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**Miscellaneous**

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## Journalism's ethical mission in a crisis of cultural ethos. Proposing a 10-paradigm shift in the pre-political foundations of journalism practice

**Abstract**

Following the Kuhnian theory of scientific development, this essay proposes a 10-paradigm shift regarding the pre-political foundations of journalism practice to address the crisis of cultural ethos in Western liberal democracy societies. It aims to reshape some of the current paradigms that are at the root of the ethical limitations of journalism in Western institutions. To do so, this essay explores the insights of some twentieth-century scholars who, by closely targeting specific failings of liberalism, offer a novel theoretical approach that broadens the meanings of basic pre-political concepts. Their insights offer elements that allow reshaping some 21st-century social assumptions –paradigms– rooted in the current form of the liberal West's society that sustain contemporary social norms and practitioners' performance. A full account of each paradigm shift is beyond the scope of this article. Rather, the goal is to sketch a disruptive theoretical starting-point to address journalism's ethical mission in a new social context and enhance practitioner reflexivity. Finally, I refer to the New Renaissance Project as the initiative to strengthen the ethical foundation of the pre-political paradigms that drive Western democratic institutions, including journalism, at the beginning of a new era.

**Keywords****Paradigms shift, journalism ethics, cultural ethos, democratic institutions, practitioner reflexivity, New Renaissance Project.**

## **1. Introduction**

This paper addresses journalism's ethical mission in the context of a crisis in Western societies' cultural ethos, which compromises the functioning of democratic institutions. This crisis is partly rooted in the paradigmatic form of some philosophical axioms that redefined according to the practices of liberal societies, shape the current paradigms through which Western societies develop an understanding of how democratic institutions –and, therefore, journalism– should function.

Thomas Kuhn proposed that paradigms are the fundamental set of assumptions that a scientific community uses to define its principles, problem models, and accepted solution methods. These basic assumptions shape the understanding of reality and influence scientific research, configuring what Kuhn calls “normal science.” He argues that paradigm changes occur when “normal science” fails to explain the persistent presence of anomalies (1970).

This framework enables the argument that journalism is currently shaped by a specific set of assumptions and beliefs rooted in Enlightenment ideals, which are reflected in the procedures of journalists within Western liberal societies. However, these assumptions and procedures may no longer effectively protect the values of democratic societies; rather, as Anderson points out, they may disclose the tensions that lie at the heart of the liberal journalistic project of the Enlightenment (2019). These tensions are visible in the flow of misinformation, in the difficulties posed by polarization, and in the public's lack of trust in the news.

This scenario reflects the crisis of cultural ethos that weakens the functioning of institutions in Western liberal societies and erodes the ethical mission of journalism, a crisis due in part, as MacIntyre (1984, p. 15) notes, to the fact that the contemporary cultural ethos is built around “simulacra of morality:” we use language and moral reasoning, but we have lost its theoretical and practical understanding because the contexts from which its meaning is derived are missing. This loss is also perpetuated in the academy (1984, p. 17) and is linked to the opacity of the current established paradigms.

I argue that the recovery of journalism's ethical mission is related to a paradigm shift regarding its pre-political foundations, which entails overcoming some limits inherent in the present iteration of the Enlightenment legacy related to journalism's social function. Following MacIntyre (1994), who points out that knowledge advances when we find traditions that explain reality better than others, the distinctive contribution of this work is to argue that the twentieth-century insights of scholars such as Guardini, Strauss, Arendt, Ricoeur, Polo, Ratzinger, Spaeman, MacIntyre, Taylor, and Archer point towards new ways of addressing ethical issues in contemporary society. Following Thomas Kuhn (1970), who holds that science advances not only by accumulating knowledge but also by changing paradigms, and based on the authors cited above, I propose a 10-paradigm shift through which journalism may repair –in a programmatic way– its theoretical ground, thus being empowered to deal with the challenges posed by contemporary society. This paradigm shift proposal also aims to enhance practitioner reflexivity.

This is a work in progress that presents the need to review 10 current paradigmatic forms that support journalism's ethical mission. Although the theoretical development of each paradigm shift is complex enough that it could constitute an object of study by itself, this article intentionally addresses these 10 paradigms together since they are interrelated as part of the same philosophical tradition. The initiative to strengthen the pre-political foundations of Western democratic institutions in a new era entails a broad program of research that I refer to as The New Renaissance Project.

## **2. The crisis of journalism as a problem of cultural ethos**

The current challenges of journalism have been thematized as a problem of adaptation to digital technology (van Dijck & Poell, 2013), which has influenced the business model and called into question the veracity of information on a global stage. The spread of misinformation is defined

as the determination of alternative facts (Billiet *et al.*, 2018), giving rise to a post-truth culture that undermines the ethical mission of journalism.

