

## Critical perspectivism

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## **Critical perspectivism: educating for a moral response to media**

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**Abstract** (146 words)

Social media is a key player in contemporary political, cultural and ethical debates. Given much of online engagement is characterised by impulsive and emotive responses, and social media platforms encourage a form of sensationalism that promotes epistemic vices, this paper explores whether there is space online for *moral* responses. This paper defends the need for moral engagement with online information and others, using an attitude entitled 'critical perspectivism'. Critical perspectivism sees a moral agent adopt a critical eye, supplemented by a caring disposition, when engaging with interactive digital media and the stories of others that are technologically mediated. Such an ethical attitude is required given our globally connected, technological world features new versions of recognisable challenges to democracy and the reasonableness of citizens. There is a vital role for educationalists to play in teaching and making space and time for students to practice being critically perspectival.

**Keywords:** moral education; critical perspectivism; digital citizens; technology; social media; epistemic vices

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## Critical perspectivism: educating for a moral response to media

### Introduction

We are spending an increasing number of hours per day on digital media. In this online space, we receive and engage with more images and information than ever previously. In order to grab our attention in this crowded space, headlines are shocking and sensationalist, images are salacious, and advertising is personalised, tailored to match our individual browsing preferences and google searches. Mobile technology has ensured our world has become a global marketplace; connected and 'datafied'. Our social media likes and shares and our online retail activities correspond directly to global e-commerce interests, National political and voting preferences, as well as our hopes, fears and aspirations. Given much of online engagement is characterised by short, quick (instantaneous) responses and gut instincts, I am interested in where there is space online for *moral* responses, and what features of online engagement hinder such moral responses. I advocate for moral engagement with online information and others, using an attitude I call 'critical perspectivism'. Critical perspectivism sees a moral agent adopt a critical eye, supplemented by a caring disposition, when engaging with interactive digital media and the stories of others that are technologically mediated.

In this paper I shall firstly diagnose a complex problem by explaining how we are now most certainly situated in a globally connected, technological world which features new versions of recognisable challenges to democracy and the reasonableness of citizens. While the issues themselves are not new, some of the means used for persuasion, manipulation, and fear mongering and their reach and impact are, particularly given the technological form they adopt. After diagnosing this particular problem in relation to social and online media, I will outline my suggested response to this problem. It is only a partial response, because I focus on the response that is possible by individuals. This individual response must be supported by collective, social, and governmental policies and procedures in order to properly respond to the problem I have diagnosed. Thirdly, I shall detail and defend critical perspectivism as an important, future-oriented approach, followed by considering some challenges to being able to adopt this attitude. The challenges I note are in the form of intellectual vices as well as some of the features of social media platforms that enhance and encourage such epistemic vices. I will conclude by responding to these objections and suggesting that educationalists make space and time for students to practice being critically perspectival. It is a difficult yet worthwhile challenge that is faced by moral agents who wish to engage ethically with online and social media; a challenge educators must tackle themselves while seeking to support their students in doing the same.

### Digitized and datafied

According to Mary Meeker<sup>1</sup>'s 2018 Internet Trends report, adults in the USA are spending on average 5.9 hours per day on digital media, an amount that has steadily grown from 2.7 hours per day in 2008 (Constine, 2018). Of that time, laptop usage has remained constant around 2.1 hours per day, with the growth attributed to the number of hours spent on a mobile device. Mobile devices are easier than ever to use; they are personalised and helpful, wifi is quicker and more reliable, and there is more competition so costs are lowered and increased services are on offer. Messaging software and applications (apps) continue to grow in

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<sup>1</sup> a legendary analyst with Morgan Stanley.

