



# Value moves in multiple ways: Ethical values, the anthropology of Christianity, and an example of women and movement

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## Abstract

How can anthropologists describe ethical values—that is, what emerges as important—in the social, material worlds of Christianity? This article considers the question by working along interfaces. The first part of the article discusses two diverging approaches to values in the anthropology of Christianity (realizing values and producing values) and situates these in relation to three groupings in the anthropology of ethics and morality (deontological ethics, first-person virtue ethics, and poststructuralist virtue ethics). The second part of the article follows one value—the value of movement—in a historical example: the writings of a group of Christian women in 1880s and 1890s Norway. I argue that ethical values move in multiple ways through this social world: people realize values, people produce values and people work on values.

## Keywords

Christianity, ethics, mission, morality, movement, reading, values, women, writing

## Introduction

There are two diverging approaches to ethical values in the anthropology of Christianity. The first examines how values are *realized* in actions, and is explicated in Robbins’

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(2007) analysis of how charismatic Christianity introduced new values among the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea. Eriksen (2012) and Haynes (2017) have used a similar analytical lens on Pentecostal churches in Vanuatu and Zambia. A different approach is offered by Daswani (2016) and Handman (2019), who have examined how value is *produced* by the actions of a Pentecostal prophet in Ghana and a Lutheran mission in colonial New Guinea. While these authors have not explicitly set their work in relation to each other, I would like in this article to bring Robbins, Eriksen, and Haynes' value-structures approach and Daswani and Handman's value-transformations approach into the same frame, to ask whether and how to bridge these diverging anthropological understandings of ethical value/s in Christian communities.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's dictum that a word "form[s] a family" ([1953] 2009: §67) is particularly apt when studying the unusually flexible concept of "values." Several anthropologists have explored the interfaces between ethical/moral, economic, and linguistic/semiotic value/s (e.g. Carrier, 2018; Cavanaugh and Shankar, 2014; Daswani, 2016; Foster, 2008; Graeber, 2001; Halvorson, 2018; Lambek, 2008, 2015; Zwissler, 2017). I draw inspiration from these interface investigations and see ethical values as running into economic and semiotic ones. In what follows I will emphasize just one Wittgensteinian "family resemblance" that I think recurs across many ethical values: a value is something that emerges as collectively important (even if contested), and its importance occurs in the relations between world and self (cf. Graeber 2001: 47).

I will refer to "ethical" rather than "moral" values. Anthropologists have suggested various distinctions between these terms (for a good overview see Mattingly and Throop, 2018). For example, Zigon (2007), drawing in part on Robbins' structuralist work on Urapmin charismatic Christianity and in part on his own phenomenological research with Russian Orthodox Christians in Moscow, has suggested that the "moral" refers to these Christians' unreflective everyday dispositions. When dispositions are called into question a "moral breakdown" occurs and the resulting conscious reflection and choices constitute the "ethical." While I find this distinction helpful in theory, I have noticed that in my own example of Lutheran women in Norway the distinction may unintentionally obscure some dynamics. These women's conscious evaluation was also shaped by elements below awareness, their thought action could take on the form of mindless habit, and their unreflective action was subject to thought if prompted (see also Coleman, 2015: 280). Therefore I will use the distinction outlined by Keane (2016) who suggests, drawing in part on his semiotics-oriented work on Calvinists in Indonesia, that "moral" obligations are things one can contemplate or carry out on one's own in momentary events while "ethical life" can only be produced socially. While this distinction too is artificial (Keane, 2016: 20), it does allow me to consider how ethical values were a collective construction in the group of Lutheran women as they paid attention to what was important.

I will discuss ethical values within the broader theoretical context of the anthropology of morality and ethics. This sub-field presents a wealth of approaches and scholars have suggested different "maps." Fassin (2012) uses the moral philosophy trio: deontological ethics, virtue ethics, and consequentialist ethics. Mattingly (2012) has made a distinction in anthropology between first-person virtue ethics and poststructuralist virtue ethics. And

Dyring et al. (2018) propose that there are currently three broad analytic strategies in play in the anthropology of ethics (though they overlap): a focus on “moral facts” and socio-cultural structures, a focus on moral experience and the first-person perspective, and a focus on the existential roots of the ethical in the human condition. Building on this conversation I find it most helpful to map the sub-field in terms of three (overlapping) groupings of approaches: deontological ethics, first-person virtue ethics, and poststructuralist virtue ethics. While these categories are in some ways forced, I think they serve the useful function of a map. Let me briefly outline each in turn.

In the first grouping, I place anthropologists drawn to the idealism of deontological or neo-Kantian ethics who may look for abstracted moral codes and cultural structures (e.g. Robbins, 2013). The second grouping includes a few different approaches. I begin with first-person virtue ethics, often inspired by the Aristotelian tradition, which directs our attention to human projects involving self-fashioning and moral striving, ethical deliberation by agentive subjects, and the responsibility of freedom (e.g. Laidlaw, 2014; Lambek, 2015). In this grouping, I also include two other approaches that share some concerns with first-person virtue ethics: anthropologists working to elaborate ordinary ethics, who may attend to the often overlooked significance carried by everyday habits and “small acts” (Das, 2012: 139, cf. Das, 2015; Lambek, 2010), and anthropologists working in a phenomenological tradition, who may look for the moral experiences, sentiments, uncertainties, and narratives that make up people’s assembled life-worlds (e.g. Mattingly, 2014; Throop, 2012; Zigon and Throop, 2014). In the third grouping, I begin with poststructuralist virtue ethics in a Foucauldian tradition, which directs our attention to human projects involving the play of power through self-formation (e.g. Asad, 1993; Faubion, 2011). In this grouping, I also include a semiotics-inflected approach that considers how the ethical is formed by human creativity, materiality, and history coming together in different ways (e.g. Keane, 2016).