Although the conditions of journalistic practice have changed due to internal competitive logics (Lischka 2019), Luckhurst argues that liberal theory remains the framework for understanding its social goals. Liberal theory connotes faith in the social and moral purpose of the media, whereby journalism exposes irregularities and involves citizens in public debate, protecting the democratic system with truth and justice (2011, p. 322). However, recent experience shows that this model does not achieve its goals, even less so when the digital environment facilitates the selective consumption of news, the growing spread of misinformation and disinformation, and an increase in polarisation (Örnebring, 2018).

According to Victor Pickard, liberal theory establishes that news outlet self-regulation and protection of the negative freedom of the press guarantee the achievement of the social goods linked to journalism. Nevertheless, this purpose is beholden “to a commercial media system that systematically underserves these ideals” (Pickard, 2015, pp. 82-91). He highlights how deeply normative discussions about the role of media in democracy and the government’s role in managing that relationship bring into focus recurring weaknesses in liberal reform efforts. According to him, this is because there is a “discursive capture” in which the potential reform of the press is constrained by an implicit market fundamentalism. Although Pickard calls for increasing state regulation to avoid the pitfalls that the practice of journalism encounters, it is worth asking whether emphasising the improvement of regulatory processes merely perpetuates a limited journalism framework, and if it would be better to face the deeper challenge of updating the paradigm underlying the cultural ethos that animates the ethical mission of journalism.

One of Jürgen Habermas’ major contributions was to make the pre-political foundations of the liberal state depend –in line with Kantian formalism– on deliberation and voting procedures within institutions (2007). Process and consensus define the paradigm of social acceptance and ethical legitimization. Within this cultural ethos, the epistemological authority of the news is based on the procedure that grounds professional behaviour (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013, pp. 243-245). Journalistic practice proposes professional principles of objectivity (Reese, 1990), such as the distinction between facts and values; consideration of all sides; and the balanced presentation of opposing arguments. These operative criteria are later conceptualised in journalism schools, taking the Enlightenment paradigm as their standard of reference, thus shaping the established science of journalism studies. However, while these procedures aim to protect the principles of news objectivity and balance, they seem to contradict journalism theory and practice that draw on the concepts of gatekeeping, salience, frame, and agenda (Entman, 1993; Muñoz-Torres 2012). Moreover, in today’s complex digital environment procedures cannot effectively handle information flow. In fact, this reflects that professional practice implies wise decision-making based on an in-depth understanding of the ethical goals of journalism.

Contemporary society’s moral fragmentation, linked to technological development, facilitates the emergence of what Anderson calls “new ideologies.” He argues that Facebook, Google, and Twitter shape the dominant ideology of our time through computational procedures (2019). However, technological processes cannot replace practitioner reflexivity, which allows journalists to uncover and foreground ways of understanding social reality that have explanatory value. Such practitioner reflexivity is linked to a foundation of pre-political concepts and assumptions, that allow journalists to contribute to strengthening the social order.

The theoretical contradictions and practical failures mentioned above highlight the epistemological limitations of current journalistic axioms and practices. If the crisis of cultural ethos reveals limitations from the legacy of Enlightenment pre-political paradigms, how can this situation be overcome?

### **3. Seeking a paradigm shift for a new era**

A paradigm is an established way of understanding reality consolidated over time. A change of era is characterised by a modification of social structure, to the point that the established paradigms fail to adequately account for the shift. It is a situation that generates uncertainty and functional anomalies but also provides a fitting context for reflection and adaptation.

To the extent that the structure of social reality has changed, in line with phenomena such as globalisation and digitalisation, a need to explore possible changes in understanding consistent with the current historical situation likewise emerges. As Margaret Archer states, there is a relationship between social structure, agency and culture that favours reflective thought and action to address social changes (1995).

As noted above, the Enlightenment legacy has shaped the dominant framework for understanding journalism's public function in Western liberal society. Underlying this vision are the theory of knowledge and the moral and political philosophy of such thinkers as Immanuel Kant, John Locke, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill (Christians 2013, 2019; Plaisance 2005). Within this tradition, the ethical mission of journalism may be understood as following a philosophical framework that defines subjective and formal concepts or values such as the true and the good, determines the relationship between the individual and society in terms of a social contract, and prioritises a negative sense of freedom. These principles in turn define the meaning of the classical categories that guide journalism performance: citizen, public space, freedom of expression, the marketplace of ideas, etc. However, the current historical moment calls into question this paradigmatic model and its pre-political principles.

The relationships among misinformation, disinformation, alternative facts, and post-truth culture constitute one of those Kuhnian "anomalies" (1970) that the legacy of Enlightenment axioms can no longer wholly encompass, prompting the question of whether we need to explore a paradigm shift in seeking to understand today's society. In fact, the difficulties faced by liberalism and its philosophical principles in articulating contemporary social challenges show that liberal ideology, in its current paradigmatic form, has been exhausted (Vattimo, 1991; Guardini, 2001; Sim, 2010). According to Dennen, "to the extent that it has unfolded following its own internal logic, it reveals pathological self-contradictions" (2018).

