Intellectual Character and the News Media Audience: the Role of Intellectual Virtues in Pursuing Successful Knowledge Claims

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To my parents for their love and unwavering support

To Tracy for providing inspiration and guidance

Abstract

This thesis explores the role of the audience within contemporary news media and how individual epistemic agents can make knowledge claims based on news media outputs. The aim is to show that the news media's audience plays an active role in the inter-relationships between themselves, media practitioners and media organisations. Further, it is argued that individual epistemic agents, as members of the audience of the news media, must exercise intellectual virtues in order to make successful knowledge claims based on news media publications and to be an active audience. The First Chapter considers contemporary media ethics and shows that the audience has largely been viewed as passive and has been under-evaluated when compared to the inter-relationship between practitioners and media organisations. Chapter Two evaluates the role of truth in the news media and how this affects trust of the news media within society. The Third Chapter introduces virtue epistemology, an approach which seeks to address the weaknesses of foundationalist accounts of knowledge by appealing to the cultivation and development of intellectually virtuous character traits of virtue epistemic individuals as responsible inquirers. This thesis argues that the application of Linda Zagzebski's theory of virtue epistemology has significant advantages for agents seeking knowledge based on news media outputs. The Fourth Chapter explores the application of intellectual virtues to knowledge acquisition based on contemporary news media examples; and finds that the traits of open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, thoroughness, and intellectual carefulness are of particular benefit to the audience in making successful knowledge claims based on news media publications. The thesis is concluded by arguing that the audience, as individual epistemic agents within a democratic society, have an active role in interpreting and shaping news media publications.

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Introduction

For democratic societies, truth is indispensable. Only when citizens know the facts, it is assumed, can they make responsible judgments about public policy.[1]

It may be argued that individuals can freely choose and pursue goals only if they have appropriate information upon which to act. Ignorance is a key inhibition to autonomous action. The press is therefore an important, although by no means exclusive, source of information and opinion. It is through an open press that the public can become aware, not merely of facts about how the world is, but also about the range of available opinion on how it should be.[2]

This thesis aims to make a twofold contribution to the area of enquiry: firstly, it aims to make a contribution to media ethics through highlighting the importance of the audience in their inter-relationships with practitioners and media organisations; and secondly, it aims to contribute to virtue epistemology through the application of Linda Zagzebski's character-based account of knowledge to knowledge claims based on news media outputs. And further to the second contribution, this thesis argues that the intellectual character traits of open mindedness, inquisitiveness, thoroughness, and intellectual carefulness are the most important traits for individual inquirers to cultivate in making knowledge claims arising out of news media publications.

Returning to the first contribution of this thesis: contemporary media ethics has been primarily focused on the inter-relationships between practitioners, media organisations, and audiences. Practitioners and

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[1] Clifford G. Christians, [et al.] *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning* (7th ed.) (2005) 69.
[2] Andrew Elgar, "The 'fourth estate' and moral responsibilities", in Berry, David (ed.) *Ethics and media culture: practices and representations* (2000) 75.

media organisations have received the most scholarly attention and discussion with their respective influence predominantly being evaluated against the backdrop of a passive or silent audience. The audience has largely been neglected when compared to the focus of contemporary media ethics which has been directed to the influence of practitioners and media organisations in the communication of information to the public. This thesis will provide an overview of some of the contemporary literature that focuses on practitioners and media organisations in order to show the importance of becoming an epistemically responsible inquirer in a democratic society. The fresh focus on the audience's active epistemic participation in interpreting and disseminating information will form the basis for the argument that we, as members of the public, must take responsibility to become prudent information consumers or *knowers* of contemporary facts, events and issues within society.

The passages cited above also reflect the second contribution, which is to examine individual approaches to grasping truths and making knowledge claims based on the vast amount of information produced by modern news media outlets. The news media is an important source of information for citizens of a democratic society. As referred to above, individual knowledge is an important prerequisite for a democratic society to maintain the responsibility and accountability of elected governments. It will be argued that the analysis and application of Zagzebski's virtue epistemological theory provides the justification for a more active role of the audience within media ethics. Thus the first contribution of this thesis is supported by the argument for the second contribution.

This thesis' exploration into the character traits of individual agents (as members of the audience) and their relationship to the news media is set against the background of society's political structure. The political context has significant influence on the way in which the audience and the news media interact in society. Democratic societies will be the only form of society considered by this thesis. Unlike totalitarian regimes, democratically elected governments have a high threshold of responsibility

and accountability because the government is elected to power by its citizens. The news media has the role of publishing truthful accounts of contemporary events and issues to the public so they can individually and collectively make informed decisions, such as determining the direction and election of government. The news media can also inform the public as to the credibility of large organisations, corporations, celebrities, and public figures.

Whilst the political context will be included as an over-arching framework in this thesis, cultural considerations will not receive the same attention. Cultural implications include different values, perspectives and reactions that different ethnic groups may have in relation to contemporary social issues. It is argued that whilst cultural implications can lead to different perspectives arising out of news media publications; this thesis' aim is instead to provide a general account of analysis for individual agents in making knowledge claims based on news media outputs. And further, how such individual agents' epistemic development contributes to the development of an active audience within media ethics. This is distinct from an approach which analyses knowledge claims within a specific ethnic or cultural context.[3] The focus instead will be on how the audience can utilise and cultivate intellectual virtues in order to accurately interpret news media representations of contemporary social events and issues.

Now the scene has been set for the direction and purpose of this thesis, I provide a short summary of the structure before progressing into the substantive chapters. The First Chapter will discuss contemporary approaches to media ethics by critically reviewing some of the most influential authors' works. By analysing contemporary approaches to media ethics, this thesis will argue that the role of the audience has been largely under-evaluated. The audience will be shown to play an active role in interpreting the news media's publications. The focus on the role of the audience will differ from a large proportion of media ethics which has

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[3] Valeria Alia, *Media Ethics and Social Change* (2004) 52.

tended to focus on practitioners' ethics and media organisations. The active role of the audience will form the basis of this thesis' argument for agents' responsibility in cultivating certain intellectual virtues in order to make successful knowledge claims based on the large quantities of news media outputs available in today's societies.

Chapter Two builds on the discussion of contemporary media ethics by exploring the connections between truth, trust and the news media. This chapter firstly examines the role of truth within the framework of the news media's social responsibility. This is developed further by a discussion as to the implications of falsehoods and disclosure by the news media in informing the public of current events and issues. Finally, I discuss the place of public trust of the news media and how that trust is relevant to the epistemic inquirer in consuming news media outputs.

Given the role of the news media within a democratic society, Chapter Three introduces virtue epistemology as a theory of knowledge that can be applied to individual inquirers in making knowledge claims based on the public's interaction with and trust in the news media's publications. The Third Chapter will briefly discuss epistemology and virtue ethics in order to provide an insight into how virtue epistemology can be applied to the news media. Virtue epistemology will be shown to comprise two distinct theories – virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism. This thesis will then apply Linda Zagzebski's virtue responsibilist theory to the news media and argue that it has significant advantages for the audience in making knowledge claims based on news media publications.

The Fourth Chapter applies Zagzebski's virtue responsibilist theory to media coverage of three contemporary news events and issues. The first of these is the *WikiLeaks* press release of confidential diplomatic cables from US Embassies, with a particular focus on the cables regarding New Zealand's involvement in the Afghanistan War. The second event is the international outbreak of swine flu or the H1N1 virus in April 2009. The final event is the amendment to New Zealand law that made it illegal for

parents to use unreasonable force in disciplining their children, which is commonly known as the "anti-smacking" legislation. News media coverage of these contemporary events and issues is explored in order to show which intellectual character traits are of particular importance for individual inquirers as a part of their intellectual life within a democratic society.

Before proceeding to the First Chapter discussing contemporary media ethics, it is necessary to establish some important definitions in order to clarify various terms that will be used throughout this thesis. Firstly, the term 'practitioner' includes only professional persons who are directly involved in gathering and formulating news. The principal role of practitioners is the researching and recording of factual events and collation of different viewpoints and opinions into a news item. The term 'practitioner(s)' will therefore encompass such professions as print journalists, TV and radio reporters, cameramen and photographers. People who publish their own viewpoints and opinions on the internet (for instance on blog websites or providing comments to news publications on media organisation websites – commonly referred to as 'citizen journalism') will not, however, be considered to be producing news media outputs.[4] This is because whilst those outputs have the potential to reach a large audience, they are not bound by any professional code of ethics and it is argued that they do not have the same social authority or trust as that of reputable professional media practitioners. A discussion as to social trust will be developed further in Chapter Two. It is sufficient to say that for our present purposes, people who independently publish stories that have public readership are not considered practitioners.

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[4] A justification for the inclusion of amateur practitioners as such could be that they, like professional practitioners, produce information that is instantly accessible via the internet to a large number of people within society. An example of the instantaneous technological capability to pass information over the internet is the use of video cameras and cell phones that can upload video images on to social network websites with a very large global membership such as Facebook or Twitter. The exclusion of citizen journalism does not, however, prevent a virtue-based account of knowledge for being applied to such outputs. Furthermore, with the increase of technology and the wide global use of citizen journalism over the internet, a virtue-based account of knowledge has an increasingly important role in regulating knowledge claims based on material communicated via Facebook or Twitter.

'Media organisations' will refer to those institutions that employ practitioners to publish their recorded facts and viewpoints to society. This is a relatively straightforward definition as it includes traditional news media broadcasting institutions such as BBC or CNN with a very wide global readership. Media organisations, including print media, will represent those organisations which disseminate the news to the public. This means that small community focused media organisations are included within the definition because their primary role is to inform their targeted readership or viewership. Large media organisations play an important role not only in communicating the news to the public; but also in the way in which they present different news items as well as the coverage and emphasis they give to those news stories. For example, graphic images of victims of war can have significant impacts on public perception of those conflicts as was illustrated in the US during the Vietnam War, and more recently, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Editors are also very influential in determining the news that reaches us as media consumers. Editors are responsible for what news is published and how those publications are presented to the public. The role of editors in contemporary media ethics will be discussed later; however an 'editor' will represent those professionals within media organisations who are responsible for deciding which news is published and how the news is to be presented within media organisations.

The audience is a central concept of this thesis. The term 'audience' shall refer to all people who, as epistemic agents, engage with and interpret news media publications as member of a democratic society. This raises some issues of capacity because some people may not have access to news media publications or not be able to understand them. 'Society' includes a group of people within a governing state that is primarily interested in the good of its own people. Finally, the 'news' will include the publication of issues and events as well as opinions that document and represent contemporary social issues. Terms such as 'news', 'stories', 'articles', 'outputs' and 'publications' shall also be used inter-changeably to

represent new media outputs. This will also include photographs and video footage where relevant.

Chapter One: Contemporary Media Ethics

Media ethics is a branch of professional ethics. Professional ethics has core principles that delineate right actions which can be applied across a particular field or profession. There is often a code of ethics that enshrines ethical principles within each profession. Media ethics has core principles which define the news media's role within society as well as the inter-relationships between practitioners, media organisations, and the audience. Practitioners and media organisations also have codes of ethics based on those core principles. This chapter will begin by briefly reviewing contemporary media ethics through examining the news media's role within the political context of society. This will be followed by a discussion of the inter-relationships between practitioners, media organisations, and the audience. Each of these will be reviewed in respective order, and this will give an insight into the importance of the audience's active role as an integral part of the inter-relationships. This chapter will be concluded by a short discussion as to the impact of technology on contemporary news media.

Returning to the political framework, Christians et al note that truth is a powerful political force in that good news is welcomed and strengthens social stability; whereas bad news (or when truths 'hurt') can disrupt the status quo and often creates a crisis rather than promoting general welfare.[5] The news media can be culpable in presenting the news in a sensationalist way. For example, an event can be branded as a 'crisis' where it is merely a temporarily bad state of affairs that is under control and will be remedied in the near future. The outbreak of swine flu or the H1N1 virus will be used later in this thesis to illustrate the news media's coverage of a health crisis. However sensationalism does not alter the

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[5] Christians et al. (2005) 69. It is noted that the use of 'truth' in this way is not without philosophical contention. The issues of truth and its role within the news media will be developed further in chapter two of this thesis.

point that news, particularly bad news, can have lasting negative effects over and above the event itself. This brings into question the role of the news media within a democratic society's political landscape because the news media can have a significant influence on individual and collective perceptions on reported events. A central duty of the news media is to report the truth of contemporary social facts, events and issues. However how does such a duty to report the truth affect the government and the public? This question has received a considerable amount of scholarly and political debate with more conservative accounts finding that the news media's role is limited to reporting facts within the confines of governmental control; whereas more liberal accounts have viewed the news media as an independent 'Fourth Estate' of government which plays an important role in upholding state accountability.

Matthew Kieran advocates an understanding of the news media as equivalent to a fourth estate, in that it should be viewed as an impartial and regulative ideal of the other three forms of state control (legislative, executive, and judicial).[6] Kieran believes the link between the state and the public is an implicit social contract, in which the news media are the vehicle used to give consideration to both parties. In performing this function, the news media is to aspire to the goal of truth, which must be presented in a clear and accessible way. In contrast, Andrew Elgar finds that there are not sufficient grounds for the news media to claim it is a political fourth estate because of the lack of an adequate account of the way in which news is constructed and interpreted by its audience. Edgar goes on to argue that:

> it is only as members of a political community that agents become competent interpreters of the news. The role of the fourth estate is therefore to promote and deepen this embedding of the individual within a community.[7]

This means that for Elgar, we as individual inquirers and news media consumers have the responsibility of taking an active role in society in

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[6] Matthew Kieran, *Media Ethics: a philosophical approach* (1997) 44 – 48.
[7] Elgar (2000) 73 – 74.

order to be able to interpret issues and events accurately. Such a view is a central aim of this thesis, in exploring ways of enhancing and developing intellectual character traits for accurately interpreting news media outputs. This is where virtue epistemology will be applied later in this thesis to show how the development of certain intellectual characteristics would assist individuals in making appropriate knowledge claims about contemporary social issues and, hence, would increase their opportunities to become properly active members of a democratic society.

The news media can also have significant influence on the reputations of institutions and individuals. Where there is 'trial by media', when an institution or individual has done something (allegedly) wrong, the media can often influence the public's verdict on the issue.[8] An example of this was the publishing of Members of Parliament's expense claims in the United Kingdom, which has been on-going since details were first published in May 2009. Some politicians either resigned or did not stand for re-election as a result of the news media's coverage tarnishing their political reputations.[9] In publishing details of the expenditure claims on public money by Members of Parliament, the news media was extremely influential in holding those public officials accountable for their use of public money. Louis Day develops this idea further by examining the role of stereotypes in the news media. A stereotype is a fixed mental image of a group that is frequently, and sometimes unjustly, applied to all of the

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[8] Louis A. Day, *Ethics in Media Communications: Cases and Controversies*, 3rd ed. (2000) Chapter 12: "Media Practitioners and Social Justice". See also Miranda Basner, "Consuming interests in a culture of secrecy", in Berry, David (ed.) *Ethics and media culture: practices and representations* (2000) 264 – 255. Basner notes that the news media can destroy organisations and individuals through the news media's potential influence in degrading the public's perspective. While the defamation of groups or individuals is rarely wholly attributable to the news media (for example, a person has usually committed an act that has resulted in the news media's attention in the first instance; the news media has merely publicised the act to society), it remains worth noting the power relations present within the news media when disclosure can pose a dramatic influence on organisations and individuals.
[9] For example see that *United Kingdom Parliament's website*, "MP's allowances", 2011, available   URL: http://mpsallowances.parliament.uk/mpslordsandoffices/hocallowances/allowances-by-mp/ and *The Telegraph's* dedicated website to the UK Members of Parliament expenses media coverage *The Telegraph*, "MP's Expenses", 2011, available URL: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/mps-expenses/

members of that group.[10]   Day notes that stereotyping is probably inevitable in mass media that is disseminating a lot of information to a wide audience. This can further reinforce social stereotypes which can lead to discrimination and prejudice against the stereotyped groups.[11] Using the present example of UK Members of Parliament, a stereotype would be to claim that Members of the Parliament in the UK misuse public money for personal gain – where such a claim is not accurate when applied to all Parliamentary Members as some members do not misuse public money. In terms of a virtuous inquirer and as an active member of the community, this is another factor that has to be taken into account in interpreting news media publications.

Another important issue within contemporary news media is the extent of responsibility the media has to the wider community. Bugeja argues that American practitioners operate within a theory of the press called social responsibility.[12]   Bugeja notes that there are three other established press theories, which are: libertarian, authoritarian, and communist. Authoritarian and communist press theories are characterised by government control over the press and the news media towing the governmental line on the content of news publications. Authoritarian and communist press theories fall outside the scope of this thesis which focuses on the news media's role within a democratic society.

However social responsibility and libertarian press theories are relevant to this thesis because they operate within the framework of a democratic society. Bugeja notes that previous American writers have found that the functions of the news media under social responsibility and libertarian theory are essentially the same. The role of the news media under these two theories can be characterised as follows:

1.   Servicing the political system by providing information, discussion, and debate on public affairs;

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[10] Day (2000) 387.
[11] Day (2000) 390.
[12] Michael Bugeja, *Living Ethics: Across Media Platforms* (2008) 82.

2. Enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self-government;
3. Safeguarding the rights of the individual by serving as a watchdog against government;
4. Servicing the economic system, primarily by bringing together the buyers and sellers of goods and services through the medium of advertising;
5. Providing entertainment; and
6. Maintaining its own financial self-sufficiency so as to be free from the pressures of special interests.[13]

For the purposes of this thesis, the above characteristics will be taken to capture the news media's role within society. This is because, inter alia, the characteristics can operate within the framework of a democratic society. Servicing the political and economic system as well as enlightening the public are examples of the news media contributing to a democratic society through the dissemination of its outputs to the public. As will be discussed later in this chapter, media organisations in particular can have significant influence in political and economic contexts because they reach a wide audience. The news media can potentially generate a wide range of debate within audiences in accordance with the political and economic directives of media organisations. Such directives can vary between different media organisations; however mainstream or large media organisations strive to uphold ethical principles similar to those enshrined in the codes of practitioners' ethics already outlined above.

Bugeja notes that social responsibility is the only one of the four press theories that is based more on moral principle rather than on a political premise. This is because characteristics such as enlightening the public, encouraging self-governance, and safeguarding fundamental rights act as central concepts which can override competing considerations such as media organisation directives or editorial deadlines. An example of such moral principles is the provision for the safeguarding of individual rights. Furthermore, when the theory of social responsibility is applied to practitioners' conduct, the overriding ethic is respect for the community. This means that the news media's role is, first and foremost, directed

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[13] Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson & Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press* (1956) 7, in Bugeja (2008) 82.

towards the interests of community. And central to the interests of the community is the dissemination of truthful accounts of currents events and issues, which will be explored further in the next chapter. Indeed without the public of a democratic society being the audience requiring information and understanding of important current events and issues there would be no need for the news media in the first instance.

Other authors have noted that the demands of social responsibility on a practitioner can sometimes be reduced to a debate between deontology versus utilitarianism. A practitioner's duty to act for the good of the public interest can conflict with potential adverse consequences for the interests of the practitioner's media organisation.[14] An example of this could be a circumstance where there is limited evidence available on a contentious news story about a public organisation; however the evidence is not verifiable or credible at the editorial deadline. The deontologist would likely adhere to the principle of accuracy in reporting to the public and wait until if and when more verifiable evidence was produced; the utilitarian may instead cite the importance and expediency of publishing the article as being an overriding benefit to the cost of publishing inaccuracies. While this observation will not be further expanded upon here, it is sufficient to note that practitioners and media organisations are faced with competing considerations against the background of the political, social and economic circumstances of the democratic society in which they live.

By functioning within the framework of social responsibility, the news media becomes an integral part of the social contract. At its most basic level, social contract theory is designed to show that individuals can collectively subrogate certain rights or freedoms in some form of exchange for a normative social arrangement such as government or just institutions.[15] However such is the diverse nature of social contract theories that even this basic account can be problematic. Thomas Hobbes

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[14] Christians et al. (2005) 232.
[15] Ann Cudd, "Contractarianism", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2007, available URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/contractarianism/ paragraph 1.

is one of the authors most associated with social contract theory. Hobbes argues that all human beings are primarily self-interested. Because of this, the 'state of nature' is that all individuals can only pursue simple survival needs as each individual acts only for oneself irrespective of concerns for others.[16] However, because men are reasonable they can progress beyond the state of nature by pursuing a degree of peace with our fellow people.

> … it is a precept, or general rule of reason: that every man ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek and use all helps and advantages of war. The first branch of which rule containeth the first and fundamental law of nature, which is: to seek peace and follow it. The second, the sum of the right of nature, which is: by all means we can to defend ourselves.[17]

Hobbes' social contract theory involves two distinct concepts. Firstly, individuals must consent or agree to collectively forgo some of the rights and liberties under the state of nature. Examples are freedom to act totally in one's self-interest such as theft or violence to obtain the necessities of life – there is no law preventing or punishing an individual from doing this in the state of nature. Secondly, individuals must assent to or concede power to a sovereign or government that has the power of enforcing laws that are equally applicable to all members of what is now a society.

Immanuel Kant developed social contract theory further by emphasising personal morality as justification for assenting to the state. In Kant's philosophy, an individual is to only act on a proposition or maxim that can be willed to become a part of universal moral law. For example, an individual ought not to obtain the necessities of life by thievery or coercion because if such acts were a universal law, then society would reduce to an anarchistic state similar to the state of nature. This approach by Kant

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[16] Celeste Friend, "Social Contract Theory", *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 15 October 2004, available URL: http://www.iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/ topic 2a, paragraph 8.
[17] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (2008) 89 – 90.

represents a clear distinction from earlier social contract theories such as Hobbes' because the emphasis is placed upon acting in accordance with a universal moral law instead of primarily acting on the basis of self-interest.[18] The benefits for each individual are a critical component in such justifications for co-operating with others and assenting to the power of the state. Under the Kantian approach, individual consent is not required as a fundamental basis for contracting with others to go beyond the state of nature because we each have a duty to act in accordance with universal moral law; and is shown by the example immediately above, universal moral law does not conform with the state of nature.

John Rawls revived contemporary debate of the social contract in his book, *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls uses a highly abstracted version of Hobbes' state of nature which he calls the 'original position', where:

> [The] original position is not, of course, thought of as an actual historical state of affairs, much less as a primitive condition of culture. It is understood as a purely hypothetical situation characterized so as to lead to a certain conception of justice. Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength and the like. I shall even assume that the parties do not know their conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance.[19]

In order to discover the nature of justice, we again need to canvass possible justifications under the Kantian approach to act in such a way that is consistent with universal law. For example, Rawls argues that each generation must maintain established just institutions as well as preserving

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[18] D'Agostino, Fred & Gerald Gaus, "Contemporary Approaches to the Social Contract", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2008, available URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/contractarianism-contemporary/ topic 1, paragraph 4. Further, Ann Cudd notes that this shift in emphasis places greater importance on justifications for acting in accordance with the hypothetical universal law. Cudd (2007), topic 6.
[19] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971) 11.

the gains of culture and civilization. Such maintenance and preservation by each generation are examples of meeting Kantian justifications for upholding the social contract with society and the state.[20]

These brief descriptions of mainstream social contract theory show that justifications are extremely important for individuals in interacting with other individuals and the state. Social contract theory has two relevant connections to the present thesis. Firstly, the contract between individuals and society requires justifications that benefit both individual and society that accord with universal moral law. In determining individual agent's actions, the news media provides a significant amount of information that forms the basis of individual justifications for those actions. Also, in democratic societies the public perception of a government's actions can influence its justifications for pursuing such actions. For example, the news media may publish stories revealing opposition to legislative changes by a government, as will be illustrated later in this thesis with reference to the "anti-smacking" legislative amendment in New Zealand. In a democratic society, such conduct could have direct consequences when individuals vote in public office elections.