Although I have placed individual anthropologists in each grouping as examples, several of these scholars draw on more than one approach in their work. In fact, anthropologists in this field often comment on the benefit of having multiple frames, observing that it is difficult to cleanly separate out theoretical threads in our “real world” cases (Fassin, 2012: 8) and that the tools in our toolkit could helpfully be labeled: “use as needed” (Faubion, 2011: 13, see also Dyring et al., 2018: 20; Lambek, 2010: 8; Robbins, 2020: 166–167). Building on this openness to exploring theoretical interfaces, I treat ethical values as being practically overdetermined—that is, in practice shaped by more than one of the three groupings.

The article has two parts. In the first part, I assemble a conversation on ethical values in the anthropology of Christianity. In the second part, I follow one value—the value of movement—in a historical example: the writings of a group of Lutheran women in 1880s and 1890s Norway. While I am usually drawn to describing these Protestant women within a semiotic language-and-bodies framework (Halvorson and Hovland, 2021; Hovland, 2020) that in many ways is an extension of poststructuralist virtue ethics, I will in this article experiment with working along interfaces instead. Working along the interfaces within the “family” of “ethical values” as well as the interfaces between different theoretical approaches, I will explore how this example shows that

ethical values move in multiple ways through the social, material worlds of Christianity: people realize values, people produce values, and people work on values.

## The movements of values

Let me now turn to the two diverging approaches to ethical values in the anthropology of Christianity. Robbins (2020) refers to these as the realizational and productivist camps, as they stress realizing and producing values, respectively. I also use the terms “realizing” and “producing,” but I will refer to the approaches more broadly as the value-structures approach and the value-transformations approach. I will present each in turn and situate them in relation to the three groupings identified above: deontological ethics, first-person virtue ethics, and poststructuralist virtue ethics.

### *Value structures*

One way to examine ethical values in Christian groups is to conceptualize value structures—structures that are “structural” but still “living,” that is, changing and changeable: living structuralism, as Joel Robbins has put it (Duarte, 2017: 651). Robbins (2016: 774) takes “values” here to refer to cultural conceptions of the good or desirable, not simply the desired. He argues that in any social group values arrange other cultural elements (such as ideas about persons, space, time, etc.) into hierarchies, so that it is possible to say, following Louis Dumont, that values structure culture (2012a; cf. e.g. Dumont, [1966] 1970). Moreover, values themselves are ranked, and lower values may be set aside to attain higher ones, or values may be reversed (a superior value in one context becomes inferior in another). The relations between all values in society may tend toward monism (one paramount value) or pluralism (conflict between dominant values), and Robbins (2013) proposes that all societies have varying degrees of both. Most importantly for my concerns, each value organizes strings of action that work toward realizing the goal of that value, and most cultural actions are part of such value *realization* (2012a). Robbins (2007) distinguishes between routine actions that serve a higher value, which he terms a “morality of reproduction,” and actions that have to be intentionally chosen or not chosen because they work toward a value that directly conflicts with another value, which he terms a “morality of freedom.” While values may seem abstract Robbins (2015: 18) argues that values do “exist” in “enacted examples,” such as rituals.

Given that values structure culture, in Robbins’ (2007), view cultural change is best understood as a change in values. He has explored this idea in his work on the Urapmin community in Papua New Guinea, which underwent a mass conversion to charismatic Christianity in the 1970s. In Robbins’ (2012b) analysis the highest Christian value among the Urapmin is individualism, as only individuals can achieve salvation. This value can be observed, for example, in a new ritual role, “Spirit women.” When Spirit women become possessed by the Holy Spirit they speak sincerely as individuals. However, some cultural elements remain from pre-Christian Urapmin traditions, such as showing respect for the spirits who own the land. In this frame, the paramount value is relationalism. The conversion to Christianity has therefore left the Urapmin

caught between two conflicting dominant values—individualism and relationalism. Each of these values organizes strings of action that conflict with each other, and this cascading binary scheme results in constant moral questioning. In sum, Robbins (2007) argues that values structure culture, but that this living structure of values is changeable.

Eriksen (2012), like Robbins, analyzes Christian groups through the lens of value structures. She suggests that when Christianity was introduced on the Pacific island of Vanuatu it brought about a conflict between traditional “male-gendered values” of hierarchy and “female-gendered values” of egalitarianism. Charismatic churches on the island enact this value conflict. For example, the male pastor (especially the founding pastor) is in many ways the personification of the church, often chosen through a powerful, one-on-one encounter with the Holy Spirit. This provides an image of the Holy Spirit as a centripetal force, concentrated in an individual. On the other hand, women in the churches are often associated with “soft” hearts that can be penetrated by the Holy Spirit at any time, thus giving an image of the Holy Spirit as a centrifugal force. Women who are especially open become prophetesses and receive visions from the Spirit that they must communicate communally. Eriksen argues that this binary, conflicting structure between hierarchical and egalitarian values becomes increasingly polarized within any given church over time, causing growing tension and eventually a split.

