The Critical Moral Voice on American Newspaper Opinion Pages

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This article examines diversity of content on the opinion pages of 25 different U.S. newspapers and news magazines in the weeks leading up to the 2003 U.S. attack on Iraq. It seeks to answer 3 questions. (a) Who are the authors writing these opinion pieces? (b) How are different author types distributed across different periodicals? and (c) Does author type play any role when it comes to contributing moral content to public debate? These questions are important, especially when it comes to macromoral matters like war. J. Habermas (1989) expected a properly functioning public sphere to debate such matters in a moral way. This study examines which voices contribute to that end.

Habermas (1989, 1998) argues that a properly functioning public sphere should lead society in a progressive and moral political direction. To do so, however, the public sphere must discuss moral issues in moral terms. Most contributions to public discussion do not do so. The purpose of this article is to determine who did do so on the opinion pages of U.S. newspapers when it came to the foreign policy debate about the attack on Iraq.

To see how the U.S. public sphere functions morally, the 2003 attack on Iraq is an apt case. Part of what is meant by the term “American exceptionalism” is a tendency to consider the United States set apart from other nations in its practice of virtue. Thus, U.S. audience largely resonates when a John McCain or Sarah Palin describes the United States as “the greatest force for good in the world.” Commenting on this sentiment in relation to Iraq, Greenberg draws the logical implication that Americans generally do not consider their country an aggressive initiator of unjust wars.

Americans are enamored with our own goodness. We like to think of ourselves as peace-loving, law-abiding, virtuous—a model to the world. “America has not started a war in this century,” Newsweek proudly declared at the end of the last century, summarizing 100 years of warfare and encapsulating our belief in our purity. One reason that many people have qualms about the looming invasion of Iraq—in which the United States intends to strike first without an unambiguous
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*casus belli*—is that we imagine that we go to war only when provoked (Greenberg, 2002, p. 1).

Whatever the veracity of the U.S. self-image, Greenberg is right that to the extent that the prospective attack on Iraq was preemptive and without clear provocation, it was one that would be blatantly contrary to at least how Americans perceive their national character. Thus, the questions that ought to have been raised about the attack were not only prudential but moral and legal as well.

This article examines the range of arguments made for and against the attack on Iraq in one central forum of the public sphere, the opinion pages of the nation’s newspapers and news magazines. We looked specifically at the 2 months preceding the October 2002 Congressional authorization of the use of force. We looked at 505 different opinion pieces across 25 different newspapers and news magazines from across the political spectrum, including both secular and religious periodicals. The opinion pieces we examined consisted of both unsigned editorials, representing the positions of the publications themselves, and what have come to be called op-eds, which, originally appearing on the page opposite a paper’s editorial, represented the views of an individual contributor. Op-eds in turn included pieces of both regular and guest columnists, our interest in part being in how their viewpoints might differ. Among guest columnists, we also wanted to know which type of author appeared most frequently.

Which types of authors, we also wanted to know, were most likely to raise moral arguments about the attack? As Wessler (2008), following Page (1996), points out, “the essential question to be asked of the mass media is . . . ‘Who deliberates?’” In other words, who are the interlocutors party to the collective discourse that contextualizes national decisions? Wessler’s import here concerns not only who comprises the agora of opinionmakers, but also what they say. Wessler goes on:

Do the speakers represented in the media offer diverse viewpoints and ideas? Is one camp of a debate so dominant as to marginalize or virtually exclude all or most other views? In this perspective, the composition of the collectivity of speakers in the public forum in the mass media—in terms of their social origins and interests as well as their relative weight in the competition—is the central yardstick for assessing public deliberation (p. 1).

Previous studies have focused on diversity of sources cited in opinion columns (e.g., Le, 2002). Here, however, Wessler is speaking of something less examined but even more crucial: not the sources cited but rather the rhetorical point any sources are mobilized to express. When Wessler talks of diversity, he has in mind particularly partisan differences. But another kind of diversity is also important, diversity of register: whether an argument is embraced largely in instrumental terms or whether it engages also any moral and legal dimensions. This question is particularly important as Perrin’s (2006) data suggests that once a debate is framed in one register—that is, either instrumental or moral—that register becomes the normative way that debate can be made.
This article’s address to morality is important. While communication scholars have written much about communication ethics, that is, the ethical procedures for communicating content of any kind, they have conversely written much less about moral discourse, that is, the communication of content that is specifically ethical in nature (Craig, 2000). Of course, since Aristotle, ethics has always been a subject of rhetorical analysis. Thus, early on, Wallace (1963) attempted to rally contemporary rhetoricians with the claim that just as rhetoric is about good public reasoning, good public reasoning is often about ethics. Consequently, there has been a small but steady stream of rhetorical analysis in this tradition (e.g., Condit, 1987, 2009; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2009; Shogan, 2006). Nevertheless, Condit (2009) still faults contemporary rhetoricians too of slighting the ethical dimension.