Secondly, the audience are hypothetically contracted to the state and have accepted the state's power in exchange for certain individual liberties. This means that it is in the best interests if each individual member of society to keep updated on social issues conveyed by the news media in order to ensure the state is acting in the most beneficial way for each individual. If an individual were not to care about contemporary social issues, there could potentially be significant detriment to that individual in terms of political change in addition to such ignorance of social issues not conforming to a universal law. Indeed if all people ignored social issues, then society would revert to the state of nature or original position. This thesis will argue that being an active member of society by engaging with

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[20] Rawls (1971) 285.

news media publications is best grounded in intellectually virtuous character traits.

Thus the news media has an important role in dissemination of information based on current affairs to the audience. The contract between individuals, as well as between individuals and the state, is facilitated by the news media through the publication of material about current affairs that is relevant to such contractual relationships. I will now discuss the inter-relationships within media ethics between the practitioner, media organisation and audience in order to provide further insight into the audience's role within contemporary media ethics.

Practitioners

Ethical considerations for practitioners have been the subject of significant discussion within contemporary media ethics. Valerie Alia notes that practitioners' ethics are often stated as principles and guidelines with which practice should be in accordance at all times. "The main argument [for upholding principles] concerns serving the public interest".[21] Some of the general principles that have been developed in mainstream media ethics are described by Philip Paterson and Lee Wilkins. The authors emphasise the following principles as the most important for a news media professional:

1. Accuracy: Using the correct facts and the right words and putting things in context.
2. Tenacity: Knowing when a story is important enough to require additional effort, both personal and institutional effort.
3. Dignity: Leaving the subject of a story as much self-respect as possible.
4. Reciprocity: Treating others the way you wish to be treated.
5. Sufficiency: Allocating adequate resources to important issues.
6. Equity: Seeking justice for all involved in controversial issues and treating all sources and subjects equally.
7. Community: Valuing social cohesion.
8. Diversity: Covering all segments of the audience fairly and adequately.[22]

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[21] Alia (2004) 39.
[22] Philip Paterson and Lee Wilkins (eds.), *Media Ethics: Issues & Cases* (2002) 31 – 32.

Generally, these principles sufficiently capture contemporary mainstream ethical ideals for practitioners. Practitioners are expected to aspire to these ideals in assembling and presenting their coverage. In most situations the above principles can easily be applied by practitioners to news articles. For example, a good practitioner reporting on a peaceful protest outside Parliament would undertake appropriate inquiries to determine the issue that is being protested and uncover the various viewpoints to ascertain the present progress of the issue, and even to anticipate future progressions. Collating all of this information is an important step in ensuring the resulting news story is *accurate* and whether it is important enough to pursue more substantively given the current social issues and other newsworthy events (pursuing further lines of inquiry is an example of thoroughness or *Tenacity*). *Dignity* and *reciprocity* are generic moral principles that provide for the respect for humanity, which is particularly applicable in the news media when reputations can be at stake given the potentially wide publication of news media outputs.

In this context, *equity* means that news publications should seek to articulate the truth of the issue at hand regardless of which people or organisations are accountable. Equity also refers to the treatment of people regardless of rank, race, sex etc. *Diversity* ensures that practitioners cover stories that are representative of its audience and addresses and engages with their concerns and interests. *Sufficiency* flows on from accuracy in that once the issues have been sufficiently understood, resources should be allocated in proportion to a story's importance. This is not to say that stories with a lesser social importance are not significant in their own right; however it is part of a practitioner's role to determine the appropriate coverage proportionate to its importance for the *community*. The above principles provide a solid foundation for the ideals practitioners aspire to in collating and presenting their news publications. The practitioner's process in presenting a news story will be shown later in this thesis to be relevant to individual epistemic inquirers in formulating legitimate knowledge claims.

The Australian Journalists Association ("AJA") is an organisation with voluntary membership which places a code of ethics on its members that reflects the principles outlined above. The AJA claims that most journalists in Australia are members; and those members are to commit themselves to the core principles of honesty, fairness, independence, and respect for the rights of others.[23] These core principles are followed by twelve statements that serve as guidelines for practitioners. These statements are an expansion of the four core principles. For example the first statement is:

> Report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress relevant available facts, or give distorting emphasis. Do your utmost to give a fair opportunity for reply.[24]

This statement reflects the expansion of the core principles of honesty and fairness and applies them to the newsgathering process. When comparing the AJA code of ethics and the principles set out by Paterson, there are some distinct similarities such as dignity and reciprocity being the equivalent of the respect of other people's rights. The similarities between ethical theory and the code of ethics show that ethical theory has some application to the practice of being a media professional in contemporary society.

The AJA code of ethics also has a 'Guidance Clause', which states:

> Basic values often need interpretation and sometimes come into conflict. Ethical journalism requires conscientious decision-making in context. Only substantial advancement of the public interest or risk of substantial harm to people allows any standard to be overridden.[25]

This clause recognises that in practice such ethical principles can conflict and differ in interpretation. The guidance clause therefore entrenches the public interest or avoidance of substantial harm to people as overriding

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[23] *Australian News Commentary*, "Journalists code of ethics – an oxymoron?", 25 November 2009, available URL: http://www.australian-news.com.au/codethics.htm
[24] *Australian New Commentary* (2009) Statement 1.
[25] *Australian New Commentary* (2009) Guidance Clause.

principles when the standard ethical principles do not, or cannot, apply to a particular context.

Further, many contemporary practitioners believe that in practice situations can often arise where one or more of these principles needs to be contravened. This means that for many experienced professionals such ethical ideals are not able to be universally upheld in actual professional contexts. Michael Bugeja sets out what he calls the "ABC's" for practitioners in upholding ethical principles, which are general guidelines for practitioners.[26] Bugeja's guidelines can be characterised by the first three guidelines: 'Act with urgency; Be professional; Cover your ass', in that they acknowledge practitioners have competing interests in producing their news stories. Because of these competing interests, such as deadline and organisational pressures, practitioners cannot always adhere to the standard, more complex, ethical principles and guidelines in every circumstance.[27] It is clear from these guidelines that practitioners' experience when out in the field gathering the news can be significantly different to those envisaged by the authors of the ethical principles outlined above. This is important because it is a factor that needs to be taken into account in forming the audience's interpretation of news media outputs.

Such complex situations for practitioners arise where adherence to ethical principles is not as straightforward as generic guidelines will allow. Alia elaborates:

> More often, the situation is ambiguous, and we must decide whether the quest for 'truth' is driven by the need for knowledge, the desire to increase readership or raise broadcast ratings, or blatant careerism.[28]

The above quotation provides a useful insight into some of the different ethical demands that confront practitioners in gathering and formulating

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[26] Bugeja (2008) 93 – 98.
[27] Bugeja (2008) 93.
[28] Alia (2004) 39.

the news. Practitioners weigh up different motives and factors in addition to publishing the truth to the public; and these external factors can influence which news items survive the practitioner's assessment of the information's relevance to contemporary society, the editorial process or a media organisation's directives.

Another important dilemma within the ethics of contemporary media practice is the relationship between practitioners and their sources of information. A practitioner's 'source' usually refers to the connections that practitioners have with people who possess inside knowledge that is of relevance to a particular story. The dependence on well-informed sources is vital to practitioners in understanding the factual matrix of the news story and, accordingly, being able to present a publication to the audience in a way that is newsworthy to the audience. However this dependence is not without difficulty:

> A news medium's pledge to divulge its sources of information would be welcomed by the public; however, printing names usually results in the sources thereafter speaking guardedly or even drying up.[29]

This means that there are two important issues in the relationship between practitioners and their sources. The first issue is that practitioners are reliant on well-informed sources, particularly if the story is of a sensitive nature and secondary information to verify the information provided by the source is difficult to attain. An example of this would be a source leaking information regarding confidential government actions, such as will be illustrated using the *WikiLeaks* example in the Fourth Chapter. The second issue is whether the practitioner should disclose the source. In many cases, disclosure of sources should occur because the claims made by the source often need credibility in the eyes of the public in order to be authoritative or persuasive news publications. However confidentiality of sources can be important to preserve the source in order to gain further information in the future.

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[29] Christians [et al.] (2005) 72.

The way in which practitioners present their news stories is another significant issue in contemporary media ethics. Mike Jempson states that the impression of a news article is very important, as important as the contents of the story itself.[30] The immediate impressions that are left with the reader are mostly derived from the headline, photographs, and the first few sentences of the news story. Because practitioners attempt to grab and hold reader attention at the beginning of a news story, it is important for audiences to realise that usually the whole story has to be read in order to form an accurate account of that news story. Further, it is important for audiences to acknowledge that news stories from professional practitioners are often produced while jockeying practical considerations under deadline pressures.[31] An example of such practical considerations is the space allocated for a news story within a newspaper's page layout. This can lead to the presentation of news stories not always being the same or as thorough as if they were produced without the external pressures placed upon practitioners.

Contemporary practitioner-focussed ethics has also been challenged by investigative journalism, which is a distinct section of the news media's outputs. Investigative journalism often attempts to uncover truths about important social issues about which the public has had previously little or inaccurate information. Documentary film making, as a particular type of investigative journalism, has provided an excellent medium for the coverage of such stories because it allows practitioners to present in a way that captures audience attention. The greater impact on viewer attention is achieved through visual footage, which intensifies the issue that the practitioner is attempting to convey. David Berry believes that documentary film making has distinct types of practices that set it aside from mainstream media-sourced information. Berry argues that audiences understand that documentary films are a representation, through constructed text and image, of the truth. Berry goes as far as to propose

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[30] Mike Jempson, "And the consequence was…", in Berry, David (ed.) *Ethics and media culture: practices and representations* (2000) 289.
[31] Christians [et al.] (2005) 72-3.

that audiences may infer a heightened sense of reality from documentary films in relating their content to life outside the film.[32]

However, whether the society's trust of documentary films is similar to that of news stories is a matter of contention within media ethics. Documentary films often concentrate on particular social issues that are (at least perceived to be) important, yet they have not received sufficient coverage in the news media for the public to grasp the complete picture of the news story. Often the lack of public awareness is asserted as a catalyst for changing or re-evaluating the particular issue. An example is the documentary film *Bowling for Columbine*, where the political and social issue of the right of US citizens to bear arms and the vastness of the armaments industry in the USA was highlighted, criticised, and argued by Michael Moore to be accountable for the increasing level of mass murders in schools within America.[33] The asserted independent evaluation of important social issues could lead to a public perception of documentary films being of a higher social value or social trust than that of mainstream media practitioners. Further, documentary films often have a particular motive which is usually made explicit to the audience; whereas in many other media publications the agenda behind the articles is rarely communicated. The motive behind producing the news story is another point that the audience, aiming to be responsible as epistemic agents, should take into consideration in making knowledge claims based on news media publications. Documentary film making is a distinct form of the news media output and will not be afforded further discussion in this thesis; however the importance of trust and the media will be developed further in the next chapter.

A final important issue in contemporary practitioner-focussed ethics is the ever-growing presence of what is commonly referred to as 'popular

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[32] Berry, David, "Trust in media practices: towards cultural development", in Berry, David (ed.) *Ethics and media culture: practices and representations* (Oxford: Focal Press, 2000) 29.

[33] Michael Moore, *Bowling for Columbine*, 23 November 2009, synopsis available URL: http://www.bowlingforcolumbine.com/about/synopsis.php

journalism'.[34] Popular journalism is news coverage which is presented by practitioners in a sensationalist way with the predominant aim of generating a wider readership. Cynthia Carter and Stuart Allan examine the effects of news publications that have been presented to the public in a sensationalist way in order to generate a wider readership. While 'infotainment' (the merging of information and entertainment by the news media) is currently not used widely by professional media practitioners, Carter and Allan note that infotainment is a growing phenomenon in contemporary society. However contemporary authors have argued that infotainment blurs the distinction between fact and fiction and thus detracts the audience from reality.[35] This results in personal and emotional responses to infotainment publications as opposed to reasoned responses to truthful news accounts. An example of an infotainment new article that is commonly used is an overly-hyped 'scandal' involving celebrities or public figures such as the UK Parliamentary Members expense 'scandal' already referred to in this thesis.

Infotainment has a positive aspect in that it is (allegedly) generating greater readership and viewership of news stories. So long as the audience acknowledges the role of entertainment and its possible negative effects on accuracy and on depth of coverage, then there is nothing inherently wrong with infotainment publications. However the sensationalist way in which news stories are presented can lead to the intellectual quality of those news items being diminished. Alia states that:

> Editors and journalists often work from the assumption that readers, listeners and viewers are unable to cope with too much information and require the kind of tension found in works of drama and fiction to hold their interest.[36]

This simplification of news stories and emphasis on the dramatic invariably reduces the story to two opposing sides, when there can often be more

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[34] Cynthia Carter and Stuart Allan, "'If it bleeds, it leads': ethical questions about popular journalism", in Berry, David (ed.) *Ethics and media culture: practices and representations* (2000) 132 – 135.
[35] Carter and Allan (2000) 145 – 147.
[36] Alia (2004) 43.

sides to the story resulting a far more complex truth than that which is presented by the news media. Such diversification of stories relating to one factual scenario is an importance reason why the audience must utilise all intellectual resources available to them in order to grasp truths and make subsequent knowledge claims based on news media outputs.

Media Organisations

Media organisations have significant influence in presenting the news that reaches the citizens of a democratic society. Such an influence can come from the institution's owners or the editorial process; although these two influences often coincide with each other in realising the goals of that particular media organisation. The influence of corporate entities on media organisations has received a lot of public attention, for example the alleged influence that media tycoon Rupert Murdoch has had as owner of several large media organisations.[37] The competition between organisations within the media industry for profits has brought into question the independence of media organisations, while others view the competition as advantageous in producing and communicating news of a higher quality to the public.

Louis Day discusses these two separate and distinct views of economic involvement and regulation of the media industry.[38] The first view is that economic competition between news media outlets has created aggressive competition and substantial expansion of media organisations giving the public greater choice and more information. The opposing view is that the commercialism of the media has seen it corrupted by corporate interests and motives.

> The critics view the unrestrained pursuit of profits as a parasitical
> practice that puts self- interest above any sense of social
> responsibility. According to this view, whenever profit motives

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[37] For example, see *Center for American Progress*, 23 November 2009, "Who is Rupert Murdoch?", available URL: http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2004/07/b122948.html

[38] Day (2000) 227 – 228.

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compete for the attention of corporate management, commercial interests always prevail.[39]

Day notes that there is nothing inherently wrong with commercial media enterprise, and so long as public interests are given the highest precedence, the media organisations are not doing a disservice to their audiences. However, Day goes on to argue that the influence large media corporations have on news media outputs cannot be overlooked.[40]

Christians et al. argue that intra-organisational pressures can result in the 'down-playing' of corporate liability in the news.

> The actual truth is almost always more than one person's story or one person's perspective. In an organisational setting, truth is often negotiated and contains components of several opinions. Practitioners operating within the multiple layers of organisations are often charged with communicating a message composed so that its original kernels of truth are well hidden.[41]

This means that media organisations can potentially be adversely affected by corporate pressures in a competitive media market. However, these types of claims have not been quantified and corporate owners of large media organisations have asserted their independence in the publication of the news. This raises issues of truth and of trust in the news media which will be explored in the next chapter. In cultivating intellectual virtues an epistemic agent should be aware of this economic influence in collating and evaluating the information we obtain from the news media.[42]

The ethical debate as to disclosure versus confidentiality is an issue for media organisations as well as for practitioners. Day observes that

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[39] Day (2000) 227.
[40] Day (2000) 228.
[41] Christians [et al.] (2005) 199 – 200.
[42] Christians et al. further argue that the growing economic pressures on media organisations puts further emphasis on producing news stories that are pseudo-dramatic rather than publishing the boring, unadorned, truth. This sensationalist tendency among media organisations and practitioners alike is evidenced by infotainment discussed in the section above. Sensationalism is designed to increase readership and economic profitability; and this reinforces the pressures on practitioners and editors to produce such news stories. Christians [et al.] (2005) 199.

confidentiality is valued highly in society, and disclosure of information should always be considered objectively. One of the main justifications for disclosure of highly sensitive information is that it is in the public interest.[43] This is because the dissemination of accurate information to the public is the lifeblood of democratic societies.

> The moral position of mass media institutions is often at issue when they seek the release of confidential information. From the standpoint of motivation, the media are at least on respectable moral ground when they publish sensitive information because they believe it to have news value. Such decisions, of course, do involve subjective judgments, but they are at least news judgments born out of public interest considerations.
>
> This is not to suggest that public interest concerns are the only noble ethical motivations. Obviously, the potential for harm to individuals, small groups within society, or even large institutions can provide a morally justifiable rationale for breaching confidentiality. But actors' moral position is an important consideration in evaluating their claims of access to confidential information.[44]

The quotation above shows that media organisations have competing issues to consider when disclosing sensitive news items to the public. While there is the primary consideration of the news story being disclosed because it is for the good of the public interest, there are other considerations that can arise in particular contexts. An example is the name suppression of a sexual assault victim. Media organisations' news stories often reach a large readership and therefore the wider social context of newsworthy stories is an issue when publishing sensitive information to the public.

One of the most important contextual considerations is they way in which media organisations address conflicts of interest. Day states that conflicts of interest typically arise from the different roles we play within society.

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[43] Day (2000) 167.
[44] Day (2000) 168.

The conflicting interests are derived from the news media's role against the background of wider social obligations. In terms of media organisations, their role is to produce relevant and important news stories to inform the citizens of a democratic society. However the content of these stories can potentially conflict with wider social obligations such as the interests of national security in times of armed conflict. The *WikiLeaks* example used in the Fourth Chapter will illustrate these issues further where sensitive US diplomatic cables were published by *WikiLeaks* to the public. Day notes, in terms of resolving conflicts of interests, that media organisations' policies are generally found to be legally orientated so as to preserve the media organisation's public reputation.[45] The focus on legal consequences can result in a further conflict with the media organisation's adherence to the news media's ethical principles.

The Importance of the Audience in Contemporary Media Ethics

Traditional media ethics has largely viewed the audience as passive interpreters of news media outputs. Practitioners and media organisations have been taken as the central focus of ethical issues involving informing the public of important events and issues within society. The role of the audience has therefore been generally neglected when compared to the interests of practitioners and media organisations in producing news publications. As previously identified, Matthew Kieran takes the traditional liberal view of the news media as being the fourth estate of society, in that the news media should be an impartial and regulative ideal of the other three institutions of state control. Kieran goes on to focus on the importance of the audience, and states that the audience's understanding of news publications is a regulative ideal that practitioners must aspire to in order to render complex events comprehensible within given time constraints.[46] On the basis of such a regulative ideal, Kieran proposes a twofold requirement for an impartial news media: firstly, news stories are to report the essence of what actually happened; and secondly, practitioners are to remain as impartial as possible given individual

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[45] Day (2000) 193.
[46] Kieran (1997) 44.

prejudices. These two requirements are designed to ensure the audience is provided with the most accurate account of the facts; which is presented from an impartial point of view so as to assist in including all relevant facts and ensuring disinterested coverage.

As members of the news media's audience, this thesis argues that it is each individual agent's responsibility, as a member of a democratic society, to keep informed of contemporary social issues (including political issues). The role of the audience within the inter-relationships with practitioners and media organisations is accordingly as an active participant. This is because practitioners and media organisations produce outputs to inform the public; and importantly, the audience determines, or at least participates, in determining which stories are relevant to contemporary social issues. The citizens of a democratic society shape their own issues according to their own interests. In response to this, practitioners and media organisations must produce outputs that conform and are relevant to those contemporary social issues.

This means that interpretation of news media outputs is argued by this thesis to play a central role in how individuals perceive, evaluate and participate in important social issues. The importance of our individual interpretations of the news media gives rise to an approach where individual members of the audience can utilise a subjective intellectual process, yet still have the confidence of an objective criterion of correctness. This is a point where intellectual virtues may be relevant. The audience may be assisted in gaining access to the most accurate interpretation of news media outputs by exercising intellectual character traits. This thesis will argue that, given the agent has grasped truths arising out of news publications, individual inquirers can make subsequent knowledge claims based on those publications. The application of virtue epistemology to an account of reception of the news media will be developed and critically analysed in Chapters Three and Four of this thesis.

Advancements in Technology and Contemporary Media Ethics

The rapid evolution of technology, particularly in the later twentieth and early twenty first centuries, has brought a new set of challenges to the media industry. The number of media through which news can be presented to the public has progressed from newspapers with photographs to include video and the internet. The news media's use of such technologies provides interactive media that allow for greater audience interpretation and appreciation of reported news events. Not only has the number of media increased, the technological advancements within each media have increased. For example, high definition digital imaging has enabled the quality of photographs in newspapers to provide readers with improved visual effects to the stories; and large media organisations that publish stories online have discussion forums where readers can post accessible comments and reaction to stories. This publication of reactions to news media adds added scrutiny to practitioners and media organisations and added motivation to publish high quality news articles because the reactions to their outputs are accessible to all other users or readers.

The internet has provided a platform for the news media that has allowed media organisations to reach a global audience in a way that is unprecedented. Companies that control mainstream search engines such as Google and Yahoo can potentially expand or limit search results for news stories. However, there have been instances of government control over the internet, such as the Chinese government blocking access to certain internet sites.[47] Users of search engines and internet sources need to be aware of the questionable veracity of some articles. This is because of anonymous publishers and the potential influence of computer hackers. Large media organisations use the internet to add to their readership and to provide up to date news stories as they are completed. Also, video footage on the internet has increased dramatically in the early twenty first

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[47] See for example *BBC News*, "Media", "China Country Profile", 14 June 2010, available URL: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1287798.stm#media paragraphs 2, 10 – 12.

century. This, along with television and films such as documentary films, provide greater impressions for viewers of news stories. These advances for technology add further implications for practitioners and media organisations in the presentation of their news stories.

Day observes that the challenges to the media industry, in the context of the advancement of technology, are significant given the vast amount of information that is now literally at audiences' fingertips.[48] With so much information readily available it is easy to become inundated with too much information, to experience what is commonly referred to as an 'information overload'. This places added importance on the role of the audience in being able to access the media through all of its different forms and in taking individual responsibility to keep updated with important contemporary social issues as a citizen in a democratic society.

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[48] Day (2000) 42 – 43.

Chapter Two: Truth, Trust and the News Media

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the connections between truth, trust and the news media; and how those connections are relevant to the epistemic inquirer in consuming news media outputs. The first part of this chapter will build on the discussion in the previous one by evaluating the importance of truth within contemporary media ethics. In addition, truth telling and issues concerning various types of falsehoods within news media publications will be examined. Finally, the discussion of truth will be connected with the question of trust in the news media and how this impacts on audiences' engagement with news media.