Haynes (2017) agrees with Robbins and Eriksen in seeing values as structuring relations in social life. However, her analysis of Pentecostalism on the Zambian Copperbelt differs in that she does not construct a binary schema of conflicting values. Instead, she argues that the introduction of Pentecostal churches has led to an ongoing creative process in which the existing cultural value of “movement” is re-imagined as a Christian value of “moving by the Spirit.” Here she conceptualizes value both as a noun (values as “animating ideas”) and a verb (ideas that have “structuring force”) (2017: 8). She finds that when Pentecostal church-goers put forward claims about value, that is, claims about the good social life, the value of movement is tied to “sub-values,” especially charisma and prosperity, which sit somewhat uneasily side by side. Church-goers would ideally like to rank charisma above prosperity, and they seek to realize these values and their proper structural relation. Engaging in especially moving prayers is more important than (but does not occur instead of) seeking a promotion and a car.

The value-structures approach is indirectly informed by Émile Durkheim and to a lesser extent Max Weber, who both sketched out large patterns of values, actions, and effects. For example, Durkheim ([1897] 1951) argued that suicide rates were lower among Catholics in Europe than Protestants because Catholic societies held more strongly to a value of group attachment. Group attachment, in this picture, was a given: a “moral fact” that organized actions and that constituted, borrowing Dumont’s words, “the presence of society in the mind of each man” (Dumont, [1966] 1970: 6). Weber ([1905] 2002), examining Protestant groups in Northern Europe, traced a more paradoxical movement: he argued that nascent capitalism took hold more strongly in Protestant than Catholic societies because the ideals of pietistic Protestants—vocation, self-denial, salvation—yielded affinities between their tendency to save profits and the possibility of investing accumulated capital. While this work does not deny the role of

value judgments and freedom, it reminds us of the weight of the “unfreedom” (Robbins, 2007: 295) of people acting within Christian value structures that are, from the viewpoint of sociological or cultural analysis, seen as in important respects collective and given to individuals.

How might we situate the value-structures approach in the landscape of the anthropology of ethics and morality? The approach offers a method of “cultural analysis” (Robbins, 2009: 279) that most closely matches the idealism of deontological ethics and its attentiveness to moral codes. From this perspective values move behind the scenes, arranging the relative significance of other cultural elements and organizing series of actions. Robbins and Haynes suggest that value is “a relation” that connotes comparison (Haynes, 2017: 162) or is “relationally embedded” (Robbins, 2016: 804n2), as values rank and are themselves ranked. Cultural change comes about through the clash between multiple dominant values—perhaps from different value spheres (economic, political, religious, familial, etc.)—or from the introduction of a whole new value structure. This approach is “idealist in orientation” (Haynes, 2017: 164), sometimes making it difficult to read values off everyday speech and acts that do not demonstrate the value in clear form (e.g. Eriksen, 2012; Robbins, 2012b, 2015). Nevertheless, values have a significant force in real life since they motivate behavior (Robbins, 2020: 167). In this approach, the behind-the-scenes movement of values creates cultures.

### *Value transformations*

Let me turn now to a diverging approach within the anthropology of Christianity that emphasizes how values are *produced* through actions rather than how they are *realized* through actions. I will refer to this as the value-transformations approach. This is not a self-consciously elaborated approach, and the examples I use—Handman (2019) and Daswani (2016)—do not set out to theorize values explicitly in contrast to the value-structures approach. But I have found it productive to use this work, for my own purposes, as an alternative approach.

Handman (2019) describes the adoption of airplanes by German Lutheran missionaries in colonial New Guinea. Handman (1977: 39) suggests that the missionaries’ adoption of airplanes forms part of a sequence of “spatiotemporal transformations,” a term she borrows from Nancy Munn. Let me first, therefore, outline Munn’s conception of value. Munn (1977: 40) examines value (rather than values) in the context of “making processes” on the island of Gawa, off the coast of Papua New Guinea. She begins with the question: what is being made when Gawans make a canoe? She traces this process across several “conversion planes.” On the plane of production, a tree (associated with heaviness and stability) is converted into a canoe (associated with lightness and speed). On the exchange plane, food gifts within kinship exchange relationships are converted into canoe ownership, and the canoe is then exchanged on other islands for *kula* arm shells. Each conversion facilitates access to and influence over a wider “space-time”: from canoe construction on the beach to intra-island kinship relations, and then to

inter-island fame. The production of the end value—overseas fame—shows how the outward-moving value transformations end up returning value to the self.

Handman applies this analysis of generating value to German Lutheran missionaries, who saw the New Guinea forest as dark and difficult to penetrate. When they acquired their first aircraft in the 1920s, however, the slow progress along muddy rainforest paths was transformed into quick flights through the open sky. But this was not all: in their view, the airplane would finally create the ultimate value of the conversion of souls. In other words, the missionaries transformed money into a new mode of circulation (from paths to airplanes), and then transformed this circulation into Christians. These value transformations gave them access to successively expanding space-times: from infrastructural (being able to move easily from one place to another), to colonial (being able to compete in the push inland), to eschatological (moving toward more and more Christians who would enter heaven). The movement itself became a sign of Christianity. In sum, in this case, the Lutherans were not just *realizing* values through their actions but *producing* value through their actions.