In periods of crisis, as Kuhn points out, while the scientific community tends to concentrate on settling unsolvable problems by following the established pattern, some (young) scientists, less influenced by the dominant paradigm, propose a change in the way of understanding the anomaly as such. They have the ability to see a "new form of reality" enabling science to shift the paradigm itself. Consequently, science defines new significant problems and methods of research (1970). From this perspective, the task of reinforcing the ethical mission of journalism given the crisis in Western liberal cultural ethos requires, in the first place, overcoming some limits of the still operative paradigms from which the crisis stems. The challenge is to find a new pre-political approach that may enable journalism to address the ethical issues facing contemporary society.

To this end, I propose to look at insights from a number of well-known twentieth-century scholars, from a variety of academic traditions, who by closely targeting specific failings of liberalism, have overcome some limits of the Enlightenment heritage. They offer a novel theoretical approach that broadens the meanings of concepts such as truth, common good, freedom, politics, and cultural diversity, which lie at the heart of the liberal Enlightenment project of journalism. Finally, based on the insights of these authors, I suggest a 10-paradigm shift that may enhance practitioner reflexivity.

Significant insights may be traced in the work of Romano Guardini (1885-1968), Leo Strauss (1899-1973), Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), Paul Ricœur (1913-2005), Leonardo Polo (1926-2013), Joseph Ratzinger (1927), Robert Spaeman (1927), Alasdair MacIntyre (1929), Charles Taylor (1931),

and Margaret Archer (1943–2023), which enable a more comprehensive reading of the contemporary social context. Paraphrasing Kuhn (1970), they are the ‘young scientists’ who have proven able to discern the new form of reality that includes the presence of the anomaly outlined above.

Although this account is not exhaustive, their approaches to the ethical problems of contemporary society evince common features.

- a) They identified both the strengths and weaknesses of the Enlightenment thinking through their experiences with the new social contexts shaped by World War II, totalitarianism, globalization, and multiculturalism. They observed that the evolving Enlightenment framework did not adequately address the complexities of the post-war social structure (Arendt 1958, 1959; Taylor, 1994).
- b) Moved by a deep desire to understand the human condition in its natural and historical dimensions (Arendt, 1958), they have underlined its plural character and have developed a dialogical form of thought, in which the human experience of intangible goods gives way to relationships of commitment and gratuity (Arendt, 1958; MacIntyre, 1984; Spaeman, 1980, 2005).
- c) They have maintained an open attitude towards reality, giving it primacy over the gnoseological categories that serve to order knowledge (MacIntyre, 1994), and have accepted the limited and paradoxical nature of all forms of knowledge (Guardini, 1996).
- d) As a consequence, they have focused on practical philosophy, as well as on political and social theory. They have dialogued with diverse traditions, attending to issues related to public life, emphasising the social nature of human life.
- e) They defend a relational anthropology from which arises a new sense of freedom and community (Taylor, 1994; Archer, 1995).
- f) They have rejected the imposition of power; instead, they are interested in a person achieving control over his/her work, while technological change shapes the conditions in which human life unfolds (Arendt, 1958; Guardini, 1994).
- g) To this end, they propose character building through virtuous habits (MacIntyre, 1984; Spaemann, 1989, 2005) and remain open to the achievement of a common good (Strauss 1988), while respecting the identities of different individuals and cultures (Taylor, 1994; Ratzinger, 2007).
- h) They underscore the narrative dimension of knowledge (Ricœur, 1984, 1986, 1988; MacIntyre, 2016), whereby the word recovers its value within a plurality of explanatory traditions in the world (Arendt, 1958; MacIntyre, 1994).

By narrowly targeting specific flaws in liberalism, these thinkers discerned a new form of reality that prompted them to modify Enlightenment epistemological and pre-political paradigms. Paraphrasing Kuhn (1970), they dare to see through ‘reverse lenses’ and enable us to enter a provisional disruptive academic context.

#### **4. A proposal for 10 paradigm shifts**

This section presents a proposal for 10-paradigm shifts in pre-political terms, aiming to address the limitations of some Enlightenment principles in facing specific failures of liberalism. To do so, attention is paid to 10 noteworthy social issues that reflect the current crisis of Western cultural ethos, exploring their theoretical roots in the legacy of Enlightenment thought, and a set of paradigm shifts based on the epistemological approaches offered by the authors cited above is proposed.

The ten proposed paradigms follow an intuitive sequence referring to the anthropological and epistemological conceptual frame that dominates contemporary thought. They are based on Hannah Arendt’s concept of the human condition, in which the human person is intrinsically linked to community life and political action. Therefore, the paradigms present in a sequential manner the basic elements that make up human life within the community, addressing the concepts of truth, goodness, the meaning of action, freedom, politics, diversity, culture, religion,

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and communication. These elements are essential for the development of individuals, both on a personal and social level. They help shape relationships and structures that exist prior to the establishment of formal political institutions, indicating their pre-political nature.

