From the Sins of Greenwashing to the Virtues of Green Marketing

Abstract This chapter further develops the virtue perspective. First, by taking stock of the classical virtues. Then, we flip the "sins of greenwashing" to bring to light the corresponding virtues they imply. Thereby, we provide a detailed model for the analysis of rhetorical virtues, specifically tailored for judging the ethical qualities of green marketing. Green marketing is viewed as a specific form of environmental communication, subject to rhetoric's domain.

6.1 Taking Stock: The Traditional Virtues

In exploring the notion of an ethically constructive rhetoric as an art contributing to the common good, the classical rhetoricians have emphasized the value of carefully examining good examples, that is, *paradeigmata* in the sense of positive exemplars. The classical teachings include a pedagogy of creative imitation and critical emulation.

For such an art, or rhetorical enterprise, it is not sufficient simply to map out the *topoi* for persuasion (i.e. the metaphorical places, where arguments can be found). We also need a typology, or better yet, a more fully

developed framework for reflecting on the relative ethical virtues of the examples we choose to scrutinize. Therefore, we will now, as promised, engage with the scholarship on the "sins of greenwashing", which has become a standard analytic in the greenwashing discussions (e.g. Delmas and Burbano 2011; Baum 2012; Aggarwal and Kadyan 2014; Scanlan 2017). We look at the sins and try to articulate their corresponding virtues.

In doing so, we will co-read Futtera's (2008) "Ten signs of greenwashing" and TerraChoice's "Seven sins of greenwashing" (TerraChoice 2009) to find the correlations and then identify their corresponding virtues, core vices, and problem types. Further, we will discuss some additional sins, of a somewhat different nature, that have been proposed by environmental sociologist Stephen J. Scanlan (2017) in an expansion of the list of greenwashing sins.

Our general approach is based on an understanding of public rhetoric as an arena for the reproduction of virtues, and a space where character is formed. Character and virtue are not seen as external to rhetoric and appearances, but as integral elements thereof. Hence, the typology formation of the current section is focused on textual manifestations of virtue. This focus is consistent with a rhetorical ontology along the lines sketched in the preceding sections, entailing that there is no way of definitely separating character virtues from their concrete manifestations. Hence, we acknowledge that an institutional norm system for green marketing virtues must simultaneously concern, on the one hand, norms of character and, on the other hand, norms regarding the use of symbols, that is, norms for the public performance of ethical judgment.

Let us sum up the specific virtues that have already been mentioned. We have:

  I. Aristotle's three dimensions of ethos: virtue (*aretē*), practical wisdom (*phronesis*), and goodwill toward the audience (*eunoia*).
 II. Isocrates' emphasis on justice (*diakaiosynē*) and moderation (*sōphrosynē*) but also courage, wisdom, and piety.
III. Cicero's propriety (*decorum*) and prudence (*prudentia*).
 IV. Intertwined with these last two virtues is consistency (*constantia*), which is of key importance for both Quintilian and Cicero.

Thus far, we have focused on character virtues and some general virtues of rhetoricity, such as decorum. However, there are also general virtues

embodied in the discussion of *style* within the rhetorical tradition, which you might note below. As regards the explicit stylistic virtues, different authors enumerate them somewhat differently (cf. e.g. Fahnestock 2011), but a possible synthesis of the main virtues of style is as follows:

A. Correctness, or purity (*latinitas/sermo purus*), meaning adherence to prevailing conventions of vocabulary and syntax, grammar, and usage. Note that deviations from customary usage can indicate either a grammatical vice or a rhetorical virtue (use of a rhetorical device).

B. Clarity (*perspicuitas*) is related to correctness and involves using proper names and terms, being as precise and specific as necessary, and following a straightforward arrangement of words and sentences. In a sense, it is the opposite of vagueness and ambiguity (*ambiguitas, amphibologia*) as well as obscurity (*obscuritas*).

C. "Evidence" (*evidentia*) does not mean proof in a logical or forensic sense. Instead, it is about making arguments vivid, giving them emotional appeal (*pathos*), and conjuring images in the minds of the audience. The meaning relates to "that which is evident" or "which comes before the eyes". The Greek term for this stylistic virtue is *enargeia*, implying the energetic effect of the virtuous orator's words.

