

Communicating for Influence: Ethical Borders

Jim Gough
Red Deer College

Introduction

It is obvious that most of our communication with others is intended to influence them somehow. What is less obvious is the ethical guidance that should determine the ethical limits of how we can communicate to influence others. These ethical guidelines need to be “spelled out,” regardless of whether the result of giving voice to them is greeted with universal acknowledgement and acceptance or not. Spelling out the test will involve the exposition of the notion of personal autonomy and provide an open possibility for reflective analysis of the relationship between influence and communication. We need to suggest some initial boundary conditions for limiting the influence exerted in communication and how it is manifest.

Some important examples of communicating for influence from the areas of advertising/marketing, branding, social work counseling, propaganda should help us to focus on some aspects of the problem of communicating for influence. To this end, it is necessary to briefly explain and then employ the right to personal autonomy as a test to decide the acceptable ethical limits of communicating for influence. Some examples of the need for such a test are provided as well as an evaluation of these examples. In developing the groundwork for the evaluations the concepts of the right to personal autonomy, situational control, border crossing, etc. will be explained and employed.

Autonomy - A Moral Compass

The first question that might reasonably be asked is why moral autonomy should be the moral compass to test the limits of influence in communication. A completely satisfying answer to this question will involve a response well beyond the confines of this paper. So, I will give some less than adequate reasons to simply provide a focus for what follows. First, in the main there is a tendency towards character as the basis for good decision making in our professional roles and in personal relations. Rules and principles are notoriously full of holes and are, to use a cliché, “no better than the people who use them.” Codes of ethics or principles are not effective if there is no motivation for individuals to use them. Out clauses predominate most codes of ethics and guidelines are

deliberately general and vague in order to provide for varying circumstances in their application or use. Rules require moral characters to use them, as Bernard Williams maintains (Sher 25-26). Autonomy is the development of moral character (Gough 101) through self-authored moral agency. Second, teleological accounts of the consequences of a choice rely too heavily on the possibility of expediency; that is, contrary to Mill's attempt to avoid this possibility, people will inevitably only worry about consequences when it suits them and only rely on a consideration of others when it appears to others that they are doing so (Sher 376). Expediency bypasses the internalization of moral character, intention or duty in a way which can be worrisome.

Finally, the innocent victim problem identifies the serious ethical issue that social utility can be enhanced neatly at the expense of moral character and moral principle (Sher 25-26). This serious ethical problem occurs when some member or a minority group within a society, governed by utilitarian considerations of promoting the greatest good for the greatest number, is discriminated on the basis of what Mill calls the "tyranny of the majority" to achieve benefits for the majority denied the minority. So, for example, if individual autonomy is violated for the sake of the public good, on sound utilitarian grounds, there seems to be applause all around and little utility in worrying about its negative effect on the individuals who compose the society supposedly protected in making their individual such choices (Gough, "Autonomy" 101).

Communicating for Influence—the Audience

To some extent, all communication is used to influence someone - an audience that may be general or specific, an audience with its own set of beliefs and attitudes, an audience that is able to understand the communication and make a decision about whether to be influenced by it or not in their beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. It is important for the communicator to understand his or her target audience in order to be able to influence their beliefs. At the same time, however, there are limits to the influence that the communicator should develop.

In ethical determinations, these limits can be defined as borders with a "borderline" established, up to which it is *acceptable* to influence an audience to consider your idea or product or service in a favourable way, but beyond which the