Thus, this proposal addresses the pre-political paradigms that exist prior to any theoretical conceptualization of journalism. Since, in an effort to restore fundamental concepts essential to sound ethical behaviour, it is important to place journalism practices rooted in a robust understanding of human condition. Additionally, from an epistemological perspective, the proposed paradigms attempt to restore the balance that Enlightenment epistemology has lost by emphasising subjectivity.

Table 1 briefly indicates, in correlated columns: a) the formulation of each proposed paradigm; b) the current paradigm it tries to repair; c) the novel journalistic frame that each proposed paradigm implies; d) the journalistic criteria that underline each proposed paradigm, and finally; e) a sample reference to the work of some of the authors that offer philosophical elements to understand the meaning and scope of each paradigm.

This table presents specific paradigmatic changes as parts of a correlated whole, aiming to shift the journalistic frame established by the Enlightenment tradition. As noted previously, this is in response to a cultural ethos crisis, where the epistemological roots of the meaning of moral concepts have been lost.

**Table 1.** The new paradigmatic model.

<b>New paradigmatic model</b>	<b>The Enlightenment heritage</b>	<b>The new model frame</b>	<b>Journalistic criteria</b>	<b>Authors &amp; References</b>
<b>1. To understand the person and society in their "human condition"</b>	Anthropocentrism: social contract	Human plurality: condition of political life	Interpersonal relations: word value and common good	Hannah Arendt: The Human Condition (1958)
<b>2. To discover the polyphonic nature of truth</b>	Epistemological relativism. Ethos: "post-truth culture"	Primacy of reality over knowledge and of knowledge over communication	Displays different practical truths without engaging in dialectical competition. Understands and then interprets	Paul Ricœur: Time and narrative (1984-86-88)
<b>3. Practitioner virtue and commitment to the common good</b>	Value ethics: procedure and processes	Virtue ethics: phronesis and character	Journalism as practice: activity constituted by human communication as a good in itself that is directed to the flourishing of society	Alasdair MacIntyre: After Virtue (1984)  Robert Spaemann: Basic moral concepts (1989)
<b>4. To experience the world as a project in need of meaning</b>	Logic of the market	Human sense of action	Human orientation of technology, economics, and consumption	Romano Guardini: Letters from Lake Como (1994)

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<b>5. Broaden the meaning of freedom</b>	Negative sense of freedom: absence of restrictions	Positive sense of freedom: human flourishing and personal growth	Ethical and responsible exercise of freedom of expression	Hannah Arendt: Eichmann in Jerusalem (1994)
<b>6. Broaden the meaning of politics</b>	Procedure as corrective of the state of law and institutional performance	Society based on common good and freedom	<i>Authoritas vs potestas</i> Work sectors in building society Social innovation projects	Leo Strauss: What is political philosophy? (1988)
<b>7. Articulate diversity</b>	Democracy and equality blur people's differences	Acknowledging difference is a condition for the recognition of one's own identity	How to avoid audience fragmentation and polarisation. Work in conjunction with others	Charles Taylor: The politics of recognition (1994)
<b>8. Culture as primary</b>	Knowledge fragmentation Political speech encompasses meaning of freedom and culture	New human confluence of knowledge that guides the relationships between disciplines Integrates abstract logical thinking with imaginative thinking through the experience of reality and education	Corporate intangibles transform society, putting service of the person at the centre of professions Corporations expand their relationships by cooperating and engaging in community development actions	Alasdair MacIntyre: Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry (1994)
<b>9. Religion and cultural demythologization</b>	Avoid religion in public discourse and give way to ideologies	Reason about spirituality and religious diversity while avoiding violence	Positive secularism	Joseph Ratzinger: That Which Holds the World Together: The Pre-political Moral Foundations of a Free State (2010)

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<b>10. Communication as community building</b>	Journalism as political activity within representative democracy	Build community on the basis of a relational anthropology	Storytelling as knowledge of the self and cultural identity	Leonardo Polo: Being and Communication (2017)
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Source: Own elaboration.

Each paradigm and the corresponding columns of Table 1 are explained below.

***Paradigm 1: Journalism needs to understand the person and society in their "human condition"***

The legacy of Enlightenment thought establishes the conditions that enable the organisation of a common life via a social contract. As soon as it configures an agreed order, the connection felt by the citizen is weak. Coexistence agreements may be destroyed by following the strongest of conflicting interests (Spaemann, 1989).

This contractual vision changes within the broader notion of the "human condition" that Hannah Arendt explores, where permanent human capacities and the historical conditions in which the particular human's life take place – as a "condition of their existence" – are brought together. Arendt stresses plurality as a permanent feature of human life; in fact, plurality is "the *conditio per quam* of all political life." Word and action articulate a person's identity; forgiveness and commitment are essential, gratuitous experiences that strengthen social relationships (1958).