D. Propriety, as its Latin label *decorum* (which is both a virtue of argumentation and of style) implies, is the aptness of the expressive means used, describing how well they fit relative to the subject matter and situation.

E. Ornateness (*ornatus*) concerns the aesthetic qualities of style, including the figures of speech. Simply put, the style that aims at producing delight or admiration in the audience. Ornateness is thereby also connected to the rhetorical canon of delivery (*actio*) through its concern with rhythm, and attentiveness to the sounds of language.

Having thus taken stock of the traditional virtues of the orator and of style, we now move on to further elaborating on the possibilities of developing the analytical framework of green marketing virtues.

6.2   Developing the Scheme: Flipping the Sins

In our view, the traditional virtues of the orator, and the stylistic virtues, can no doubt be utilized in analysis of modern communication quite generally, thus including green communication. However, precisely due to their generality of analytical scope, it follows that they are not specifically tailored to analysis of green promises, or even green communication more broadly. Conversely, there have been several suggestions of analytical schemes in the contemporary discussions on greenwashing, which are specifically tailored for the analysis of green communication, and primarily green marketing. Two of the most influential suggestions are found in the "Ten signs of greenwashing" (Futerra 2008) and the "Seven sins of greenwashing" (TerraChoice 2009). Both the Signs and the Sins are analytical schemes, built on identifying what kinds of greenwashing actually occur in practice, breaking these down, and sorting them into categories. These categorizations are thus specifically tailored for the analysis of green communication. Both the Sins and Signs enumerated can, however, be viewed as particular instances of more general problems of human communication, and the problems they enumerate can thus be generalized, in effect articulating a more general communicative vice, each of which will imply its own corresponding opposite virtue. Thus, to reiterate our previous example, a "fib" regarding the "greenness" of a product can be seen as a particular instance of the more general communicative vice of fibbing, or indeed lying, which in turn entails the virtue of telling the truth.

In the following table, we take inventory of the Signs, as well as the Sins. As the table illustrates, there is a great deal of correspondence between the two—a correspondence no doubt attributable to the fact that, as a matter of historical causality, the Sins are a further development on the Signs. The parallels are demonstrated by our placing of the original Sign (in the first column, i.e. the one on the far left) next to the corresponding Sin (in the second column). These are then contrasted with the implied virtue (the middle column), followed by a generalization of the communicative problem (dubbed the Core vice), and finally a categorization of the Problem type (in the right-most column). The table is followed by a discussion.

Ten signs of greenwashing (Futerra 2008)	*Seven sins of greenwashing (TerraChoice)*	*Virtue(s)*	*Core vice(s)*	*Ethical problem types*
Fluffy language ("Words or terms with no clear meaning, e.g. 'eco-friendly'")	**Vagueness** ("Using terms that are too broad or poorly defined to be properly understood (an 'all-natural' cleaner may still contain harmful ingredients that are naturally occurring)")	Preciseness (adequately defined) Specificity (adequately narrow)	Ambiguity Vagueness	Language use
Gobbledygook ("Jargon or information that only a scientist could understand")		Transparency	Obscurity	Language use
Green products v. dirty company ("Such as efficient light bulbs made in a factory which pollutes rivers")	**Hidden trade-off** ("Labeling a product as environmentally friendly based on a small set of attributes (i.e., made of recycled content) when other attributes not addressed (i.e., energy use of manufacturing, gas emissions, etc.) might make a bigger impact on the eco-friendliness of a product as a whole")	Balanced disclosure of relevant aspects (e.g. as relating to product/company/process)	Omission or suppression of relevant aspects (cherry picking)	Selection (deflection)
Lack of credibility/ just not credible ("'Eco friendly' cigarettes anyone?; 'Greening' a dangerous product doesn't make it safe")		Balanced disclosure of relevant economic, environmental, social, and ethical responsibility	Suppression of relevant economic, social, or ethical aspects (disingenuous appropriation of green rhetoric)	Selection (deflection)
Suggestive pictures ("Green images that indicate a (unjustified) green impact, e.g. flowers blooming from exhaust pipes")		Appropriate evocation of/appeal to emotion and images	Inappropriate evocation of/appeal to emotions and suggestive images	Pathos
Irrelevant claims ("Emphasizing one tiny green attribute when everything else is un-green")	**Irrelevance** ("Stating something that is technically true but not a distinguishing factor when looking for eco-friendly products (i.e., advertised as 'FC-Free'—but since CFCs are banned by law this is unremarkable)")	Relevance (of claims to propositions)	Irrelevance	Inference
Best in class? ("Declaring you are slightly greener than the rest, even if the rest are pretty terrible")	**Lesser of two evils** ("Claiming to be greener than other products in its category when the category as a whole may be environmentally unfriendly (i.e., an organic cigarette may be greener, but, you know, it's still a cigarette)")	Fair and relevant comparison (as to objects, modes of comparison and presentation)	Misleading comparisons	Inference