Different explanations have been offered for the general neglect of the ethical dimension in communication theory. Condit (2009) suggests that communication scholars fear that objectivity and neutrality will be compromised by address to ethical issues. As indicated, Condit (1987) further suggests that a social scientific neglect of ethics is part of a broader, societal trend that she and Luckmann (1997) independently term the privatization of morality, that is, the retreat of morality along with religion from the public to the private sphere. The result is a morally naked public square.

On the basis of her research at the individual level of analysis, Lamont (1994) finds morality privatized more among Americans than the French. Americans are wont to think that a moral foreign policy will emanate naturally from the intrinsic goodness of their country and its leaders. On the contrary, national behavior will be consistently moral only if citizens actively see to it. That task begins with the articulation of moral commitment in the public sphere. It, therefore, becomes important to know which voices are most likely to champion moral principle and where they likely are to be found. Thus, our research questions were two:

RQ1. What is the distribution of author types in different segments of print journalism?
RQ2. What difference if any does author type make to moral content?

Opinion pieces and the public sphere

Public debate takes a variety of forms. It includes political leaders making speeches or just commenting informally to the press. It includes the protest activities of social movement organizations. The opinion pages of the press are also one major forum in which public debate takes place. Together, these and kindred practices constitute what Habermas (1989, 1994) calls “the public sphere,” and others, like Warner (2005), “publics and counterpublics.” As such, these forums are an institutionalized site of citizen discourse operating between the state and market. Ideally at least, in such publics, citizens from all levels of the social hierarchy abandon their official ranks to come together as equals to discuss and debate the common good.
As one of the most influential publics, newspaper opinion pieces are an important site where society reflexively talks to itself. In opinion pieces, elites at any rate speak rationally to each other, to government, and to any of the general public reading along. Thus, if opinion pieces are not the only domain constituting the American public sphere, they do represent that important part of the public sphere constituted by America’s print media. As Sommer and Maycroft (2010) argue, opinion pieces function as powerful agenda setters, shaping not only what policy makers think but also what they think about. This ability to guide public debate imbues opinion pieces with special power. Source and opinion diversity in the opinion pages affects the breadth of what has been called society’s democratic imagination, that is, the range of political ideas that can be publicly embraced and mobilized (Perrin, 2006).

Although Belmonte (2008) describes newspaper opinion pieces as a “Cinderella genre,” that is, one that had been overlooked, certainly, for a while now, they have been claiming more attention from communication scholars (e.g., Cohen, 2007; Day & Golan, 2005; Golan & Wanta, 2004; Goldin, 1990; Kowalchuk & Mclaughlin, 2009). One particular interest has been the different author categories that speak on foreign policy. Looking at discussion in The New York Times during the first Iraq War, Page (1996), for example, found that 22% of pieces were unsigned editorials and another 44% were written by regular columnists. Among the guest columnists, academics contributed roughly 8% of total columns, politicians contributed 9%, and Think Tank affiliates 7%. Page neglects, however, to tell us how specifically their opinions differed but merely observes that in all cases only a narrow range of considerations were aired, mostly mirroring official positions.

More recently, Golan and Wanta (2004) examined The New York Times op-eds for opinions on the Middle East and Israel before and after the September 11th attacks. They examined both author type and content. They found that the content of the op-eds varied ideologically, with the regular columnists offering both more positive and more negative opinions and the guest columnists remaining more neutral. While they found a diverse range of opinions, with the more extreme views coming from the newspaper itself, they found little diversity among the authors of the guest columns, 86% of which were written by either U.S. or Israeli politicians or experts.

Subsequently, on the topics of the death penalty, gay marriage, and affirmative action written in The New York Times and Washington Post, Day and Golan (2005) found 52% of guest columns written by academics, 32% by advocates, 9% by politicians, and 2% written by others. Day and Golan were again interested to find out whether the op-eds differed in perspective from the unsigned editorials. What they found was that the opinions differed very little between the guest contributors and the regular columnists. The lack of opinion diversity they found was so striking that they were prompted to write, “The opinions of guest contributors clearly reinforces those of the columnists.” In our data, however, we will examine how a more nuanced analysis of guest columnists reflects a diversity of opinion types, where some continue to echo the regular columnists but others offer distinctly different perspectives.
The instrumentalization and privatization of morality

For Habermas (1989, 1998), as well as for the entire Frankfurt School, one of the problems of modernity is that moral and values rationality is increasingly eroded. In part, so it is argued, values rationality is increasingly displaced by the ever growing hegemony of instrumental or technical rationality, which tends finally to instrumentalize even morality itself. Compounding the problem is that with modernity’s increasing pluralism, lost is a common metaphysic (Habermas, 1998) or what Taylor (1989) speaks of as a moral ontology. The result is the fragmentation of moral perspectives described by MacIntyre (1984), with different sectors of the public adhering to very different ethical principles. Consequently, to communicate effectively across moral divides, the tendency is to dispense with moral reasoning altogether in favor of instrumental considerations common to all.