From this perspective, one of the specific goods that journalism could provide to society is a stronger cultural ethos in which the word 'plurality' recovers its value, and gratuity is placed at the centre of human relationships, oriented towards the common good (Douglass, 1980). From this stance, journalism can move away from polarisation and show the richness of pluralism rooted in common ground.

In journalism, this paradigm can be seen in community-centric reporting, which focuses on real-life stories, diverse voices in the city, and how people unite to create positive change (common goods) in society. This approach emphasizes interpersonal relationships and themes such as resilience, identity, and community strength to illustrate the natural interconnectedness of society.

***Paradigm 2. Journalism needs to discover the polyphonic nature of truth***

The Enlightenment legacy gradually grants primacy to subjectivity until the sovereignty of epistemological relativism holds sway (Christians, 2005, 2008). The misleading categories of "fake news," "alternative facts," and "post-truth culture" emerge in the context of this cultural ethos. Idealism takes subjectivity to the extreme and ends in in-communication (Polo, 2017).

Understanding the polyphonic nature of truth means embracing its common and relational, permanent and historical, theoretical and practical dimensions. The truth emerges as a judgement about an external reality, whereby – through a reflexive act – it is possible to distinguish between external elements (shaping factors in reality) and the position or relationship of the person who judges this external reality. Thus, regarding factual truth (Arendt, 1958) not all opinions are equal, which poses a challenge to journalism.

The polyphonic nature of truth requires journalism to understand and then interpret (Ricoeur, 1976), by recognizing a certain primacy of reality over knowledge and of knowledge over communication (Llano, 1986). Likewise, the implications of the notion of practical truth (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI 2) are specified in the journalistic criterion that supports the legitimacy of multiple choices and solutions to the problems of social life without setting up dialectical oppositions among them.

In practice, this involves strengthening investigative journalism that goes beyond just presenting different perspectives in a debate-like manner. Instead, it should clearly highlight the level of authority and knowledge of its sources or demonstrate how various interpretations of a situation can be equally valid and useful.

***Paradigm 3: Journalism involves practitioner virtue and commitment to the common good***

Following the Enlightenment framework, journalism has established self-regulation processes and deontological regulations as ethical guides to ensuring specific values. As noted, procedures

do not always succeed in realising the values they aim to achieve (Anderson, 2019) because of the loss of the context that provides meaning to those values (MacIntyre, 1984).

Following MacIntyre's notion of practice, it's possible to understand journalism as an activity constituted by the goods of human communication as such, directed towards social flourishing (Borden, 2007). If so, journalism must achieve specific human goods, thus taking on a more decisive ethical role. To do so, practitioners need to shape their journalistic criteria by developing practical wisdom (*phronesis*) in applying their professional skills and forging their character by developing virtues (Plaisance, 2013, 2014). Journalists' *phronesis* and character make them strong enough to be independent in the achievement of journalistic goals (Quinn, 2007) and in addressing the common good (Douglass, 1980).

The importance of maintaining integrity in practice becomes even more significant within the context of journalistic deinstitutionalization, which poses a threat to the realisation of democratic values. Recent community journalism initiatives are facing challenges in a cooperative way, whether it be the economic sustainability of their media or the protection of the physical integrity of their practitioners. These initiatives exemplify a paradigm shift that prioritizes the social goods inherent in the practice.

***Paradigm 4: Journalism needs to experience the world as a project in need of meaning***

As noted above, communications media are subject to a logic of market fundamentalism, which is fostered in turn by technology. Technological development impacts the world and human nature, thus transforming the conditions of human existence (Arendt, 1958; Guardini, 1994). Given that technological development is unstoppable, humankind feels called to master technology and technique, and to reflect on its ethical dimension because the risks involved in using technology are no longer predictable, controllable, or compensable (Beck, 1992).

Technology is performative of human behaviour, and its use needs to be humanely oriented (Vallor, 2016). This orientation entails thinking about human behaviour, character building, and the meaning of human action. From this perspective, the challenge for journalism lies in finding and underlining the human orientation of technology, economics, and consumption, as well as communication processes.

Technology, including AI, can assist practitioners in managing data and finding information and sources. However, it cannot replace their expertise in determining social relevance and accurately reporting facts. An example of practice could be explaining data with narratives of human experience, encouraging citizens to be reflective.

***Paradigm 5: Journalism needs to broaden the meaning of freedom***

Enlightenment thought yields a negative sense of freedom, which underpins the concept "freedom of expression" as the "absence of restrictions" and is legally protected to ensure that the functioning of institutions may be controlled. However, recent experience has prompted questions about the shortcomings associated with that kind of "freedom of expression" in a context of extraordinary multicultural complexity.

Hate speech reveals that rules and procedures are not enough to guarantee the proper exercise of freedom of expression, since it requires internal ethical guidance. When Hannah Arendt (1994) coined the expression "the banality of evil," she pointed out the inhumanity of the actions those who follow the rules of an established system may be capable of, by abrogating their ability to reflect on the moral value of their own actions.