influence exerted on the audience is unacceptable (Cooper 135-136). At one end of the limiting conditions is the use of censorship which should, following Mill, be avoided so as to allow for the free expression of opinion to provide everyone with the maximum number of options in autonomously choosing a life of their own. At the other extreme end is propaganda, which seems clearly determined to prevent the best understanding of alternatives. This has the negative effect of rendering the rhetorical context of fully informed choice inoperable. Between these two extremes is a continuum within which particular examples of influencing fit. We start with what we believe, namely that both unrestrained censorship and propaganda are wrong. So, we use these two extremes of dialogical poles to fix on what is ethically acceptable in particular cases of communicating for influence. For example, in the local newspaper in my city, every automobile accident report used to be accompanied by the following information: where it occurred, when it took place, what damage and/or injuries occurred and who was involved in the accident with the name, gender and age of those involved. In the last few years, the following information has also been included: whether alcohol was involved at all in the accident and whether or not the occupants of the automobile were wearing seatbelts. This information is included to influence a general perception (whether this is supported statistically or not) that not wearing seat belts is wrong since it is often related to serious injury and that alcohol use related to driving often is associated with serious accidents. Is this propaganda? Some people think that it is propaganda, while others look at its positive possibilities and suggest it is not propaganda since it exhibits positive support for good practices. This difference needs to be negotiated by informed discussion and dialogue, not legislated by a fixed definition and a category of cases. There is a gray area where propaganda can sit, where communication does not necessarily violate truth conditions but is still more subtly manipulative.

These borders are normative and force-field relative (Cf Quine 42-43); that is, they are determined by the process of deciding on acceptable social norms and these norms are not fixed in any absolute sense, forever. For example, when presented with various internet possibilities, is it normatively assumed (not without controversy, however) that children should not be subject to communicative influences that will cause them to make –critically unreflective—bad choices for themselves, and perhaps others.

In a force field, there is a core and a periphery field, and an interaction between the two, such that the core influences the periphery and the periphery influences the core in a kind of symbiotic relationship. In the force field metaphor as I employ it here, there is a core set of normative values, while at the periphery of this set there is a set of values, intended to reflect the core set but much more susceptible to change because of changes in technology, changes to the constitution of the individual, changes to the educational background of the audience, and so on.

In the force field metaphor (Gough, “Autonomy”), one core value is the protection of the right to choose a life for oneself, the right to autonomy. This is related to a periphery concern for the protection of the right to confidentiality, the right to be told the truth, the right to privacy, the right to informed consent. These are periphery because the justification for overriding any of these periphery rights and the values inherent in them is provided by the core right or values. So, for example, in order to protect the individual’s right to choose for herself, it may be necessary to override privacy conditions of herself or others in order to provide the means necessary or the opportunities necessary to protect her autonomy. To understand the border crossings that do occur, it will be useful to consider some examples (Gough, “Ranking”).

In the domain of technical communication by professionals in a recognized area of expertise, one of the central ethical tasks is to learn to communicate in language across differences in culture, attitude, socio-economic situation or worldviews. This is not an easy task, but one which is normatively expected of professionals in a multi-cultural, multi-stratified society or state. By using language in such a way as to *talk through* differences (not eliminate or level them), it is possible to *think through differences*, conceptualize oneself as writer or speaker in a non-domineering relationship to an audience. (Gough, “The Writer”) Respect is shown the other or audience by recognizing the place of each in a diverse society. This can preserve individual autonomy by guarding against the professional practitioner using technical, esoteric language to disempower the professional’s client, patient, customer or student. So, within this context of language use, it can reasonably be expected that the individual worth of a human being is recognized by insuring that the individual’s capacities and social environment mutually contribute to supporting the possibility that someone, anyone, can choose and act autonomously. The

effects of autonomous choices can be adversely determined by branding for influence in ways that are similar to the already questionable use of propaganda to influence choices.

Propaganda and Branding for Influence

The failure of the principle of respect for autonomy can be explicated by elaborating critical ways that the practice of branding treats the individual in relation to some features of propaganda. In both propaganda and the marketing strategy known as “branding”, there is an attempt to distract the reader or audience and to control the interpretation of the message. Both offer serious threats to individual autonomy. By analogy and parity of reasoning, if there are sufficient, relevant similarities between the situation of propaganda and that of branding, then any ethical qualms we have about the analogue should be equivalent to our reaction to the primary subject of the comparison, in this case branding. Otherwise we suffer the logical and an ethical pain of inconsistency, which itself is akin to anxiety associated with entertaining a contradiction.