Daswani (2016) too focuses on value transformations in his analysis of a Pentecostal prophet in Ghana. Daswani locates a chain of value conversions in the actions of the prophet who works to convert spiritual authority into larger client networks, and client networks into prosperity. The end value of prosperity has both a quantitative and a qualitative texture among Ghanaian Pentecostals, encompassing financial resources but also good character. Therefore, the extent to which a prophet demonstrates prosperity is also continuously evaluated by others as they deliberate, for example, between character ideals. Daswani sets this emphasis on value *production* in relation to the question of whether actions also *realize* values, and he acknowledges a certain back-and-forth:

I recognize that value [such as the value of prosperity] emerges in action but only becomes recognizable as having “value” if there is a cultural framework or there are multiple frameworks in place through which action is interpreted and understood. Yet that process of interpretation and deliberation would not occur if action were not already in motion. (Daswani, 2016: 124n6)

The value that is produced continues to circulate and be exchanged: prophets who successfully transform authority into clients, and clients into prosperity, may in turn use their prosperity to “add value to people’s lives” (Daswani, 2016: 112) by, for example, exorcising demons.

Let me return to the question of how values move through social worlds and compare the first approach (value structures) with the second (value transformations). While the first conceptualizes values as arranged in hierarchies, the second conceptualizes values as arranged in cycles or circuits of transformations or conversions. The first sees values as structuring actions, and the second sees actions as structuring values. To observe values, the first approach directs our attention to how values are *enacted* in examples, while the second approach directs our attention to processes of making and how values are in a stronger sense *embodied* in persons and things (such as prophets or airplanes). In the value-transformations approach values might still be seen as relations,

but this time the relations are less structuring and more converting, as value is the process of creating and forming, of turning something into something else, and so on.

How might we situate this approach in the landscape of the anthropology of ethics? While the value-structures approach proposes that values create cultures, the value-transformation approach, I would argue, proposes that the production of values creates circuits and persons in those circuits. Robbins (2020) puts forward an alternative reading, arguing that the second approach primarily analyzes how the production of value creates an increasing quantity of that value, thus connecting it to a Marxist tradition. While there are clearly resonances between a Marxist tradition and Munn's work, it seems to me that the key characteristic of the people described by her, Daswani and Handman is not—as from a Marxist perspective—that they could be alienated from the increasing value they produce. Instead, the characteristic we are interested in here is that they as makers are deeply involved with what they make, and with the value of what is made and of the maker. I will therefore situate this approach in the theoretical frame of virtue ethics.

I agree with Mattingly (2012) that while virtue ethics broadly locates the moral in the care of the self, this can take two distinct theoretical forms: first-person, humanist virtue ethics (primarily drawing on the Aristotelian tradition) and poststructuralist virtue ethics (in anthropology primarily drawing on the Foucauldian tradition). Daswani's (2016) work highlights some characteristics of the first form (though he also draws more widely on other traditions, including ordinary ethics). In this understanding, values in Christianity come about as an effect of the continual work of self-cultivation by Christians, such as the work of the Pentecostal prophet in Ghana. Other examples of this approach may be found in Elisha's (2011) exploration of how socially engaged evangelicals in megachurches in Tennessee cultivate the value of "moral ambition," or Coleman's (2015: 281) argument that Pentecostals "may allow external forces to threaten" as a way of experimenting with the borders of the self. In this approach, we see value moving through the individual dispositions of Christians. Christians expend moral effort and engage in value judgments and deliberations, even if the results cannot be grasped firmly (Coleman, 2015: 282). They demonstrate agency—a striving for character, moral ambition, or an open self.

I view two other approaches as being part of the same broad grouping as first-person virtue ethics, though they have their own distinct concerns: ordinary ethics and phenomenology of moral experience. Scholars in these traditions may not use the term "values" at all, sometimes associating "values" with a more idealist approach (see the conversations between Das and Robbins—Das, 2012, 2016; Robbins, 2016—and Zigon and Robbins—Zigon, 2009a, 2009b; Robbins, 2009). It seems to me, however, that their focus on habits and "small acts" (Das, 2012: 139), everyday improvisations and sentiments, can help illuminate another aspect of how values move through Christian worlds. One example may be seen in Strhan's (2017) description of children's skits during an end-of-year assembly at a church-run school in London, in which children from diverse backgrounds named their families' different types of food and music. These small acts may give insight into the ethical imagination in this group. Similarly, Strhan's (2015) and Hardin's (2016) examinations of everyday practices among London evangelicals and Samoan Pentecostals, such as "ordinary" prayers, illuminate how these communities work with



fragmented or decentered ethical subjectivities as part of life. From a phenomenological perspective, Zigon (2009a) has explored a conversation between two Orthodox Christian women in an office in Moscow in which they reflect on how they negotiate the Christian value of “truth” in their workplace, highlighting not only their awareness of moving between situated relationships but also of the affective consequences. In these approaches, the movement of values does not always create individual moral striving or fashioning; rather, the movement of values creates “the ordinary” and “life” for these Christians.