Truth and the News Media's Audience

As previously discussed, some authors have commented that truth is a powerful political force in that good news is welcomed and strengthens social stability; whereas bad news disrupts the status quo and often creates a crisis rather than promoting general welfare.[49] However other authors have criticised the claim that truth does not promote the general welfare of society.[50] Bugeja, for instance, argues that "truth is more powerful than fiction", and that experienced reporters know and abide by this in presenting their news stories.[51] Providing truthful or accurate accounts is particularly important for the news media because any falsehoods can be amplified through their communication to a wide audience. Moreover, the advancement of technologies has increased the ability of both the news media and the public to disseminate a vast majority of false or mis-information, particularly over the internet. An example of this will be illustrated in the Fourth Chapter of this thesis where the news media's initial coverage of the outbreak of swine flu contained inaccuracies as to the global severity of the H1N1 virus' health risks.

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[49] For example see Christians [et al.] 69 – 75.
[50] Bugeja (2008) 137 – 139.
[51] Bugeja (2008) 137.

Bugeja argues that truth promotes social welfare and that:

> Little in life is truly relative. Our values may be relative, the meanings of words may be relative, and our beliefs may be relative, too. But as a practical matter, we must make choices to follow laws, codes or cultures of a given community….
>
> Because communication is a social science whose methods are fact-based and verifiable, truth is subject to proof. Proof is more laborious than belief. It is one thing for a reporter to believe that a politician is corrupt and another to prove corruption in an investigative piece. It is one thing for an advertiser to *believe* there is a need for a product and another to prove that *true* via marketing studies.[52]

Further, Bugeja believes that objectivity in communication is a process. As a result of this process, all forms of communication are as objective as each other; and this is because objectivity occurs at different stages of the process.[53] In the present context of the news media, the notion of objectivity means 'free-of-bias'. Bugeja argues that news reporting begins subjectively with a reporter collecting and researching news stories and finishes objectively with the editorial process reducing subjective bias.[54] Advertising and Public Relations are the opposite in that they begin objectively with market research, modes of communication and target research; and then proceed to become more subjective to the intended target audience in that they attempt to relate to a potential consumers so they will purchase the advertised product. Bugeja's account shows that in terms of the communication of truths, news reporting and advertising have

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[52] Bugeja (2008) 102. This quotation raises a further distinction between the requirements for proof and the requirements for knowledge. Proof requires credible and accurate evidence that reinforces the asserted fact or proposition. However, as it will be shown in chapters three and four of this thesis, non-accidentally justified true belief is at least required to fulfill the individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for knowledge. Proof can be argued, therefore, to be involved in the process of making a knowledge claim by assisting the formation of non-accidental justifications for an epistemic agent. The agent, equipped with a true belief that is grasped via non-accidental justification, can then make a legitimate knowledge claim in the sense demanded by a traditional, tripartite, account of knowledge.

[53] Bugeja (2008) 103 – 104.

[54] A critique of Bugeja's view of the editorial process in this context is that the editorial process itself can be biased in pursuing news media organisation agendas or directives.

similar processes in that they both require a subjective and objective element in order to communicate accurately with the audience.

The notion of truth is deeply contested in philosophical theory however, as Bugeja notes, there is general agreement amongst philosophers that the idea of truth is complex and accounts of truth range from the verifiable, to the divine and everything in between.[55] In relation to the news media, the ability to grasp truths can become problematic for individual epistemic agents when there is a widespread acceptance of unprofessional or deceptive news practices derived from untruthful news media publications.[56] Some of the effects of such widespread publication of falsehoods can be seen in the aforementioned example of the People's Republic of China, where the state controls news media outputs through editorial certification and the censorship of various internet websites.[57]

Correspondence theory is arguably the most widely accepted account of truth.[58] Taking correspondence theory in its most simple form, a proposition is true if and only if that proposition corresponds with the way things are in the world. An example is the proposition that a particular angle measures 45 degrees. According to correspondence theory, the proposition is true if and only if the stated angle is actually 45 degrees. Further, correspondence theory is analogous to the way truth is understood and used in ordinary language in that if a proposition or assertion is true, then it is taken to reflect or correspond with the way things actually are.

The correspondence theory of truth provides an insight into how the communication of truths by the news media to its audience can be inconsistent. As already discussed in the previous chapter, a practitioner may not be able to accurately interpret the facts of a story for a variety of

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[55] Bugeja (2008) 99.
[56] Berry (2000) 36.
[57] *BBC News* (2010), paragraphs 1 – 12.
[58] Michael Glanzberg, 13 June 2006, "Truth", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth/ paragraph 1.1.

reasons such as constraints on time and space. Publication of a practitioner's outputs to a widespread audience can compound any factual misinterpretation because it is likely to lead to further misinterpretation by the audience. Given that truth is a necessary condition of knowledge, the audience will accordingly be unable to make any legitimate knowledge claims based on those news media publications. This is because practitioner or media organisation misinterpretation typically results in the epistemic agent's belief in false propositions which are inconsistent with knowledge.

False propositions do not correspond to the way things are in the world. This means that where there is practitioner or media organisation misinterpretation or misunderstanding of reported events, truth is unlikely to be presently grasped by the audience because the publication has not communicated an accurate account of the event or issue. Even if a practitioner was able to publish a news story that depicted an event precisely as it occurred from all possible viewpoints, the audience's differing interpretations do not always correspond to the factual event or issue; and the audience needs to recognise these potential frailties in grasping truths based on those events and issues. Showing how this recognition might be achieved through the cultivation of the audience's intellectual virtues is a central aim of this thesis.

The potential frailties in agents' grasp of truths do not, however, detract from the role of truth within the news media. Day sets out three of the most important reasons for embracing the commitment to truth as a fundamental principle of media ethics.[59] The first is that access to accurate and truthful information is essential for people to make informed decisions in a democratic society. A prime example of the need to make such informed decisions is the decision to vote for a government. Autonomous individuals need to be able to rely (to a certain extent) on available information in order to ensure their decisions are sufficiently informed. It is

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[59] Day (2000) 79 – 80.

simply not possible for individuals to experience everything in the world because of the physical limitations of the human mind and body. For example, we cannot know precisely what is happening at different places around the world at exactly the same time. Accordingly, we rely on external information providers, such as the news media, to provide truthful and accurate information so we remain able to claim knowledge of social events and issues that we cannot experience directly. It is this knowledge that provides individual epistemic agents with a basis for constructing opinions and making informed decisions.

Secondly, a commitment to truth is an essential pre-requisite for a democratic society. As already noted, the news media play an important role in the dissemination of information to the public resulting, ideally, in informed individuals and democratically elected governments. Day identifies the link between individual autonomy and social responsibility, with respect to news media outputs, because without truthful media publications, the autonomy of the individual to make informed decisions is eroded. The erosion of individual autonomy has a flow on effect within a democratic society because individual consent forms the basis for an elected government. Again citing the UK Parliamentary Members expenses news story, the news media's coverage of truths about expense claims played an important role in the United Kingdom's present democratic government composition. This is because Parliamentary Members were held accountable for their actions resulting in the resignation of the Speaker of the House of Commons, Michael Martin, as well as in several Members of Parliament deciding to not stand for re-election in 2010.

Finally, a commitment to truth encapsulates the earlier cited media ethic: the principle of respect for individuals as ends rather than means. This principle is derived from one of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperatives and is often cited in contemporary deontological ethics. Day notes that the

use of deception usually places self-interest over the interests of others.[60] By committing to publishing the truth, the news media is implicitly upholding respect for individuals as opposed to pursuing other interests such as political or economic ones. *WikiLeaks*, a media organisation used as an example in the final chapter of this thesis, presents itself as an organisation that is committed to truth, and claims it is free of such political and economic interests. As will be shown, however, such a commitment to truth can raise other issues such as the disclosure of confidential sources. If we accept as a fundamental feature of the news media in a democratic society that it is committed to truth, then it follows that the new media must be committed to publishing news articles in a way that is able to accurately convey or reconstruct truths to the audience. Some contemporary authors have referred to the news media's practices of communicating truths to society as 'truth telling' or providing 'truth platforms'.[61] Truth telling by the news media raises several important issues that an audience ought to be aware of in attempting to grasp truths and make knowledge claims based on news media publications. These issues are discussed and further elaborated below.

Truth Telling

Louis Day sets out three minimum requirements for a truthful news account: a news publication ought to be (i) accurate (ii) promote understanding and (iii) be fair and balanced.[62] While these principles are valuable in communicating truths to the public, it is important to note that the truth of an event or issue often consists of several accounts. For example, a newsworthy event could be a political leader giving a speech outlining new health reforms. Person A could be observing the speech from a position close to the speaker amongst a noisy and supportive crowd. Another person, person B, could be observing from further away where the sound is not clear and there are few people close by; and those that are in vicinity are voicing their disapproval of the speech.

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[60] Day (2000) 80. Deception and falsehoods will be discussed further later in this chapter.
[61] See for example Day (2000) 96, Berry (2000) 40 and Bugeja (2008) 106.
[62] Day (2000) 81 – 84.

The differing accounts outlined illustrate two separate factors affecting the ability to accurately retell truths of the public leader's speech. Firstly, there are the differing perspectives of those present. Such differing perspectives can, however, be addressed by further research and by recording other accounts of the event. Secondly, there are the individual biases or prejudices that affect how the speech is received and the particular aspects of the speech that are considered newsworthy (or at least relevant to include in the news story of the event).

In terms of the present example, person A who suffers from cancer or has family members who have suffered from cancer may place added importance on a cut in cancer research spending in a health reform that in all other respects improves health care. A negative emphasis on the cuts on cancer research funding could alter an otherwise positive outlook for the health reforms; whereas person B who has little direct experience of cancer could view the health reforms in a more positive light. Another example of a differing perspective could be that of a government economist who is concerned to reduce all public spending. One's socio-economic background can also influence one's perspective and these perspectives can be diverse. These differing perspectives, whether they are situational or personal, all add factors that can result in a variance in interpretations of the subject matter. It is important that such differing perspectives are given due attention according to their relevance and importance in the construction of accurate representations of truths and the determination of which events are newsworthy.

Bugeja argues that reporters need to be self-aware with respect to their personal influences and biases, and adjust for those influences accordingly so news publications can retell truths as accurately as possible.[63] For instance, one may not be able to give a full and objective

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[63] Bugeja (2008) 109. Further, epistemic agents should be self-aware of personal influences and biases. Later in this thesis when formulating knowledge claims, it will be shown that the exercise of the intellectual character traits of open-mindedness and intellectual carefulness can assist in mitigating the effects of personal influences and bias.

account of one's personal influences and biases because it may not be possible to distance oneself in order to be so sufficiently self-aware. In referring back to the immediately previous example in respect of health reforms, it may not be possible for person A to be sufficiently self-aware in order to be able to objectively assess the implications of the health reforms given their past experiences with cancer.

However Bugeja's observations are sufficient to show that bias and prejudice are present within the news media whether or not they are consciously acknowledged by practitioners and media organisations. Day goes as far as to say that in contemporary society, bias and prejudice result in greater moral relativism, which is present in many of the judgments that all people, including media practitioners, make in relation to actions or events.[64] Day argues that such moral relativism is the result of society becoming more accepting of morally questionable behaviour, such as lying, because such behaviour is not the individual's responsibility to condemn – rather it is up to each individual to assess their moral behaviour. While this argument is not considered further in this thesis, it provides some insight into how bias and prejudice is affecting contemporary media ethics and society.

Truth telling by the news media also raises issues with respect to the relationship between truth, objectivity, and impartiality. Within the news media context, truth and objectivity are very closely linked in that truthful accounts are often evaluated by the audience in terms of their independence and freedom from bias, in addition to the accuracy of the news story being conveyed. Further, objectivity and impartiality are closely related and are often conflated. Objectivity often requires impartiality; and further, impartiality typically is regarded as sufficient and necessary for objectivity. Objectivity requires the practitioner and media organisations to ensure sufficient perspectives are taken into consideration in order to provide truthful and complete news accounts. The main requirement for

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[64] Day (2000) 77.

impartiality is that there is sufficient independence of practitioners and media organisations alike to ensure publications are objective. Objectivity and impartiality therefore are similar in that they both are primarily concerned with ensuring external factors such as editorial pressure, time and economic influence do not adversely affect the news media's commitment to truth. However, Matthew Kieran notes the inability of the news media to claim impartiality:

> Value-neutral reporting is a myth, and thus the regulative ideal of impartiality is unrealizable. Therefore, impartiality and the underlying notion of the ideal observer cannot be a requirement of ethical journalism.
>
> Moreover, we might go further and suggest that the impossibility of value-neutral reporting is a virtue. After all, we typically buy a particular newspaper or watch a given news channel because of the way it represents the world to us.[65]

Kieran progresses this argument to show that the approach of discrediting the news media because of the presence of bias and impartiality is, in part, unfounded. Kieran argues that the ideal of an impartial news reporter does not exclude personal interests and the potential for multiple interpretations and evaluations of particular events.[66] The ideal of the impartial news reporter is, if this argument is to be accepted, redefined from an overly optimistic view that a news reporter can be completely objective and independent in interpreting and presenting an event; to an acknowledgement that media practitioners and media organisations are a part of a particular society, at a particular time and place, and thus cannot be completely disinterested in reporting news publications. This acknowledgement does not preclude the news media from being able to report events impartially. Rather it reflects the practice of the news media in reporting events to society, because media practitioners and media organisations will have some degree of self interest or bias in all news publications.

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[65] Kieran (1997) 57.
[66] Kieran (1997) 61.

Further, Bugeja makes various distinctions between our personal, social, and political biases that can alter (whether consciously or not) our individual responses to different types of communication and information.[67] Bugeja argues that individual agents' beliefs and dispositions can be very influential in the way the audience's interpretations can be manipulated. This manipulation does not result solely from the media practitioner collating and presenting the news story, but also from the editorial process and, most importantly, from the way the audience interprets news media outputs.

Moreover, Kieran goes on to argue that a commitment to impartiality is likely to result in the most accurate and objective news media outputs.[68] Such a result is achieved because reasonable steps are taken by practitioners and media organisations to strive for impartiality; whereas to simply denounce all news media publications as biased does not contribute to the credibility and dissemination of information through society. The reasonable steps to be taken by practitioners and news media organisations are those that conform to the fundamental principles referred to in Chapter One of this thesis. It is acknowledged that impartiality does not always affect the accuracy of news media publications. Some forms of news media such as film documentaries can have specific agendas behind their broadcast; however they can still provide truthful accounts. An example of this is the documentary *Bowling for Columbine*, by Michael Moore which has already been discussed in the previous chapter.

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[67] Bugeja (2008), Chapter 5: "Manipulation", 159 – 183.
[68] Further, some authors have stressed the importance of impartiality as an essential part of being an epistemic agent. For example, see Christine McKinnon, "Knowing Cognitive Selves", in DePaul, Michael & Zagzebski, Linda (eds.) *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 227 – 254. McKinnon also places importance on knowing one's individual dispositions in enhancing intellectual character traits and living a virtuous life. This foreshadows the next chapter's discussion of the application of virtue epistemology to news media publications in enabling the agent to make credible knowledge claims based on news media publications, as part of the fulfilment of their role as a responsible citizen in a democratic society.

The commitment to impartiality is of course restricted to general circumstances where the news media is attempting to produce accurate and independent publications. Impartiality fails if a practitioner or media organisation is biased to the point that publications are false or deliberately deceptive. This highlights the ethical distinction between impartiality and falsehoods. A further discussion as to the implications of falsehoods and deceptive disclosures appears later in this chapter.

Kieran's argument for a commitment to impartiality on the part of the news media is similar to Day's argument for a commitment to truth in that it is recognised that both can be impossible to precisely or substantively achieve universally. However to strive for such principles attains the end purpose of the news media to disseminate information to society using the best or most accurate means available.[69] On the face of it, Kieran's argument can be critiqued in that it can be viewed as a utilitarian argument under the cloak of a deontological principle. This is because the central principle is a commitment to impartiality, yet the predominant justification for such a principle is that it brings about the best consequences (to attain the most accurate news media outputs).

Having a utilitarian basis for an impartiality principle can be problematic because the consideration of external benefits (such as economic pressures) can erode and undermine the adherence to the principle. In terms of the audience, however, it is sufficient to note that the news media cannot claim to be completely impartial or disinterested in their outputs. Further, the audience ought also to recognise, in exercising their intellectual character traits in formulating knowledge claims, which practitioners and media organisations within the news media can generally be taken to aim for truthful and impartial reporting of events. Therefore criticisms of the news media's impartiality should be limited to specific

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[69] This illustrates how an epistemic agent might apply a principle of charity when considering news media outputs – in the absence of a good reason to do otherwise, agents treat news media accounts as aiming to tell truth and not to mislead or deceive the public.

instances where deliberate or flagrant bias is present in news media outputs.

Given that we accept that a commitment to impartiality is an important part of the news media accurately communicating events and issues to society, another point of contention which underpins a commitment to impartiality are the motives for producing news media outputs. A news publication is produced because a practitioner and media organisation had a particular reason or motive to do so. It is important to note that members of the audience who are concerned by the motives behind a particular news publication can easily access the generic principles to which practitioners and media organisations are supposed to adhere. Access is available via, for example, searching the internet to ascertain whether a practitioner belongs to a practitioner's institute or a media organisation's website which often states their values and motives for producing media outputs. The disclosure of motives can influence both the media practitioner and media organisation by ensuring that all publications comply with their principles and codes of ethics. However, a motive that is often not explicitly stated by media organisations is the need to make profits and to attract advertising.[70]

Kieran identifies the role of motives in producing news media outputs:

> The really crucial thing is that the motive – whether purely one of aspiring to portray reality, personal advancement, or a mixture of these and other considerations – does not pick out good journalism as such. Rather, good journalism is constituted by the achievement of the end toward which the motive should be directed. Thus the intention involved in investigating and reporting should involve a commitment toward reporting the objective truth of the matter.[71]

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[70] An example of this is former *Waikato Times* editor Bryce Johns, who stated in a lecture at Waikato University on 25 September 2006 that his primary ethical aim when editing the *Waikato Times* was to sell newspapers. He claimed this was an ethical aim because maintaining circulation meant that employees kept their jobs and shareholders reaped the profits due to them.
[71] Kieran (1997) 59.

It is therefore important that the audience appreciates the motive for which the news story is the product. Professional news media practitioners who belong to large media organisations are often vigorously committed to the principles of good practice and, accordingly, audiences can take some reassurance that motives are of such a quality so as to produce news media outputs that are committed to the truth. It will be shown in the next chapter that epistemic agents' motives are also an important part of exercising intellectual virtue and making knowledge claims. However there are instances where the motives of a practitioner or a media organisation can conflict with personal influences. This links back to the discussion in the previous chapter that outlines the various conflicts and external pressures that can influence the truth of news media outputs. For instance, the American media organisation Fox News has come under criticism from the public and politicians alike for openly pursuing conservative political agendas.[72] Such conflicts can result in falsehoods or inaccurate disclosures, which are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Falsehoods and Disclosures

In the present context, falsehoods are untruthful or false news publications which mislead the audience and can be committed either consciously or unconsciously. Conscious or deliberate falsehoods are typically the result of the self-interest of the practitioner or news media organisation overriding the core principles of media ethics. Unconscious or accidental falsehoods usually result from poor journalism or from editorial processes that result in the inaccurate portrayal of an event to the audience. It is important to note that there are several different forms of falsehoods because, arguably, each of them has a differing effect on the ability to communicate truths.[73]

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[72] For example, see *Fox News*, "White House Escalates War of Words With Fox News", 12 October 2009, available URL: http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/10/12/white-house-escalates-war-words-fox-news/ or Brian Stelter, *New York Times*, "Fox's Volley With Obama Intensifying", 11 October 2009, available URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/12/business/media/12fox.html?_r=1
[73] Day (2000) 85. Day notes that under a narrow interpretation of Kant's ethics, it is not a universal moral principle that one should never lie, as such a maxim cannot be willed to

Lying is in essence a subcategory of falsehood or deception because it is the communication of information that is known to be false; whereas deception involves a further and subtle difference in that an agent actually pursues and achieves the act of misleading another person.[74] Bugeja states that:

> just as there are many types of truths, … there are several types of lies:
>
> - *White lies:* untrue statements about seemingly minor topics usually told to flatter or spare the liar or another person or group of persons, pain, embarrassment or other uncomfortable feeling.
> - *Half-Truths:* statements that contain a mix of falsehoods and truths meant to mislead the listener or provide the liar with an escape route, if challenged.
> - *Exaggeration:* the disproportionate inflation of a small truth, not for the social good – as satire intends – but to serve the interests of the liar.
> - *Falsehoods:* complete lies or fabrications masquerading as truth.[75]

The above taxonomy of lying descends from white lies being morally questionable to falsehoods, which possess the greatest moral culpability. White lies and half-truths are often employed with 'good intentions' in that they are made to prevent minor harm or imply an inaccurate proposition without actually expressing that proposition, however they can result in significant adverse consequences. In terms of the news media, half-truths can be utilised to deceive and imply. For instance, in the UK Parliamentary expenses example, they could be used to imply that a politician did not know they were breaching regulations when using public money for personal expenditure. The half-truth that the politician did not know exactly which regulation they were breaching does not incorporate the whole of

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become universal moral law. However other authors have argued that this interpretation does not encompass the wider meaning of Kant's moral principles and that, in some instances, lying could be included in universal moral law.

[74] Day (2000) 77.

[75] Bugeja (2008) 140. For reference to philosophical accounts of lying and deception, see James Edwin Mahon, "The Definition of Lying and Deception", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 21 February 2008, available URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lying-definition/

the surrounding circumstances where it may be that the politician ought to have made further enquiries into whether questionable personal expenditure was breaching regulations. Exaggeration and falsehoods are often intentionally or consciously deceptive and can be catastrophic to the pursuit of truths if undetected. Bugeja notes that quotations are often deliberately taken out of context when presented in a news media publication.[76] Further, the presentation of photographs in a news publication can also be culpable in communicating falsehoods. An example is manipulating or retouching photographs as is often done in social gossip magazines.

There are various forms of conscious falsehoods. One falsehood is government censorship of news media publications, which is characteristic of non-democratic forms of government such as dictatorships or totalitarian governments. Typically, censorship generates a falsehood because it involves a deliberate manipulation of information designed to prevent various types of information from reaching the audience. This almost exclusively results in news publications that do not provide accurate accounts from all perspectives because the censored aspects of the publication are altered or withdrawn. Another example of a falsehood is economic pressures on media organisations leading to the untruthful minimisation of corporate liability. Unconscious falsehoods are more subtle in nature in that they are incidental to another purpose or agenda; however unconscious falsehoods can still have a dramatic effect on the veracity of news publications. Taking the previous example of UK Parliamentary expense claims, if it subsequently transpires that a politician is innocent, the news media could have lied and committed an unconscious falsehood if it has released a news publication on the presumption of that politician being guilty of misusing public money.

Further, omissions by practitioners in presenting news publications are another form of unconscious falsehood (although an omission can also be

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[76] Bugeja (2008) 147 – 149.

conscious). Omissions of relevant information are often the result of editorial processes prioritising the most newsworthy facts. This can lead to inaccurate inductive reasoning. For example, by omitting an unknown fact that an athlete has taken illegal performance enhancing drugs, a news publication is providing a news story that induces the audience to believe that the athlete performed according to their natural talents; when instead the accurate account is that the athlete's performance was assisted to some extent by drugs that other athletes did not have access to. Unconscious falsehoods can also be committed by the news media in reinforcing stereotypes. As previously discussed, social stereotypes can result in unqualified discrimination, bias or prejudice against the stereotyped groups.