Habermas (1975) speaks of this tendency as the colonization of the lifeworld by technical rationality. Condit (1987), Luckmann (1997), and Porpora and Nikoalev (2008) call the pattern the privatization of morality. The privatization of morality is seen as one consequence of the privatization of religion. The privatization of religion refers to the contraction of religion from the public sphere to the private sphere, where it becomes exclusively a personal lifestyle with no broader social consequences (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Luckmann, 1997). The privatization of morality means that with modernity, morality, too, like religion, retreats from the public sphere, maintaining residence solely in the private sphere. In a sense, morality comes to be regarded as the province of individual rather than social relations.

Under such circumstances, in fact, it becomes actually normative to refrain from discussing macromoral matters in moral terms. Moral silence about macrosocial matters that actually are moral reinforces the norm against framing those matters in moral terms, in turn furthering the privatization of morality.

Moral versus prudential discourse

Although space does not permit us to develop fully the distinction between moral and prudential discourse, enough can be said for the purposes at hand. Prudential discourse involves reasoning oriented toward actors’ self-interest and own well-being. As such, prudential discourse is (a) egocentric, (b) instrumental, and (c) oriented toward contingencies. The egocentric nature of prudential reasoning is not necessarily what we usually call selfish but only oriented toward the actor’s own welfare. Where the actor in question is the nation as a whole, as in the case of foreign policy, prudential argumentation would refer to national self-interest. The instrumental aspect of prudential reasoning refers to what Weber (1997) called Zweck rationality, meaning the evaluation of different means to accomplish a given end. Among other things, such evaluation involves comparing what each action will cost the actor against its likely benefits. It is this weighing of costs against benefits that orients prudential discourse around contingencies. Actions advised in prudential
discourse are contingent upon favorable ratios of benefits to costs. An example is the question of whether the use of torture against terrorists is worth the damage it might do to the American image in the world.

Moral discourse adopts what philosophers sometimes call the “moral point of view” (Baier, 1965; Frankena, 1973), which may also encompass legal considerations (Frankena, 1973; Habermas, 1998). That an attack on Iraq would violate international law is both legal and moral. In contrast with prudential reason, discourse taking a moral or legal point of view is normative. Normative thinking, a form of what Weber (1997) called Wert or values rationality, is not calculative, not concerned with means and ends but, rather, with affirmation of or conformity to certain values or principles. Thus, acting out of principle despite great personal cost is an instance of Wert rationality.

Within moral discourse, an important distinction inheres between utilitarian and deontological forms of argument. Moral utilitarianism frames arguments in terms of what serves the “greater good.” Bush’s claim that “the world would be better off without Saddam Hussein” is of this type. In contrast, deontological considerations stipulate moral requirements, that is, what morally (or legally) must or must not be done. The legality of a unilateral attack on Iraq is a deontological consideration. Where deontological considerations are thought to hold, which may be a matter of dispute, they are independent of consequences. Thus, from a deontological perspective, there are some means—in the modern period until recently, torture indisputably would have been one—that no ends can morally justify.

Whether utilitarian or deontological, moral discourse further differs from prudential discourse in being impersonal or nonegoistic. Actors discussing the morally right thing to do are no longer asking how costly or beneficial alternative actions are to themselves. Thus, when as above, Bush claims the world would be better off without Saddam Hussein, he is citing the interests of the world as a whole rather than the specific interests of the United States. Because conformity to moral norms is an end in itself, moral reasoning, as Kant observed, is categorical rather than contingent on personal costs and benefits. If actors are observant of certain moral norms, then they consider those moral norms binding on them regardless of personal cost.

In contrast with prudential discourse then, moral discourse is (a) normative, (b) impersonal or nonegoistic, and (c) categorical rather than contingent on personal costs and benefits.

Methods

Five hundred and five opinion pieces were selected using the search terms Iraq and War between August 15 and October 15, 2002. This corpus was not a sample. It was instead all the opinion pieces written in the 25 periodicals canvassed during that period that featured the words “Iraq” and “war” and which dealt with that topic. The period was pivotal. August 2002 was when the Bush administration began explicitly
voicing its intention to attack Iraq, and October 2002 was when the U.S. Congress formally authorized the president to use force for that purpose.