The third grouping begins with poststructuralist virtue ethics, which does not primarily see the self as a cause but rather as an effect (Mattingly, 2012: 173). Often taking Michel Foucault’s work as a starting point, poststructuralist virtue ethics examines how linguistic discourses, material practices, and power come together in configurations that mold selves. One of Foucault’s (1978: 58–73) well-known examples is how a Christian value of truth was produced through the procedure of confession from the Catholic middle ages onwards, thus forming subjects—including the subjects’ intentions and what they saw as the truth about themselves. This process of producing truth simultaneously opens up spaces of ethically transforming the self (Faubion, 2011). Asad (1993: 125) picks up the same play between Christians as subjected and subjects in his example of how a medieval Catholic monk learned “to will obedience.” We can see both that the monk’s “will to” the value of obedience—his disciplining toward it—demonstrates ethical work with the value and the self, and also that the power of monastic practices produced the value of obedience and the obedient monk subject along with it. A distinct but broadly related approach is the semiotics-inspired analysis elaborated by Keane (2016) that intertwines Christians’ creative use of the affordances available to them and the hard constraints they come up against. This third grouping also includes some scholars who have argued that our understanding of Foucauldian subjectivation should be extended, such as Scherz’s (2017) exploration of how God introduces an unruly element into the ethical deliberations of Catholic nuns in Uganda. This work draws our attention to how responsibilities and their consequences may be understood to be distributed across human and non-human social actors in different Christian contexts. I think Handman’s (2019) work on Lutheran airplanes relates broadly to the third grouping, as it attends to how language, material objects, and power come together to produce values. The persons entangled in these processes might be analyzed as being subjected to and subjects of the production of values and persons at the same time. From the perspective of poststructuralist virtue ethics the Christian value of truth, for example, as brought by colonial-era German missionaries or played out in Catholic medieval confessions, takes on a different movement than in the phenomenological analysis of Christian truth above. Here the process of producing values, such as the value of truth, also produces subjects in the double sense.

## **The value of movement**

To think through these different approaches to ethical values, I will consider the historical case of a new women’s magazine that was started in the late nineteenth century in a Christian mission organization in Norway.

The Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) was established in 1842 as a result of the second-wave evangelical revivals, for the purpose of sending Norwegian Lutheran missionaries overseas. The missionaries were sent to Southern Africa—the Natal Colony, the Zulu Kingdom, and Madagascar—overlapping unevenly with British and French colonization in the region. Although NMS was formally male-dominated in its leadership and theology, it quickly became financially dependent on a grassroots network of women's groups across Norway—"mission women's groups" (*misjonskvinneforeninger*)—in which women met together fortnightly or monthly to make crafts, sell the crafts and donate the money to the mission. In 1865, there were approximately 300 such groups (Tjelle, 1999: 176), but the number grew rapidly; at NMS' 50th anniversary in 1892 the organization reported receiving donations from around 3,000 women's groups (MfK, 1892: 50<sup>1</sup>). Tjelle (1990: 108) estimates that the groups had an average membership of around 25, meaning that around 75,000 women across Norway were likely involved. By the end of the nineteenth century, the financial contributions from the women's groups accounted for 75 percent of NMS' total income (Tjelle, 1999: 181). It was in this context that NMS' all-male board reluctantly agreed to the request of missionary wife Johanne Borchgrevink, mediated to them through her husband, to start a women's magazine to distribute more inspirational material to the women's groups (Norseth, 2007: 108; Tjelle, 1990: 119–120). The magazine was formed in 1884, against the backdrop of Norwegian democratization reforms in the 1880s and the founding of a Norwegian Association for Women's Suffrage in 1885, and might be seen as an early instance of the Scandinavian "mission feminism" movement (see e.g. Norseth, 2007). A friend of Borchgrevink's, Bolette Gjør, agreed to edit the magazine.

The magazine, titled *Missionslæsning for Kvindeforeninger* (*Mission Reading for Women's Groups*), was distributed as a supplement to NMS' main magazine *Norsk Missionstidende* (*Norwegian Mission Tidings*) for an additional subscription fee. In 1891, 7,000 of *Mission Tidings'* 11,000 subscribers had also subscribed to *Mission Reading* (MfK, 1891: 3), making it the largest women's magazine in Norway at the time (Norseth, 2007: 109). The magazine's contents were meant to be read aloud in the women's mission groups, thus potentially reaching many of the estimated 75,000 women involved. In this way, the scattered groups, who had not previously had any means of connecting, formed a new writing/reading community. Writing and reading are themselves acts of valuing, of judging what is worthy of attention and directing others' attention to it. The circulation of *Mission Reading* therefore introduced a new possibility for the mission women: they could undertake the social activity of valuing through their collective writing and reading.

During the magazine's first decade one of the subjects voiced by the editor Gjør and other women contributors was the importance of movement. They are not alone in this regard: the value of movement frequently plays a role in Protestant evangelical and Pentecostal Christian traditions (see e.g. Coleman, 2015; Daswani, 2015; Eriksen, 2012; Handman, 2019; Haynes, 2017; Reinhardt, 2015; cf. Premawardhana, 2018). Here I will trace three interwoven themes that concern the particular valuations surrounding "movement" during the first years of *Mission Reading*.

## A movement

The first theme concerned the question of what it meant for women to be part of the globally-oriented evangelical mission movement. This movement had gathered speed among Protestants in Europe and North America from the early nineteenth century onward and was male-dominated in terms of organizational leadership, key personnel (the missionary pastors overseas), writings, and theology. In *Mission Reading*, it was sometimes described as a “great” movement with reference to both its size and perceived significance, and it was conceptualized as an “expansion” of Protestant Christianity across the globe, though with a special focus on sub-Saharan Africa, India, and China.