Propaganda is defined as “the organized attempt through communication to affect belief or action or inculcate attitudes in a large audience in ways that circumvent or suppress an individual’s adequately informed, rational, reflective judgement” (Marlin 22) in a stipulative attempt to avoid “negative import.” However, this definition fails to distinguish between the process of argumentation and propaganda since the former, like the latter, “attempt[s] to alter their cognitive environments ... to alter their actual thought processes: to bring them to hold what we have introduced to the cognitive environment to make manifest to them” (Tindale 107). This occurs specifically in “communications where the form and content is selected with the single-minded purpose of bringing some target audience to adopt attitudes and beliefs chosen in advance by the sponsors of the communications” (Carey 20). By shaping attitudes and beliefs of a target audience, propaganda becomes “the more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people’s beliefs, attitudes or actions by means of symbols (words, gestures, banners, monuments, music, clothing, insignia, hair styles, designs on coins and postage stamps and so on)” with an added notions that there is “a relatively heavy emphasis on deliberateness and manipulateness distinguishes propaganda from casual conversation or the free and easy exchange of ideas” (Smith 187). The process is a deliberate shaping, manipulation of

beliefs and attitudes which is significantly different from the process of simply attempting rational persuasion.

Propaganda is often accompanied by “labeling,” “slanting of information,” “card stacking,” “distorted references and questionable classifications” and deliberate “close mindedness.” If branding is propaganda, then it is the gray rather than the black variety in that both involve “simplified or ‘pat’ answers” to complicated issues,” a picture of the world composed of “good guys and bad guys,” as well as “a simplistic and direct connection between cause and effect”(Marlin 101). My seven year old grandson was in need of a wallet. We went shopping and he immediately fixed on one wallet which seemed very similar to all the others except that it contained the bold letters of a branded logo on it. It was the most expensive wallet of all the options. My grandson was using his scarce resources to buy it with his own money. Like his grandfather, he values his money. However, the cost of the branded wallet manufactured by the same manufacturers of the alternatives was triple that of alternatives. He had succumbed to what John Kenneth Galbraith has called the “dependency effect,” where advertisers create new wants rather than satisfying existing wants, with an accompanying low level of satisfaction, since the new product wanted often does not deliver the quality or conditions promised. (Gallbraith 116) His scarce resources made no difference to his decision because, as he said, even if he bought the alternatives he couldn’t have anyone see him using it since it would be in his words “too embarrassing to be seen using any of the alternatives.” He had only one choice. Like the soldier who is propagandized to kill the enemy without consideration or thought to the person on the other side of the barbed wire or looking at the person in the uniform, his sights are slanted, his reference distorted into one solitary image of a threat. My grandson’s choice was cauterized on the logo letters “DC” on the outside of the wallet and like the soldier, he had no choice.

Branding is the blurring of the foreground with the background in a message in order to influence recognition of an attitude or a lifestyle to override critical evaluation of the product or the service being marketed. The background or placement of the message—illogically—seems to confirm or support the recognition of the message, independently of the produce or service being sold. Negative political advertisements severely slant information well beyond gray propaganda towards black or negative propaganda but to

