grounded in the philosophical work of Immanuel Kant.

Lecture  
2

## Is Digital Media Ethics Possible? Grounds for hope

Similarly, both the **EAG report** and the more philosophical account of the key **ethical pillars** of a **Good AI Society** foreground the central aims of virtue **ethics** – namely, flourishing, well-being, and good lives.





Simultaneously, these ethical frameworks are applied in a pluralistic manner. The EAG emphasizes that fundamental norms and values—such as autonomy, dignity, and equality, are integral to “The European project”.

Lecture  
2

## Is Digital Media Ethics Possible? Grounds for hope

These examples suggest that **digital media ethics** – as likewise requiring us to address the **ethical dimensions** evoked by **developing new technologies**, – including how these implicate diverse cultural norms and traditions– is nonetheless a doable project. Moreover, extensive evidence argues that with few exceptions, as enculturated human beings, we are already **deeply ethical**.

Lecture  
2

# How to do ethics in the new mediascape



Lecture  
2

## How to do ethics in the new mediascape

Frameworks for Ethical Decision Making:

When making **an ethical decision**, there are a range of **steps** that we go through, perhaps **spontaneously** and **involuntarily**, yet these steps are **necessary** to make the **Right Ethical Decision**.



\* Identify the Ethical Issues

Could this decision or situation be damaging to someone or to some group, or unevenly beneficial to people? Does this decision involve a choice between a good and bad alternative, or perhaps between two “goods” or between two “bads”? Is this issue about more than solely what is legal or what is most efficient? If so, how?

Lecture  
2

## How to do ethics in the new mediascape

## \* Get the Facts

What are the relevant facts of the case? What facts are not known? Can I learn more about the situation? Do I know enough to make a decision?

What individuals and groups have an important stake in the outcome? Are the concerns of some of those individuals or groups more important? Why?

What are the options for acting? Have all the relevant persons and groups been consulted? Have I identified creative options?

\* Evaluate Alternative Actions

Evaluate the options by asking the following questions:

Which option best respects the rights of all who have a stake?

Which option treats people fairly, giving them each what they are due?

Which option will produce the most good and do the least harm for as many stakeholders as possible?

Lecture  
2

## How to do ethics in the new mediascape

Which option best **serves** the community as a whole,  
not just some **members**?

Which option **leads** me to act as the sort of person I  
want to be?

Which option appropriately **takes** into account the  
**relationships, concerns, and feelings** of all stakeholders?



\* Choose an Option for Action and Test It

After an evaluation, **which** option **best** addresses the **situation**?

If I told someone I respect (or a public audience) **which** **option** I have chosen, **what** would they **say**?

**How** can **my decision** be implemented with the greatest care and attention to the **concerns** of all stakeholders?

Lecture  
2

## How to do ethics in the new mediascape

In this context and in general, there are **three** philosophical methodologies used to interpret ethical decisions, namely:

- \* Ethical **Monism**
- \* Ethical **relativism**
- \* Ethical **pluralism**



## Ethical Monism:

This framework posits that there is a single, universal set of ethical principles that apply to all situations. It suggests that One Moral Standard can be used to judge all actions as right or wrong, regardless of context. Ethical monists believe in an objective moral truth.



Lecture  
2

## How to do ethics in the new mediascape

Ethical Relativism:

This framework asserts that **moral principles** are not **absolute** but are **relative** to the **cultural, social, or individual context**. Ethical relativists believe that what is considered morally **right** or **wrong** can **vary from one culture or society to another**, and that no one moral perspective is superior to another.

### Ethical Pluralism:

Ethical pluralism acknowledges the **existence** of **multiple, sometimes conflicting, ethical principles**. It accepts that there can be various moral values and principles that are equally valid and important. Ethical pluralists recognize **the complexity** of **moral life** and the need for a **flexible approach** to moral decision-making.

**Ethical Pluralism** stands as a **Middle Ground** between **absolutism** and **relativism**

Lecture  
2

Further considerations:  
Ethical judgments



Lecture  
2

## Further considerations: Ethical judgments



Another **difficulty** with the “**moral panics**” approach to ethical issues in the new mediascape is that it suggests that “**ethics**” works **like this**:



1. There are clear, **universally** valid norms of **right** and **wrong** that we can take as our ethical starting points – as premises in an **ethical argument**.