popularity. With new functionality and capabilities, Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger, Wechat and Instagram usage soared from 2011-2017, with Twitter not far behind. Given how much we use mobile technology, it is unsurprising that social media is driving product discovery and commerce, with e-commerce having a significant impact on the retail industry. Consumers spend more time online and less in physical stores, particularly as mobile shopping is increasingly personalised, entertaining and even gamified and social. Worldwide, there are over 2.38 billion monthly active users of Facebook (as of March 31 2019, *techcrunch*; Facebook 4/24/19), with 307 million Europeans on Facebook (Constine, 2018) and the largest demographic being 25 – 34 year olds (29.7%). Half the world's population (3.6 billion people) is connected to the internet (Marr, 2018) and 300 million photos are uploaded every day (*techcrunch*; Gizmodo). 95% of American teenagers have access to a smartphone, and 45% say they are online 'almost constantly' (Pew Research Center, 2018). These statistics demonstrate that users of social media represent a significant market share which global businesses simply cannot afford to ignore. They also signify how effective it is to sway voters, making clever (manipulative) use of digital media (Tomlinson, 2019, p.12, citing Moore and Ramsey, 2017). With digital media effecting global economy and national politics, its impact cannot be overstated.

In a time of fake news, truthiness and alternative facts, we need citizens to be discerning, critical, and ethical. Critical thinking skills are sorely needed in contemporary society. When it comes to multimedia, we need to discriminate between reliable sources of information and misinformation while engaging ethically with Web 2.0. Web 2.0 (a buzz word introduced around 2003-4, replacing the World Wide Web - WWW, retrospectively called Web 1.0) is characterised by increased participation as pervasive network connectivity and communication channels encourage greater use and collaboration. The social nature of Web 2.0 is evident as users are also content creators and curators. As existential threats unite us in fear of pandemics, climate change and extremist factions, the antidote to negative news and clickbait media is a positive approach that seeks connection and community. Teaching people to engage critically and compassionately with others via online media is of vital importance, yet educational environments have not kept pace with rapid advancements in technology.

### **A moral response**

In the face of our ubiquitous use of mass art, media, and social media, people need to learn how to use such tools critically and ethically if participation in society is to be democratic and fair. Democratic in this sense refers to truly listening to diverse voices even while recognising a common humanity amongst contextual and individual differences. Ethical here refers to treating others with compassion while maintaining a respect for truth and knowledge based on sound evidence. Seeking truth in the face of such multiplicity may sound naively optimistic or idealistic, or downright old fashioned. Yet it is still the case that the human experience is one characterised by shared features; notably the emotions, hopes and fears we have in common, as well as the mutual interest we have in ensuring the planet is protected for future generations. The global world is more connected than ever previously and the language of images prevalent in the media cut across nationalistic and geographical boundaries.

As ‘global citizens’<sup>2</sup>, then, we need to listen to one another and disagree *reasonably* in public spaces, while also seeking solutions to problems that affect us all (for instance, the effects of pandemics, climate change and global warming). The global citizen is someone who recognises others as embodying more similarities rather than differences to oneself, even while taking seriously individual, social, cultural and political differences between people. In a pragmatic sense, global citizens will support policies that extend aid beyond national borders and cultivate respectful and reciprocal relationships with others regardless of geographical distance or other differences (such as those related to personal identity, such as race, religion, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, or gender identification). A moral response is one that reminds us of our connectedness and common humanity. The skills of communication, rational argumentation, critical assessment of arguments and the willingness to build upon, as opposed to solely tearing down, one another’s ideas are important, transferable skills that can be used face-to-face or online. Such skills need to be taught from an early age and then practiced until they become habitual expressions of our respect for others. They must also be supported by appropriate emotional dispositions such as care and compassion. It is these skills that will enable people to be moral agents who are able to engage ethically with mass art, media, social media and online sources of information and entertainment.