Human freedom contains features of finitude and fragility. Furthermore, contemporary civil liberties, rooted in the socio-cultural context of representative democracy, are experienced in an ambivalent way. Democracy can quickly turn into autocracy since democratic processes on their own do not guarantee an authentic democratic culture (Arendt, 1959).

Journalism is called to explore how to preserve human freedom and enhance civil liberties in articulate ways. This implies an expansion of the concept of freedom, enabling journalists to

draw respectfully on different worldviews. It leads to the question of the meaning of what we freely do, which addresses the telos or purpose of both communication and political action and requires responsible and ethical freedom of expression.

***Paradigm 6: Journalistic activity needs to broaden the meaning of politics***

According to Enlightenment thinking, journalism exercises corrective control on the state and its laws and facilitates transparency in the functioning of representative democratic institutions. As noted above, procedures alone may fail to correct the performance of representative institutions in a democracy. However, this task requires a stable cultural ethos, which is lacking in the liquid society described by Baumann (2015).

By sidelining ethics in public speech, Enlightenment thinking twists journalistic performance to the limits of action and disputes between different political parties. Reporting on politics appears to involve a sense of equidistance or being in favour of a particular ideology. However, social life is not shaped primarily by government policy, even less if its actions are conditioned by a dynamic of ongoing electoral campaigning that distorts its goals. Professional groups such as educators, judges, and medical staff play an essential role in determining the ethical ends and means of their work insofar as it pertains to achieving the common good of society.

A new journalism agenda that expands politics would focus on public life and the needs of society, taking into account the specific contribution made by the professions, understood as “practice,” which involve internal and particular goods for the construction of the *polis* (MacIntyre, 1984); and would thus give voice to professional contributions, highlight social innovation projects (Murray *et al.*, 2010) that contribute to enhancing the common good and freedom (Strauss, 1988), and prioritise epistemological *authoritas* over *potestas* (D’Ors, 1973) in the construction of social life.

After examining the limits of both the libertarian and communitarian political models, Plaisance (2005) proposes adopting a communication discursive-network model that enables citizens to demand and exercise the accountability that a democratic polity requires, “by incorporating moral agency as a central feature of the communication enterprise.” This means that “the cultivation of moral agency be embraced as a central objective of the press.”

For example, journalism practice could improve by showcasing initiatives led by professionals to highlight their contributions to society, rather than focusing solely on political debates. Reporting could delve into how various professions uphold ethical standards, illustrating how their moral agency impacts democracy.

***Paradigm 7: Journalism needs to learn new ways of articulating diversity***

Liberal society has established individual freedom and equal dignity as key concepts of democracy, in which citizens have an “identical basket of rights and immunities.” However, according to Taylor, this equality tends to blur differences and impose a false cultural homogeneity. Thus, liberalism develops a “pragmatic contradiction” by presenting “a particularism masquerading as the universal” (1994).

Making plurality an essential aspect of the human condition (Arendt, 1958) prioritises interpersonal relationships based on a relational approach to anthropology (Archer, 1995; Donati 2012). The person reaches their fullness and configures the world by acting with others. The affirmation of the human condition as plural implies recognizing a new sense of dignity and respect within a global world, which does not eliminate differences but figures them as a way of enriching culture and an opportunity to discover one’s own identity (Taylor, 1994).

Globalisation and multiculturalism may be better understood from a perspective that frames equality and diversity as interdependent, since one’s own identity is recognized in the face of difference. Thus, equal human dignity is not realised as homogeneity but as diversity in opinions, cultures, worldviews, and proposals for action in response to the same challenges (Ratzinger, 2007).

From this perspective, journalism is called to avoid audience fragmentation and polarisation and encourage citizens to understand and work by acting with different others. For example, journalism can explore diverse groups' perspectives on common subjects and highlight stories that demonstrate the connections between different cultures and communities, shaping identities and fostering mutual understanding.

***Paradigm 8: Journalism needs to see culture as primary***

Post-Enlightenment thinking leads to the progressive fragmentation of knowledge and renders it provisional (Foucault, 1968; Popper, 2009). The human capacity for knowledge is called into question, and political discourse endeavours to harness the meaning of language and culture. The politicisation of culture impedes the capacity for critical reflexivity. To the extent that it is up to journalism to defend public freedoms and create space for them, it needs to find a way to protect cultural, educational, and religious freedom from the potentially despotic rule of the state.

While political disaffection and media detachment increase, the rise of corporate communication narratives indicates the need to recover meaningful stories. If political discourse seizes freedom and culture in favour of power, the challenge in corporate and journalism storytelling is to show what makes life worthwhile. In fact, corporations are aware that the ethos that accompanies communication phenomena encompasses a critical capacity to transform social life. To do so ethically, practitioners need to expand the meaning and scope of rationality, integrating knowledge, reason, experience, emotion, and action, an approach that involves wondering what makes human life flourish.

