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Journalistic agency and news judgment have long fascinated media scholars, and we now have a comprehensive analysis of autonomy's contribution to both the history of “the press” and contemporary debates about journalism practice and research. *Journalistic Autonomy: The Genealogy of a Concept* is an ambitious study that shifts our key understandings about news work and its democratic potential and ethical responsibility.

Authors Henrik Örnebring and Michael Karlsson, colleagues at Karlstad University in Sweden, focus most of their analysis on US journalism, past and present, but they bring an international perspective to their task, reminding us that journalism's democratic aspirations and constraints are not peculiarly American. Even so, their discussion of journalism’s democratic failings and their prescription for ethical change catalog the shortcomings of an American journalism whose influence on global media is outsized and so naturalized that it often escapes notice.

The newspaper industry, the legacy medium of the printing press, is the focus of the analysis, and, drawing on a strong historical grounding, Örnebring and Karlsson assess journalism's present struggles to fulfill its social and political commitment to its public. To that end, the book explores contemporary issues centered on the financial challenge of online competition, the impact of digitization, and the democratic implications of structural inequality in journalism. The analysis culminates in a set of ethical recommendations. “Our history,” they write, “is also an alternative history of the path not taken” (p. 17).

The ideal of journalistic autonomy, the conceptual vortex of this history, imagines that a news worker's decision-making is empowered, self-directed, and unconstrained by pressures internal and external to the news organization. On this view, journalism's reality and its ideal are misaligned, which is why this book is necessary. In their genealogy of autonomy, Örnebring and Karlsson contrast its familiar construction as “in-
dependence from” the state and other self-interested actors with a “freedom to” approach, by which journalism might more effectively serve the public. In this way, journalists might exercise their agency in positive and constructive ways that rub against the grain and defy established templates for professional decision-making. A more authentic autonomy defined as “freedom to,” they argue, would empower journalists to make creative choices and produce news content that is more truthful and more inclusive.

This observation speaks to one of four definitional propositions undergirding the book, namely that journalistic autonomy is relational and defined by collaboration with and opposition to other actors. In addition, the authors also assert that journalistic autonomy is constituted by boundaries, such as ethics codes and professional norms; that it assumes journalists have agency in their decision-making; and that autonomy has a purpose that is understood by the members of the profession and serves the democratic mission of the press. Although objectivity is also a journalistic ideal that sometimes intersects with autonomy, Örnebring and Karlsson clearly distinguish the two concepts, noting that the value of intellectual independence predated objectivity's claim to critical distance.

In organizing their argument, Örnebring and Karlsson interrogate autonomy along seven professional dimensions related to independence and journalism’s democratic mission: the state; political interests; the market; news sources, including public relations; the workplace; audiences; and technology. All of these chapter-length discussions—which explore conflicts of interest, historical paradoxes, and the competing allegiances of journalism and journalists—have a democratic and/or ethical hook. Three are explicited here for their contemporary, topical significance and immediate usefulness to scholars and teachers.

Örnebring and Karlsson isolate native advertising, the sponsored information formatted like news stories on newspaper websites, as a significant point of tension in their chapter “Autonomy and the Market.” The authors note that native advertising, in the form of “puffs” and reading notices, was prevalent in the nineteenth century but became taboo, even illegal, during the emphasis on professionalization and ethics in the early twentieth century and construction of the wall between the business and editorial sides of the newspaper. Lately, however, the journalism industry, under pressure to increase revenue, has forfeited its autonomy on this issue and rationalized that inclusion of native advertising is no longer unethical.

Similarly, the chapter “Autonomy and Technology” offers a timely discussion of artificial intelligence and “robot journalism,” which already is fairly standard in some aspects of sports and business journalism. The more ominous view, they write, is that artificial intelligence (AI) not only challenges autonomy but poses an existential threat to journalism itself: “The only journalists left will be those needed to monitor the robots and do the rare tasks that robots cannot do yet” (p. 267). Örnebring and Karlsson note that ethics codes generally ignore concerns about technology, despite its inextricable role in publishing, dating to Gutenberg.

Finally, in their chapter “Autonomy and Politics” and in their conclusion, “Whither Autonomy?” Örnebring and Karlsson engage issues of race and reckoning, feminist critiques of the press, and concerns about the structuring of inequity into journalism. Importantly, Örnebring and Karlsson demonstrate that autonomy is not equally available to all journalists and is one of the mechanisms by which power differentials based on race, gender, and other identities are embedded into professional norms. Full empowerment of the nonwhite, nonmale journalist is not possible in an industry grounded in traditional views of autonomy, which activate and subsume historical biases and inequalities.
Their prescription for change, outlined in the conclusion, contains nine bullet points emphasizing the need for journalists to pursue truth even when sources are lying and to stop viewing the marginalized as “special interests” who threaten journalism’s values. Reporting their concerns is not political engagement. “Why would it be an activist approach to try to advance the values of democracy, liberty, equality, and truth?” they ask. “This is, after all, what journalism says it has been doing all along” (p. 302). This contradiction between ideals and practice raises an important and necessary question about journalism’s core mission.

One criticism is that the book’s hopeful and compelling case for a journalistic autonomy refo¬ocused on truth and social justice underestimates the force of white backlash in American politics and journalism. Racial self-interest impeded the US newsroom diversity movement during the twentieth century; more recently, calls for historical accuracy about slavery and the US Civil War have elicited a reactionary, white supremacist response from various white politicians and American legislatures. Because “critical race theory” and whiteness studies have been distorted and maligned in the current debate, it is not clear that this book would adorn the CV if the authors were faculty at a university in, say, Florida.

Moreover, the authors assume mainstream journalists are united by shared values. Given the ideological fragmentation within journalism, the argument risks preaching to the choir. The book’s length and intellectual heft make it unlikely to gain many readers among working journalists, so the suggested ethical guidelines for journalists presumably would reach the rank and file over time and through journalism faculty. There is a reason that Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, whose work on journalism is analyzed in this book, were succinct in writing for professional audiences.

Those observations aside, Journalistic Autonomy offers an expansive, historically ground¬ed analysis and synthesis of existing research, both quantitative and qualitative, that achieves real depth despite its broad focus. Its place in the literature is assured. Scholars will assign and cite the full volume; individual chapters will gain traction in the discipline’s subspecialties. The book also will function as a desk reference, as scholars use the index to parachute into the text.

Ultimately, Örnebring and Karlsson’s lasting contribution will be their recalibration of discourse about journalistic agency and its intersection with ethical responsibility and democratic values. This thorough study sets a baseline for the conversation moving forward.