(continued)

Ten signs of greenwashing (Futerra 2008)	Seven sins of greenwashing (TerraChoice)	Virtue(s)	Core vice(s)	Ethical problem types
Imaginary friends and endorsements ("A 'label' that looks like third party endorsement … except it's made up")	**Worshiping false labels** ("Implying that a product has a third-party endorsement or certification that doesn't actually exist, often through the use of fake certification labels")	Use of authentic and reliable external authorities	Misleading use or construction of external authorities	Evidence
No proof ("It could be right, but where's the evidence?")	**No proof** ("Making an environmental claim without providing easily accessible evidence on either the label or the product website (i.e., a light bulb is touted as energy efficient with no supporting data)")	Use of supportive evidence	Lack of supportive evidence	Evidence
Outright lying ("Totally fabricated claims or data")	**Fibbing/lying** ("Advertising something that just isn't true (i.e., claims to be Energy Star Certified, but isn't)")	Truthfulness	Untruthfulness	Reality use

Focusing on the virtues, as appropriate responses to general problems of human communication, the systematization above could be summarized in the following list:

Ethics of language use

1. Preciseness (adequately defined)
2. Specificity (adequately narrow)
3. Transparency

Ethics of selection and deflection

4. Balanced disclosure of relevant aspects (e.g. as relating to product/company/process)
5. Balanced disclosure of economic, environmental, social, and ethical responsibility

Ethics of pathos argumentation

6. Appropriate evocation of/appeal to emotion, for example, by use of suggestive images

Ethics of inference making

7. Relevance (of claims to propositions)
8. Fair and relevant comparison (as to objects, modes of comparison and presentation)

Ethics of evidence use

9. Use of authentic and reliable external authorities
10. Use of supportive evidence

(Ethics of reality use)

11. (Truthfulness)

Now, as regards to several of these ethical problems, it could of course be said that the very function of marketing, qua marketing, is to portray products and/or their sources in a positive light. And every student of rhetoric knows that all symbol use—by necessity—involves highlighting certain aspects, while simultaneously downplaying others. These basic premises should not be ignored. Nor can they be expunged, or fundamentally transformed. However, when we acknowledge these consequences of a rhetorical ontology, we should also simultaneously acknowledge that rhetorical practice can be seen as the manifest performance of ethical judgment and that green marketing can be construed as an arena for such ethical performance. This entails that the question of which aspects to highlight, or downplay, involves ethical dilemmas. The problems thus have clear ethical dimensions that cannot be separated from the praxis and study of rhetoric.

With this book, we want to propose the first ten virtues, presented above, as a framework for:

A. examining green marketing in specific cases,
B. supporting marketers in their work with developing ethical (principles for) green marketing, and finally
C. exploring how adjusting regulatory frameworks can contribute to sustainability and legal certainty, thereby strengthening consumer rights (consumers here in the sense of recipients of marketing), in relation to the rhetoric of green promises.