The women’s community around *Mission Reading* thus directed their attention toward “other” groups of women, mainly the group thought of as “heathen women.” At this time, NMS was colloquially known in Norway as “the heathen mission” (*Hedningemisjonen*), to distinguish it from the other Norwegian mission organizations that grew out of the evangelical revivals, informally referred to as “the Santal mission,” “the China mission,” “the Israel mission,” “the interior mission” (in Norway), and “the seamen’s mission.” The generic “heathen” thus formed an important figure in *Mission Reading* as one among a cast of figures that populated the world as seen by the mission. For example, in 1891 an anonymous woman wrote a devotional piece for the magazine with the title “We Women,” saying:

I am myself a woman, and I am writing for women, therefore I would most like to fasten our thoughts to the woman in heathen lands. How she must suffer under the consequences of sin. There are those here at home who speak loudly about oppression and marginalization of women’s rights; but the poor heathen woman! which rights does she have? [...] In ourselves we are nothing and can do nothing; but we are the children of a rich and mighty father [...] Let us make diligent use of the delightful gift of prayer. Our calling is not to preach; but let us in silence prepare the way for those who are so called. (MfK, 1891: 57, 59)

Being part of the mission movement did not, for this woman, mean that she should claim women’s rights for herself or question the fact that NMS only allowed men to preach. Rather, she should direct her attention toward the “heathen” woman on the one hand, and her divine “father” on the other hand, and be a point of connection between these two through her prayer “in silence,” making it possible for those “called”—men with moral authority—to preach overseas. We see here how the woman author was able to form an image of Christian “globalism,” as other women also did in the nineteenth century (Kaell, 2020), even though it is unlikely that she herself traveled much.

As mentioned, the women’s groups were responsible for around 75 percent of NMS’ income by the end of the nineteenth century—a significant contribution to making the Protestant mission movement in Norway possible at all. But, while receipts for all donations were printed in NMS’ main magazine *Mission Tidings*, they were not mentioned in *Mission Reading*. Instead, the tone in *Mission Reading* was one of hopeful humility, as in this comment by Gjør:

Though there is much to be thankful for and joyful over when one looks back at the past year, one must nevertheless cast one's eyes down in shame when one looks at one's own mission work, and burst out like the apostle [Paul]: I have not yet grasped it, but I am chasing after it, because I am grasped by Jesus Christ. (MfK, 1891: 1)

The women writing for *Mission Reading* did not seek to foster a sense of pride or achievement among their fellow women readers, but instead a sense of gratitude. As Gjør put it on the occasion of NMS' 50th anniversary:

[I]f anyone has reason to give thanks when looking back at these fifty years, it is us women. [...] [T]here are now thousands of [women's] groups in our country. Through this, namely us women being brought into the work, a great blessing has flowed to us, which is of immeasurable significance for our own spiritual life. (MfK, 1892: 41)

What was going on with ethical values in this situation? Though the mission women were skeptical of much of the early political women's movement, their particular historical context seems to have created the possibility for them to take up the value of "women's rights" on their own terms and combine it with the value of "salvation" from the mission tradition. The case bears some resemblance to the clashing values of the Urapmin. When Gjør and her readership chose to carry out the actions of reading and writing for a public magazine, they had to choose to elevate "we women" as a collective within a "great" and "expanding" global mission movement. However, the mission movement emphasized female subordination. As with the Urapmin, the need to choose between competing dominant values led to a heightened ethical intensity—the mission women felt a sense of the weight of their task in addressing how to relate Protestant mission and women. The outcome in the 1880s and 1890s was that as a collective reading/writing community the women retained "mission" to "the heathen" as the highest value, that is, what emerged as important to pay attention to in configuring self and world. They subordinated the value of "women" and their contributions to the mission. They were working to relate one value to the other, to rank them, and to carry out actions—such as writing—to *realize* these values. The values structured actions and actors.

At the same time, we might use the lens of first-person virtue ethics to notice that the collective "we women" were attentive to the contrasting figure of "the heathen woman," alongside ethical cultivation of being humble and industrious. The phenomenological emphasis on moral sentiments similarly illuminates the importance of encouraging women to feel gratitude for their engagement with the mission, which was termed a "blessing." Working along the interface of structure and sentiment, then, we see that women combined new value-judgments—an elevated yet subordinate valuation of Christian women using "heathen women" as a point of comparison—with the emotional labor of demonstrated humility.

### *Moving around*

A second theme that surfaced in *Mission Reading* was the question of how best to move and arrange persons and objects to shape the mission. This was emphasized already from

the first issue of the magazine, in which the editor greeted her new readers by explaining that the magazine's purpose was to "gather the many sisters around the country to a communal meeting before God's throne" (MfK, 1884: 2). She reprinted a prayer by Henriette Gislesen that had been used in some women's groups since the 1850s, and which included supplication for "those who have traveled out from our country with the message of salvation" and for the "heathen" to whom they went: "bend, O Lord, the heathen souls toward longing for salvation." The prayer asked God to "pull us more and more away from the world and its nature" and to allow everyone to feel "the joy of pulling others along" (MfK, 1884: 1). Gjøl goes on to explain that *Mission Reading* will "travel to the many women's groups all around" and that she wants women to "go to women's group meetings" and experience the "great cause" they are part of, to receive letters from missionaries "out there" and send donations in return (MfK, 1884: 3). Many types of desirable movements are mentioned here: the magazine "traveling" to the groups, the women "going" to their own group but also "gathering" with other groups "before God," the missionaries "traveling out" and the souls being "bent" toward salvation, the missionaries sending letters back and the women in turn sending donations. In this depiction, the women readers played a role in the movement of persons, texts, money, and things that made up "the mission."