We chose the 25 newspapers and news magazines so as to span the political spectrum, including both secular and religious publications. We then grouped these publications into five categories of what we expected to be like-minded ideology:

- **Secular Left** (24 pieces): *American Prospect*, *In These Times*, *The Nation*, *The Progressive*
- **Religious Left** (12 pieces): *Commonweal*, *Tikkun*, *The Christian Century*

How did we group the publications? One need not do a content analysis to determine that *Commentary*, *The Weekly Standard*, and the *National Review* are conservative publications or, conversely, that in comparison with the elite and mainstream press, publications like *In These Times*, *The Nation*, and *Tikkun* are decidedly left. They are well-known and marketed as such. There might be disagreement about our placement of the *Wall Street Journal* (*WSJ*) with the right-wing press. Although the *WSJ* is certainly an elite publication, its opinion pages are very different from the other elite publications and more in line with the smaller, right-wing publications. Because our interest was in the type of argument entertained by different ideological perspectives rather than the status or circulation size of the source, it made sense to classify the *WSJ* as we did. On the right, religious and secular publications were collapsed because the religious publications ran only two pieces on the war during the time period.

Following Entman (2006), pieces were coded for the presence or absence of individual argumentative points, assertions, or assertion-types. However, whereas Entman coded only whether such points were for or against a given foreign policy, here the actual semantic content of the points was also coded. Fifty-six such argumentative points were identified both from a first reading of the pieces and from such other sites in the broader debate as presidential pronouncements. The most frequently cited of these are presented in Table 1 along with their interrater reliability statistics. These arguments include, for example, the most frequently cited arguments for war espoused by the Bush administration such as the need to disarm Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction or Saddam’s connection with terrorists. Such arguments are prudential in their concern with the interests of America or its citizens. Prudential arguments against war included the failure of Iraq to pose an imminent threat and the likelihood that a war would provoke further terrorist counterattacks (both presented in Table 1).
Table 1  Arguments About Iraq War Most Cited in News Opinion Columns and Their Interrater Reliabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prudential or neutral arguments</th>
<th>Overall frequency (%)</th>
<th>% Agreement (%)</th>
<th>I (lower bound)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disarmament of weapons of mass destruction</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddam’s link with terrorism</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts not proven</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War with Iraq will distract from war on terrorism</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prudent to get congressional/U.N. approval</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacking may provoke counterattacks that may otherwise not have occurred</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have not exhausted other options</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq is not an imminent threat</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor postwar plans</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral or legal (normative) arguments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brutality of the regime-dictatorship; regime change; liberation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddam violated U.N. resolutions/uphold international law</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddam is evil, crazy, demonic</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War to promote democracy in region</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War will put American lives at risk</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War will create civilian casualties</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestically, President not legally entitled to initiate war</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack would be illegal internationally, no U.N. authorization</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit invocation of right to self-defense</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to Just War Theory (JWT)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unjust per JWT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such prudential arguments for and against war represent an argument style that is purely pragmatic in nature. They concern the costs and benefits of an attack. While these arguments were without doubt important in the overall debate about war, they fail to address the true human cost of war both to soldiers and citizens alike, and they tend to overlook the social and cultural degradation inflicted by combat. Prudential arguments ignore the moral underpinnings that are inevitably involved in all acts of war.

Arguments that address moral concerns are normative in nature. Unlike prudential arguments, they are not framed in terms of national interest but in terms of...
universal principle or general good. Those arguing morally in favor of going to war cite, for example, concerns about the brutality of Saddam’s regime; they likewise might invoke an explicit right to self-defense (see Table 1). Those arguing morally against war warn of the danger to Iraqi civilians. They describe the contemplated attack as a war of aggression. Some even refer to Just War Theory (JWT), which, originally developed by the medieval Catholic Church, remains, even for secular thinkers, the most comprehensive catalog of criteria for determining whether or not a war is justified (Walzer, 2000). In all cases, the concern of moral arguments is not with costs and benefits to the United States but the general good or with what is right and just.

Clearly, the argumentative points being coded were not concrete words but more abstract ideas. To determine the interrater reliability of the coding, two coders cocoded a 10% sample of 50 pieces drawn randomly from the larger corpus on the attack. The percent agreement for the individual argumentative points was uniformly high. For only one point on the war—Saddam is dangerous to international security—was agreement under 80%; it was accordingly dropped from analysis.

Assessing interrater reliability beyond chance was more difficult because the distributions were very highly skewed (see Neuendorf, 2002; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999; Xenos & Foot, 2005, for a discussion of the issues). We employed Perreault and Leigh’s (1989) $I$, which Neuendorf describes as a parametric approach “which does not contrast observed agreement with chance agreement but rather takes into account the notion of a true population level of agreement” (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 162). Especially for data as skewed as some of ours, where the percentage distribution of a variable’s values is not known a priori, Perreault and Leigh’s $I$ makes more sense than Cohen’s $\kappa$ or Krippendorf’s $\alpha$ (see Perreault & Leigh, 1989, for discussion). As an estimate of the true reliability, we calculated confidence intervals around $I$, with Table 1 presenting the intervals’ lower bounds along with percent agreement for each variable.