The extent of disclosure can also have a significant influence on the communication of truths. As discussed in the previous chapter, there are professional ethical obligations on practitioners and media organisations to ensure information is disclosed as and when it is necessary to uphold the commitment to truth by the news media. However, disclosure by the news media is not always a straightforward matter, for instance there can be matters in the public interest or national security interests which can limit the scope of disclosure. Furthermore, practitioners tend not to reveal their sources as a way (i) of protecting the source, and (ii) ensuring an ongoing productive relationship with the source. For example, *WikiLeaks* do not disclose any of their sources in an attempt to provide security for those sources due to the sensitive nature of the news item which are leaked to the news media.

Disclosure within the news media involves two main issues. The first is whether the benefits derived from full disclosure will be offset by any confidentiality considerations. The second is the extent of disclosure to be used in a news publication to accurately communicate truths. In respect of the disclosure versus confidentiality issue, Day notes that society values confidentiality highly, and the disclosure of information should always be considered objectively with reference to the overriding ethical principles of

the danger of serious harm or of serving the public interest.[77] The public interest is served by disclosure because the dissemination of accurate information to the public is essential to the democratic process.

> The moral position of mass media institutions is often at issue when they seek the release of confidential information. From the standpoint of motivation, the media are at least on respectable moral ground when they publish sensitive information because they believe it to have news value. Such decisions, of course, do involve subjective judgments, but they are at least news judgments born out of public interest considerations.
>
> This is not to suggest that public interest concerns are the only noble ethical motivations. Obviously, the potential for harm to individuals, small groups within society, or even large institutions can provide a morally justifiable rationale for breaching confidentiality. But actors' moral position is an important consideration in evaluating their claims of access to confidential information.[78]

This shows that disclosure issues arise in news stories that involve individuals as well as all institutions within society. An example of an issue of disclosure for an individual is whether to name the victim of a sexual crime. In naming the victim, the news media could be causing irreparable harm to the reputation of the victim. In New Zealand, name suppression during a trial is a contentious social issue and is only granted in special circumstances; however name suppression is often granted in sexual offence cases under the Crimes Act 1961 and the Criminal Justice Act 1985.[79] In terms of sensitive government information, disclosure issues can arise if, for example, the information is critical to national security. Such issues of disclosure and confidentiality can alter the veracity of news publications given the wider social implications or public interest surrounding the information.

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[77] Day (2000) 167.
[78] Day (2000) 168.
[79] See for example *R v Liddell* [1995] 1 NZLR 538; (1994) 12 CRNZ 458 (CA), *R v Russell* 16/5/96, CA133/96, and *R v Proctor* [1997] 1 NZLR 295.

Turning to the second issue associated with disclosure, full disclosure of the relevant facts of events and issues that make up the subject of a news publication is synonymous with truthful accounts of that subject. Bugeja stresses the importance of full disclosure because it generally results in the most accurate news publications.[80] Because of presentation and editorial considerations, news publications may only have enough time or space to present the most relevant facts. The audience thus relies on the news media to properly ascertain which facts are relevant in providing truthful accounts of the event being reported. In conjunction with full disclosure, Bugeja warns against partial disclosure that omits some relevant facts, resulting in misleading news publications.

At its best, partial disclosure can lead to an agent's accurate interpretation of a news publication by accident. A vague account, or omission of materially relevant facts that leads to accurate audience interpretation of the news publication, is an exception rather than the rule for good news reporting. As will be shown later in this thesis, even in a circumstance where the epistemic agent acquires a true belief, if such a true belief is gained by luck or accident, then, according to philosophical accounts, it does not qualify as knowledge. At its worst, partial disclosure can be a deliberate falsehood used to misrepresent truths.

An example of the news media partially disclosing a news story can be seen in the use of headlines. Television, print media and internet publications all use headlines to attract the audience's attention. On the face of it, headlines are successful in attracting the audience and many headlines provide an accurate inclination as to the subject of the article. Headlines are also necessary for the audience to decipher which news publications they believe are newsworthy and sufficiently interesting to engage with. However the use of headlines is also an example of partial disclosure that can be abused by the media. Sensationalist headlines that over-dramatise an event can undermine the audience's trust in the news

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[80] Bugeja (2008) 110.

media as well as misrepresent truths. For example, the *Sunday Star Times* used a headline stating "Swine flu wave 'yet to peak'". [81] However, despite the sensationalist headline referring to swine flu, the article turns out to be predominantly concerned with the most common form of influenza and, as it turns out, swine flu had caused only two confirmed deaths in New Zealand in 2010. The headline used by the *Sunday Star Times* commits a falsehood because the audience is likely to be misled on the present risks of swine flu in the community.

The Importance of Trust in the News Media

In the present context, the trust relationship to be explored is the relationship between the news media and its audience. For the audience to have trust in the news media, the news media must publish accurate and truthful accounts of events. As we have already seen in this chapter, a commitment to truth is an essential pre-requisite for the news media. A commitment to truth is also an essential pre-requisite for trust. Louis Day elaborates the point that:

> The notion of individual autonomy is based, in part, on freedom of choice. Deception may undermine the confidence we have in our choices, which may make us reluctant to exercise our autonomy in the future. For example, a lack of veracity among advertising and public relations practitioners would understandably create a climate of public distrust of the business community. Thus, the term social *responsibility* has entered the lexicon of media practitioners alongside the word *freedom*, a concept that is also reflected in the codes of the various media professions. [82]

The above quotation shows that a commitment to truth is an essential requirement if the audience is to trust the news media. This is because the news media are guided by core ethical principles that regulate their conduct; and in doing so the news media are reassuring the audience that by adhering to those principles, they are acting within a trusted method for

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[81] Susan Pepperell, *Sunday Star Times*, "Swine flu wave 'yet to peak'", 15 August 2010, available URL: http://www.stuff.co.nz/sunday-star-times/news/4025556/Swine-flu-wave-yet-to-peak

[82] Day (2000) 79 – 80.

reporting social issues and events. For that is an important element of trust – by acting consistently in a particular manner, trust is gained by providing a high degree of rational expectation on the part of an agent that the particular behaviour will continue both presently and in the future. Further, trust has as its fundamental basis credibility and reputation. Credibility is established and maintained by the news media adhering to the principles of commitment to truth already discussed. Reputation is gained by ensuring that credibility is consistently maintained. Also, the news media can enhance its reputation by ensuring that any errors and omissions discovered post publication are publicly corrected. For example, the *New Zealand Herald* publishes any minor corrections in its 'In Brief' section and *The Guardian* has an external ombudsman who investigates public complaints of reporting inaccuracies.

Of course trust can be misplaced or broken when the particular behaviour that the agent expects will continue does not eventuate. In application to the news media, however, all is not lost if a practitioner or media organisation breaches trust and produces a publication that is untruthful to some extent. The damage to the trust relationship between the audience and the news media can be repaired to some extent by understanding the circumstances and justifications for the untruthful publication.[83] If, for example, the audience is given an explanation by the news media as to the motives or confidentiality considerations behind the untruthful publication, then the trust relationship can be repaired to the extent possible which is proportionate to untruthfulness of the publication. Again, the publication of corrections in the *New Zealand Herald* is an example of such an explanation by a media organisation.

However, some media used to communicate news and current affairs have differing target audiences and this can lower the expectations of a commitment to truth. Examples of such media are those newspapers and magazines with a primary focus on celebrity and infotainment genres.

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[83] Berry (2000) 43.

Some contemporary authors have noted that the target audience of news media outlets ultimately determines how committed to truth the news publication is and how it is presented.[84] For example, a gossip magazine will have a select target audience for which it produces publications that can contain speculative news items in order to raise interest among that target audience. It is doubtful that gossip magazine readers are as concerned with the veracity of such speculation as, for instance, a reader may be in regards to a news item on humanitarian crises in a foreign country.[85] If we accept this proposition, then it follows that a speculative or untruthful article in a gossip magazine is unlikely to commit the same breach of the trust relationship with the audience that a speculative or untruthful news publication from a reputable broadcaster or newspaper may commit.

The higher commitment to truth that the audience holds the news media to is derived from public expectations of the role of the news media to inform the public as members of a democratic society. The expectations for a commitment to truth in a celebrity gossip article, even if within a reputable newspaper or news broadcast, are lower because the audience has engaged with such topics that are primarily presented for entertainment and not for the substantive affect they will have on a democratic society. The audience expectation is higher for reputable media practitioners and media organisations because the information the news media is providing could affect individuals and groups in a serious way; and the dissemination of information is an important part of the democratic process.

Berry argues that the trust relationship with the news media is important to the audience not only because of the need to gain access to external information, but also to uphold professional ethics in society generally.[86]

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[84] See Bugeja (2008) 106 and Kieran (1997) 58.

[85] This is a potential point of contention. Arguably, on the basis of some of their responses (in the form of readers' letters) at least some readers of celebrity focussed magazines genuinely believe almost everything they read in such media outputs.

[86] Berry (2000) 43 – 45.

Professional institutions are an integral part of a democratic society, and an unregulated or untrusted news media would result in an essential part of the democratic process being dysfunctional. The news media, it is therefore argued, has an obligation as part of its wider social responsibility to uphold the audience's trust in committing to publishing the truth and adhering to its own ethical principles to ensure the democratic process is maintained in society. This function, if performed by the news media, upholds the conceptual framework of social responsibility in a democratic society.

It has been shown in this chapter that a commitment to truth is essential for the news media to perform its function and purpose within a democratic society irrespective of our conception of truth. Berry identifies a fundamental issue within media ethics where external considerations can conflict with the news media's ability to communicate the truth:

> Media ethics, constructed dialectically, requires an understanding of the relationship of 'power' and 'practices' that is differentiated and complex, that connects the media with its audience and constructs ethical identity.[87]

The communication of truth is therefore a complex issue that involves an understanding by the audience of wider issues within a democratic society. The basis of such an understanding by the audience is their trust relationship with the news media.

In order to consume the news media's publications effectively, the audience must be able to trust the news media to produce truthful accounts of events and issues in the real world. The level of trust individual epistemic agents should afford the news media is developed as part of intellectual life and of the exercise of character traits, which is discussed in the next two chapters of this thesis. However for our present purposes, an audience which has absolutely no faith in the news media would result in the complete discrediting of all news media publications. The audience would thus lose a valuable vehicle by which to obtain

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[87] Berry (2000) 48.

external information about society and global events and issues. Further, the news media would have not fulfilled its role to promote social responsibility and failed in its role to communicate information and uphold a democratic society. It is important, therefore, that the audience holds some level of trust in the news media to produce truthful publications; and the news media must fulfil its responsibilities in its relationship with the audience and act in a manner so as to justify that trust.

The first two chapters have explored the relationship between the audience and the news media so as to lead into a discussion of whether it is possible for the audience to make legitimate knowledge claims, based on news media outputs. In regards to knowledge claims, it is important that the audience believe that the news media are reporting the truth; and that the news media provide enough information for epistemic agents to be able to grasp truths.[88] This is because the audience must engage in some intellectual process whereby individual agents form true beliefs that meet the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge. Virtue epistemology will be introduced in the next chapter as a framework that according to which inquirers could make legitimate knowledge claims based on news media outputs.

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[88] The audience's belief that the news media are attempting, by the best means possible, to provide truthful accounts of current affairs requires the principle of charity by the audience. As noted earlier in this chapter, the principle of charity can be justified by the news media embracing a commitment to truth and a commitment to impartiality, thereby setting up rational expectations on the part of the audience that they will aim to tell the truth and to report impartially.

Chapter Three: Virtue Epistemology

Virtue Epistemology is a relatively new strand within epistemology that seeks to address the issues inherent in foundationalist accounts of knowledge by shifting the focus from agents' beliefs to their intellectual virtues. This chapter will develop the previous chapter's discussion of truth and trust in relation to the news media by introducing virtue epistemology. It will be argued that the application of intellectual virtues can be beneficial for an audience in news media outputs interpreting and making successful knowledge claims based on them. Firstly, the field of epistemology will be briefly canvassed in order to provide some background for further application of philosophical accounts of knowledge to the news media. Secondly, the two main theories of virtue epistemology – virtue responsibilism and virtue reliabilism – will be discussed in order to critically assess their application to the news media. Finally, this chapter will argue for the application of virtue responsibilism as a valuable conceptual framework for individual epistemic inquirers making knowledge claims based on news media publications.

Epistemology

In short, epistemology is the study of knowledge or an analysis of how a person can claim to 'know'. Epistemology traditionally attempts to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge by evaluating our beliefs in respect of truth; as well as the justification for such truth or truths.[89] The classic epistemological account of knowledge, which is consistent with twentieth century conceptual analysis approach to such questions, is the *Tripartite Account of Knowledge* which argues that a person S has knowledge that *p*, if and only if:

    (i) *p* is true;

    (ii) S believes that *p*;

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[89] Jack S. Crumley, *An Introduction to Epistemology* (1998), Introduction, xiv.

(iii) S is justified in believing that *p*.[90]

The tripartite account states, therefore, that a justified true belief is required in order for a person to claim knowledge of a proposition. Justified true belief is traditionally argued to be individually necessary and jointly sufficient to meet a knowledge claim.[91] For example, take the following proposition: Susan knows that John Key is the current Prime Minister of New Zealand. The first condition is that there is a person, John Key, who at the present time holds the office of Prime Minister in New Zealand. The second condition requires that Susan believes John Key is the Prime Minister. And thirdly, Susan is justified in believing that John Key is the current Prime Minister of New Zealand because such belief is the result of the exercise of Susan's cognitive abilities to successfully weigh up the relevant evidence.[92] Susan's belief is thus justified if it is consistent with her intellect, past experience and sensory perception of various factors relevant to the proposition. Utilising the present example, Susan is justified in her belief that John Key is the current Prime Minister because, inter alia, she is aware that John Key performs acts consistent with those actions a Prime Minister would usually undertake, all people Susan knows and trusts believe that John Key holds the office of Prime Minister, and Susan has read various *news media publications* confirming such a proposition. We, like Susan, would claim that we know John Key is the current Prime Minister of New Zealand based on the role of a similar justified true belief in our everyday lives.[93]

Unfortunately, the tripartite account of knowledge has fundamental flaws that can arise in specific contexts, thereby rendering the elements of

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[90] Ernest Sosa, "The analysis of "knowledge that p"", in Sosa, Ernest, *Knowledge In Perspective: Selected Essays In Epistemology* (1991) 15.

[91] Matthias Steup, "Epistemology", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 14 December 2011, available URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/ topic 1.1, paragraph 2.

[92] It is noted that this example is very simplistic and can have various ontological and epistemic objections such as, for example, a skeptical argument that queries whether Susan's sensory experience is an accurate representation of reality.

[93] However, Jonathan Dancy notes that the tripartite account of knowledge is limited to propositional knowledge of that *p*; as opposed to knowledge by acquaintance and practical knowledge (unless they can be shown to reduce to propositional knowledge). Jonathan Dancy, *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (1985) 23.

justified true belief jointly insufficient to meet what seem, intuitively, to be the demands of knowledge. Edmund Gettier used specific examples to show why justified true belief does not always count as knowledge. The following example is used by Gettier to illustrate a context where a proposition (the second proposition in the following example) meets the requirements of the tripartite account, yet intuitively is not knowledge:

(1) Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has 10 coins in his pocket; and

(2) The man who will get the job has 10 coins in his pocket.[94]

Gettier shows that there can be a context where Smith is also a candidate for the job and, further, Smith has the belief that Jones will get the job. Furthermore, Gettier adds to this context by showing that unknown to him presently, Smith will get the job and, also, he has 10 coins in his pocket. Smith, then, has a true belief of proposition (2) because Smith is the man who will get the job and he has 10 coins in his pocket – despite Smith presently not being aware that he will get the job. In terms of knowledge, however, an inconsistency arises between true belief and knowledge because Smith has entailed the second proposition from the first by focusing on the wrong fact (that the man who will get the job has 10 coins in his pocket). This means that Smith's true belief is caused by the wrong fact about Jones instead of a fact about Smith.[95] The above example is used by Gettier to show how a true proposition that an agent is justified in believing cannot always be jointly sufficient for knowledge. This is because, intuitively, there seems to be a tension between such a justified true belief and the subsequent knowledge claim.

It is important to note that Gettier is not quarrelling with any of the three premises of the tripartite account individually: each premise is individually

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[94] Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?", in Sosa, Ernest., Kim, Jaegwon., Fantyl, Jeremy & McGrath, Matthew (eds.) *Epistemology: An Anthology* (2nd ed.) (2008) 192 – 193.

[95] Linda Zagzebski characterises Gettier cases as examples of justified true belief not being necessary and sufficient to count as knowledge because of the occurrence of an independent unfortunate or unlucky event; and then a subsequent fortunate or lucky event which renders the justified true belief as fulfilling the necessary condition for knowledge by accident or chance. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: an inquiry into the nature of virtue and the ethical foundations of knowledge* (1996) 296 – 297.

necessary but the Gettier cases suggest that collectively they require some kind of supplementation to fulfil the jointly sufficient condition for knowledge.[96] Prima facie, truth is a necessary condition of knowledge because a proposition that is false cannot be known.[97] Further, belief is a necessary condition for a knowledge claim because a person cannot claim to know a proposition without at first performing the cognitive act of believing the same. It is very unlikely that one could claim to know a proposition when they do not believe it.[98] For example, if person A tells person B that an apple is red when person B believes, on the basis of its perceptual appearance, that it is green, then person B cannot claim to know that the apple is red because their senses are leading to a different conclusion – that the apple is green.[99] Person B cannot believe a proposition that they, for all their cognitive abilities, think is false otherwise it fails for the generally accepted criteria of a 'belief'.[100] Justification also appears to be necessary for knowledge because true beliefs that are arrived at by luck or chance do not intuitively count as knowledge. The result of the above is that justified true beliefs are individually necessary conditions for knowledge. What is required is an additional element that will be jointly sufficient and bridge the gap between justified true belief and knowledge.

There have been various attempts to supplement the tripartite account of knowledge, leading to differing versions of a *Quadripartite Account of Knowledge.* One such version of the quadripartite account is the addition

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[96] Dancy (1985) 25.

[97] Matthias Steup, "An Analysis of Knowledge", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 16 January 2006, available URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-analysis/ paragraph 1.

[98] Duncan Pritchard argues that we place significant value on internally justified beliefs: "…we tend to want beliefs that are more than just safe. That is, we don't just want agents to be forming beliefs in such a way that we can rely on the truth of those beliefs, we also want agents to be *cognitively responsible* for their beliefs, and this is only possible if they form beliefs in ways that are responsive to the reflectively accessible grounds that may have favour in their beliefs". Duncan Pritchard, "Cognitive Responsibility and the Epistemic Virtues", in Sosa, Ernest., Kim, Jaegwon., Fantyl, Jeremy & McGrath, Matthew (eds.) *Epistemology: An Anthology* (2nd ed.) (2008) 464.

[99] However, if person B is color blind and Person A is not color blind, and bother know this, then person B may treat person A as an authority on the color of apples.

[100] There are various philosophical and psychological accounts of what a belief is and how they are formed. See for example Steup (2006) paragraph 1.1. Such accounts are outside the scope of this thesis so they will not be developed further.

of a reliabilism as a necessary condition of knowledge.[101] This means that a true belief must have been arrived at by a reliable process. However to date, quadripartite accounts have been unsuccessful in jointly being sufficient for knowledge. Using the present reliabilism version of the quadripartite account, the problem of regression arises when analysing what is required to be a 'reliable ground'. The requirements for a reliable ground require epistemic justification, which in turn will require further justification – thus illustrating the regression of justification problem as to what is required in order to be reliable. The result being that some scholars, such as Ernest Sosa, advocate a new approach to knowledge that focuses on agents' intellectual faculties or character traits as opposed to agent beliefs.

Virtue Epistemology

There are diverse accounts within virtue epistemology. However two aspects are common to all versions: firstly, epistemology is regarded solely as a normative discipline; and secondly, intellectual agents are the basis of epistemic value and hence are the focus of epistemic evaluation.[102] Virtue epistemology is normative because it focuses on evaluating various cognitive abilities or character traits of individual agents. Further, virtue epistemology switches focus from beliefs on to the intellectual virtues of individual agents. The result is an evaluation of their cognitive abilities or intellectual character traits and how they can satisfy the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge. This is distinct from the traditional or classic epistemological inquiry, which has been briefly shown above to generally result in shortcomings for knowledge claims.[103]

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[101] An example of another version of the Quadripartite Account of Knowledge is the causal account, where it is argued that the relevant true belief must have been caused by the same true proposition(s) that justify it. Other quadripartite accounts similarly involve tweaking the tripartite account in an attempt to identify the individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for knowledge.

[102] Greco and Turri (2009) paragraph 1.

[103] There are other more general criticisms of knowledge claims in contemporary philosophy, such as Jonathan Kvanvig, who finds that epistemological inquiry should largely reject foundationalist approaches to knowledge and instead focus of broader questions of human cognitive abilities in attempting to grasp truths. Kvanvig advocates to "focus instead on the broader question of the nature of exemplary cognition, constrained perhaps by the possibilities of such for us, and intellectual virtues such as understanding

Virtue epistemology's focus on the intellectual virtues of agents is important to this thesis in its application to the news media because it highlights not only the potential frailty of knowledge claims based on consuming news media publications; but also provides an argument for a solution to the frailty of knowledge claims – by utilising the character traits of individual intellectual agents to identify any shortcomings in claims of knowledge.[104]

Moreover, Jason Baehr notes that:

> There are substantial and complicated differences between the various virtue epistemological views; as a result, relatively little can be said by way of generalization about the central tenets of virtue epistemology. These differences are attributable mainly to two competing conceptions of the nature of an intellectual virtue.[105]

The two competing conceptions of the nature of intellectual virtue referred to by Baehr are the basis for two distinct approaches within virtue epistemology: virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism. Virtue reliabilism conceives the exercise of intellectual virtue as the utilisation of cognitive faculties. Sosa argues that the most important cognitive faculties are both deductive and inductive reasoning abilities, perception, introspection, and memory.[106] Whereas virtue responsibilism conceives intellectual virtue as the exercise of good intellectual character traits. Zagzebski cites the following intellectual character traits as central to epistemic inquiry: autonomy, intellectual courage, perseverance, humility, fearlessness,

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and wisdom that make for it". Jonathan Kvanvig, "Why Should Inquiring Minds Want to Know? Meno Problems and Epistemological Axiology", in Sosa, Ernest., Kim, Jaegwon., Fantyl, Jeremy & McGrath, Matthew (eds.) *Epistemology: An Anthology* (2nd ed.) (2008) 505.
[104] It is important to note that approaches in virtue epistemology are not without problems. For example, Ernest Sosa identifies the value problem of knowledge as a potential issue for epistemology (and virtue epistemology) to address. The value problem is that of classifying exactly what the benefit of knowledge is over and above true belief. Ernest Sosa, "The Place of Truth in Epistemology", in Sosa, Ernest, Kim, Jaegwon, Fantyl, Jeremy & McGrath, Matthew (eds.) *Epistemology: An Anthology* (2nd ed.) (2008) 481. Another example is John Greco's lottery problem, which argues that the presence of luck can erode true beliefs and their claim to be counted as knowledge: John Greco, "Knowledge as Credit for True Belief", in DePaul, Michael & Zagzebski, Linda (eds.) *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* (2003) 111.
[105] Baehr (2004), topic 1, paragraph 3.
[106] Sosa (1991) 284 – 292; Baehr (2006) paragraph 2a.

open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, thoroughness, perseverance and humility.[107] The differing conceptions of intellectual virtue outlined above are the point of difference that ultimately distinguishes virtue reliabilism from virtue responsibilism. Intellectual virtue will now be explained further via a brief discussion of ethical virtue. I will go on to explain how virtue epistemology differentiates virtue reliabilism from virtue responsibilism. This chapter will then ultimately argue that virtue responsibilism has significant advantages over belief-focused and virtue reliabilist accounts of knowledge when applied to an audience interpreting the news media's outputs with a view to acquiring knowledge.