an ill informed public, this is still the most effective advertising message that can be communicated to affect voting patterns. In such ads there is no counter view. There is an emphasis on a confrontational style that seems to elicit a bandwagon style reaction from viewers unconnected to alternative views. As well, product placements in television programs and movies is a 1.5 billion dollar business that is so effective as a marketing strategy for brand recognition and acceptance that over 1000 companies employ it. Of course, the effectiveness of the strategy depends on the fact that we are not overtly aware of the placement. That is, there is some level of deception. The literature on the subject indicates that if the product becomes too obvious, then the positive brand identification effect is diminished or negated. It seems a normal or unobtrusive object in the background not consciously intruding on our awareness. Nonetheless, this leaves the viewer autonomously defenseless to make a choice to avoid it or to overcome its influence. Naomi Klein has some observations on these related phenomena: “these companies don’t wear their image like a cheap shirt—their image was so integrated with their business that other people wore it as their *shirt*” (Klein 16); “the brand reinvented itself as a cultural sponge, soaking up and morphing to its surroundings” (Klein 17); “brands must ‘establish emotional ties’ with their customers (through shared pleasant experiences)” (Klein 20). The communicated message is placed inside the confirming influential focus of the background environment in which it is placed. Sometimes symbols and the connotations associated with them - quality, coolness, and so on - are the message that is communicated. So, nothing needs to be said along with or besides the *Nike* swirl. The swirl conveys the message of speed, simplicity and being at one with oneself and the universe. The reference and the symbolic visual message are clear. What is read and understood is influenced by where it is read and what is believed about the place where it is localized. There is nothing subliminal or subconscious about this, even though much of what is going on is unspoken. To speak might break the spell. The spell binds the audience to the image so well that they

purchase and wear the image everywhere as part of the recognition that they too are now a part of the communicated message, confirming its authenticity. It is what Naomi Klein has called the beginning of the “reign of logo terror” (Klein 27).

But there is something ethically wrong in this communication situation. What is wrong is not so clear and *that it is not clear* says volumes about the effectiveness of the techniques employed in marketing brands. No one gives voice to the structure of the messaging of the image or the brand. This communication omission is ethically significant. It is not just a model of distortion or technical wizardry. It is a communication ethical problem of disclosure. In the medical domain, for example, failure to disclose what the medical practitioner will do, the way he or she will structure his or her relationship with the patient, what processes will be followed, and the inherent right of the patient to refuse to be involved in the relationship, are all paramount ethical concerns connected to the right to autonomy.

For branding to work effectively, the transition from visual image to recognition to acceptance to purchase must be seamless. If the structure is released, the process realized, and then the effect will be greatly diminished or lost altogether as the audience pauses to critically consider a choice. The communicative influence of branding could fail if the audience recognizes the technique employed - the diversion that is taking place - so full disclosure is ineffective to achieve the marketer’s anticipated result but it is effective to maintain and protect individual autonomy in decision making. As in the case of the medical model, it is not up to the recipient of the medical service or the audience of the message to achieve disclosure. Technically this may be impossible for the audience. It is not the victim’s task to repel the attack, nor is it the audience’s mantra to chant the “caveat emptor” mantra in response to influence peddling through communication in marketing. The experts in the technical knowledge of the communicative message delivery have the ethical responsibility to make sure that individual autonomy in decision-making is preserved and the right of individuals to full disclosure of information is protected in order to protect individual autonomy. “Those brands are free to soar, less as the dissemination of goods or services than as collective hallucinations (Klein 22); “ads that position a corporation, its values, its personality and character...[are] a way of

life, an attitude, a set of values, a look, an idea (Klein 23). Compulsion and manipulation can occur because of the distortion that takes place because of the omission of relevant information about the kind of communicative influence that is taking place. Branding interferes with the normal developmental process of human beings becoming autonomous, a process that involves a combination of intuition, emotion or positive feeling (and negative) of approval learned in a pre-procedural stage of development in the family

The border has shifted from selling a product or service to influencing the choice of a lifestyle or attitude—identification with a group—potentially subverting individual choice and management of relevant information by cutting off the critical skeptic. While most of us have been involved in various groups that help to shape our lifestyle and influence our choices, there is within these groups on-going debate and intellectual discussion, whether the group is political, religious or environmental. In the case of branding no such internal debate is made public. This is a critical component of respect for informed choice that is omitted. It can have a serious negative effect on autonomous decision making. One might think, and management strategists might believe, that the critical skeptic is not a good audience for marketing or selling a product, so why frame your influence in terms of that audience when the less discerning audience is more likely to be successfully influenced to accept your brand? An audience that will simply comply with the influence, that will simply accept the message or the brand, that will find the imprint to be identical to their imprint of their identity, is the best way to frame the message and to be successful at selling the message. There are, of course, a number of psychological variables that influence the varying effects of branding on decision making (Petty and Cacioppo).