Note that we have put the eleventh virtue of truthfulness in parenthesis. This virtue could well be left out of the list of primary virtues of green marketing, as, in a sense, it is located outside the problematic "gray area" of ethical rhetoric. Suspending the philosophically pressing, yet nonetheless perennial (chronic), issues of the *concept* of truth, truthfulness is not so much a problem of discourse, or of the rhetorical characteristics of discourse, as it is a problem of reality. It effectively pertains to some kind of correspondence between (rhetorical) discourse and an (extra rhetorical) reality, which provides the measuring stick required to ascertain the truthfulness of a statement. Further, to put it bluntly, "not lying" should perhaps not be seen so much as a rhetorically virtuous act, as a prerequisite for at all legitimately being (i.e. acting) in the public sphere. As a matter of law, the consequences of lying—for commercial actors—can in some, or perhaps even many, cases be harsh, depending of course on the circumstances. It should probably also be noted that our placement of "truthfulness" outside of the core virtues of green marketing is significant. It signifies an approach differing from much of the current discussions of greenwashing, which tend to either center on the question of whether the claims are true (or greenwashing) or simply presuppose the invalidity of green claims (implying their greenwashing characteristics).

6.3   Green Marketing as Climate Communication

Regarding the greenwashing discussions, an interesting contribution, which further builds on the Signs and Sins, and stays within the discursive "gray area", has been developed by the American environmental sociologist Stephen J. Scanlan. In a critical article, he scrutinizes the "green" rhetoric of petroleum companies utilizing methods of hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking" for short: a set of well stimulations techniques designed to maximize the yield of oil and gas wells. Fracking is controversial due to its effects on the surrounding environment, and there has emerged an international anti-fracking movement. This development has in turn spawned countermovements from within, or supported by, the petroleum industry. Scanlan concerns himself with these countermovements, of which he is severely critical. His criticism has been read as a proposal to add additional greenwashing sins, extending TerraChoice's list with six more (Scanlan 2017; cf. de Freitas Netto et al. 2020). Namely, the sins of:

12. reinforcing *false hopes* (e.g. that "fracking", even though it has an enormous negative impact on the environment, is the only way forward as part of an ecological modernization paradigm where technological development and green capitalism will solve environmental and climate issues),

13. *fearmongering* (through claims that reorients public understanding of risk e.g. by shifting the location of the hazardous consequences, or by fabricating insecurity related to not accepting a certain practice),

14. *broken promises* (relating to positive qualities that compensate for negative impact of business activities, thereby obscuring who loses or exploiting the hopes and trust of the citizenry),

15. *environmental injustice* (focusing on a segment of the population that benefits from a business practice without suffering its consequences—"a classic pattern of injustice in the long history of resource extraction"),

16. *downplaying hazardous consequences* (hiding the reality of inequality and distracting the public from potential dangers and the risk others experience), and

17. *profits over people and the environment* ("the corporate bottom line and consumption on the treadmill of production reigns regardless of risk", perhaps the primary sin?).

Interestingly, the questions Scanlan's sins are concerned with are not only morally, but also politically contingent. The questions, or rather, the answers accepted and positions taken by different people, are dependent upon ideological presuppositions concerning both how to be a morally virtuous member of society, and how a good society is best formed. This is perhaps most clear when it comes to Scanlan's sins of "profits over people" and "environmental injustice". The first of these sins depends upon a certain preference as regards the value spectrum of "greed/solidarity" (or perhaps "/generosity"), while the second seems to be dependent upon an acceptance of a certain (global) conceptualization of distributive justice. Thus, they can both be described as ideological elements, which are rhetorical in the sense that they are based on value judgments that are always subject to debate, rather than on some sort of posited reality.

In our view, Scanlan's additional sins are of a somewhat different species than TerraChoice's Sins. They differ in several aspects. Where the seven original sins relate primarily to green marketing as a process of

conformative legitimation, adhering to the values and norms of the institutions of sustainability or climate change, Scanlan's additional sins, instead, work through the processes of selective and manipulative legitimation. In short, the studied companies (the frackers) tend to compensate for their lack of environmental legitimacy by highlighting other institutional norms—and by reframing the understanding of what constitutes a reasonable approach to climate transition, including downplaying risks of climate change or of fracking or hyperbolizing the advantages of the latter. Following the structure presented above, where sins are linked to virtues and problem types, Scanlan tackles a somewhat different type of problem. In fact, the vices he highlights—downplaying the threat of climate change, turning a blind eye to injustices (as a matter of distributive equality), and overemphasizing economic values—are of another species than the original sins. They concern primarily how the problems of climate change and climate transition should be framed.