Web 2.0 is equitable in allowing low barrier access to information along with the tools and technology that enable almost anyone to communicate with almost anyone else, while also opening up a truly global market space for ideas, content, products and services. This democratization of the Internet results in a barrage of opinions and reviews that can drown out the voices of experts. There are challenges to online dialogues as McAfee notes “these public conversations and deliberations can be, however, so fragmented, decentred, and often fractious that it is hard to discern them collectively as democratic” (2015, p. 289). Online debates may be frustrating in their lack of sensitivity and nuance, as ideas are easily decontextualized and short, snappy, click-bait headlines are constructed in order to grab one’s attention in an over-crowded space. Even so, Cunningham et al are “optimistic about the potential of global technologies to create information democracy and low cost access to a whole range of knowledges” (Cunningham et al, 1997, p. 160, quoted in Edwards & Usher, 2008, p. 65). However, Edwards & Usher (2008) rightly point out that, while virtual communities may well have democratising potential, they are not inherently democratic themselves, and even though online spaces are participatory, not all forms of participation are democratic. McAfee is also keen to remind us that any political engagement online is still situated in a real world context. It is simply not the case that the Internet is a different world, even if it is a decontextualized space (2015, p. 274).

The virtual public sphere is open and accessible in an exciting new way with ideas being discussed and debated in a transparent and engaging manner. Yet the openness of the Internet also makes it a public forum that evokes criticism and trolling. At worst, unstructured discussion online is full of misinformation and promotes superstition and anti-scientism. It may allow for negative personal attacks or bullying. At best, it fosters genuine learning through expansive dialogue that respects those engaging in the discussion and encourages self-reflection. To foster the latter, we must cultivate the habits of the individual, which

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Singer (2002), Martha Nussbaum (2012), Kwame Anthony Appiah (2007), and Naomi Klein (2010; 2014) have all argued in support of the notion of the global citizen. The global citizen sees all human beings as members of a single, global community.

include critical and creative thinking, the intellectual and moral virtues, discernment and compassion.

The only way people will be civil online is if they are generally civil. The only way people will use technological tools democratically is if they are already committed to being democratic and inclusive. Such attitudes, including reasonableness and compassion, must be taught and cultivated initially *as well as* be supported in society, by policies and institutions, corporations and governments, both face-to-face and online. Digital natives describes people who have grown up with the Internet and smart technology. Familiar with the technology, digital natives must still learn how to use it in a savvy, safe and respectful manner. Significantly, most of these young people learn how to use technology and social network sites informally, through their engagement with such sites, and from their peers rather than from their parents or teachers. We ought to teach our students to engage critically with information sources and compassionately with one another so that they have the tools they'll need when out on their own in the technological world, a world that cannot be ignored or avoided without disengaging from society. This critical and compassionate approach is encapsulated by an attitude I call *critical perspectivism*.

### **Critical perspectivism**

Critical perspectivism is an ethical attitude that may be applied to processing and understanding information received from multiple sources, including multimedia. It is an attitude that requires a moral agent be critical and compassionate. To be critically perspectival means to approach information in a critically engaged way, seeking the truth by checking evidence for claims and resting belief upon sound arguments that are reflected upon logically. Yet it is more than this, as it also includes the understanding that others with diverse opinions, beliefs and agendas are fully fleshed out human beings much like ourselves. This understanding that others are *like us* in important respects, aiming at living a good life with a sense of meaning or purpose, means that even when they present claims that are biased or incorrect, we ought to approach them with compassion, even when we must, at times and only when appropriate, also be skeptical of the stories they tell us or even condemn their behaviour. This seeming tension between being caring and critical is accommodated when we acknowledge the pluralism of perspectives in the world and affirm the existence of shared values and objective truth even while noting the contextual and individual differences that exist amongst persons and their experiences.