Branding is not a serious problem for the teleological account of ethics since it is possible to argue that the branded personality is better than the autonomous chooser. The branded personality provides a uniform base from which to make accurate decisions about what humans and what they would want distributed to their advantage or satisfaction. The consequences of a branded personality may be beneficial to both the individual and society. The individual may be better off, depending on how this is measured, because he has not had to expend any costly effort to create his personality and

the personality of the branded individual may indeed be a good one, sensitive to the needs of others, not egoistically focused, environmentally conscious, caring, and so on. Society could be better off because the collective effort of the majority to try to reach consensus among themselves and with the minority may be eliminated. Social policies could efficiently be determined and implemented since knowledge of the nature of the individual in society is fixed and not an imponderable. The bane of social utility could be eliminated as inter-subjective utility calculations could seamlessly be accomplished.

However, the branded personality is a serious threat to the idea that ethics is built on the nature of the ethical chooser, the moral agent. The necessary self-respect, duty to oneself, right to be the sole author of one's self-chosen plan of life may be put in jeopardy. Jean Paul Sartre provides a well-known response to the idea that a plan of life for the individual may be chosen by another. For Sartre, the freedom to choose for oneself, a life for oneself and a meaning for that life and reciprocally accord the same respect to others efforts is seriously compromised. The individual is converted from autonomous creator of his or her life to an instrument realized in the plan and meaning of a life provided by someone else, in his case the other is God.

The concept of man in the mind of God is comparable to the concept of a paper-cutter in the mind of the manufacturer, and, following certain techniques and a conception, God produces man, just as the artisan, following a definition and technique, makes a paper-knife. Thus, the individual man is the realization of a certain concept in the divine understanding. (Luper 265-266)

Mary Wollstonecraft argues (Gough, "Mary") that women who define themselves in relation to the personality or characteristics assigned them by men are like planets "out of orbit" with no self-direction or possibility of making ethical choices for themselves (Mahowald 124). Harriet Taylor Mill suggests that women who believe they are safe within the confines of the harem supported by men are sadly mistaken about their own future and the future of the society where they live (Mahowald 154). As Simone de Beauvoir suggests, while women may be complicit in their own bondage by always finding themselves in some personal relationship with their oppressor, the move away from the other is a self-determined one since no oppressor ever gives up his superior power relationship willingly (Mahowald 204). Even if the choice is a difficult one, it is still the individual's choice to make. Not making the choice, allowing one's situation to

remain the way it has been given, is itself a choice. It is inauthentic to oneself to choose not to choose and indeed the choice to enslave one is the only choice not tolerated by someone who supports autonomous decision making, since such a free choice would insure that no further autonomous choices could follow. We do have self-created obligations to ourselves as much as we reciprocally have similar obligations to others.

Minimal Conditions

We can be distracted by the transformation of the distortion of the environment into the political or ideological, for example, in order to deal with the problem of a deficient social environment. This distraction can tend to blur existing or presumed borders or the borderline between what is acceptable on ethical grounds, promoting and supporting autonomy, and what is unacceptable on the same grounds.

There are several well-known instances of communication for influence which are ethically suspect. For example, the AIDS crisis and some of the ethical debates surrounding the situation tended to distort the issues and hence possible resolutions to them. When a crisis occurs in ethics, the first move is often to determine whether our existing beliefs can serve to resolve the crisis—sacrificing nothing at either the core or periphery of our belief set—or whether we need to make some sort of sacrifice to our belief set in order to help resolve the controversy. For some, there could be no sacrifice of a fixed interpretation of their text, the Bible, which both proclaimed homosexuality a sin and sanctioned “natural” punishment of it. For others, however, there needed to be a *sacrifice* of this interpretation, a modification of the “guilt/sin” language of condemnation, which was a distortion of the loving father figure of an all caring God. A normative borderline had been encountered, producing the crisis in determining an acceptable ethical response to the situation of AIDS, one which preserved the core set of beliefs in an all loving, all caring God and the wrongness of violating divine commands, while dealing with the reality of a disease.