Virtue Ethics and Intellectual Virtue

Virtue ethics is one of three main approaches to contemporary normative ethics, with the other approaches being utilitarian ethics and deontological ethics.[108] Virtue ethicists seek to prescribe moral judgments based on certain virtuous character traits of the agent. For example, person A decides to lie to person B. A virtue ethicist would find that such an act would generally be immoral due to apparent absence of such character traits as honesty and fairness.[109] This is distinct from a utilitarian who would assess the lie based on whether the lie has beneficial consequences to person A; whereas a deontologist would almost invariably find that lying would breach a universal principle to always tell the truth thereby rendering the act as unethical or immoral.

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[107] Linda Zagzebski, "Intellectual Motivation and the Good of Truth", in DePaul, Michael & Zagzebski, Linda (eds.) *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* (2003) 153 – 154; Linda Zagzebski, *On Epistemology* (2009) 85 – 86.

[108] Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 18 July 2007, available URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/ Introduction.

[109] However it is noted that, as with many ethical and moral judgments, this is not straightforward as there could be a context where lying could be a display of courage. For example, to lie about access codes for nuclear weapons when under the threat of personal physical harm. Further, David Solomon argues that each of the three normative ethical theories have greater similarities than is often appreciated. Solomon points out that each of the three theories have a fundamental notion which functions in a similar way: deontology is determined by adherence to rules; consequentialism is determined by adherence to the best state of affairs; and virtue is determined by adherence to the virtues in developing one's character. The adherence to a fundamental notion illustrates a common thread amongst normative ethical theories. David Solomon, "Virtue Ethics: Radical or Routine?", in DePaul, Michael & Zagzebski, Linda (eds.) *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* (2003) 57 – 68.

The genealogy of contemporary virtue ethics can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. Further, writers in this field have employed three important concepts derived from the ancient era: "*arête* (excellence or virtue) *phronesis* (practical or moral wisdom) and *eudaimonia* (usually translated as happiness or human flourishing)".[110] This thesis will not discuss these fundamental points of virtue further. However for the present purposes, the focus will predominantly reside with *arête* because intellectual virtue (which will be discussed further immediately below) will be argued to be a character trait that comprises motivation to use such skill as well as a success element. However, *phronesis* and *eudaimonia* will be referred to and expanded upon where necessary to enhance the wider discussion of virtue epistemology.

Moral virtue is the fundamental basis for determining moral actions within the framework of living a virtuous life. A virtuous life consists of developing one's character or character traits throughout that life with reference to a perceived virtuous role model. What this means is that one can exercise moral virtue (and thus conform to a virtue ethical account of what it is to be good) by modelling certain virtuous character traits, such as courage and honesty, experienced in the conduct of a person who exemplifies those qualities regularly or in difficult circumstances.[111] For example, an experienced media practitioner with a reputation for honesty and conscientiousness in their life and in their publications can be used by a student or aspiring practitioner, or indeed any person, to be an example of how they should act with honesty or conscientiousness in order to act morally in their own professional life, and in their life generally.

The ultimate goal for the aspiring practitioner should be to develop their own moral character such that it embodies the character traits of the experienced practitioner. Further, the embodiment or modelling of specific

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[110] Hursthouse (2007) paragraph 1.
[111] 'Idolising' is term more akin to classic virtue ethics; a contemporary example is 'modelling'.

character traits need not be limited to one source. One is able to aspire to different character traits from different people. For instance the aspiring practitioner referred to immediately above may also take inspiration from a sports athlete who shows tenacity in achieving their goals in spite of substantial obstacles. The aspiring practitioner could apply such a character trait of tenacity in developing their own moral character to pursue a career in the news media or in pursuing all sources to uncover all relevant facts for an important news publication.

Within the field of virtue epistemology it is *intellectual* virtue that is the primary focus. Intellectual virtue is distinct from moral virtue because its end aim is a grasp of the truth as opposed to developing one's moral character. Julia Annas provides a clear summary of the differences between moral virtue and intellectual virtue:

> The real distinction emerges [between moral virtue and intellectual virtue] when we consider that moral virtue is essentially practical; it is the skill of living… living, in the virtue tradition, is seen as essentially active, shaping your life so that it is ordered from within. The way you live is seen as actively reflecting and expressing your character and hence your choices. Intellectual virtue, on the other hand, is not essentially practical; it is theoretical in that it is directed at achieving aims other than good action. Particularly if we think of intellectual virtue as aimed at achieving truth, we can see that its aim is going to be distinct from that of moral virtue.[112]

Annas goes on to argue that intellectual virtues have at a fundamental level the aim of truth within a wider context of deepening human understanding. The various intellectual virtues utilised by the audience are distinct from the moral virtues; however some authors such as Linda Zagzebski have utilised classical moral virtues, such as Aristotle's moral virtues, as the basis for the formation of intellectual virtues. How intellectual virtue is conceived is discussed further below; for our present purposes it is sufficient to note that intellectual virtue can either be the

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[112] Julia Annas, "The Structure of Virtue", in DePaul, Michael & Zagzebski, Linda (eds.) *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* (2003) 21.

exercise of cognitive faculties (such as memory or vision) or the exercise of intellectual character traits (such as honesty or open-mindedness) in order to achieve the ultimate goal of understanding truth or truths. In exploring such intellectual virtue within the context of living in a democratic society, it could be argued that the audience is developing greater appreciation of moral virtue through the exercise of intellectual virtue as a part of moral life.

To conclude the comparison between moral virtue and intellectual virtue: it is important to reiterate that within virtue epistemology, intellectual virtue has the ultimate aim of truth. This encapsulates the purpose of deepening human understanding in making knowledge claims about issues and events on the basis of news media accounts.

> Intellectual virtue could on these approaches [application of virtue to epistemology] be seen to be of value in itself as constituting the epistemologically well-lived life. And it might also be of value as being our best strategy for success in achieving our immediate target. The interest of this suggestion will of course depend on a number of factors: whether intellectual virtue can have both these roles, and, if it cannot, whether it can have either, and which is of greater epistemological interest.[113]

Whether intellectual virtue has epistemic value or leads to epistemic success depends upon how it is defined and conceived. We now turn to the different accounts of intellectual virtue.

Virtue Reliabilism

As previously noted, virtue reliabilism conceives the exercise of intellectual virtue as the utilisation of an agent's cognitive faculties. Ernest Sosa sets out a comprehensive definition of intellectual virtue with reference to various external factors that can affect the exercise of such virtues. For Sosa, then, an intellectual virtue is any human quality that contributes to

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[113] Annas (2001) 32 – 33.

grasping truth as opposed to leading to error.[114] Sosa supplements this general definition by adding that the truth-conducive human qualities are constrained to a limited field of propositions and certain conditions within a particular context or environment:

> One has an intellectual virtue or faculty relative to an environment E if and only if one has an inner nature I in virtue of which one would mostly attain the truth and avoid error in a certain field of propositions F, when in certain conditions C. The distinction between E and C is not sharp or important and amounts to distinction between relatively stable background conditions and relatively epistemic conditions.[115]

Sosa concludes his definition of intellectual virtue by emphasising the cognitive faculties of reason, perception, introspection, and memory as the most important and influential intellectual virtues in grasping the truth.[116] Sosa then proceeds to argue that this conception of intellectual virtue can provide a solution to the problems inherent in foundationalist and coherentist theories of knowledge. Such a solution is possible, Sosa advocates, because one's cognitive faculties can resolve justification and accidental beliefs challenges through proper utilisation of intellectual virtues and through limiting the propositions, conditions and environments from which one can make knowledge claims.[117]

With reference to a foundationalist problem and using the Gettier example involving Smith getting the job (above), Sosa would argue that by utilising intellectual virtues such as reason and good perception, Smith can ensure he tracks the correct proposition of 'who will get the job'; instead of 'whoever gets the job has ten coins in their pocket'. Further, by limiting the environment and conditions of this example, it would become clear to Smith that the proposition of the man who gets the job also has ten coins in his pocket is at best only *indicative* of who actually got the job. This means that the Smith cannot yet claim knowledge of who has the job

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[114] Sosa (1991) 225.
[115] Sosa (1991) 284.
[116] Sosa (1991) 284 – 292; Baehr (2006) paragraph 2a.
[117] Sosa (1991) 292.

because the field of propositions within which the limitations of conditions and environment operate do not yet enable an accurate exercise of intellectual virtue. Smith would, therefore, require further information to supplement the propositions that Smith will get the job (such as the job interviewer informing the successful job recipient) before he could utilise his intellectual virtue of reason and know that it is he who has been appointed to the job.

John Greco agrees with Sosa's definition of intellectual virtue and its placement at the centre of epistemological justification for true beliefs and knowledge claims. Further, Greco argues that giving credit to a person for forming a true belief is an important part of knowledge attribution.[118] Earning such credit for knowledge attribution is argued by Greco to be the result of the exercise of one's intellectual virtues. This thesis supports this argument that the exercise of intellectual virtue is individually necessary to meet a philosophical account of knowledge. And this forms the basis of the inclusion of intellectual virtue as a necessary condition of any knowledge claim.

However, virtue reliabilism will not be explored further in this thesis. The predominant reason for this is that in the context of the news media, more than the exercise of cognitive faculties is often required in order to grasp the truth or truths that a news media publication is attempting to portray. Using Sosa's definition applied to the Gettier example above, Smith can identify the potential frailties in knowledge claims according to the propositions and his present environment; however he cannot take this further to grasp the truth of the matter (that Smith is getting the job) without utilising intellectual character traits such as tenacity or thoroughness to ascertain who exactly is getting the job. The same can be said for virtue reliabilism when applied to the news media. Take, for instance, a news media publication that describes various military operations by American or New Zealand military forces in the present war

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[118] Greco (2003) 111 – 114.

in Afghanistan. One can use their cognitive faculties such as reason and introspection to identify various frailties within the publication. However it is through the utilisation of intellectually virtuous character traits that one can exercise thoroughness and open-mindedness as part of an intellectually virtuous life to sufficiently research government and other media sources to verify the claims of the publication. Virtue responsibilism places such intellectual character traits at the centre of epistemological justification (in the same way virtue reliabilism places cognitive faculties at the centre of epistemological justification) and the implications of this will be explored immediately below.

Virtue Responsibilism

Lorraine Code provided one of the first responses to Sosa's virtue reliabilism, arguing that Sosa's characterisation of intellectual virtue in terms of cognitive faculties should be expanded to include broader contextual considerations such as personal and social influences. Code commences her argument by showing that cognitive faculties in some circumstances can provide erroneous knowledge claims for the reasons already canvassed immediately above. Code then argues that a theory of knowledge focusing on stable intellectual virtues and dispositions of the agent is more advantageous. She cites wisdom, intelligence, and prudence as valuable character traits for an epistemic inquirer.[119] It is on the basis of these Aristotelian virtues that Code argues epistemic responsibility is the over-arching intellectual character trait from which all other traits follow. As previously referred to, Zagzebski develops the virtue responsibilist framework further by providing perhaps the most comprehensive list of intellectual character traits: autonomy, intellectual courage, perseverance, humility, fearlessness, open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, thoroughness, perseverance and humility.[120]

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[119] Code, Lorraine, "Toward a 'Responsibilist' Epistemology", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (September 1984) Vol. 45, No. 1, 40. Available URL: http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/stable/2107325 The traits of wisdom, intelligence, and prudence are based on original Aristotelian virtues.

[120] Zagzebski (2003) 153 – 154; Zagzebski (2009) 85 – 86.

Further to those traits identified by Zagzebski's, Christopher Hookway cites observance, open-mindedness, carefulness, perseverance, judgment and holistic character as traits of character which epistemic agents need to develop and utilise as a part of intellectual life.[121] Hookway further argues that it is the agent's selection and utilisation of the different character traits which is of primary importance for a virtue responsibilist theory of knowledge – hence it is the agent's responsibility to exercise character traits in such a way that true belief can be justified and meet the criteria for knowledge. In an approach similar to Code's version of virtue responsibilism, Hookway emphasises epistemic responsibility as the central intellectual virtue for an agent with reference to stable dispositions as an inherent advantage or benefit of character traits in grasping truths. These character traits will be discussed and applied to news media examples in the next chapter.

Returning to Code's virtue responsibilism: she argues that the application of an agent's cognitive abilities to knowledge claims is limited to a particular time and a particular social context. For example, consider a news publication reporting the finding of a study that 33% of the country is regarded as over-weight and meets the criteria of being obese. Suppose the news publication goes further to say that such results illustrate an 'obesity epidemic' within the country. Through the exercise of cognitive faculties alone, it is difficult to be able to make any sort of knowledge claim about the obesity levels presently in New Zealand, as at the present time we have only our own experience to gauge whether one-in-three people are obese. And even if our experience was consistent with that statistic, it may not be representative of the whole of New Zealand (assuming of course that the agent has not viewed and recorded the weight of every person in the country). By utilising character traits such as thoroughness and open-mindedness, the agent may carry out further research as to the methodology of the study and examine further medical records to enhance

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[121] Christopher Hookway, "How to be a Virtue Epistemologist", in DePaul, Michael & Zagzebski, Linda (eds.) *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* (2003) 188.

the justification of such a knowledge claim regarding obesity levels within New Zealand.[122]

The application of such character traits does not endow one with infallibility in grasping the truth of the exact obesity levels presently in New Zealand. There could, for instance, be a subsequent study using a different sampling method or more accurate criteria for what qualifies as obesity, resulting in a lower obesity level. However, if the agent has exercised and exhausted all relevant character traits in their consideration of the resulting findings, then they could have presently fulfilled the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge of a proposition that there is a significant obesity problem within New Zealand (irrespective of whether the statistic of 33% is precisely accurate or not).[123] It is this extension of intellectual virtue to include stable character traits that, for Code, results in epistemic responsibility being seen as the highest epistemic value. Thus virtue responsibilism has arisen as distinct from virtue reliabilism because an agent has the responsibility to exercise the correct epistemic character traits. The above example also illustrates an instance of epistemic responsibility through the agent consulting all relevant external sources of information are consulted and analysed in making a claim of knowledge.

Of particular importance in Code's version of virtue responsibilism is how the character traits of epistemic agents are exercised and developed as a part of intellectual life. The agent's character traits are derived from their stable dispositions, which in turn are influenced by the society the agent is a part of:

> …it is not just a matter of assessing individual conduct *per se*, but of assessing it as a manifestation of justifiable social practices of

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[122] The virtue reliabilist could exercise their cognitive faculties, such as reasoning and good perception, to accurately understand the statistical and scientific aspects of such a study. However it is the exercise of intellectual character traits that enables an agent to go further and research the study more comprehensively in order to make a successful knowledge claim based on the study.

[123] Baehr notes that such knowledge claims are at times culpable of being accurate generalisations as opposed to precise technical propositions logically leading to a claim of knowledge. Baehr (2006), topic 3.a, paragraph 4.

and approaches to enquiry. It is crucial that the individual be recognized as a social being, as part of a community, with all of the obligations this entails, as much in intellectual as in moral activity. For such an epistemology, I shall claim, epistemic responsibility is a central virtue from which all others radiate.[124]

The above remarks highlight how Code's version of virtue responsibilism attempts to bridge the gap between true beliefs and knowledge claims. The agent's justifications are set against the backdrop of society – with the agent assessing various sources of information received during their everyday activities. At the core of this account of epistemic virtue is the responsibility to utilise all desirable intellectual character traits to gain an accurate understanding of the way the world actually is. Code argues that human understanding conceived in this way can meet the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge. Fundamental to epistemic responsibility is accountability for the choices the agent makes in exercising character traits to form true beliefs.[125] The result is that justifications of true beliefs can arrive at knowledge via the virtue responsibilist framework.

To illustrate this point further: we can usefully apply Code's virtue responsibilism to the news media. On this view, the audience consumes news media publications in the course of living in society. It is each individual's epistemic responsibility as part of a democratic society to not only engage with sufficient news media publications so as to be aware of current affairs; but also to exercise their intellectual character traits in pursuing knowledge about social issues and events. Thus under Code's virtue responsibilism, as individual agents, we can make responsible knowledge claims based on news media publications by firstly ensuring that we are up-to-date on present social issues; and secondly, by exercising our character traits such as open-mindedness and thoroughness as we analyse the present news media publication, in order

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[124] Code (1984) 34.
[125] Code (1984) 39 – 40.

to form a (intellectually virtuous) true belief that fulfils the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge.

Code elaborates with respect to the source of information in forming knowledge claims that:

> …central among the considerations that will count in my acceptance of a knowledge claim is my evidence as to whether the person at its source is in a position to know. This will depend, in part, upon his/her intellectual integrity, much in the same way as, in moral matters, my trusting a person hinges, to a great extent, upon his/her moral integrity. These varieties of integrity are, at least in most important senses, objectively describable, even if not exhaustively, ultimately, or foundationally. Thus the importance accorded to the person as knower is accorded insofar as conditions (no doubt an open-ended set) can be spelled out for the reasonableness, in certain specific sets of circumstances, of respecting his/her claims to know.[126]

Code notes that such a theory of knowledge can, amongst other things, invoke questions of trust in the formation of appropriate justification for true beliefs.[127] This connects to the discussion in the previous chapter regarding truth and trust. For some news stories where it is impossible to obtain any credible or relevant further information, the exercise of epistemic responsibility (and the strength of any resulting knowledge claims) can reside in the trust placed in the publishing practitioner or media organisation. The *WikiLeaks* example in the next chapter will illustrate this point further because *WikiLeaks* does not publish its sources. The result is that a high degree of epistemic trust is required by the public if they are to believe outputs from the *WikiLeaks* media organisation.

James Montmarquet provides a similar conception of virtue responsibilism to Code except he emphasises Aristotelian moral virtues as the central intellectual virtues. Montmarquet's over-arching intellectual virtue is

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[126] Code (1984) 31.
[127] Code (1984) 34.

epistemic conscientiousness which differs slightly from Code's epistemic responsibility. For Montmarquet, epistemic conscientiousness is based on the desire to achieve the ultimate goal of intellectual virtue, which is truth. However, Montmarquet supplements epistemic conscientiousness by arguing that other forms of the central intellectual virtue, such as impartiality and intellectual courage, are similarly important to safeguard against the vices within the agent's own dispositions.[128] Roberts and Wood note that the opposite of the virtue of humility (i.e. the vices) include arrogance, vanity, conceit, egotism, grandiosity, portentousness, snobbishness, impertinence (presumption), haughtiness, self-righteousness, domination, self-ambition, and self-complacency.[129] Thus for Montmarquet, the agent must appreciate or take into consideration and actively seek to avoid the above vices in order for the exercise of the character trait humility to be intellectually virtuous. In terms of application to the audience in interpreting news media publications, Montmarquet's consideration of intellectual vices in developing his account of intellectually virtuous character traits is applicable not only through raising caution with respect to the agent's personal bias; but it also provides a deeper appreciation of potential bias present within the publication by the practitioner or media organisation.

Unfortunately, despite the advantages of the virtue responsibilism of Code and Montmarquet, there are significant weaknesses in application to knowledge claims within news media publications. Baehr notes that the predominant criticism of this approach to virtue responsibilism, which criticism is supported by this thesis, is that knowledge claims based on simple propositions do not require an exercise of intellectual character traits.[130] In using a contrasting example, imagine that I had just cut my hand on a knife. I would generally claim to know that I cut my hand from

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[128] James A. Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue*, Mind: New Series (October 1987) Vol. 96, No. 384, 484 – 486, available URL: http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/stable/2253844
[129] Robert C. Roberts & Wood, W. Jay, "Humility and Epistemic Goods", in DePaul, Michael & Zagzebski, Linda (eds.) *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* (2003) 258 – 259.
[130] Baehr (2006), topic 3.b.

the exercise of my cognitive faculties such as vision and pain perception. It is difficult to see how I have exercised any character trait like inquisitiveness to ascertain the knowledge that I have cut my hand. In application to news media publications, news publications concerning contemporary issues within society, such as international incidents or government policy, require the audience to exercise intellectually virtuous character traits in order to critically analyse such information and achieve the end of a claim of knowledge based on that information. This means that in order for a theory of knowledge to be applied to news media publications, there must be a requirement for the agent to arrive at a true belief via an exercise of intellectual virtue.

Hookway identifies the distinction between virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism in accounting for knowledge:

> Reliabilist virtue epistemology might define 'justified belief' in terms of 'virtuous character' and then explain virtuous character in terms of 'successful and stable dispositions to form true beliefs'. The alternative approach… [of virtue] 'responsibility' emphasises the role of epistemic virtues and guiding agents in carrying out activities such as enquiries.[131]

This illustrates the way in which virtue responsibilism, with its focus on the agent's intellectual character traits, emphasises the development of the right kinds of dispositions throughout an agent's intellectual life. A virtuously responsible agent would take it upon themselves to be accountable for which intellectual virtues they apply not only to specific situations, but also in a broader intellectual progression that is part of a generally virtuous life.[132]

Linda Zagzebski provides arguably the most substantive account of virtue responsibilism in her book *Virtues of the Mind* (1996). Zagzebski provides a general account of a virtue, whether moral or intellectual, as:

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[131] Hookway (2003) 188.
[132] Hookway (2003) 188.