Critical perspectivism is an attitude that explores multiple perspectives, instead of simply emotionally engaging with another's viewpoint or uncritically adopting an alternative perspective. As an attitude we can adopt, critical perspectivism encourages us to challenge what we see, the information we receive, to judge its truth value and moral import, and consider how it applies to our lives. When we are being critically perspectival, we are analysing the information and images we receive in everyday life, particularly stories and bite-sized pieces of information that bombard us as soon as we log online or use social media or switch on a news programme. By evaluating different perspectives that constantly surround us with the aim of getting closer to the truth and the facts of a situation, we are actively engaged in the process of deciding what to believe and what to value. Such judgments inform and influence behaviour, including how we treat or respond to others. Critical perspectivism highlights the importance of considering the perspective of others, and seeking to understand them and their experiences in the world while also acknowledging shared human values and experiences.

Critical perspectivism is an attitude that requires a moral agent to *slow down* and take time to carefully consider what they are being presented with; including the intellectual, factual, and emotional aspects of the situation. This is difficult given that much of social media, online media and advertising is designed to encourage users to respond quickly, usually out of an emotional reaction rather than from a considered, thoughtful point of view. It takes *effort* for a moral agent to resist and/or ignore the prominence of the online clickbait culture. In contrast to such clickbait, the attitude of critical perspectivism is asking us to be more critically engaged with the information we receive, and to *pause* before unthinkingly basing a decision on what we have been told, or routinely forwarding misinformation or unethical (vicious) messages.

Engaging critically with the ideas, stories, and images we receive, particularly online, is of vital importance and draws upon our analytical mode of processing information. Nobel Prize winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2011) contrasts this system of processing information with another, quicker mode we use, which can make us more susceptible to being gullible and falling for a trick or prank. It is the quicker mode of processing that clickbait aims at provoking, which is difficult to resist in part because it is an easier way to engage with information and images received online (and elsewhere), and because many stylistic and design choices made by companies, advertisers, software, app, and game designers deliberately encourage, promote and reward quick responses. Research within the field of psychology connects education (or lack thereof), trust (or lack thereof), and mood to gullibility (Forgas, 2007; Forgas & East, 2008). Summing up some of this research, Forgas (2017), citing Kahneman (2011), explains as follows for *The Conversation* on the eve of April's Fool's Day:

System 1 thinking is fast, automatic, intuitive, uncritical and promotes accepting anecdotal and personal information as true. This was a useful and adaptive processing strategy in our ancestral environment of small, face-to-face groups, where trust was based on life-long relationships. However, this kind of thinking can be dangerous in the anonymous online world.

System 2 thinking is a much more recent human achievement; it is slow, analytical, rational and effortful, and leads to the thorough evaluation of incoming information.

Human beings all use both intuitive (system 1) and analytic (system 2) thinking. However, it is analytic thinking that is going to be relevant and important to critical perspectivism. It is analytic thinking that allows us to be critically engaged with what we see, hear and feel. Forgas notes that if we are less trusting, or in a negative mood, we are also more likely to be critical and engage our analytic thinking. However, there are important pro-social benefits to trusting others and seeking to establish and maintain a trusting society or online community (see D'Olimpio, 2016 and 2015 for a fuller discussion on the importance of trust as a virtue that should be cultivated and educated). Importantly, education also reduces gullibility (Preece & Baxter, 2000).

If education can assist young people to become ethically engaged citizens, then it needs to be a space in which analytical thinking skills may be learnt, practised, and ultimately adopted in a habitual manner, while also encouraging relevant ethical responses. As an individual response to the problem of how to engage ethically online, these analytic thinking skills must

be flexible enough to be applied in the technological environment and consideration must be given to how to teach and encourage students to understand the need for this analytical response and the importance of applying such skills online. Yet understanding alone is insufficient; students must also be able to practise these skills and learn *how* to apply them online. Drawing upon Gilbert Ryle's distinction between *knowing that* and *knowing how*, we may know that we should engage ethically and critically online, yet we are only going to be effective at actually doing so if we also learn about the contextual application of such skills and are able to practise these.