First of all, using language to classify a disease as a sin commits the genetic fallacy by assuming that the source determines the rightness or wrongness of a consequence, when no such authority exists (Govier 191). The source, in this case, was an interpretation taken to be authoritative. It is also characteristic of fundamentalisms and

their varied attempts to reinterpret events in light of only one reading of the past as it relates to the present. Fundamentalism often tries to reduce that which is complex to a simple, although often inconsistent, alternative which contains ideological, political and paradoxical components. Second, to place AIDS within an already condemned category of activities, which includes adultery and promiscuous sex, and so on, is to condemn by labeling and to reduce a complex situation to a simplified cartoon version of reality. The language shaped and to some extent determined the decision, making it functionally impossible to autonomously choose whether the situation was to be condemned or treated. The language of condemnation served to distort the situation and make possible autonomous decision making on the part of the participants and audience *functionally impossible*. What should be treated as a disorder is instead condemned as an intentional commission, which is ethically questionable since no one ought to be condemned for the effects of a disease. This violates the logical and ethical *principle of possibility* or the *ought implies can principle* (Cooper 291-292), which correctly maintains that it is not possible (inconsistent and incoherent) to expect, condemn, advise, applaud or reward someone for doing something that is not within his or her power, ability or capability to accomplish or avoid.

This kind of distortion is common. A less serious but similar language distortion occurred when a government official was questioned about the possibility that he might receive *severance pay* as a result of quitting a government appointed position. The official first moved the discussion from an ethical issue to a legal one, in order to shift the frame of reference to what could be buried under impersonal rules, laws and principles. The executive director indicated that his lawyers were working with government officials to determine what *entitlements* he might be *entitled to*. Some of those questioning him in a publicly televised meeting were frustrated by the distortion of *severance pay* to an *entitlement*, which seemed a way of making it impossible for them to get answers to their questions in order to help resolve a conflict in meaning or intention. The entitlement classification set up legal borders for resolving ethical considerations of entitlement, in a reductionist attempt to make what was legally permissible ethically acceptable, when the two are not identical. A reframing of the controversy served to confuse and distort what

was initially a relatively clear cut case that was open to clear resolution. The reframing into legal discourse closed the possibility of an open resolution.

When the economic worldview considers the natural world its fancy, it naturally turns to a classification of resources (with economic value) and non-resources, sometimes externalities (having no economic value, but measurable consequences of choices or actions), which can frustrate environmentalists who cannot accept the language to convey meaning about the natural world, its important and intrinsically valuable self-organized relationships. The distortion is apparent and it does nothing to eliminate the conflict.

The issue of distortion of meaning or the conversation, which directs us away from the possibility of resolving an ethical conflict, is connected to our natural attempt to manage issues, problems or situations, within a conceptual-linguistic framework of our own creation or accommodation. This, like most other kinds of management, involves a *transformation* of one belief system or value scheme into another. There is nothing neutral or detached about this transformation and the language used to facilitate it. A comfortable or accommodating (to the individual's ideas or beliefs) linguistic framework and language is imposed on the description and explanation of the situation or issue. The solution is often captured in the linguistic description and explanation, a solution not likely comfortable to those outside the linguistic framework. The ethical problem is one of accommodation, open-mindedness and the possibility that one could "change one's mind." This means that the language employed in a descriptive or explanatory mode has to invite, rather than reject, opposing points of view into the discussion, conversation or argumentation, not exclude the other.