During its first years, there was a discussion thread in the magazine about a problematic question related to this moving, namely how to organize the crafting work that yielded the financial donations. The women's groups who wrote to the magazine reported that their meetings usually included some communal singing, praying, or reading, but it was always taken for granted that this would occur alongside crafting; in fact, the meetings were often simply referred to as "our work meetings" [*vore Arbeidsmøder*]. Some women wrote in to try to convince other women not to work on their own private crafts in the meeting (and then donate a separate cash sum to the mission) since they felt it was desirable for all the women in the meeting to work on the very crafts that would be sold for the mission, and one suggested the group could buy common supplies to facilitate this (e.g. MfK, 1890: 14–15, 51, 83, 1894: 53). Others had thoughts about whether a bazaar or a sale was the most suitable way for people to pay for the crafts (e.g. MfK, 1891: 9, 47). One women's group suggested that they should just sew shirts and send these directly to the Norwegian missionaries in Southern Africa, and Gjøl in her response agreed that one benefit of this would be "a more direct connection to the mission field" (MfK, 1894: 22). The arranging that the women carried out thus centered on the question of how to transform women and meetings into crafts and donations in the most desirable manner.

Another problem that emerged was how to properly circulate texts written by women. Gjøl was in constant dialogue with her readers, writing notes "from the editor" in the magazine and receiving letters in return. The kinds of texts that she wished to circulate were primarily communications between women: work descriptions from missionary wives in Natal, Zululand, and Madagascar, reports from women's groups in Norway, and a few translated letters from Zulu and Malagasy female converts. After editing the magazine for seven years she wrote that she had received the most thanks from her readers for "the mutual greetings between the women's groups [in Norway]"

(MfK, 1891: 3). However, she was hesitant to acknowledge that the women's writing in the magazine was public, saying, for example, that in the magazine "women's groups greet each other with encouraging words, messages are sent between the missionaries and us [...] the magazine is, with its half private character, like a letter from friend to friend" (MfK, 1888: 5). Perhaps she perceived a collection of personal letters as more easily authored by women. Even so, many of the pieces in *Mission Reading* were during the first decade either published anonymously or simply signed with initials or with the name of the place from which the piece was sent. Gjøl herself, who was a well-known pastor's wife in Kristiania in her late forties, for the first nine years of her editorship never gave her name anywhere in the magazine, instead printing on the front of each issue: "Published by an older female friend of the mission." In 1889, she published a small note in the magazine saying that some women had requested that letters from missionary wives ought to be signed with their full names so they could be known to the readers. Gjøl stated that the magazine would try to do so unless expressly asked not to by the author, and she hoped that "the women [authors] out in the mission field will not be offended" (MfK, 1889: 48). Even after this note, however, many letters were still printed without names, and Gjøl herself continued to refrain from including her own. For most women writers in this community, it seems it was too big a step to attach their name to words that moved around in public, even if the words were re-imagined as being "half private."

What can we say about ethical values here? If we consider the situation using a value-transformations approach, we see how the Norwegian mission women used writing to produce texts, then used the curated texts to produce a readership, and then used the readership to produce crafts and convert these into donations in the right way. The donations were used to produce missionaries, the missionaries to produce Christian converts overseas, and finally, accounts of the Christian converts were returned to the Norwegian women. At each conversion plane (from writing to texts to readers to crafts to donations to missionaries to Christians and back to self) the collective reading/writing community gained influence over a larger space-time. Moreover, this sequence returned value to the self: as the circulation of texts, donations, and overseas evangelization grew, the women gained what Munn might call "status"; the women in 1890s Norway called it "blessing."

Using the terms of poststructuralist virtue ethics we might see this as a type of self-fashioning shot through with power, producing the women both as authorial subjects and as subjected to larger discourses. Collectively the women wanted to see other women's names attached to writings as part of the chain of value transformations, and Gjøl sought to make this easier by re-conceptualizing the chain as "half-private." But individual women time and again hesitated to sign their *own* name. Turning to an ordinary ethics approach, we see that this habitual "small act" of hesitation also contributed to making "women" in this community. In sum, working along the interface of expanding space-time and small acts, we might say that this collective of women did not always *realize* their own values in their actions. Sometimes their actions *produced* value embodied in a range of objects and persons. Actions structured values, or what emerged as important to pay attention to in configuring self with world. In the process, the relation between the values of "movement" and "women" emerged as ambivalent.

### *Being moved*

The third theme in *Mission Reading* related to movement was the importance of women being moved, affectively and cognitively. A typical expression of this sensibility was given in an anonymous greeting from a women's group in one of Norway's sparsely populated mountain valleys, directed "to every reader of this little magazine":

To be honest we do not feel that we are very capable of writing up here in Sætersdal; but since we women—at least until the railroad comes rushing up towards us—live so to say completely separated from the rest of the world, yes even rarely have the opportunity to meet with members of the closest women's groups because of the distance between homes in the valley, we have to use the pen [...] It is so strengthening for us to know that we too, with our relatively small abilities and efforts, have been given a small part to play in the great work of love for the salvation of the heathen. (MfK, 1892: 17)

The authors then emphasize the importance of feeling moved in the right manner to attend women's group meetings, encouraging women to ask themselves: "Are *you* a true friend of the mission? Why do you go to the meetings of the women's group, why do you join in their work?" (MfK, 1892: 18, orig. emph.). And they exhort their readers not to go to the meetings out of a sense of shame or obligation or even enjoyment, but out of "love for Christ" and "the heathen."