For these reasons, I propose that moral agents adopt the attitude of critical perspectivism when engaging with social and online media and this attitude must be taught and practised in educational environments. Critical perspectivism takes Martha Nussbaum's well-known version of ethical attention, her 'loving' attitude (Nussbaum, 1990) as a starting point, but then further emphasizes the need to be critically engaged with what is technologically mediated and received online. Critical perspectivism takes into account all perspectives, including technologically conveyed viewpoints which are seemingly un-located (for instance, the Internet seems to operate in an omnipresent ether, even though they are connected to specifically located hardware and users). There is more room for deception and trickery when the source of our information is mediated via technological tools and sharing platforms that may not have as much transparency as other forms of communication. Furthermore, multimedia contain various features and constraints that are particular to the tool or platform or app used and a user must be critically engaged with such features and their effects if they are to be discerning. The smorgasbord of choice online results in it being too easy to use these tools without reflection or consideration for their impact. Given how technology connects everyone instantaneously, any such impact may be felt or witnessed on a global scale (there are several well respected online sources, including Hoax-Slayer and Snopes.com, dedicated to exposing hoaxes and scams, debunking myths and halting the dissemination of false information). The adoption of critical perspectivism as an ethically engaged attitude may be particularly useful for the moral agent who may think of themselves as a 'global citizen'.

### **Epistemic vices**

There are some difficulties in adopting the ethical attitude of critical perspectivism. As detailed above, the first is that time must be taken to engage the analytical mode of processing information. This is difficult in light of technological tools that push users to *hurry* and respond *instantaneously*, to make fast decisions and react (emotionally) rather than respond (thoughtfully and reasonably). Another central concern is the idea that, when communication is technologically mediated, people sometimes forget that they are interacting with real life others. This is where the idea of compassion becomes of paramount importance. It is not simply critical, analytical and rational thinking skills that we need good citizens to possess, it is also rational emotions such as compassion and the ability to work and play in collaborative settings alongside others.

While seeking to be reasonable, analytic and compassionate, moral agents must also take care to avoid epistemic vices. Quassim Cassam (2019) describes epistemic vices, such as arrogance, closed-mindedness, and dogmatism, as blameworthy character traits, attitudes, or ways of thinking that obstruct efforts to gain, keep, or share knowledge. On this account, there are negative epistemic consequences of epistemic vices for which the moral agent is in some sense responsible – that is, if they are aware of these vices and can possibly change or



reduce them. In this way, epistemic vices are to be differentiated from cognitive defects (which one may not be aware of or be able to alter). It is important to note that epistemic vices and virtues, along with moral vices and virtues, may hinder or help us, online as well as offline. This should not come as any surprise. Yet it is relevant to consider the specific ways in which such virtues and vices may manifest online, and whether or not they are encouraged or discouraged by specific technological tools at our disposal.

In one example, Cassam argues that knowers have responsibilities that include not dismissing challenges to their beliefs without good reason. What he has in mind here is that when faced with a conspiracy theory, we shouldn't simply ignore it or deny it, rather, that it calls for a serious response in the form of a rebuttal (Cassam, 2019, p. 117). Quoting Morton, Cassam (2019, p. 117) writes, "As Adam Morton notes, 'when you believe something for a reason you can defend it against attacks or undermining' (2014: 165). If one can't be bothered to argue against conspiracy theories one can hardly complain if people end up believing them." This idea of the epistemic virtue of defending a reasonable position using argumentation and rebuttals may work well in face to face situations or when we know the people with whom we are debating. However, in online forums, in which users are anonymised through technology, or when we do not know the people with whom we disagree, we cannot always take such reasonable disagreement for granted. Particularly with the prevalence of online 'trolls', respectful dialogue is quickly undermined online.

While it is true that with quicker access to information than ever previously, citizens are able to be better informed, we are also better at creating echo chambers that serve to reinforce our existing opinions, biases and assumptions. With algorithms and data tracking, helpful software platforms and social media apps work to please their customers by only presenting them with information that is likely to match and thus reinforce existing search terms and websites previously visited or browsed. In light of this, there are good arguments to be made in favour of moderated forums (in which offensive comments are removed or vetted before being posted publicly) and for companies (such as Google and social media platforms which generate individual 'news feeds' tailored to the user) to consider how their search engines and algorithms work to reinforce biases or misinformation.