To test the significance of the relationships between arguments and author type, we used one-way ANOVA.

Who speaks?

For the distribution of Times opinion pieces preceding the first Iraq war, Page (1996, p. 36) found that two thirds were either from regular columnists or the editorial staff. Similarly, for the second Iraq war, we found 75% of the Times opinion pieces authored by editors or columnists. The opinion dominance of the journalism establishment continues when we look beyond the Times to all the newspapers we examined (see Table 2). Almost 75% of all opinions offered came from newspaper columnists or editorials. In short, the opinion pages of print journalism leave little room for public voice beyond that of print journalism itself.

Who are the voices heard in the guest columns? Here, too, we find general consistency with some variance by topic. On the domestic topics that they monitored, Day and Golan found 52% of guest columns written by academics, 32% by advocates, 9%
Table 2 Who Speaks Where? Author Type by News Source Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author type</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Mainstream</th>
<th>Elite</th>
<th>Secular left</th>
<th>Religious left</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Editorials</td>
<td>34.8% (32)</td>
<td>33.6% (42)</td>
<td>20.6% (49)</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>16.7% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columnists</td>
<td>39.2% (36)</td>
<td>39.2% (49)</td>
<td>57.0% (135)</td>
<td>47.8% (11)</td>
<td>33.3% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>14.1% (13)</td>
<td>4.8% (6)</td>
<td>12.2% (29)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite academics</td>
<td>7.6% (7)</td>
<td>8.8% (11)</td>
<td>8.9% (21)</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>50.0% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4.3% (4)</td>
<td>13.6% (17)</td>
<td>1.3% (3)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (92)</td>
<td>100% (125)</td>
<td>100% (237)</td>
<td>100% (23)</td>
<td>100% (17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

by politicians, and 2% written by “others.” Academics seem much less frequently represented on foreign policy issues. Page (1996) found 12% of foreign policy opinion pieces in *The New York Times* authored by academics, and we found the same percentage authored by academics across the entirety of the 25 publications we examined. Of course, on both wars, politicians also accounted for <10% of total opinion. All “others” together accounted for under 5% of the opinion expressed we examined.

How much diversity is there when it comes to gender? We observe a remarkable consistency over time. Over 20 years after Wolf’s (1995) study, on the foreign policy topics we examined, the agora of opinion still remains a men’s club. Only 5 op-eds out of 91 (5.5%) in the *Post* were written by women. On the surface, the *Times* seemed better. Roughly 22% of *Times* op-eds were written by women. However, out of the 13 *Times* op-eds on the war written by women, 12 were written by Maureen Dowd. The *Times* opinion pages thus did not present much female opinion beyond Maureen Dowd.

Female representation does not get much greater when we look more broadly at the full corpus of sources we examined. Across the 25 sources for which we coded, 86% of the opinions were male.

**Who speaks where?**

Table 2 shows how the different author categories were distributed across the different news source categories. A number of different patterns are evident. First, the heavy reliance on unsigned editorials cuts across all categories, except the religious left. Aside from the religious publications, the percentage is actually lowest in the elite press. The elite press on the contrary relies most on regular columnists.

Second, politicians show up more than 10% of the time in only two categories: the elite press and the right. In contrast with their presence on the right, politicians do not show up at all in either the secular or religious left. Instead, the left seems to make the most use of academics. Whereas academics account for <8% of the commentary in right-wing publications, they account for over 26% of the commentary in the publications of the secular left and 50% of the commentary in the publications of the religious left. Of course, although academics account for just under 9% of the opinion
in the elite press, it is the elite press that in absolute terms publishes academics most frequently. In fact, it is in the elite press that 41% of the academics appear.

Again, we come to the location of the female voice. In percentage terms, women received most representation in the nonelite mainstream press (25.9%). The women who are being published are overwhelmingly regular columnists. Regular female columnists represented over 85% of the female voice. Only 15% of the academics were female. It seems that if the female voice is to be heard on such topics, it is mostly through the institution of regular columnists.

**Does it matter?**

Who is speaking and where is supposed to matter because of what is said. The whole point of diversity in voices is for there to be a diversity of opinion. Was there then in the cases examined here a diversity of opinion corresponding to the diversity of voices?

In terms of gender, recall that there were very few women contributing, and these were overwhelmingly the regular columnists. The spectrum of voices in this respect is thus quite curtailed. That said, we found only one statistically significant difference: 12% of pieces written by women in comparison with 4% written by men observed that the prospective attack would be an unprovoked act of aggression ($p = .041$).

With respect to author type more generally, there was an important, statistically significant pattern of differences. The pattern shows up in Table 3. Going down column one are the various kinds of argument cited. These are divided into two categories: prudential and moral. Columns two through six identify the arguments emphasized by each author category. By emphasize, we mean an emphasis within the category rather than within any individual author’s article. We mean, in other words, that the argument or point showed up in at least 9% of the pieces in that author category—although it might not have been emphasized in any one piece.