The public debate over sustainable development as a prelude and necessary component to the debate over the need for the reduction of green house gas emissions, is one that was initially framed in the terms, concepts and ideas of economics: free-market bargaining as a component of individual free choice satisfaction of preference maximization, substitutions, resource management for profit, compensation, and so on. This framing of the debate distorts the issues and blurs an understanding of a possible resolution to some conflicts. This dulls the possibility that individuals can make fully informed autonomous decisions for themselves and others within the public domain (Mitchell 20-22).

This is a serious problem since there is a developmental component to autonomy. As children we learn to recognize an emotional response to our actions, either disapproval or approval and we are constrained by the negative emotions to refrain from the choices that trigger it. So, early on in our ethical development, usually in the family, we learn a pre-procedural approach to dealing with ethical situations at the same time that we learn to identify what is of ethical significance. We learn gradually to see the ethical situation as one which contains an emotional component and then we move to a procedural approach learning to employ rules or principles in our deliberations about what to do and what advice to give others. Finally, we learn to make choices in such a way that we just intuitively know what to do and only in confusing or complicated cases do we go back to the calculations, principles, rules or theories. This internalization is essential if the autonomous individual is able to develop a response based on good character, creating reasonable and uniform expectations for him and others. However, at no point do we lose completely any of these developmental stages. From the beginning to the end of our ethical development we have an emotional, empathetic reaction to an ethical problem, otherwise we wouldn't be able to "see" the problem and assign our responsibility for dealing with it. Communicating for influence can subvert our developed emotive responses by using them to serve the purposes of lifestyle preferences and brand loyalty above doing the right thing, regardless of "how it looks or is perceived by others."

Setting the Limiting Ethical Conditions

In the first place, what needs to be done is to establish the basis for limitations since the initial presumption is against any constraints on human behaviour. That is, the reasonable liberal democratic political presumption of an individual being free from all constraints and coercion requires an argument or justification to override it or interfere with this initial condition. It is also the minimalist construal of intentional action that some prominent cognitive psychologists now argue is central to accept the claim that animals and human beings deliberate and think (Bermudez 46-51). To establish the basis for ethical limitations is to introduce the process for making the decision about the justification for limits. I may need to do something to change my grandson's decision making in light of the influence of branding. As well, none of should be smug about our

own abilities to critically evaluate communication influences, like branding, on our decisions. The process minimally requires the following components in serial order.

First, we need to either argue or assume that developing and enhancing moral autonomy is the ability or capacity that needs the full protection of rights and society paralleling the protection for safe and secure cognitive development strategies.

Second, if we accept the first claim to the priority of moral autonomy, then we need to do empirical research to determine the actual negative effects of branded personality, distorted reference and product placement to the capacity and ability of individuals to function autonomously.

Third, we need to set the issue of negative communicative influences before the public so that there is an open conversation, dialogical context in which the public considers the negative possibility of restraining individual freedom of choice (Mitchell 24) in communication for influence and the negative effects of such communication on the development and application of autonomous decision making. This discussion takes place within various communities or organizations in which the religions open the discussion of the nature of the righteous individual to ongoing critical scrutiny, the fraternal organization continues discussions of its membership conditions and the political organization is often in the process of revising its ideas about its partisans and their beliefs.

Fourth, there is a need for parents and individuals in the private domain of the family—to provide the means whereby children can understand the need to question, skeptically criticize the set of claims made by advertisers in order to insure that they are fully aware of the capacity and ability to choose other than the branded personality.

Conclusion

In the end, the issue of how to identify and mitigate the borders, limiting some debilitating influence in communication, will remain open to a continuous critical debate and on-going conversation. However, despite cultural differences, the priority placed on the value of preserving and enhancing the ability to fully exercise individual autonomy will remain the initial touchstone. Whatever anyone would want, minimally it would be (a) the ability to choose what is best for themselves consistent with (b) their self-chosen

life-plans. Branding influences choices in ways that can make (a) either difficult or impossible, rendering (b) distorted so that it is not fully self-chosen.

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