If social media plays a role in perpetuating echo chambers that reinforce fallacies, misinformation, and biased views, then, to the extent they do so they may also support epistemic vices such as close-mindedness and dogmatism, specifically in relation to these same views. One example of this is the presence of anti-vaxxers online. Smith & Graham's (2019) research focussed on how the structure and discourse on public anti-vaccination pages on Facebook acted as a social movement, aiming to influence vaccination practices by strategies that sought to convince and confuse while appealing to emotion and parents' protective instincts (Davies et al., 2002). Platforms such as Facebook made it easier for people to seek out and stumble across anti-vaccination propaganda, and anti-vaxxers are often eloquent and engaging, making it more difficult for parents to critically evaluate the nature of vaccine-related health information online (Smith & Graham, 2019). Smith & Graham also note the prevalence of discourses focussed on 'moral outrage', 'righteous indignation', and 'structural oppression by institutional government and the media' online; narratives that are suggestive of 'conspiracy-style' beliefs and thinking. Such emotive and sensationalised personal stories are very well-suited to being shared via social media, which also suggests, as Smith & Graham conclude, 'that social media may have a role in spreading anti-vaccination ideas and making the movement durable on a global scale'. Companies such as Facebook and The Conversation (Ketchell, 2019) obviously agree, recently changing their

policies to restrict the presence of anti-vaxxers and climate change deniers, respectively, on their fora.

It is true that a critically engaged individual should be able to seek out further appropriate, academic research in order to debunk conspiracy theories, and indeed, social media is also responsible for sharing stories of teens sneaking out to get vaccinated against their parents wishes (Marchildon, 2019). Yet, to the extent that companies such as Facebook wish to be ethical, arguably they have a duty to minimise the reach and impact of harmful propaganda.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly true given that exposure to false or biased views can serve to reinforce and perpetuate myths through what behavioural psychologists term the ‘familiarity backfire effect’ (Cook & Lewandowsky, 2011). The worry here is that fact checking claims of anti-vaxxers online may serve only to reinforce the myths with Cook & Lewandowsky noting that “a simple myth is more cognitively attractive than an over-complicated correction” (2011, p. 3). Thus, while it is important that individuals develop analytical skills that serve to inoculate them against believing myths, it is also important that such myths become less (rather than more) prominent so that users are less likely to stumble upon them online. Happily, some tech companies are starting to recognise their ethical and epistemic responsibility in supporting the conclusions of science.<sup>4</sup> Facebook recently announced that it will combat the spread of vaccine misinformation on Facebook and Instagram by diminishing the reach of anti-vaccine information on its platforms, even if such posts will not be taken down entirely. This will take the form of ads being rejected that include false information about vaccinations and anti-vaccination pages and posts will no longer be able to be promoted through ads or recommendations, which will make them less prominent in search results. (Wired, 2019).

Cassam is somewhat optimistic (a view he calls ‘qualified optimism’) that we may improve with respect to our epistemic vices (2019, p. 169). Such self-improvement, he claims, relies on the moral agent being motivated to tackle their own character vices as well as being willing and able to make the necessary effort required in the form of self-control. This necessarily involves firstly recognising such epistemic vices. Some, which he labels as ‘stealthy’ epistemic vices, such as implicit biases, are resistant to self-improvement strategies because it is in the nature of the epistemic vice to resist detection and to deprive us of the motivation to eliminate them. Yet Cassam is not a pessimist with respect to our quest for self-improvement and for aiming at reducing and/or eliminating our epistemic vices, even the stealthy ones. He concludes, “The main point, however, is that we aren’t stuck with our epistemic vices, and this leaves it open that at least some of them are blameworthy.” (Cassam, 2019, p. 170). If we can work to avoid and eliminate epistemic vices, with a view to being more critically engaged, then we should. This inevitably raises the possibility of education and the role for teachers in assisting with recognising and striving for improvement with respect to our epistemic vices. Cassam (2019, p. 120) emphasizes the centrality of the role of education when he states,