> … a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving
> a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and
> reliable success in bringing about that end. What I mean by a
> motivation is a disposition to have a motive; a motive is an action –
> guiding emotion with a certain end, either internal or external.[133]

Zagzebski gives a comprehensive account of the four main features of a virtue, whether ethical or intellectual. Firstly, a virtue is an acquired excellence of the person in a deep and lasting sense. As we have seen, a vice is the contrary quality; it is an acquired weakness that has manifested through the living of the agent's moral or intellectual life. Zagzebski explains that the depth required for the trait to be a virtue or a vice is to think of it as a quality we would ascribe to a person if asked to describe them after their death. An individual's virtues and vices are a category of qualities. While such virtues and vices may not be permanent for each person, they come closer to defining a person than any other category of qualities. Secondly, a certain amount of time and work are required in order for the agent to cultivate, develop and subsequently achieve virtues. Thirdly, virtues are not simply a skill in isolation: Zagzebski notes that correlative skills are important, as are the wider intellectual and moral life of the agent in cultivating virtues. Fourthly, a virtue has the component of motivation. Motivations can be a part of, and a result of, a person's character that results in given actions. Zagzebski argues that emotions are extremely influential in the formation of motivations and subsequent actions.[134]

Zagzebski's definition of a virtue is based on the Aristotelian definition of a moral virtue. Aristotle's moral virtues are character traits that are developed over the course of one's life. In order for such character traits to be developed and utilised, the moral agent must have at a fundamental level the motivation to be morally good; as well as achieve sufficient

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[133] Zagzebski (1996) 137.
[134] Zagzebski (1996) 135 – 136; Zagzebski (2009) 81.

success in order to be morally virtuous or to act virtuously.[135] However unlike Aristotle, Zagzebski argues that the same structure can be applied to intellectual virtues. This means that an intellectual virtue has as its fundamental 'good' the goal of truth. Zagzebski notes that truth itself is not a form of good. She states that what is good about a true belief is that the mind fits reality or slightly less roughly, the agent's propositional representation of reality is accurate. Zagzebski highlights the importance of distinguishing the state of belief (which is not true) and the thing that is the true (the proposition) which is neither good nor bad. However, as long as that distinction is understood, there is nothing inherently wrong in speaking about the good of truth. Zagzebski goes on to conclude that "a true belief is therefore good because it is successful in its representation or aim or is a disposition to be successful".[136]

However, Zagzebski shows that more than the goal of truth is required for a character trait to become an intellectual virtue:

> What makes a trait an intellectual virtue? We might be tempted to think that a trait of intellectual character is virtuous because its possession is more truth-conducive than its lack, but I think that that cannot be the full explanation for two reasons. One is that we treat traits like attentiveness, carefulness, thoroughness, intellectual courage, perseverance, and humility as prima facie virtues in advance of evidence of their truth–conduciveness. We assume that these traits are truth-conducive, under the assumption of general

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[135] Sherman & White note that Aristotle does not include natural faculties such as good memory or good eyesight as particular character traits or cognitive processes that result in intellectual virtue. The authors show that, by contrast, some lines of contemporary epistemic inquiry have tended to rely on such character traits as a foundation for forming knowledge claims. However Aristotelian moral virtues have traditionally been regarded as distinct from intellectual virtues. Nancy Sherman & Heath White, "Intellectual Virtue: Emotions, Luck, and the Ancients", in DePaul, Michael & Zagzebski, Linda (eds.) *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* (2003) 34 – 38.

[136] Zagzebski (2003) 135 – 136. As a further point, Wayne Riggs argues that the fundamental goal (or highest epistemic end) of intellectual virtue should instead be human understanding. Zagzebski takes a similar line in Zagzebski (2009), "Chapter Six: Epistemic Good and the Good Life" 131 – 152. However given the indeterminacy of the level of understanding required to meet such an epistemic end, this thesis will not consider this argument further. It is noted that the goal of truth is also problematic as outlined in Chapter Two. Wayne D. Riggs, "Understanding 'Virtue' and the Virtue of Understanding", in DePaul, Michael & Zagzebski, Linda (eds.) *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* (2003) 224 – 226.

trustworthiness, but I doubt that we wait for that evidence before treating them as virtues. The other reason is that we admire these traits more than we would if their goodness was limited to their truth-conduciveness.[137]

This means that character traits are to be exercised in a certain way in order to qualify as intellectual virtues. Taking the Aristotelian approach to moral virtues, Zagzebski argues that the elements of motivation and success must be satisfied in order for the utilisation of character traits to be considered an exercise of intellectual virtue. Thus a character trait is not intellectually virtuous in itself – it is only virtuous when exercised in accordance with the elements of motivation and success.[138] And these two elements are the primary difference between Zagzebski's virtue responsibilism and those put forward by Code and Montmarquet who instead attempt to account for the intellectual 'good' of truth by placing epistemic responsibility and epistemic conscientiousness respectively at the centre of intellectual virtue. Instead, Zagzebski accounts for the fundamental good by utilising the two elements of motivation and success in exercising agent character traits. These two elements are discussed further below.

Zagzebski's conception of motivation is relatively straightforward in that an agent's motives for utilising character traits must be directed towards the fundamental goal or *telos* of grasping the truth. The agent's motivation must be consistent with the fundamental goal in order for intellectual virtue to be exercised.[139] This has application to news media publications because it is argued that the fundamental goal of the audience is exactly the same in exercising their own intellectual virtues. The news media

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[137] Zagzebski (2009) 85 – 86.

[138] Greco notes that conflicts between intellectual virtues can arise in the same way moral virtues can conflict. It is for this reason that Greco suggests that the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* or practical wisdom is of high importance in mediating conflicting virtues. Greco (2004), topic 7, paragraph 7.

[139] Zagzebski notes that all intellectual virtues have the same fundamental goal as a general motivation for truth. This is distinct from the moral virtues which can have different motivations. Zagzebski thus claims that intellectual virtues are in essence a subset of moral virtues because of their singular general motivation. Zagzebski (1996) 137 – 139; 142 – 145.

audience's motivation is similarly to grasp the truth or truths in terms of understanding issues or events by means of the account of reality provided by the news media's outputs.

Zagzebski proceeds to discuss the element of success within her account of intellectual virtues. She notes that in pursuing intellectually virtuous motivations as a part of an agent's intellectual life, the agent is developing various skills that are beneficial in forming knowledge claims. Intellectual skills differ from virtues because they are particular sets of truth-conducive procedures that are relevant to a particular area of intellectual life.[140] Taking the previous example regarding obesity levels in New Zealand society, the need to conduct further research is a result of the pre-conceived intellectual virtue of thoroughness. The intellectual skill is conducting relevant medical research that will exercise and enhance the agent's intellectual virtue.

Julia Annas notes that:

> The success element in virtue is important for anyone wishing to develop an epistemology in which virtue plays a basic or foundational role. For knowledge is a successful term if any is. Knowledge is not the state you achieve by doing your best although you fail, but the state in which you actually succeed in getting your claim right, and succeed in meeting the required conditions, whatever these may be. Zagzebski defines knowledge as a state of cognitive contact with reality arising out of acts of intellectual virtue, and obviously 'act of virtue' must be a success term here, or it would not be knowledge that we are defining. Virtue, then, must be a success term in virtue epistemology.[141]

These remarks show that the success element is required for any exercise of intellectual virtue and knowledge claims because both are the result of processes. Intellectual virtue requires the process of exercising character traits within the agent. Returning to the element of motivation, the element

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[140] Zagzebski (1996) 136 – 139.
[141] Annas (2003) 23 – 24.

of success ensures that the motivation for truth is followed through by the agent in accordance with their character traits. Failure to have such a success element could result in the risk of character traits being exercised incorrectly, which would undermine the process of exercising intellectual virtue and any subsequent knowledge claims. Thus in order for intellectual virtue to result in successful knowledge claims, there must be a requirement for successful achievement of the motivation for grasping truth.

Now that Zagzebski's conception of intellectual virtue has been discussed, it is necessary to examine how this relates to a virtue responsibilist theory of knowledge in order to have a framework to apply to knowledge claims based on news media outputs. Zagzebski notes that a contemporary problem in the definition of knowledge is that sometimes it can be thought to be no more than the minimum state we expect out of a reasonable person with respect to a given proposition; however on other occasions knowledge can represent the pinnacle of our cognitive aspirations.[142] Zagzebski further states that, in the present context, knowledge can be explained by determining its value over and above true belief.

Accordingly, the structure of Zagzebski's theory of knowledge is as follows:

> S knows that p if and only if:
>
> 1.   S believes that p;
> 2.   S possesses the motive to know that p as part of an intellectually virtuous life;
> 3.   S exercises intellectual virtues to understand that p is true; and
> 4.   S is successful in understanding that p.

Zagzebski characterises the final three conditions as 'acts of intellectual virtue', which conforms to her definition of knowledge as consisting of true beliefs arising out of acts of intellectual virtue. "Acts of intellectual virtue" is

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[142] Zagzebski (2003) 150.

the label given to the process outlined above whereby a character trait is exercised in accordance with the motive to achieve the truth as well as success in grasping the truth or truths. Because the two elements of motive and success are solely directed towards the fundamental goal of truth, truth is not independently expressed by Zagzebski as a necessary condition for knowledge. This means that the agent can make a claim of knowledge by pursuing their initial belief and going through the process or acts of intellectual virtue – which is argued by Zagzebski to result in a belief that is not only justified (due to the exercise of intellectual virtues of the agent) and true but is also jointly sufficient for knowledge.[143] Zagzebski concludes by noting that the motives behind pursuing truth include the following intellectual virtues: autonomy, courage, perseverance, humility, fearless, open-mindedness, and other intellectual virtues.[144] These intellectual virtues will be examined further in the next chapter in the context of their application to the pursuit of knowledge via the consumption of news media publications.

The relation between beliefs and acts of intellectual virtue is also important for Zagzebski's theory of knowledge. Generally, Zagzebski argues that an agent's beliefs involve a conscious assent, cognitively and emotionally as well as in varying degrees, to facts, events and issues that are relevant to our intellectual and moral lives. Thus for Zagzebski, the more we care about something, the more conscientious we are about it. Moreover:

> …conscientiousness requires self-trust. Being conscientious is all I can do to get true beliefs, but there is no guarantee that being conscientious gives me the truth. I can be careful, but be thorough in seeking evaluating evidence, be open-minded, listen to those with a contrary view, and so forth, but there are no guarantees. So I need to trust that there is a close connection between conscientious belief and true belief. If I do not trust, and my lack of

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[143] In her more recent work, Zagzebski modifies this definition of knowledge slightly by arguing that true belief is an intellectual act, or at least, strongly analogous to an intellectual act. On this line of reasoning, Zagzebski concludes that because belief itself is either within an act of intellectual virtue of the result of the same, knowledge is defined as an act of intellectual virtue. Zagzebski (2003) 152 – 153.
[144] Zagzebski (2003) 153 – 154.

trust led me to have fewer conduced beliefs in the domains I care about, I would care less about what I care about and that would give me a less desirable life, a life I would not care to have. Furthermore, since I depend upon other people for most of my beliefs, I need another sort of trust. I am not often in a position to confirm that other people are conscientious, so I need to trust that they are. And again, if I don't trust them, I will have fewer beliefs about what I care about and that will give me a less desirable life.[145]

These remarks show the link between beliefs and knowledge claims because a lot of what we would ordinarily count as knowledge, particularly in application to the news media, requires a degree of trust in order for us to participate effectively in contemporary social issues and to prevent scepticism about sources undermining knowledge claims.

Before undertaking an application of her theory to the news media, it is desirable to critically analyse Zagzebski's theory of knowledge in more general terms. Indeed Zagzebski notes that there are three generally uncontroversial notions that are characteristic of knowledge claims. The first is that there is at least the criterion of thinking with assent when enquiring about a subject to gain knowledge. Secondly an essential feature of knowledge is that its object is a true proposition. And finally, that the combination of the above two (true belief) is epistemically inferior to knowledge or knowing.[146] On the face of it, Zagzebski's virtue responsibilism meets the three basic criteria for knowledge. Further, it is claimed by Zagzebski that her virtue responsibilism solves Gettier problems.[147] This is because in Gettier cases the accidental nature of the true belief such as that held by Smith (above) did not result from a proper or correct exercise of intellectual virtue. This means that Smith's true belief does not count as knowledge due to the accidental or lucky formation of his belief, or alternatively, due to Smith's failure to properly exercise intellectual virtue.

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[145] Zagzebski (2009) 11 – 12.
[146] Zagzebski (2009) 107.
[147] Zagzebski (1996) 296 – 298.

However there are weaknesses within Zagzebski's account. The most prominent point of contention is the restriction of what qualifies as knowledge. Only knowledge that arises as the result of an act of intellectual virtue can count as knowledge. Going back to the example where I cut my hand with a knife, this would be unlikely to count as knowledge because I have only become aware of the cut through exercise of my senses and cognitive abilities. Yet ordinarily I would say that I know that I have cut my hand. Whereas under virtue reliabilism, the exercise of cognitive faculties such as vision and perception could, together with a true belief, lead to a successful knowledge claim.

Zagzebski counters such a criticism by emphasising the desirability of truth and knowledge. She notes that we are still forced to the conclusion that knowledge in a given case is not significantly valuable if grasping the truth is not desirable.[148] This means that basic facts learned via the sole exercise of our cognitive faculties do not count as knowledge because such information is of insufficient importance or complexity to require a claim of knowledge.[149] While this is a serious criticism of Zagzebski's theory, it will be argued in this thesis that such a criticism does not apply to knowledge claims based on news media publications, because its content requires acts of intellectual virtue in order to claim knowledge of the same.

Another criticism of Zagzebski's virtue responsibilism is that a specific intellectual virtue in a given context can be sacrificed for the sake of adherence to the fundamental over-arching "good" of truth. This will be shown to have serious implications in application to the news media where specific contexts such as name suppression can be problematic in achieving the over-arching good. Finally, general criticisms can be levelled at the indeterminacy of the role of emotions in forming motives and

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[148] Zagzebski (2003) 137.
[149] Although it could be argued that if we made a new and useful discovery about blood, cuts or knives as a result of the discovery that we had cut our hand, then that new and useful discovery could count as knowledge for Zagzebski as a result of exercising intellectual character traits.

regarding the degree or extent of success required to meet the success element.

Zagzebski's Virtue Responsibilism and the News Media

We have seen from the Introduction and First Chapter of this thesis that information that the audience receives from the news media has a myriad of different aspects that have led to its final published or presented form. Further, in Chapter Two, consideration of the influence of truth and trust both within the news media and with its audience added further considerations for the audience in forming knowledge claims based on news media outputs. This thesis will now argue that Zagzebski's virtue responsibilism can be applied to knowledge claims that an audience member may make based on information extracted from news media publications.

To begin, it is necessary to set out the frameworks within which Zagzebski's theory of knowledge is to operate. In the Introduction and First Chapter of this thesis, it was determined that the relevant political context would be that of a democratic society. The main considerations derived from this for our present purposes are that society is self-governing through elected representatives, and the news media is independent of governmental control. Secondly, within such a society, the role of the news media is to be characterised by the theory of social responsibility. The relevant aspects of social responsibility are that the news media is responsible for serving the political system and enlightening the public; and the theory also identifies the inter-relationships between practitioner, media organisations and the audience. Finally, the news media is to function within its generally accepted ethical principles, which include the duty to report the truth and to uphold the public interest. These three frameworks delineate how the news media will be viewed and how the audience can develop intellectual virtues based on these frameworks to enable them to make successful, virtue-based, knowledge claims.

As we have seen, Zagzebski defines knowledge as beliefs arising from acts of intellectual virtue. Her account of acts of intellectual virtue has been shown to require that the audience utilise their individual character traits in analysing information from the news media; and the audience must also analyse such information pursuant to the genuine motive to grasp the truth and succeed at the same. Information received from news media outputs will rarely be sufficient on its own to satisfy a claim of knowledge. This is because news media publications are largely based on current affairs within society. Because of this currency, a virtuous inquirer with character traits such as thoroughness and intellectual carefulness will naturally refrain from forming hasty conclusions about events and issues that have not yet been concluded.

However, on the other hand, an agent should not discount truths or the relevance of information merely because a reported event is still developing. An example of this will be shown in the swine flu example in the next chapter, where some news media accounts of the global health risks of swine flu were originally overstated. Instead it is a matter of context which intellectual virtues will be the most relevant to successfully grasp truths obtained via the news media. In general terms, the information accessed by the public in consuming news media outputs fits within Zagzebski's theory of knowledge. This is because news media accounts are complex in that they relate to more than just an exercise of cognitive faculties – news media publications have wider social and political context implications. Further, inherent frailties within the accounts may require additional epistemological inquiry in order to meet the requirements of an 'act of intellectual virtue' as a necessary condition for a knowledge claim.

We have already seen in Chapter Two that the truth is often complex and understanding requires more than an instantaneous mental act. Zagzebski's virtue responsibilism recognises the fundamental goal of the application of intellectual virtue; and the agent needs to utilise their character traits to achieve that end. Furthermore, to grasp the truth, the

agent is required to possess virtuous motives that are argued to be generated by emotions that can include the sense of belonging to, or responsibility of being an active member of, society. The audience is also required to be successful in accurately grasping the truth in exercising intellectual virtues. This places erroneous or accidental beliefs that result from consuming news media outputs as outside the scope of knowledge. Character traits such as thoroughness and open-mindedness provide the agent with the capacity to grasp truths within and behind a news media publication over and above their immediate reading or viewing of those outputs. Thus Zagzebski's virtue responsibilism can be applied to the news media through its theory of knowledge being well-suited to the information provided and debated in the news media in relation to current events. The issues and events of contemporary society are such that acts of intellectual virtue are required in order to make successful knowledge claims about those events and issues if we are to be fully informed citizens of a democratic society.

However, the above application of Zagzebski's theory of knowledge is not without some minor weaknesses. One such weakness is that it can be difficult to determine the veracity of some news publications because truths may be difficult or impossible to uncover. An example is a publication alleging the actions of a foreign government that does not disclose documents regarding its affairs such as those published by *WikiLeaks*. This increases the probability of accidental or lucky true beliefs. However in such cases where the information is scarce or unreliable, an intellectually careful inquirer would reserve judgment at this point and would not yet be able to claim knowledge. The result being that an intellectual virtue has not been properly exercised and thus the agent cannot at present claim knowledge of the actions of that foreign government.

This example illustrates another weakness for the audience, which is the potential lack of knowledge claims that can be made because some news stories are simply too difficult to determine its veracity given their

remoteness or lack of information. However such a weakness could also be directed at foundationalist knowledge claims as the problem for the agent is lacking justification for true beliefs. Finally, another significant weakness is the high level of epistemic responsibility placed upon the virtuous inquirer in an 'information age' when we are constantly inundated with new information by the news media. However it is argued that this weakness can be countered by using Zagzebski's conception of intellectual virtue to utilise character traits such as open-mindedness and perseverance to ensure the agent is attempting to sufficiently inform themselves as an active member of society.

Further points of contention will be addressed as they arise in analysing news media publications in the next chapter. The final chapter of this thesis will build on the above argument by applying virtue responsibilism to knowledge claims within news media publications by an exploration of individual intellectual virtues and their application to contemporary news media coverage of specific events and issues.

Chapter Four: Cultivating the Audience's Intellectual Virtues

The citizens of a democratic society are the potential audience for the news media. We have seen that the requirements for Zagzebski's account of virtue responsibilism can have a general application to the audience in making knowledge claims based on news media outputs. This thesis will now outline the various intellectual character traits that are relevant to knowledge claims based on news media outputs. This will be followed by an examination of news media coverage of specific contemporary events in order to provide case studies that illustrate how knowledge claims can be assessed within the proposed framework, and to illustrate the inter-relationships between intellectual character traits in application to the news media outputs. Finally, this thesis will consider which intellectual character traits are most beneficial to individual agents in making successful knowledge claims based on news media outputs.

Character Traits as Intellectual Virtues

This section will discuss specific intellectual character traits and how their exercise can assist individual agents as members of the audience in performing acts of intellectual virtue. We have seen in Chapter Three that Zagzebski identifies autonomy, intellectual courage, perseverance, humility, fearlessness and open-mindedness as important character traits for an intellectually virtuous inquirer.[150] Latterly, Zagzebski includes such character traits as inquisitiveness, thoroughness, attentiveness and intellectual carefulness in her list of responsibilist virtues.[151] In application to the news media, some of the character traits are more relevant as truth-conducive intellectual virtues than others. For example, the trait of intellectual courage generally has only minimal relevance for individual

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[150] Zagzebski (2003) 153 – 154.
[151] Zagzebski (2009) 85 – 86.

members of the audience in consuming news media publications. This is because in most circumstances it is unlikely that intellectual courage is required for an individual agent to make a knowledge claim arising out of news media outputs. There could be a circumstance where such a trait is important such as the intellectual courage to pursue a research inquiry of the fatality of swine flu; however such circumstances are prima facie likely to be rare. The character trait of intellectual courage has more relevance for practitioners in pursuing news stories that may have significant professional, political or social ramifications.

Each of Zagzebski's character traits can be cultivated and brought to bear by epistemic agents in order to make successful knowledge claims. To briefly canvass some examples: the trait of open-mindedness can be utilised in considering alternative opinions as well as in developing an awareness of personal bias in consuming news media outputs. The trait of inquisitiveness can be exercised by an agent is pursuing further lines of inquiry where the present information is not sufficient or credible in order to formulate a knowledge claim. Further, traits of perseverance and thoroughness can be utilised to comprehensively pursue those further lines of inquiry by conducting research or even collaborating primary data.[152] Intellectual carefulness will incorporate the trait of attentiveness in that its utilisation incorporates agents' analysis of news media sources and whether those sources are credible or trustworthy in order to successfully grasp true propositions.

Zagzebski's set of intellectual virtues are a way of filling-out or supplementing Code's overarching notion of epistemic responsibility. Epistemic responsibility has strong links to Zagzebski's character trait of autonomy. Agent autonomy also has present application to the news media because it is important that the audience is not unduly influenced in making decisions, particularly in determining which lines of further epistemic inquiry and research are required in order to satisfy a knowledge

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[152] This thesis will view the trait of thoroughness as incorporating perseverance in pursuing further lines of epistemic inquiry.

claim. For example, political or economic pressure, as we have seen, can influence the presentation of news media publications. It is important that the audience as individuals are not coerced by similar pressures in pursuing the goal or *telos* of truth. Now that the relevant character traits have been briefly outlined, this thesis will now utilise three contemporary news media examples – *WikiLeaks*, Swine Flu, and the "Anti-Smacking" legislative amendment in order to illustrate how those traits work within Zagzebski's framework; and which character traits are of particular importance in making knowledge claims based on news media outputs.[153]

WikiLeaks

The first contemporary event to be examined is the release of politically sensitive diplomatic cables by *WikiLeaks* on 28 November 2010. *WikiLeaks* is an internet-based organisation that releases information supplied by anonymous sources into the public domain via its website, an approach to publication that is coming to be known as 'data journalism'. *WikiLeaks* is self-described as a:

> Non-profit media organization dedicated to bringing important news and information to the public. We provide an innovative, secure and anonymous way for independent sources around the world to leak information to our journalists. We publish material of ethical, political and historical significance while keeping the identity of our sources anonymous, thus providing a universal way for the revealing of suppressed and censored injustices.[154]

WikiLeaks pitches itself as the ultimate medium for the publication of information that is relevant to important political and social issues.[155] The organisation aims to be politically and economically neutral. Further, all sources remain anonymous and information is provided by sources via an

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[153] The term "anti-smacking" legislative amendment is frequently used by the news media to refer to the law change to physical correction of children in New Zealand.
[154] *WikiLeaks*, 2011, available URL: http://www.WikiLeaks.ch/ for further information regarding *WikiLeaks* see the "About" tab at URL: http://www.WikiLeaks.ch/About.html
[155] *WikiLeaks* has released information covering many different social issues such as sensitive government documents from the United States of America's involvement in the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; as well as various instances of censorship, diplomacy and environmental issues. For a comprehensive list, see the "About" tab at *WikiLeaks*, paragraph 2.2.

'electronic drop box' from where the information is uploaded to *WikiLeaks* via the internet and protected from external hacking or manipulation by cryptographic computer hardware. The information is then scrutinised by *WikiLeaks* journalists who undertake a research and verification process to ascertain the truth and credibility of the information. The journalists then write an article describing the significance of the information for users of the website. The article and the source's original information are then released or 'leaked' to the public through the *WikiLeaks* website. Various news media organisations, such as *The Guardian* in the United Kingdom, assist in the dissemination to the public by publishing their own stories based on the leaked information.[156] *WikiLeaks* claims to be a completely independent organisation and they are fearless in their "efforts to get the unvarnished truth out to the public".[157]

The information leaked on 28 November 2010 was the start of the release of over 250,000 diplomatic cables which originated from US embassies. Presently only 5,000 diplomatic cables are released by *WikiLeaks*. The cables mainly concern either external political relations or internal government affairs and cover the period 1966 until February 2010.[158] *WikiLeaks* claims that over 15,000 of the cables to be published have been classified as 'Secret' by the US government. The *New Zealand Herald* has published a webpage dedicated to *WikiLeaks*' release of diplomatic cables, with specific reference to those cables about New Zealand.[159]

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[156] *WikiLeaks* have also utilised social networking websites such as Twitter and Facebook in order to release or leak information online that is easily accessible to the public. Whilst these social network websites do not come within the formal definition of a news media organisation, there are further research questions arising out of public use of social networking websites and their relationship to knowledge claims. Such inquiry could also be expanded to the public use of internet search engines such as Google to obtain information. The credibility and trust of such information would be important factors for an intellectually virtuous inquirer to consider in making knowledge claims.