The development of critical thinking prompts comparison of the explanatory traditions of the world (MacIntyre, 1994), to find ways that enable us to better understand and live within our social reality, which in turn entails looking beyond one's own subjectivity, recovering the primacy of reality and its relationship with truth, goodness, and beauty.

For example, journalism can prioritize culture by focusing on narratives that promote human flourishing. This involves reporting stories that highlight factors contributing to well-being within diverse cultural contexts. Additionally, cultural criticism can be enhanced to prompt reflection on how cultural narratives influence public discourse. This may involve critiquing media representations, corporate narratives, and political discourse to encourage readers to contemplate the impact of these narratives on societal values and individual freedoms.

***Paradigm 9: Journalism is called to contribute to a new demythologization of the world that makes space for spirituality and religions***

Evolving Enlightenment thinking tends to strip religion out of public speech. The denial of God in the twentieth century gave way to the dominance of pseudo-religions. Ideologies (such as Marxism or rapacious capitalism), the reduction of ethical conscience itself to the law and political consensus (Arendt, 1994), the sacralization of experimental science, the undervaluation of the humanities, and human submission to scientific and technological power without ethical considerations (Guardini, 1994) are various forms of ideology that undermine people's freedom.

Religions help to form an ethical conscience independent of the established power, which can positively influence public life by reinforcing hope (Sarkozy, 2006). In a "positive secularism," which makes room for diverse beliefs, religions challenge personal conscience and enable such consciousness to go beyond the present. Questions concerning identity and the meaning of human life are ultimately religious ones.

Journalism needs to achieve a positive view of religions, without confusing them with myths or particular social or political systems. From this perspective, the challenge is to find religious rationality (Habermas, 2006; Ratzinger, 2007) by exploring its congruence with human experience and other forms of knowledge. The proposed paradigm shift here involves finding the rationality of spirituality and religious diversity without violence (Ratzinger, 2007), which

means increasing the human understanding of people and the world, opening a space for mystery and the sacred nature of the human condition.

For example, journalism can promote understanding and respect among diverse faith traditions by featuring conversations between representatives. Opinion pieces can explore the implications of a purely secular worldview and advocate for a balanced perspective that values the positive impact of spirituality in society. Human interest stories can highlight how religion motivates positive social change. Investigative reporting on religious freedom can contribute to a more inclusive public dialogue, fostering appreciation for the complexities of human experience.

***Paradigm 10: Journalism needs to frame communication as community building***

In the wake of World War II, the focus of communication studies turned to its social effects, introducing the paradigm of domination, leading to a gradually more limited view of the field, and replicating research models to obtain results that were both expected and of questionable significance (Donsbach, 2006).

As the pre-political scientific framework of journalism studies is deeply marked by both the idealism and voluntarism that stem from Enlightenment philosophy, the scope of communication studies narrowed further. Leonardo Polo notes that idealism frames truth as self-grounding and excludes being, while voluntarism establishes value as the fundamental criterion of truth. Thus, nominalism leads to an undermining of the truth and voluntarism leads to transcendental “incommunication.” While idealism limits communication to logical relationships, voluntarism establishes “incommunication, isolation, solitude, by attributing a fictional or hypothetical character to the relationships between ideas” (2017).

Leonardo Polo approaches communication from a realistic and anthropological point of view. He explores this perspective in greater depth by emphasising that to be a person is to be communicative, open to truth and the good: “the transcendentals are convertible among themselves” in the notion of person, which enables a clearer understanding of the meaning of communication. The reason is that the radicality of being is not insofar as it is closed, but rather precisely insofar as it is open. Therefore, “the person is being in which the transcendentals are really given” (2017).

Polo states that pure information is redundant and insufficient as communication. Because the person can never be redundant as such, all forms of redundant communication imply a fall into the impersonal. Without communication there is no society. He recalls Aristotle’s argument that there can be no *polis* without *legein* (discourse, speech, saying), and asks in turn, “but is there *legein* without a person? No” (2017). As a result, Polo sees the expression “mass society” as a contradiction in terms.

This paradigm shift means to understand and build community based on a relational anthropology (Archer, 1995; Donati, 2012), encompassing plurality (Arendt, 1958) and the narrative structure of human life (Ricœur, 1984–86–88) as the basis of storytelling, knowledge of the self, and collective identity (MacIntyre, 2016; Taylor, 1994). Hence communication theory may extend the paradigm of transmission and exchange to include partaking –i.e., communion– in its paradigm (Peters, 1999).

These are some of the paradigmatic features towards which a new cultural ethos could point; and drawing the theoretical contributions of these authors into dialogue with contemporary social issues could yield practical conclusions in journalistic practices.

**5. Reflexivity as a journalistic practice**

The crisis in the cultural ethos in Western liberal societies makes the ethical mission of journalism essential to both discerning and effecting social change. Thus, journalists are faced with the task of articulating the historical conditions of a change of era.