Other pieces focused on the significance of women being moved by the memory of the meetings afterward. For example, Gjør wrote:

These various accounts [of the mission] that one has heard in the women's group often follow one in daily life; while one putters about with one's domestic duties, one's thoughts go to Zulu, to Madagascar [...] Precisely because daily life proceeds so quietly and uniformly, even if it may be filled with work and busyness for us women, these mission accounts become something that tears our thoughts away from the daily struggle [...] For many a lonely woman in the countryside mission interest has been the means that has sustained her own spiritual life, has helped her so that she was not spiritually ruined in the daily toil and struggle. Therefore it seems to us that we women perhaps have the largest reason to give thanks on this day, thanks for what we have received through the mission [...] [T]he place that the woman now takes up in the mission work is large and important. Let us in humility thank God for this and above all not forget that what we receive through our work for the mission is greater, yes, much greater than what we give. (MfK, 1892: 41–42)

Gjør is suggesting here that if the women retained thoughts about the mission in their daily life they would be cognitively torn away from their activities so that they would not become spiritually deadened by the boring, busy domestic labor of women. In this way, though women were seen as important in the mission, they were conceptualized as receiving more from the mission than they were giving, thus cultivating a sense of humble gratitude.

Gjør wrote this comment on the occasion of NMS' 50th anniversary in July 1892. Gjør, in her capacity as editor for *Mission Reading*, was the first woman to be given a ticket to enter the NMS General Assembly negotiations in Stavanger that year, where she sat as the only woman among the approximately 800 male delegates who had come from all corners of Norway. She commented afterward that "it was not so easy to get in, as the guard at the door thought there must be something wrong with the ticket; because never before had a woman been a delegate" (MfK, 1892: 53). Six months later, in January 1893, she began printing her own name on the first page of each issue of *Mission Reading*: "Edited by Bolette Gjør."

What were the women doing with values here? In these instances, it seems to me that the women were working *on* values. There was a dynamic quality to the way they connected values in new ways—especially the values of "mission" and "women"—and in so doing they changed the shape of these values. For example, as discussed above, by positing that it might benefit the mission if women used full names when authoring texts, they were shifting what it meant for women to write and be recognized in public. In the "small act" of not signing their name, they complicated this value, revealing the contradictions inherent in a life-world. But even when writing as an anonymous group, as in the example from the mountain valley, the women were doing something new.

Using the terminology of a semiotic approach, they had not previously had the opportunity to write publicly, but now that they did, they took up one of the "affordances" (Keane, 2016: 27) of the material practice of public writing: telling others what to do. They produced themselves as people "not [...] very capable of writing" but nevertheless capable of using writing to make ethical demands of others, wielding the authority of explaining the right moral sentiments that ought to be demonstrated by "a true friend of the mission." Similarly, as mentioned above, by discussing how to best organize the crafting work communally as part of an expanding sequence of value transformations they were stretching their usual understandings of women's work. This new understanding of their "work meetings" set their daily domestic labor in a new light: an opposition emerged between the "blessing" that could accrue from making crafts for the mission and the "spiritual ruination" that could result from their monotonous home chores. This re-shaped not just the value of women's work but also the value of overseas mission; "mission" was now presented as a useful remedy for women's domestic boredom and the resulting spiritual damage to them. Working along the interface of phenomenological ambivalence and semiotic affordances, we see that these women tightly linked the values of "women" and "mission" in new ways in *Mission Reading*, thus changing both values.

## Conclusion

Ethical values move in multiple ways through social, material worlds. In my historical example, two of the ways are readily recognizable from the literature: people realize values against the backdrop of their perceived hierarchy of values, and people produce values by converting one value into a different one in a circuit of transformations. It seems to me there is also a third movement evident in this case: people work on values, altering one value's use in the world, causing the value to change in use while still retaining the same name.



Let me draw out one final thread from the historical example to illustrate this. As the Lutheran women explored the possibilities afforded by the material form of a circulating magazine, through which their valuations could take on existence in a collective world, they happened upon different ways of working on the value of “women.” It is admittedly unusual to refer to “women” as an ethical value in a particular social world. This requires that we think of “value” as a family with myriad instances of use, and “extend our concept [...] as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre” (Wittgenstein, [1953] 2009: §67). If one “family resemblance” is that a value is something that emerges as important and the importance occurs when configuring self with (a specific) world, I think we can say that “women” had become a “value” in the writings of these Protestant women. The new reading/writing community of *Mission Reading* began paying attention to “women” as something that was important in their own configuration of the relations between themselves and their expanding world—a world that now included the foil of “other” women. The concept of “women” (itself a tangle of partially contradictory ideas and material practices) was turned into an ethical value (something that emerged as important in specific, collective ways), and this value was altered, albeit ambivalently. In the same way that we as anthropologists turn our attention to a topic and in so doing give it a “temporary crystallization,” changing its shape (Coleman, 2015: 281), scattered women across 1880s and 1890s Norway turned their attention to the embodied idea of “women” and, however slightly, changed its use.

Value moves in multiple ways. I think one of the contributions that a study of values brings to the anthropological conversation on ethics is this attention to the movements of ethical life. Perhaps looking back at a historical example helps bring this out more clearly, as it allows us to trace change over time. In the example, the multiple movements of ethical values give us ways to think about the complicated histories of feminism in the West. But an ethical movement is not confined to history. Therefore, one further direction that I think it would be interesting to explore is—in addition to the “deontological” question of how people work *from* values and the “virtue ethics” question of how people work *toward* values—to consider the question of how people may be working *on* values. This question extends virtue ethics in a new direction. When people work on values in their ethical life, they change that ethical life as they live it.

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## Note

1. I will use the abbreviation MfK for references to the magazine *Missionslæsning for Kvindeforeninger*. The magazine can be found in the Mission Archive in Stavanger, Norway.

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