[157] *WikiLeaks*, paragraph 1.2.

[158] *WikiLeaks*, "Archives", "Secret US Embassy Cables", 28 November 2010, available URL: http://www.WikiLeaks.ch/cablegate.html

[159] *New Zealand Herald*, "WikiLeaks cables on NZ", 19 December 2010, available URL: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10695095

If the audience are intellectually virtuous inquirers, what are they able to claim as knowledge on the basis of the diplomatic cables released by *WikiLeaks*? Take for instance the several diplomatic cables regarding New Zealand's present involvement in the Afghanistan War.[160] The cables generally confirm the New Zealand's government's stance of supporting USA in the war effort by deploying aid and troops. However, the cables also discuss the secrecy of military equipment and tactics as well as the release of politically sensitive documents under the Official Information Act 1982.

Applying Zagzebski's virtue epistemology to the present case; the agent is firstly required to have the correct motive of pursuing truth (in order to gain a deeper understanding of contemporary social issues). The point of possessing the requisite motive will not be laboured in this chapter because in the usual case it is plausible to think that the agent is pursuing the truth. It is sufficient for our present purpose to note that the agent must be sufficiently motivated to grasp the truth or truths in order to make successful knowledge claims based on news media publications.

With this assumption that the agent is correctly motivated in place, we can begin the application of a virtue-based account of knowledge. In relation to the cables relating to New Zealand's involvement in the Afghanistan War, of particular importance is the exercise of intellectual character traits of thoroughness and inquisitiveness. The confirmation of the New Zealand government's actions in this conflict could serve as a satisfactory authority for the agent to know some of the particulars of New Zealand's involvement. The cables are a primary site of government foreign diplomacy and correspondence; and thus the agent could claim to know about New Zealand's involvement in the Afghanistan War provided the agent has consumed the other relevant information and consistent news

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[160] See for example: *WikiLeaks cable: NZ weighs Afghanistan asks request*; *WikiLeaks cable: Is NZ open or opposed to added Afghan deployments?*; *WikiLeaks cable: NZ input to Afghanistan strategy review*; *WikiLeaks cable: NZ releases documents on US Afghan troop request*, all available from *New Zealand Herald*, "WikiLeaks cables on NZ", 19 December 2010, available URL: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10695095

media accounts. The agent could claim to know propositions such as 'New Zealand sent troops to Afghanistan as part of its commitment to the Afghanistan War' or that 'the American Government applied political pressure on the New Zealand Government to provide support for the Afghanistan War'.[161] While the agent is ordinarily unlikely to have personally witnessed such events, the sheer weight and consistency of the sources and evidence would mean the agent could treat them as reliable testimony that can contribute in leading to true beliefs. And further, given the agents would exercise intellectual character traits within Zagzebski's framework, the beliefs would count as arising from acts of intellectual virtue which met the definition of knowledge.

However, as noted, the exercise of intellectual virtues must satisfy Zagzebski's other condition of intellectual virtue – the exercise of intellectual virtue must be successful in achieving knowledge. The character trait of inquisitiveness is useful in this instance because the agent should pursue other lines of inquiry and sources in order to ensure any knowledge claims about New Zealand's involvement in the Afghanistan War are accurate. Further, the character trait of thoroughness is important to ensure all relevant sources are consulted by the virtuous inquirer in order to achieve the greatest understanding of the present news story. In the context of *WikiLeaks*, inquisitiveness and thoroughness would require good grounds for trust in *WikiLeaks* as a source. For the sources who leaked the diplomatic cables are unknown, as is any editorial manipulation by *WikiLeaks*.[162] This is important for an intellectually virtuous agent because if there is external manipulation from either *WikiLeaks* or its sources, then the success condition of Zagzebski's theory

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[161] *New Zealand Herald*, "WikiLeaks cable: NZ releases documents on US Afghan troop request", 29 December 2010 (diplomatic cable dated 9 July 2009), available URL: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10696970 paragraph 1.

[162] There is contemporary debate as to the value of *WikiLeaks* to society: some view *WikiLeaks* as an organisation that is breaching government confidentiality rules and endangering national security; others view *WikiLeaks* as campaigning for the ultimate independence of the news media in publishing political documents to society. *New Zealand Herald*, "Opinion", "WikiLeaks – valuable service or dangerous liability?", 8 December 2010, available URL: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/opinion/news/article.cfm?c_id=466&objectid=10692847#cmnts_Add

of knowledge is not satisfied and it would follow that a knowledge claim is inappropriate.

This leads back to the question of the public's trust in *WikiLeaks* and of their anonymous sources. The success condition would not be met, despite the agent exercising their character traits in order to grasp truths, because such external manipulation can result in false beliefs or arriving at true beliefs by luck or chance - which as we have seen do not count as knowledge. However the responses of the American government in not denying the truth of the cables' content tend to suggest or imply that it is very likely the diplomatic cables published by *WikiLeaks* are accurate. The degree of evidential justification that is required to go beyond such suggestion or inference is a point that is in need of clarification in Zagzebski's virtue epistemology and will be discussed further in the final section of this chapter. An agent's evaluation of evidence and information is vital in order for the exercise of intellectual character traits to become 'acts of intellectual virtue'; thereby providing the basis for a knowledge claim.

Attention to the responses of the American government would form part of the exercise of intellectual virtues of thoroughness and inquisitiveness. Other character traits are relevant to the exercise of intellectual virtue in grasping truths of New Zealand's involvement in the Afghanistan War. For example, intellectual carefulness is relevant in ensuring sources are accurately interpreted, and in assessing whether *WikiLeaks* publications are trustworthy given their anonymous sources. Furthermore, perseverance is relevant in ensuring all relevant sources are consulted. It is important to note that the exercise of intellectual character traits in a specific context, such as media coverage of the New Zealand involvement in the Afghanistan War, forms a part of the wider intellectual life of the agent in society. The exercise of intellectual character traits in formulating knowledge claims is accordingly consistent with the goal or *telos* of intellectual virtue, that being the grasping of truth.

Wider issues arise from the *WikiLeaks* cable press release for the intellectually virtuous inquirer. The agent is now aware that US diplomacy has security risks and that this could compromise its diplomatic relations in the short term future. This means that future media press releases about US international diplomacy should be interpreted with this issue in mind. The release of the diplomatic cables has been particularly damaging to US international diplomacy:

> Security analysts tended to agree that the release of the documents was a severe blow to US diplomacy, undermining the confidentiality that is vital for foreign leaders and activists to talk candidly to US officials.[163]

The relevance of the *WikiLeaks* cable story to other contemporary news media publications concerning US foreign affairs offers an insight into the importance of the character trait of open-mindedness. An agent possessing the requisite motive to know a proposition should recognise that the truth of an event is complex and often the sum of a number of different viewpoints and opinions. Accordingly an agent must be open-minded about how they interpret each source and its role in the wider context of other sources in grasping the truth and truths. A virtuous inquirer therefore suspends their judgment of particular sources of information until multiple sources of relevance are consulted. The multiple sources provide the agent with a wider picture of the factual matrix of the subject of epistemological inquiry. Being aware of external influences such as political and social contexts as well as internal biases is the vital role of the character trait of open-mindedness.

Swine Flu

The news media coverage of the swine flu outbreak in April 2009 provides the second contemporary example of how an intellectually virtuous agent could make successful knowledge claims based on news media publications. On the 29th of April 2009, the World Health Organisation

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[163] *Television New Zealand*, "Politics", "WikiLeaks' 'cablegate' causing waves as far as NZ", 29 November 2010, available URL: http://tvnz.co.nz/politics-news/WikiLeaks-releases-us-nz-diplomatic-cables-3924097 "Devastating" topic, paragraph 1.

made a press release officially stating there was an international outbreak of 'swine flu' caused by the H1N1 virus.[164] The outbreak of swine flu had its origin in Mexico resulting in a number of deaths in that country and spread to cause hundreds of deaths internationally. However the number of deaths was low compared to the number of influenza-related deaths internationally per annum.[165]

The news media coverage was extensive, leading many media analysts to comment that the coverage was excessive and, accordingly, misled both the international and national audience as to the severity of the outbreak and the danger of contracting swine flu. For example, Howard Kurtz, a Columnist for the *Washington Post*, argued that the news media coverage of the outbreak of Swine Flu reached "fever pitch".[166] The extensive coverage shows that news media gives greater focus or penetration to a contemporary issue that has potentially serious implications for society. This is because the outbreak of swine flu, at least initially, appeared to carry significant health risks for the public. This is an instance of the news media attempting to fulfil its duty to report the truth and inform the public of important social issues.

Other news media commentators have stressed the point that the news media has to balance its duty to publish the truth with its duty of avoiding causing widespread and unnecessary fear among the public. For example, Robert Thompson, Professor of media and popular culture at Syracuse University in New York, argues that the news media has to balance

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[164] See for example John D. Sutter, *CNN – SciTech Blog*, "CDC backs social-media coverage of swine flu", 29 April 2009, available URL: http://scitech.blogs.cnn.com/2009/04/29/cdc-backs-social-media-coverage-of-swine-flu/ ; and *Medical News Today,* "Public 'reassured' By Swine Flu Media Coverage", 20 July 2010, available URL: http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/195186.php#opinions

[165] See for example Ministry of Health, *Influenza 2011*, last updated 21 February 2011, available URL: http://www.moh.govt.nz/influenza-a-h1n1 ; and Dr Trisha Macnair, *BBC – Health*, "Swine Flu", last reviewed November 2010, available URL: http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/physical_health/conditions/swineflumulti1.shtml

[166] Howard Kurtz, *The Washington Post*, "Swine Flu Outbreak Pales Compared With Media Frenzy Surrounding", 28 April 2009, available URL: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/27/AR2009042703762.html paragraph 1.

restraint with the imperative of covering an important story.[167] Such restraint is justified because it is in the public interest. Thompson further notes that: "If as many people had swine flu as those that are covering swine flu then it would be a pandemic to reckon with".[168]

The news media's justification for editorial intervention in media publications on a public interest basis is an important consideration for an intellectually virtuous inquirer. This is because the agent must take into account, when exercising the applicable character traits, the possibility of editorial manipulation by media organisations when the stories have significant social impact such as national security implications or, as in this case, widespread public health risks. This thesis argues that news stories with a highly significant social impact are more likely to involve public interest considerations for media organisations.

The potential for news media manipulation or 'downplaying' of important social issues or events can lead to distrust of the news media, as discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. Ben Goldacre, who writes a "Bad Science" column and is a well-known and well-regarded blogger for *The Guardian* in the United Kingdom, noted that a significant portion of the first public responses to the news media coverage of the outbreak of swine flu were that the news media were lying or had over-dramatized the social and health implications.[169] Goldacre shows that both the news media and the public are poorly equipped to think and reflect upon issues involving the risks of infectious diseases. This is because the error margins on the health models are wide and it is extremely hard for medical authorities and professions alike to make clear predictions.[170] Goldacre goes on to state that:

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[167] Sue Zeidler and Steve Gorman, *UK Reuters*, "Swine flu gets big dose of American media coverage", 29 April 2009, available URL: http://uk.reuters.com/article/2009/04/28/idUKN28351698 paragraph 12.
[168] Zeidler (2009), paragraph 13.
[169] Ben Goldacre, *The Guardian*, "Swine flu and hype – a media illness", 29 April 2009, available URL: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/apr/29/swine-flu-hype paragraph 1.
[170] Goldacre (2009), paragraph 2.

I'm not showing off. I know I'm a D-list public intellectual, but I just think it's interesting: because not only have the public lost all faith in the media; not only do so many people assume, now, that they are being misled; but more than that, the media themselves have lost all confidence in their own ability to give us the facts.[171]

The public distrust of the news media referred to in the above quotation may not be solely attributable to the swine flu issues itself; for instance earlier outbreaks of the SARS virus and 'bird flu' are likely to have influenced the public's initial reaction to the outbreak of swine flu. Goldacre's comments, however, show the extent of damage to public trust as a result of manipulation of news publications. Trust of news media sources could be enhanced by utilising the character traits of intellectual carefulness and thoroughness in determining the credibility of the sources. Further, damage to public trust of the news media is proportional to the significance of the news story. Using the present example, if the news media significantly over-states the seriousness of the threat of swine flu, the audience may disregard information from media sources and also could be reckless in assessing the credibility of future related news stories.

However, the news media's excessive coverage of the swine flu outbreak needs to be measured against the positive aspects of such coverage. When there is a story involving a 'crisis' such as the outbreak of swine flu, the public tends to rely most heavily on information from the medical community.[172] Further, *Medical News Today* reported research by Professor Susan Michie of University College of London found that the news media coverage of the Swine Flu outbreak reduced public concern rather than exacerbating it.[173] One reason for the lack of public concern links back to Goldacre's article highlighting the public distrust of news

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[171] Goldacre (2009), paragraph 13.
[172] Mary Hockaday, *BBC*, "The Editors: Swine Flu Coverage", 29 April 2009, available URL: http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2009/04/swine_flu_coverage.html_paragraph_5 However Hockaday also notes that, similar to the *WikiLeaks* press release discussed above, social network media also played a significant role in the disseminating of information to the global audience. Hockaday further emphasises public reliance should be placed on authoritative news media sources in order to gain the most accurate information.
[173] *Medical News Today* (2010), paragraphs 1 - 2.

media after the initial press release in respect of the outbreak of swine flu. The public may not have taken the news media's coverage seriously because the over-use of sensationalist press releases could have reduced public concern.

Mary Hockaday, of the BBC, clarifies the role of media organisations in relation to the outbreak of potential serious and serious diseases:

> Essentially, our task is to give you the facts; to tell you what we know, but also explore what isn't known; to give you the best scientific and medical information and to inform but not to alarm. There is a great deal of coverage in all the media which has led to a debate about whether the threat is being overplayed. With any public health story, there's a risk that raising awareness can raise concern. We have sought at every step to report the science soberly and responsibly, with due weight given to the uncertainty of what will happen.[174]

Hockaday then considers the BBC's initial coverage of the swine flu outbreak in the context of the media organisation's role in disseminating information of contemporary events and issues:

> So far, the balance we have been trying to achieve is to report what we know and, critically, what isn't known, using the science available - for instance from the Chief Medical Officer for England, Sir Liam Donaldson and the World Health Organization - as well as what respected scientists are telling us about the possible pattern of this illness. At our editorial meetings, we have been regularly discussing how to get the approach, tone and use of pictures right, and to make sure that we offer our expertise and subject depth via our website.[175]

For an intellectually virtuous inquirer, the excessive news media coverage of swine flu again places importance on the character trait of open-mindedness. When consuming the initial coverage of the swine flu outbreak, the agent should take into account the constraints on

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[174] Hockaday (2009), paragraph 2.
[175] Hockaday (2009), paragraph 7.

practitioners and media organisations as noted by Hockaday. Where information is not from a credible source or there is significant unknown information, the agent will find that the absence of all relevant facts and information should result in unsuccessful knowledge claims and a responsibility to suspend judgment because the agent does not possess a sufficient grasp of the relevant facts and evidence. By utilising the character trait of open-mindedness, the agent can pursue multiple lines of inquiry to ensure the possible challenges around grasping the truth of news stories can be resolved. Further, the character traits of inquisitiveness and thoroughness can be exercised by the agent to substantively pursue those lines of inquiry in order to sufficiently complete an 'act of intellectual virtue' and subsequently form a legitimate knowledge claim.

Using the present example of the swine flu outbreak, the agent cannot make successful knowledge claims in relation to propositions such as 'the swine flu outbreak is a significant health risk to both global and local communities', or 'the H1N1 virus is highly contagious in present global environmental conditions'. This is because the agent has not acquired sufficient information to grasp whether that proposition is true, although the agent could have acquired a justified belief. In exercising open-mindedness, the agent can research medical sources in order to understand, for example, the particulars of the swine flu or H1N1 virus and the likely patterns for the international spreading of the disease. The agent can then utilise the trait of thoroughness in order to fully pursue those lines of inquiry. Further, if that research is contentious and results in new lines of inquiry, the agent can utilise inquisitiveness in order to pursue those further lines of inquiry.

A useful contemporary tool for agents to pursue such lines of inquiry is media organisation webpages that are dedicated to a particular news story. References to external links and all relevant pieces of information can provide a more comprehensive and balanced account of the present issue.The *New Zealand Herald* website has a webpage dedicated to major

news stories such as the swine flu outbreak where the public can access further information and links to other authoritative sources.[176] An example of an authoritative source is the New Zealand Ministry of Health website which also has a specified webpage dedicated to swine flu.[177] It is important to note, however, that these media organisations' webpages provide links for further lines of inquiry which they believe are relevant; and those links may not be sufficient to satisfy all lines of inquiry for a virtuous inquirer in performing 'acts of intellectual virtue'.

As with *WikiLeaks*, public trust of the news media is important for the audience in relying on facts provided in the news publications. If the public or an individual agent's trust is low, then greater responsibility is placed on the agent to further research the account(s) presented by the news media. Asserted facts from distrusted media sources do not generally tend to lead to grasping truths and making knowledge claims; and can give no more than suspicions or inferences. Such initial suspicions or inferences do not count as knowledge as they do not provide a route to truth or truths relating to the subject; however such inferences can provide a platform for further exercise of character traits such as thoroughness as an initial step towards acts of intellectual virtue that eventuate in successful knowledge claims.

It is important to note, however, that falsehoods can in some circumstances contribute to an appreciation of the wider opinions and facts of the story or event. Catherine Elgin argues for the retention of falsehoods in assisting agents in formulating knowledge claims because of the value and insight they offer in evaluating truth claims. The reason being that falsehoods provide a certain level of insight into the way things *could* have been if another set of circumstances eventuated instead of reality. Thus it is argued by Elgin that falsehoods offer material for imaginative reflection on contemporary events and issues. Using the

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[176] *New Zealand Herald*, "Swine Flu", last updated 25 February 2011, available URL: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/swine-flu/news/headlines.cfm?c_id=1502821
[177] Ministry of Health (2011), homepage.

present swine flu example, an agent could ask the following questions which could give rise to further lines of epistemic inquiry: what would it be like if the swine flu became a global pandemic? And what would be needed to minimise deaths as far as possible? And further, what can be done to stop swine flu spreading? Elgin goes onto discuss the implication of possible worlds put forward by David Lewis in accurate human representations of reality:

> We understand the Sherlock Holmes stories in the same ways we understand histories of Victorian England, the crucial difference being that the histories pertain to the actual world, while the stories proclaim to other possible worlds.[178]

Further to the above quotation and using the present example, a false assertion that the swine flu could kill millions of people worldwide does not assist in the exercise of intellectual virtue by itself; but it can lead to further lines of inquiry such as researching the lethality of the disease and how it spreads. Such lines of inquiry would contribute to acts of intellectual virtue in making knowledge claims about the swine flu outbreak.

Anti-Smacking Law in New Zealand

The changes to child abuse laws in New Zealand under the "anti-smacking" legislation in 2007 are the final contemporary event to be analysed within the framework of Zagzebski's virtue responsiblism. Section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961 was amended to prevent the use of force by a parent or guardian against a child for the purpose of correction. This amendment to the law came to be known as the "anti-smacking" legislation. "Anti-Smacking" legislation came into New Zealand law in June 2007 and faced intense public and news media scrutiny and opposition over the next two years. In response to that scrutiny and opposition, the government elected to hold a referendum on the issue. The question on which voters were asked to vote was:

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[178] Catherine Z. Elgin, "True Enough", in Sosa, Ernest., Kim, Jaegwon., Fantyl, Jeremy & McGrath, Matthew (eds.) *Epistemology: An Anthology* (2nd ed.) (2008) 513 – 514.

Should a smack as part of good parental correction be a criminal offence in New Zealand?[179]

While only about 54% of eligible New Zealand voters responded to the referendum, a resounding 87% of the voters replied "No". The government's response was not to change the law but instead emphasise the discretion Police had in electing to prosecute based on reasonable force used by an adult against a child in the circumstances.

The news media's coverage of the anti-smacking law change has been extensive as warranted by the controversy it generated amongst the public. Those advocating the law change wanted it as a punishable deterrence resulting in a reduction of crime rates for the abuse of children. Those opposing the law change did not want parents unjustly prosecuted and punished for disciplining their children. An example of the news media coverage against the "anti-smacking" law change in New Zealand is the website *Scoop* which is an independent media organisation that publishes stories from a variety of sources, including interest groups. The editors of *Scoop* determine which stories are published. *Scoop* published a press release from the Family First Lobby Group and also the Kiwi Party which were presented as a news stories against the current "anti-smacking" legislation.[180]

These articles provide information to the audience from a source campaigning against the "anti-smacking" law changes and so this coverage is clearly one-sided. For a virtuous inquirer confronted with such material, it would be important to exercise the trait of intellectual

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[179] *Television New Zealand*, "Politics", "Timeline: Anti-smacking legislation", 21 August 2009, available URL: http://tvnz.co.nz/politics-news/timeline-anti-smacking-legislation-2936192

[180] *Scoop Independent News*, "Politics", "Parenting Put on Trial by Anti-Smacking Law", 3 November 2010, available URL: http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO1011/S00040/parenting-put-on-trial-by-anti-smacking-law.htm and *Scoop Independent News*, "Politics", "Scrap Smacking Law, Target Rotten Parents", 2 January 2011, available URL: http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO1101/S00003/scrap-smacking-law-target-rotten-parents.htm and *Scoop Independent News*, "Politics", "Kiwi Party: Two years of the 'anti-smacking law'", 22 June 2009, available URL: http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO0906/S00233.htm

carefulness and to realise the particular perspective and one-sided argument these articles present. If an inquirer's goal or *telos* is to grasp the truth, then they must be inquisitive in order to seek out further information about the "anti-smacking" law change such as, in this instance, the arguments in support of the introduction of the new legislation.[181] Also, the agent must be thorough in order to satisfactorily understand the arguments for and against the "anti-smacking" debate. Furthermore, the character trait of open-mindedness is important to the correct exercise of intellectual virtue in this instance, because it enables the agent to place material such as this within the context of the "anti-smacking" debate as a whole. This provides a wider appreciation as a contemporary social issue within New Zealand which, in turn, provides a deeper understanding of the facts, perspectives and issues inherent in the smacking debate.

According to Zagzebski's framework, the exercise of intellectual virtue incorporates a success element. Single perspective articles such as those outlined above would generally fail to lead to successful knowledge claims in isolation due to not providing the complete picture of the present subject. This means that even if a one-sided news publication leads the audience to a true belief, the claim of knowledge based on anti-smacking propositions has been arrived at via luck or chance. The one-sided article may have provided some facts about anti-smacking that could subsequently lead to successful knowledge claims; however because the article fails to provide a full and balanced account of the smacking debate, it cannot provide the agent with a complete picture of the truth of the anti-smacking issue.