In order to make the overall pattern more visible, no entry is made for an author category if an argument did not achieve such threshold frequency. Thus, the absence of a percentage in a column does not mean necessarily the absence of address to that issue in that category but only that the issue was addressed by fewer than 9% of the cases. That category in other words did not emphasize that argument. This set-up simultaneously allows us to compare similarities as well as differences across categories.

The most important pattern to be observed in Table 3 is that, along with the heterogeneous category of “others”, the academic authors are the most consistent—and in some cases the only—ones to voice normative (i.e., moral or legal) considerations for or against war. In contrast, as in the extract from a *New York Times* editorial below, the elite press typically offered only very muted, prudential criticism of the march to war.

Vice President Dick Cheney grabbed the microphone this week to make the case for war. We’re glad the White House is talking at greater length and more specifically about Iraq, but Mr. Cheney failed to offer convincing answers to questions that give many Americans pause about using military force to oust Saddam Hussein . . . Mr. Cheney’s stern speech suggests that the Bush
Table 3 Arguments Cited in at Least 9% of News Opinion Columns by Author Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Editorials (N = 132) (%)</th>
<th>Columnists (N = 242) (%)</th>
<th>Politicians (N = 48) (%)</th>
<th>Academics (N = 53) (%)</th>
<th>Others (N = 24) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prudential arguments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disarmament of weapons of mass destruction*</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddam’s link with terrorism</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts have not been proven to citizens of the world/war</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War with Iraq will distract from the war on terrorism</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prudent to get Congressional/U.N. support*</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacking may provoke counterattacks that may otherwise not</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have occurred*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have not exhausted other options**</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq is not an imminent threat</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral or legal (normative) arguments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brutality of the regime-dictatorship; regime change; liberation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddam violated U.N. resolutions/Uphold international law***</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddam is evil, crazy, demonic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War will put American lives at risk</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War will create civilian casualties**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestically President not legally entitled to initiate war**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack would be illegal internationally, no U.N. authorization**</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit invocation of right to self-defense***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War would be aggressive, unprovoked*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to Just War Theory (JWT)***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unjust as per Just War Theory (JWT)**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Absence of percentages in this table does not necessarily indicate no citations, but only fewer than 10%.

*p ≤ .05. **p ≤ .01. ***p ≤ .001.
administration has set a course for military action against Iraq. It still has to persuade the country that war is warranted (New York Times Editorial, 2002, p. 18).

Essentially, the Times faults the Bush administration for failing to overcome the American public’s failure to be fully persuaded of the warrant for war. The way the Times has formulated this complaint suggests the considerations at issue were entirely prudential. Presumably, were there also strong moral reasons to oppose war, Americans would have been given more than just “pause” about initiating it. The argument below, offered in the Washington Post by former National Security Advisor Samuel R. Berger, is likewise purely prudential.

Doing nothing is not an option. But neither is failing to seek the broadest possible international support. We don’t have time to waste, but we do have time to try to outmaneuver Hussein before we have to outmuscle him . . . For if the threat is real, so too are the risks of military action – and each will be substantially greater if this is seen as an essentially U.S.–British assault, without broad international endorsement (Berger, 2002, p. A19).

Note what Berger is and is not saying. Like many in the elite press, Berger argues not for the need for UN approval, which would, indeed, be a moral consideration, but for international support, which downgrades that consideration from moral requirement to prudent strategy. By contrast, writing in Tikkun magazine, academic and Rabbi Michael Lerner condemns just such moral evasion.

That, by the way, is why the U.S. approach to the United Nations is so contemptible. Even those who call for the United States to go through the UN to achieve its ends in Iraq argue that doing so will make it easier for us to build a better alliance to get our way. Very few argue what needs to be said: That we have no business imposing our views on the rest of the world (Lerner, 2002, p. 12–13).

In favor of war, the academic category was the only one to emphasize a U.S. moral right to self-defense. Against the war, together with the heterogeneous category labeled “others,” academics were the only ones to speak more than 9% of the time about the domestic illegality of an attack and the only ones to suggest more than 10% of the time that the war would be aggressive and unprovoked. Exemplary in this regard is the pronouncement of Marxist historian Howard Zinn, writing in the Boston Globe.

The Bush administration’s plan for preemptive war against Iraq so flagrantly violates both international law and common morality that we need a real national debate (Zinn, 2002, p. A11).

Not adulterating his statement with any admixture of prudence, Zinn holds decisive the considerations of morality and legality. Similarly, philosopher Talcott Brewer below, writing in the Washington Post.