Social and cultural changes must be endowed with a map and goal since they cannot be achieved by mere inertia. Supposing that visions of reality anchored in old paradigms coexist

with others that must make their way by breaking established paradigms, it is up to journalism to identify and give visibility to those insights and practices that contribute to social flourishing. This mission requires a broader philosophical outlook (Christians, 2008, pp. 46-47).

From a historiographical perspective, the derivations of the Enlightenment legacy in the forms of modernity, postmodernity (Lyotard, 1984), and the liquid society (Bauman, 2015) must face up to the epistemological shifts involved in responding to the demand for a change in social structure. Such changes call for society to project something new. That means being willing to accept a paradigmatic change where the structure of the current news frame and the agenda of public opinion debates may lose validity. This is an urgent challenge to the extent that it is necessary to face a crisis of cultural ethos that endangers the functioning of institutions in Western representative democracies. However, none of this can be done without making space for reflexivity.

Reflexivity is a key concept for future journalism, since “reflexivity is a precondition for the articulation of critique.” The principle of reflexivity is relevant “for understanding language use, context, social practice, but also for analyses of subjectivity and power.” As a condition and feature of discourse and politics, reflexivity enables the journalist to examine different socio-political positions and address issues of bias, subjectivity, and ideology. Moreover, “reflexivity as a general feature of inter-subjectivity and discourse” facilitates dialogue and integration (Zienkowski, 2017).

However, reflexivity is only possible through previously articulated knowledge. Accepting the 10-paradigm shift proposal implies that journalistic reflexivity be practised in line with the renewed paradigmatic approach. This may apply to practitioners' decisions about news salience, frame, and agenda, and may well involve breaking with some professional routines and reformulating long-held theoretical assumptions in the field of journalism.

In performing this role, journalism carries out an irreplaceable ethical function within society. This is achieved through public discourse, reclaiming the value of words (Arendt, 1958), and articulating meaningful stories through public discourse that can become sites of collective self-understanding (Ricoeur, 2006). Reflexivity is a characteristic of human communication, which the pragmatist tradition sees as based on “the interplay of human cognition and subjectivity” (Zienkowski, 2017). Reflective awareness plays a crucial role in establishing a sense of self and contributes to shaping a particular collective consciousness. By emphasising subjectivity, post-Enlightenment thought frames understanding as interpretation (Eco, 1994). Today, however, journalism must, above all, understand the new social reality in order to project it into the future.

## **6. The ethical mission of journalism**

The anomalies in the functioning of Western democratic institutions highlight a crisis in cultural ethos that calls for strengthening the ethical mission of journalism. This can be achieved by uncovering a fresh perspective on reality, seeing a new paradigmatic form, which enables a deeper understanding of society and fosters a renewed cultural ethos through sound journalistic practices. In this way, journalism can contribute to strengthening both Western journalism and political institutions.

The paradigms presented here aim to expand the theoretical foundation of journalistic practices without eliminating the Enlightenment understanding of journalism's purpose. These are meant to enable journalism to uphold its ethical mission in a new social landscape that reflects the dawn of a new era.

The limits of this paper are clear. A thorough examination of the deficiencies and possible restoration of each paradigm is beyond the scope of this essay. Instead, the aim is to show that the challenges presented by the current paradigmatic perspective are interconnected and stem from a shared philosophical foundation. Furthermore, the question is why journalists would embrace a paradigm shift and how they can reflect a new approach to social reality through

their practices. It is not within the scope of this essay to provide definitive answers to these questions, as they involve adopting a new epistemology and ethical stance. The aim is to pave the way for intellectual exploration that can inform professional reflexivity and practice. Communication schools can serve as a starting point for exploring this new perspective. The small practical examples provided for each paradigm offer insights into potential ways to do so. The new modes of practice will be the consequence of a paradigmatic change in the understanding of the pre-political concepts that nourish social life and the life of institutions. These changes cannot be imposed but only proposed, with the hope that they will be significant for professionals who freely choose to take on this ethical commitment.

Further research is needed to create a thorough theoretical framework that incorporates the insights from the mentioned authors. This will enable researchers to offer more comprehensive explanations of the pre-political foundation of journalism and contribute to a more extensive understanding of this shift in paradigm. In doing so journalism could reinforce the functioning of Western democratic institutions. This could be seen as a New Renaissance Project, an initiative aimed at bolstering the ethical underpinnings of the pre-political paradigms that shape Western democratic institutions, including journalism, as we enter a new era<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugenio Garin (2006) explained how the sociocultural context of the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century prompted men to organise an intellectual and social project later known as the Renaissance. The realisation that they were at the end of an era, the invention of the printing press, and exposure to other cultures fueled a strong desire for renewal. This desire was manifested in the study of the humanities as the foundation for understanding of human being and the subsequent transformation of culture, allowing individuals to have a new role in political and social life. On the similarities between the present moment and the Renaissance, see Codina (2009).

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