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I will set aside the vital debate about the appropriate limitations on free speech and ‘who decides’ what counts as harmful, except to note that it is not always straight-forward and obvious. Having said that, in some examples (i.e. neo-Nazism) it is. The debate around ‘harm’ and ‘personal choice’ in relation to anti-vaccination rhetoric is complex; yet sound, reasonable scientific consensus falls indisputably on the pro-vaccination side of the debate.

<sup>4</sup> Again, due to lack of space in this paper, I will flag but set aside the question as to what role the very same companies may and should have in relation to democratic processes such as elections given the controversial impact of disgraced data analytics firm Cambridge Analytica in the 2016 US Presidential election campaign and 2016 UK Brexit referendum.

the only hope for a society that cares about knowledge is to equip its citizens with the intellectual and other means to distinguish truth from lies. Education can play a vital role here, especially if it can focus on the development of pupils' critical faculties and epistemic virtues such as rigour and respect for evidence. Only the inculcation and cultivation of the ability to distinguish truth from lies can prevent our knowledge from being undermined by malevolent individuals and organizations that peddle falsehoods for their own political or economic ends.

In a footnote, he adds, "D'Ancona is right to suggest, therefore, that it should be a core task of primary education 'to teach children how to discriminate from the digital torrent' (2017: 114)." (Cassam, 2019, p. 120).

It is vital that we teach children how to engage critically, analytically, ethically, and responsibly with the media that assails them every time they log online. It is crucial that we educate them to understand that their contributions online make a difference, and to *care* about the effects their actions and interactions may have. Such an education must not only be cognitive, it also entails formative and affective moral education if we hope to bring it about that our citizens are not only reasonable, but also motivated by appropriate dispositions and wish to act in a way that promotes flourishing – not just their own, but also that of the community in which they live (Kristjánsson, 2018). Given that technology has ensured the online community is global and we are, in this sense at least, global citizens, the individualistic approach of critical perspectivism must also be supported by social, communitarian and governmental approaches that seek to similarly encourage rather than discourage ethically and epistemically responsible online engagement.

### **Conclusion: aspirations and limitations**

Critical perspectivism is an ethical attitude that an individual may adopt when seeking to engage both critically and compassionately online. There is an important role for teachers and schools in supporting students to be critically perspectival. Through education, students may learn to be critical of the ideas and beliefs they and others hold, while simultaneously respectful towards and compassionate of the others who hold such diverse perspectives, recognising that together we form a community of people seeking the truth and a harmonious life. For those who do not seek truth nor harmony, we must be able to appeal to normative values in order to judge and condemn things that may threaten our peaceful coexistence.

Critical perspectivism is an attitude that supports a practise of being morally engaged in the world by processing and understanding information received from mass produced and distributed media sources in a critical and compassionate manner. Much of the information (including images) we encounter contains implicit or explicit social, political and moral messages that needs to be approached actively and critically with a caring response to their real life counterparts. As technology increases the rate and amount of information we receive, we must seek to morally evaluate and assimilate useful information, while discarding misinformation, and avoiding hoaxes and scams. In order to do this successfully, students require safe spaces in which they can practice being critically perspectival by engaging in meaningful dialogue with others and reflecting on this form of moral engagement, how it applies to digital media, and what may be its limitations. In this way, critical perspectivism is a useful attitude that may be applied online in order to support moral engagement and the epistemic virtues in order to gain and share information while treating others civilly. Yet where there is a lack of transparency and greater risks (i.e. deep fakes; the dark web;

interference with social media feeds, etc) and individual efforts fail, we may require companies and governments to step in and ensure the internet is a safe place.

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