Further information and research is required for the virtuous inquirer to make a knowledge claim based on propositions in respect of the new legislation. An example of such a proposition is that the 'anti-smacking

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[181] Elgin argues that epistemic inquiry, such as the goal or *telos* of intellectual virtue being to understand truth, valorises the human pursuit of truth. "Epistemology valorises truth. Sometimes practical, or prudential, or political reasons convince us to accept a known falsehood, but epistemologists deny that we can have cognitively good reasons to do so. Our overriding cognitive objective, they maintain, is the truth, preferably the whole truth, and definitely nothing but the truth". Elgin (2008) 507.

legislation has been amended to criminalise the unreasonable use of force against children'. In terms of authoritative sources, the New Zealand Police have published practice guidelines for how they envisage enforcing the new anti-smacking laws.[182] While the New Zealand Police do not have the same role as the Judiciary in interpreting the law, their guidelines do give the public a clear idea as to how the Police will decide whether to lay charges in instances of alleged child abuse. This is a primary source of reliable information that would hold substantive weight for a virtuous inquirer in exercising intellectually virtuous character traits.

The character trait of intellectual carefulness, for example, would be satisfied based on information from a primary source such as the police who enforce the law. Further, the *New Zealand Herald* has a specified webpage titled "The Smacking Debate" that gives a comprehensive range of relevant sources that the media organisation has collated.[183] As already noted, these designated webpages with external links are useful tools for an intellectually virtuous inquirer. The agent can conduct further research to satisfy thoroughness as an agent-utilised character trait. Moreover, the variety of sources available with anti-smacking law as the subject is wide. For instance, even on consumer websites there is advice about anti-smacking legislation and parenting guidelines.[184]

Analysis of Intellectual Virtues in Application to the News Media

This section will consider the previous discussion and argue for the application of virtue responsibilist character traits to the pursuit of knowledge using news media publications. Zagzebski's 'acts of intellectual

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[182] New Zealand Police, *Police Practice Guide for new Section 59*, 19 June 2007, available URL: http://www.police.govt.nz/news/release/3149.html

[183] *New Zealand Herald*, "The Smacking Debate", last updated 26 February 2011, available URL: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/the-smacking-debate/news/headlines.cfm?c_id=1501165

[184] *The Yellow Pages*, "How To Understand The New Zealand Anti-Smacking Law", 2009, available URL: http://howto.yellow.co.nz/legal/consumer-law/how-to-understand-the-new-zealand-anti-smacking-law/ The audience can utilise a virtue-based account of knowledge to be aware and pursue further lines of epistemic inquiry arising out of headlines in consumer websites. Such headlines are often misleading and are primarily designed to attract the audience's attention to a particular product as a form of advertising.

virtue' are of central importance in making successful knowledge claims in the present application to the news media. As we have seen, an act of intellectual virtue envisages a process whereby the agent utilises different character traits based on facts, events and issues obtained in consuming news media outputs. Agent biases and inferences are also relevant to the process in contributing to decisions as to which character traits to utilise. A prerequisite for the process is that the agent must have the correct motive – to grasp the truth or truths relating to the issue or events in question. The agent then applies their different character traits, such as open-mindedness, thoroughness, inquisitiveness, and intellectual carefulness in order to grasp the truth of propositions relating to the subject as shown in the *WikiLeaks*, swine flu, and anti-smacking examples above.

The final part of the process of an act of intellectual virtue is satisfaction of the success element. This is an objective criterion of correctness whereby the agent must have successfully undertaken the process of utilising character traits to grasp the truth of the subject – or at least truths relating to the subject.[185] As we have already seen, a character trait becomes an intellectual virtue when successfully exercised in a truth-conducive process.[186] On the face of it, the success element is satisfied if the character traits are utilised by the agent resulting in grasping true propositions. Assuming the agent has successfully grasped the truth of a given proposition relating to a news publication's subject, the agent has undertaken an act of intellectual virtue. Given that the agent has assented to the proposition that is the subject of the knowledge claim, and their belief is true, the necessary and sufficient conditions of a knowledge claim have been met.

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[185] It is unclear how precisely such a judgment about an agent's successful understanding of truth can be made. A knowledge claim could potentially fail in a circumstance where it is subsequently proved that human understanding of truth is limited, such as the example where people used to 'know' that the Earth was flat. However, given that the news media publications tend to be focussed on contemporary social issues, the outputs are very likely to be within the capabilities of human understanding.

[186] Zagzebski (2009) 85 – 86.

Hookway makes the following remarks about the role of virtue epistemology in questions about knowledge. His point is relevant to the present news media application:

> Why do we talk about virtues? In making judgments, we rely on traits of character, habits and dispositions. If we are genuinely virtuous, we will ask the right questions, and this explains our success in enquiry. Confidence in our possession of virtuous capacities is required for us to possess confidence in the intuitive judgments that we rely upon in directing our enquiries. And, as we have seen, this confidence is required if we are to be confident of the outcome of our enquires.[187]

In the present context of application to the news media, the above remarks illustrate how the audience can benefit from a virtue responsibilist approach in making knowledge claims. In performing acts of intellectual virtue, the audience is pursuing the correct line of epistemological inquiry in order to grasp truths about the subject of the news publication. This places added importance on how the agent utilises their character traits in order to ensure the truth of the news publication's subject is grasped, thus satisfying the success element. The process within an 'act of intellectual virtue' in utilising character traits incorporates the agent's epistemic confidence. The agent is to develop their character traits throughout an intellectually virtuous life. The progress of such development will enhance the agent's epistemic confidence in pursuing lines of inquiry in order to make knowledge claims.This process is an act of intellectual virtue which, as we have seen, can lead to a successful knowledge claim. The specific character traits that are most important to knowledge claims based on news media examples above will now be considered.

The examples of *WikiLeaks*, swine flu and anti-smacking have illustrated the four character traits which are of central importance in application to the news media: open-mindedness, thoroughness, inquisitiveness, and intellectual carefulness. For a virtue-epistemic inquirer to be open-minded,

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[187] Hookway (2008) 200 – 201.

they must be adaptable in order to consider each fact, event or issue in order to grasp truths relating to the subject of the news media publication; and not allow such consideration to be affected by personal biases or prejudices. The "anti-smacking" law change example shows how the trait of open-mindedness can be beneficial in performing acts of intellectual virtue. The "anti-smacking" publications are presented as an argument against the legislative amendment on the grounds that it criminalises parents for disciplining their children. An open-minded agent will consider this argument against other possible viewpoints of the legislative amendment. For example, a significant section of society, including a large majority of the Members of Parliament in New Zealand who assented to the legislative amendment, view the law change favourably because they believe children should not be disciplined with the use of unreasonable force, and/or they believe the child abuse rates will decline as a result. By utilising the character trait of open-mindedness, the agent can recognise the narrow and one-sided viewpoint of the "anti-smacking" articles. The result being that the agent can then utilise other character traits such as thoroughness in order to research and grasp truths about the "anti-smacking" subject. The inter-play within the utilisation of different character traits is of fundamental importance in performing acts of intellectual virtue that successfully lead the agent to grasping truths relating to the issue.

The *WikiLeaks* example brings into focus the importance of inquisitiveness and intellectual carefulness as character traits. In being open-minded and identifying facts and alternative viewpoints within news media publications, the agent must be inquisitive in following intuitive judgments about further lines of inquiry. The diplomatic cables published by *WikiLeaks* in relation to New Zealand's involvement in the Afghanistan War raise questions such as (but not limited to) the authenticity of the source, the personnel recorded in terms of their governmental position and the wider political context of the leaked cable, and the news media's coverage of the issue up until the publication in terms of whether the leaked cables contribute any new information or credibility to existing information. An inquisitive inquirer can then devote further research in order to be able to answer

those questions and to gain a deeper understanding of the factual matrix of New Zealand's involvement in the Afghanistan War. Further, an epistemic agent can utilise intellectual carefulness in assessing the trustworthiness of *WikiLeaks* publication because of the anonymity of sources. This means that the issue or event that is the subject of any knowledge claim must be thoroughly researched in order to verify that the source is credible and that the information leaked is an accurate representation of reality.

Furthermore, the trait of thoroughness can be utilised by the agent to ensure the relevant lines of inquiry are comprehensively pursued. The swine flu illustrates the value of thoroughness in performing acts of intellectual virtue. The news media outputs immediately following the World Health Organisation press release confirming the outbreak of the swine flu confused various claims about the virus itself and the likelihood of it spreading throughout the international community. A virtuous epistemic agent can thoroughly research facts about the H1N1 virus in order to make successful knowledge claims based on the swine flu. The utilisation of the four character traits outlined above would be intellectually virtuous because it would contribute to the maximisation of grasping truths instead of falsehoods for the audience in making successful knowledge claims based on news media outputs.[188]

While Sosa and Zagzebski differ on how intellectual virtue should be conceived, the authors' application of intellectual virtue in making knowledge claims has some striking similarities. In his article "Intellectual Virtue in Perspective", Sosa clarifies his argument for the application of intellectual virtue to knowledge claims:

> What is 'knowledge'? True belief that is justified. And what makes a true belief 'justified'? That it have its source in intellectual virtue. And what is 'intellectual virtue'? A skill or ability that enables one to cope in a cognitively effective way. And what makes a way of

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[188] Ernest Sosa, "Knowledge and Intellectual Virtue", in Sosa, Ernest, *Knowledge In Perspective: Selected Essays In Epistemology* (1991) 225.

coping 'cognitively effective'? That it has the power to produce effects relating to or involving knowledge.[189]

The above remark shows the difference between Sosa and Zagzebski in the definition of intellectual virtue: Sosa argues it is the exercise of cognitive faculties, hence virtue reliabilism; whereas Zagzebski's intellectual virtues are based on Aristotelian character traits, hence virtue responsibilism. However, the authors' arguments converge again at the final sentence of the above quotation – that the result or effect of an agent's exercise of intellectual virtue 'has the power to produce effects relating to or involving knowledge'.[190]

In terms of the present application to the news media, the utilisation of individual character traits can deepen the audience's understanding by helping them to grasp truths arising out of news media publications. The sum of exercising all relevant character traits is the process Zagzebski argues is an act(s) of intellectual virtue. This is without forgetting the elements of motive and success in order to ensure the agent has justified their true belief via the epistemic process that is necessary and sufficient for a knowledge claim. Thus in order to perform the process within an act of intellectual virtue correctly, it is necessary to consider all character traits – even if only to dismiss their truth-conducive role in the present application to the news media.

Other intellectual character traits still have a role to play in the performance of acts of intellectual virtue despite not being of such central importance as open-mindedness, thoroughness, inquisitiveness, and intellectual carefulness. Roberts and Wood argue that personal character traits that promote epistemic goods are honesty, charity, fairness and humility.[191] In particular, Roberts and Wood outline the advantages of humility as an intellectual virtue. The authors conclude that humility

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[189] Ernest Sosa, "Intellectual Virtue in Perspective", in Sosa, Ernest, *Knowledge In Perspective: Selected Essays In Epistemology* (1991) 270.
[190] However it is important to note the distinction between Sosa and Zagzebski in respect of the notion that virtue is a skill: Sosa allows the notion; whereas Zagzebski denies that virtue is a skill.
[191] Roberts & Wood (2003) 258.

requires not only a lack of concern to appear excellent to others and a weakness of desire to be the author of other people's minds; but also a combination of positive virtues such as daring and self-confidence. However, humility is not directly applicable in the utilisation of character traits relevant to news media outputs. This is generally because it does not assist the audience in grasping truths within publications presented by the news media.[192]

A potential weakness for the present application of Zagzebski's framework is the indeterminate degree of justification that is required for true beliefs to meet knowledge claims. For instance, once the agent has undertaken all relevant lines of epistemological inquiry, when can the agent be satisfied that: they 'know' the extent of New Zealand's involvement in the Afghanistan War; or they 'know' the scientific particulars of the swine flu and the likelihood of it spreading internationally; or they 'know' about the various issues of the "anti-smacking" law change? The answer to this question is prima facie straightforward – justification is required to the extent necessary to support assent to truths relating to the subject of the news media publication. Such justification will obviously vary from publication to publication depending on the subject of each story and the amount and credibility of the information able to be accessed by the agent. This appears to incorporate a subjective aspect to Zagzebski's success element because the agent's ability to grasp truths, in performing acts of intellectual virtue, is dependent upon the individual agent's ability to utilise their character traits. However, the success element has an objective criterion of correctness because the process of exercising the agent's character traits must lead, non-accidentally, to grasping the truth or truths relating to the subject of the news publication.

The above shows how Zagzebski's virtue responsibilism could work in this context in that the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge are

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[192] Although humility may have indirect relevance to agent motive through pursuing the goal or *telos* of truth, rather than an agent simply taking for granted that they 'know' about an issue or event. Similarly, humility can have a close connection with the trait of open-mindedness in considering alternative perspectives of a given subject.

met when the agent has a true belief that is grounded in acts of intellectual virtue. When it is within the power or ability of the agent to grasp the truth or truths through the exercising of character traits, the agent or audience can subsequently make subsequent knowledge claims so long as they also have the requisite true belief. In a circumstance where grasping the truth or truths is not possible, then the agent cannot claim knowledge because of a breakdown in the process of the act of intellectual virtue resulting from accidental true beliefs or false beliefs.[193]

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[193] Further, this conforms to Sosa's application of intellectual virtue to knowledge claims in that the agent "must have awareness of one's belief and its source, and of virtue and of that source both in general and in the specific instance". Sosa, "Intellectual Virtue in Perspective" (1991) 292. This means that virtue epistemic agent's must have true beliefs arising out of the exercise of intellectual virtue (the source) as part of their intellectually virtuous development through life.

Conclusion

There is an old saying that 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing'. Philosophical contentions and the origin of the quotation aside, the inference of the old saying is that by only possessing some facts and information about a particular event or issue without grasping the entire factual matrix of the same, an agent can be lead to significantly culpable falsehoods; as well as becoming close-minded to other relevant facts and information based on those falsehoods. The same applies to information received from the news media. This thesis has set out to show, that in the exercise of intellectually virtuous character traits, epistemic responsibility is required from agents in order to make successful knowledge claims based on news media publications. Returning to the quotations with which this thesis begins, such knowledge claims by individual agents, as citizens within a democratic society, have been argued to contribute to an informed public and to an intellectually active news media audience. Zagzebski's virtue responsibilism provides a framework for a theory of knowledge that includes this responsibility for the agent to conduct acts (of intellectual virtue) in order to make a knowledge claim. Accordingly, a 'little bit of knowledge' or information quickly gleaned from a news publication is rarely sufficient by itself to meet the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge.[194]

This thesis will be concluded by incorporating all of the previous chapters and arguing for the two aims of this thesis. The first aim is to argue for viewing the audience as having an active role in the media inter-relationship with practitioners and media organisations within a democratic society. The second aim is to apply Zagzebski's virtue responsibilist framework to the news media audience in order to provide a framework

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[194] However there could be an exception where an agent already has a lot of background information and the information obtained from a publication is sufficient for the agent to have successfully exercised intellectual virtue and grasped truths relating to the subject.

within which successful knowledge claims based on news media outputs could be made; as well as exploring the intellectual character traits that contribute to such knowledge claims. The argument for this thesis' two contributions to the relevant areas of philosophy will, firstly, review the frameworks established in the first two chapters in order to further illustrate the advantages of virtue responsibilism for the audience in its active role within the media's inter-relationship with practitioners and media organisations. Finally, this section will review the application in Chapters Three and Four of Zagzebski's virtue responsibilist framework to the news media; and the relevant character traits to be cultivated in formulating such knowledge claims.

As previously outlined, the present application of virtue responsibilism to the news media assumes the political context of a democratic society. This is important because the news media is viewed as an independent vehicle for communicating information regarding contemporary social issues.[195] If other models of society were applied, for instance an authoritarian state, then this would have further implications for an epistemic inquirer in utilising character traits such as open-mindedness to research other sources due to potential governmental influence in editing news publications. This would also raise further issues of trust in exercising character traits such as intellectual carefulness – resulting in fewer true beliefs and unsuccessful knowledge claims based on news media outputs for the public within those societies. If trust is diminished as a part of an intellectually virtuous life in an authoritarian state, then in particular cases the agent suspends belief's based on news media outputs because of the probability of manipulation or falsehoods within such publications. This shows that epistemic trust has a significant role as part of the development over the course of an agent's intellectually virtuous life.

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[195] Hookway notes that different societies and different individuals may value intellectual virtues in a different ways which can result in placing emphasis on specific virtues at the expense of others. Hookway (2008) 188 – 190.

Within a democratic society, the news media's role is defined within a theory of social responsibility. Under this theory, the news media's role has been shown to serve the political system by providing information, discussion, and debate on public affairs; and to enlighten the public in order to make it capable of self-government. The combination of a democratic political structure together with a news media functioning within a social responsibility framework allows virtuous epistemic inquirers to assess and critique news media outputs. This is because agent's can perform Zagzebski's acts of intellectual virtue and gain access to further sources required to grasp truths of social issues. Furthermore within the frameworks of a democratic society and of social responsibility, the principles of best practice, such as a duty to report the truth and reporting in the public interest, guide practitioners and news media organisations in order that they operate within those over-arching frameworks.

For the public, trust and confidence in the news media's outputs is maintained by adherence to the above frameworks. Further, in the development of intellectual virtue over time, as with moral virtue, character traits will be refined thanks to their continual utilisation within established and stable frameworks. For example, research methods that exercise thoroughness can become enhanced with consistent access to relevant information. Such intellectual tools provide the audience with a deeper understanding of social issues and events that are covered by the news media. Moreover, the application of Zagzebski's virtue responsibilism has significant implications for the inter-relationship(s) between the practitioner, media organisation, and their audience. As already noted, contemporary media ethics has thoroughly examined ethical considerations for practitioners and media organisations. However this thesis has focused primarily on the role of the audience and how they, as individual inquirers, can make successful knowledge claims based on the outputs of practitioners and media organisations. It has been shown that within Zagzebski's framework, the audience is generally required to undertake further research in performing acts of intellectual virtue when seeking the truth about important social issues. It is argued that this active

role of the audience, through undertaking further acts to make knowledge claims, in turn regulates practitioners and media organisations to publish outputs that are relevant to a fully-informed public. The result is that the public can become more aware of social issues which, relating back to the quotes at the beginning of this thesis, provide individual agents with the ability to make informed decisions on such issues.

Coverage published and broadcast by the news media is the product of their interpretation of issues and events that are important to contemporary society. As we have seen in Chapter One, the practitioner witnesses an event or interviews sources; then researches the event further in order to obtain broader contextual facts and a more comprehensive understanding; and finally drafts the news publication. The media organisation then edits the publication and determines its priority of coverage in relation to other issues and events. It could thus be argued that an active audience places greater epistemic responsibility on practitioners to develop their own character traits within the social responsibility framework. The information contained in news media publications is intended to be relevant to and uphold the public's interest in contemporary social issues. Importantly, such coverage also assumes the audience's familiarity with contemporary society's structure and issues. Indeed if the news media did not assume this basic understanding, then news media would have to provide wider contextual information for their publications resulting in long complex articles even for the smallest and least significant stories. Thus it is argued that the audience plays an active role in their inter-relationships with practitioners and media organisations.

Turning to the second contribution of this thesis, the news media, if it assumes its readership is an active audience (in that the public participates in and is aware of current social issues), it would produce publications that require more than an agent's cognitive faculties, such as good perception or memory, in order for them to acquire knowledge of the subjects of those publications. For example, the "anti-smacking" news articles require the agent to utilise character traits such as open-

mindedness, inquisitiveness, and thoroughness in order to recognise that the articles are from a narrow perspective, and further research, such as consulting authoritative sources, is necessary in order to comprehensively understand the facts and issues of the smacking debate. The application of intellectual virtue in understanding events and issues enables the formation of true beliefs on the basis of which the virtuous agent can make knowledge claims.

The difference in knowledge claims based on news media publications and knowledge claims derived solely from the exercise of cognitive faculties is important for the present application of Zagzebski's virtue responsibilism. One criticism of Zagzebski's conception of intellectual virtue could be that it does not include cognitive faculties. The result of such a criticism being that I cannot know I have cut my hand because such a knowledge claim is not the product of an exercise of intellectual virtuous character traits. The knowledge claim that I have cut my hand is the direct result of sensory experience; and not from an act of intellectual virtue.[196] However the present criticism does not apply to information obtained via news media publications because of the requirement under Zagzebski's framework for the audience to utilise character traits in order to fully grasp often complex truths within those publications.

Accordingly, such acts of intellectual virtue provide a broad basis for the successful formation of knowledge claims because agents can exercise intellectual character traits based on the facts, events and issues as they are represented by news media publications. It is argued that an agent's

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[196] It is noted that the utilisation of character traits incorporates, at their fundamental basis, the use of cognitive faculties. For example, the character trait of thoroughness requires good perception and memory. See Riggs (2003) 208. It could be argued that Zagzebski's use of the motive element provides a pathway from the consistent use of cognitive faculties being applied within the agent's intellectually virtuous life resulting in the formulation or improvement of that agent's character traits. This is another avenue of virtue epistemic research to further define the conception of intellectual virtue. Further, Christopher Hookway argues that: "we can adopt a two-tier picture: we would not be reliable seekers after the truth or effective solvers of theoretical problems if we do not possess specific skills and capacities: good eyesight and hearing, a reliable memory, good knowledge of specific subject matters and so on; but our success also requires us to possess traits of character which will enable us to use our skills and capacities effectively when enquiring and deliberating". Hookway (2003) 187 – 188.

true belief on the basis of a news media publication can, along with the exercise of intellectual virtue, meet the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge claims.[197] Further, the successful exercise of intellectual virtue can avoid the key problems inherent within traditional accounts of knowledge such as the challenge to the tripartite account provided by Gettier cases. This is because the depth of the agent's inquiry into the subject of the news media publication is as comprehensive as the limits of the human ability to 'know' or possess an accurate representation of reality.[198] It is for this reason that Zagzebski's virtue responsibilist framework has useful application to news media outputs; and the character traits of open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, thoroughness, and intellectual carefulness have been shown to be of particular benefit for a news media's audience within in a democratic society.

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[197] Jonathan Kvanvig argues that the social context of the agent should be the over-arching framework for epistemological inquiry: and virtue epistemology should be the primary focus of such a social context in that the agent's cognitive development in their intellectual life is of central importance. Kvanvig advocates that such a social/genetic theory of epistemological inquiry is more beneficial than the traditional or Cartesian methodology of analysing the nature and limits of knowledge and justification. This approach by Kvanvig could have further benefits for the application of virtue epistemology to the news media because it can potentially frame knowledge claims within a social or communitarian context. However, since Kvanvig's argument is primarily aimed at refuting traditional accounts of epistemological inquiry in favour of his social/genetic approach any connections between his argument and the approach developed here needs more investigation and reflection than can be achieved within the scope of this thesis. See Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Intellectual Virtues and the Life of the Mind* (1992) 172 – 183, in Baehr (2004) topic 3b, paragraphs 7 – 9; and in Greco and Turri (2011) topic 5.5, paragraph 1.

[198] Because Zagzebski's intellectual virtues are based on Aristotelian moral virtues, exercising character traits as a part of intellectual life and as a member of a democratic society could be argued to be an example of *eudaimonia* (happiness or human flourishing).

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