Our nation now finds itself on the verge of initiating war against another sovereign nation. We have not been attacked by Iraq, and we have thus far failed to produce convincing evidence that Iraq has aided, or plans to aid, those who have attacked us. If we go to war, we will be the initiators of aggression (Brewer, 2002, p. A15).
Brewer identifies the decisive moral consideration that ought to have preoccupied American discourse about any planned attack on Iraq. Yet, outside such academic discourse or the religious press, there was precious little moral reflection emanating from the “world’s greatest source of good.” It was, finally, the academics alone who emphasized the war’s possible civilian casualties, and only they who referenced JWT.

The distinctiveness of opinion among author groups is evident in Table 3 when one examines the pattern of blank cells and the author types to which they correspond. Although those in the “others” category sometimes speak of certain moral concerns with even greater frequency than the academics, across the moral issues, it is the academics who most consistently comment. It is the academics, and less frequently the “others”, who often are alone in moral emphasis.

To the extent that legality and morality matter in war specifically and in the conduct of foreign affairs generally, the voice of academics and “others” seems to be a vital one. Before reaching that conclusion, however, a final check is necessary. We saw from Table 2 that academics were disproportionately represented in the pages of the secular and particularly the religious left. It could be that the voice of morality expressed by the academics is due less to their academic status than to the organs from which they are writing.

To some extent this suspicion is true, but not entirely. When the publications of the religious left are removed, academics were to a lesser extent but still more likely statistically to voice moral considerations. For example, even without the religious publications, academics were more likely to cite the domestic illegality of the proposed attack \((p = .011)\); the unprovoked aggression of an attack \((p = .013)\); the cost to Iraqi civilians \((p = .049)\); the lack of moral justification for attack \((p = .019)\); and an explicit right to self-defense \((p = .002)\).

Similarly, even when we limit the analysis just to the elite and mainstream publications, some of the academic effect remains. Specifically, the academics remain statistically more likely to say that the war is illegal domestically \((p = .028)\); that it is illegal internationally \((p = .026)\); that it will endanger Iraqi civilians \((p = .042)\); and that the attack lacks moral justification \((p = .005)\). The only other difference in this case is that the category of “others” champions the moral case even more frequently.

**Conclusion**

Some of what we found in this study was not unexpected. For example, most opinion pieces in the press—76%—in our corpus originated from the news organ itself in the form of editors of regular columnists. The space for other contributors to the public debate is correspondingly small. On the matters we examined, women were particularly underrepresented. Less than 16% of all those who wrote on the war were women. Of the women who wrote, over 85% were regular newspaper columnists. Thus, it seems that women’s voice is predominantly expressed when women appear as regular columnists.

Even within the academic category, women infrequently appeared. What voice remains for women may well be muted as there was little difference between the
opinions of the women and those of the men. These findings indicate that past patterns are still with us, although the cause may owe more to women’s initiative than to gate-keeping.

In terms of our first research question, we found that the two major categories of contributors to guest columns were politicians and academics. The nonelite mainstream press relied more on other types of contributors (13.6%) compared with the elite press (1.3%). Politicians appeared mostly in the right-wing organs (14%), closely followed by the elite press (12%). Politicians did not appear at all in the left-wing organs, whether religious or secular. It was, on the other hand, the left-wing press that made most use of academics, 26% in the secular left and 50% in the religious left.

It was, however, our finding related to our second research question that was most striking. In the only recent studies done on this topic, Golan and Wanta (2004) and Day and Golan (2005) found little difference between editorials and regular columnists on the one hand and guest columnists on the other.

The previous results may have been due in part to the topics the previous studies examined and in part to the analysis of guest columnists as an undifferentiated category. In contrast, looking at the topic we did, along the dimension we did and differentiating among guest columnists as we did, we found a significant difference among author types. Our topic was an American-initiated attack that many considered unprovoked and therefore unethical. Our topic, therefore, had a strong moral component, and that moral component was one we specifically examined. When we differentiated among the guest columnists by type, the academics leapt out as the distinct voice of morality.

Together with the heterogeneous category labeled “other,” the academics were the ones to emphasize such moral considerations as the aggressive and unprovoked nature of the attack, its illegality, and its cost in Iraqi civilian casualties. The academics were the only ones frequently to employ JWT. Although academics were correlated with the religious press and so derived some of their moral voice from working with that association, we found their moral voice remained even when we looked exclusively at secular publications.

In retrospect, perhaps it is not so surprising to find academics serving in such capacity. Although academics certainly cannot be equated with intellectuals (Fuller, 2006)—both because not all academics are and because not all who are are academics—academics certainly fall within the two groups that Gouldner (1979) identified with the class: critical intellectuals and technical intelligentsia.