Lecture  
2

## Further considerations: Ethical judgments

2. All that “ethics” really involves is applying these initial premises to the particulars of the current case in front of us – in a straightforward deduction that concludes the right thing to do, as based on our first premises.



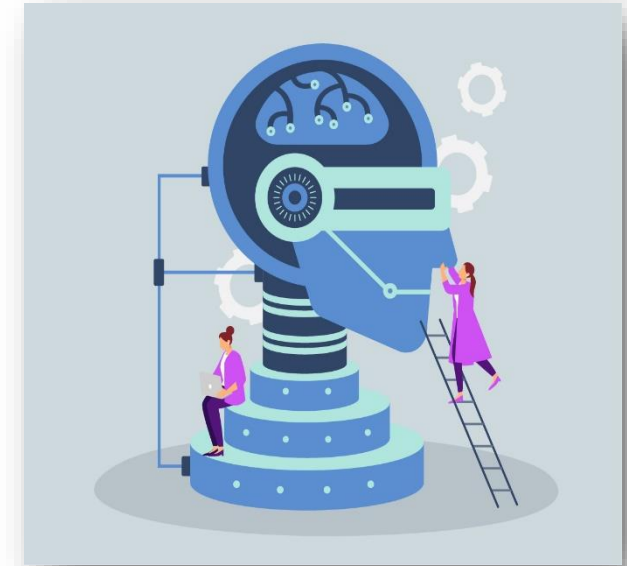


3. Once we have **our ethical answers** in this way, we can be **confident** that our answers are **right**; those **who disagree with us** must be **wrong**.

Lecture  
2

## Further considerations: Ethical judgments

This approach to **ethics** is **not necessarily mistaken**; on the contrary, **it seems that much of the time**, **Most** of us in fact **do not perceive an ethical problem or difficulty** in the **situation we're facing** – **Because** our ethical frameworks already provide us with reasonably clear and straightforward answers along just these lines.



At the same time, however, this **initial understanding of ethics** obscures a number of important dimensions of ethical reflection.

There is **no general rule** for **discerning** which **values, principles, norms, approaches** apply before we can proceed to any inferences/conclusions about what to do.

Lecture  
2

## Further considerations: Ethical judgments

That is, we will find it difficult conceptually to move toward pluralism and other forms of middle grounds, Because our thinking insists that we can only have either unity (shared norms) or difference (in interpretation/application), but not both.

Aristotle referred to this kind of judgment as “practical judgment”.

For Aristotle, the development of this sort of practical judgment is an ongoing project that continues throughout one’s entire life.



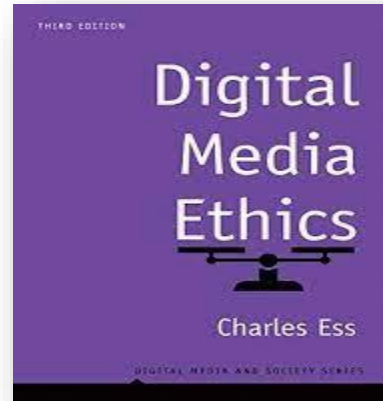
Lecture  
2

## Further considerations: Ethical judgments

Analogously, our first efforts to grapple with difficult ethical issues that require practical judgment do not always go well:

We are caught in the ethical “bootstrapping” problem of needing precisely the ability to judge that will be robust enough to help only after it has been developed and honed through many years of (sometimes hard) experience.

Digital Media  
Ethics (Digital  
Media and  
Society Series),  
3rd Edition, by  
Charles Ess



Intro

Recommended Reference





Lecture  
2

## Outlines:

- \*\* **Digital Media Ethics:** How to proceed?
- \*\* **Is Digital Media Ethics Possible?** Grounds for hope
- \*\* How to do ethics in the new mediascape: Dialogical approaches, difference, and Pluralism.
- \*\* Further considerations: Ethical judgments.



Thank You

# DIGITAL MEDIA ETHICS

## Lecture 2

DMG 723

Prepared by:  
Dr. Sherihan Mohamed