There is a large literature about who intellectuals are, and how they are supposed to function (Kurzman & Owens, 2002). Many, like sociologist Talcott Parsons, identify intellectuals as the upholders of “universal standards” (Kurzman & Owens, 2002). Intellectuals themselves historically saw themselves in utopian terms, declaring as did the original Dreyfusards that “we stand for ideal interests solely, for we have no corporate selfishness and wield no power of corruption” (Kurzman & Owens, 2002, p. 65). Perhaps, even more today, as Gouldner (1985) put it, in an age of
secularization, it befalls intellectuals to be both the stewards of morality and those who debate the moral merits of a society’s actions.

As we said, much has been written about who intellectuals are and how they are supposed to function. Less systematically studied or described is what intellectuals actually say in public debate. Again, we do not say that all academics are intellectuals, but the academics and “others” in our sample definitely assumed the mantle of intellectual responsibility. They were a distinctly moral voice otherwise absent from the discourse of foreign policy deliberation. It is an important and salutary discovery to make.

References

美国报纸言论版的道德批判之声

【摘要：】

本文采集 25 种美国报纸和新闻杂志，探讨在 2003 年美国攻击伊拉克前几周言论版内容的多样性。它旨在回答以下三个问题：1）这些意见稿的作者是谁？2）不同的作者在不同的期刊的分布如何？3）作者类型在德德内容的公开辩论中是否起到任何作用？当涉及到像战争这样的宏观道德领域，这些问题特别重要。哈贝马斯期待公共领域的正常运转，人们并以道德的方式进行辩论。本研究探讨何种声音为此做出贡献。
La voix morale critique dans les pages d’opinion des journaux américains

Résumé : Cet article examine la diversité du contenu des pages d’opinion de 25 différents journaux et magazines d’information américains dans les semaines menant à l’attaque américaine de 2003 en Irak. Il cherche à répondre à trois questions : (1) qui sont les auteurs derrière ces lettres d’opinion?, (2) comment les différents types d’auteurs sont-ils distribués à travers différents périodiques? et (3) le type d’auteur joue-t-il quelque rôle que ce soit lorsqu’il s’agit de contribuer un contenu moral au débat public? Ces questions sont importantes, surtout quand il s’agit d’enjeux macro-moraux comme la guerre. Habermas comptait sur une sphère publique fonctionnant correctement pour débattre de tels enjeux d’une manière morale. Cette étude examine quelles sont les voix qui contribuent à cet objectif.

Mots clés : théorie critique et culturelle, théorie critique des médias, discours, éthique, médias et guerre, démocratie médiatique, communication politique
Die kritische moralische Stimme in den Kommentaren U.S.-amerikanischer Tageszeitungen


Schlüsselbegriffe: Kritische und Kulturtheorie, Kritische Theorie der Medien, Diskurs, Ethik, Medien und Krieg, Mediendemokratie, Politische Kommunikation
미국 신문 오피니언 페이지들에서의 비판적인 도덕적 의견

요약

본 논문은, 2003년 미국의 이라크 공격에 이르기까지의 몇주 기간동안의 25개 미국 신문들과 미국 잡지들의 오피니언 페이지들에 대한 내용의 다양성을 분석한 것이다. 본 논문은 세 가지 질문에 대한 답을 찾고자 하였는데, 이들은 1) 이러한 오피니언 기사를 쓴 사람들은 누구인가, 2) 다른 신문과 잡지에 걸쳐 저자들의 형태들이 어떻게 다른가, 그리고 3) 저자의 형태가 대중적 토론에 대해 도덕적 내용을 기고할 때 주요 역할을 하는가 등이다. 이러한 질문들은 특히 전쟁과 같은 매크로한 도덕적 문제들에 있어 중요하다. 하버마스는 이러한 문제들을 논쟁하는데 있어 적절히 기능하는 공론장을 기대하였다. 본 연구는 어떤 의견들이 이러한 목적에 기여했는지 연구하였다.
La Voz Moral Crítica en las Páginas de Opinión de los Periódicos Estadounidenses

**Resumen:** Este ensayo examina la diversidad en el contenido de las páginas de opinión de 25 periódicos y revistas de noticias diferentes de los Estados Unidos en las semanas previas al ataque de los EE.UU. a Irak en el 2003. Busca responder a tres preguntas: 1) quiénes son los autores que escriben estas piezas de opinión? 2) Cómo están los distintos tipos de autores distribuidos a través de los diferentes periódicos? Y 3) Juega algún rol el tipo de autor cuando se trata de contribuir al contenido moral en el debate público? Estas preguntas son importantes, especialmente cuando se trata de asuntos morales a nivel macro como la guerra. Habermas esperaba una esfera pública funcionando en forma apropiada para debatir esos asuntos en una forma moral. Este estudio examina cuáles voces contribuyeron a ese final.

**Palabras claves:** Teoría crítica y cultural, Teoría crítica de los medios, Discurso, Ética, los Medios y la guerra, Medios democráticos, Comunicación política.