There is of course an overlap between issues of framing and the already discussed problem type of selection/deflection, as a certain framing entails giving salience to certain aspects while repressing others (Entman 1993; Kuypers 2010). However, Scanlan's additional sins are dependent on ideas about how the overarching phenomena (of climate change and transition) should be described, whereas the original seven sins revolve primarily around how aspects of a company or its products are highlighted or repressed. There can of course be gray areas between these two aspects of green marketing virtues, and a sliding transition between such particularities and more overarching phenomena. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Scanlan's sins address concerns on a higher level of generality than do the original sins.

Excluding some debatable examples emanating from the fossil fuel industry, the frames used within green marketing normally portray climate change as a serious problem and depict some form of climate transition as a (or the) solution. This choice of framing is logical, as it means actors can present themselves as responsibly contributing to solving a serious problem, which is a large part of the explanation why green marketing is booming. Such framing choices are however also of key importance, as they can help effectuate a move toward climate transition. Marketing, including green marketing, has opinion forming effects: it can influence the *doxa* of its recipients. It can thereby contribute to climate transition, as it can by its very existence strengthen the institution of sustainability in general and of climate change in particular. The frames used in green marketing are

thus important. For green marketing to be constructive, or virtuous, however, it is not enough *that* it constructs climate change as a problem and transition as a solution. It is also important *how* the problems, and causes, of climate change are framed, and, perhaps even more so, *how* the responsibility to address, and solve, the problems are represented, as well as which routes toward solving them are presented as not only possible, but indeed suitable and legitimate.

Another important research contribution to our understanding of this problem type is Smercenik and Renegar's (2010) study of British Petroleum's (BP) rhetoric. Their study overlaps thematically with Scanlan's, as they illustrate how BP systematically underscores that climate transition:

A. must move slowly,
B. should adhere to a capitalist logic, and
C. is the responsibility of individuals.

Thus, BP's rhetorical action is in a sense conservative. While it symbolically accepts the need for transition (strengthening the institution), it effectively acts to delay it. This is largely accomplished by portraying *carefulness* as the responsible choice—a virtue that in the petroleum company's version is performed by not doing "too much", and by not acting "hastily" when facing environmental challenges. The company's rhetoric emphasizes, and iterates, how carefulness is essential to avoid the conceivable dire systemic effects otherwise looming in the shadows. In a sense, it thus advocates for inertia by casting the conservative position as the not only necessary but indeed ethically superior choice.

The question of how climate change and climate transition should be framed is indeed an ethical one, the answer to which also has both substantial political ramifications and significant moral implications. It is also part of the "gray area" where rhetorical action has a purpose to fill. It seems clear that this area of corporate green rhetoric needs nuanced treatment with a sensibility to the different actors and interests at stake. One way to promote the necessary discussion of this aspect of green marketing could be to provide an ethical framework, similar to the 10 (or 11) virtues of green marketing, and to put that framework to use.

There are different possible routes toward providing such a framework. One is to follow the method of flipping sins, in a manner corresponding to what we have done so far. For just as the critical perspective on the sins

and signs of greenwashing can be flipped, to present a constructive framework of virtues, so it would indeed be possible to flip Scanlan's additional sins, as well as the themes implied by Smerecnik and Renegar's rhetorical criticism. Thus, further virtues could be elucidated, and used in rhetorical analysis of green marketing. Scanlan's sins suggest that such a list could highlight, among other things, the importance of presenting climate transition as a matter of urgency, as well as the distributive effects of different measures (distributive justice), and the need to balance the interests of different actors. Smerecnik and Renegar's analysis in turn suggests the importance of taking a critically reflective stance toward the conflicting aims of the capitalist and sustainability paradigms, as well as the importance of presenting a balanced view on the responsibility of various actors. These issues call for interdisciplinary treatment. They reach further than the realm of rhetoric. Even if we would limit ourselves to studying rhetoric or the norms of discourse, any real attempt to formulate a more fully developed framework along the lines sketched here would no doubt require further research. In fact, the question of how to best frame climate change and climate transition to facilitate sustainability could arguably be described as the core question of the entire field of climate communication and climate transition rhetoric. That being the case, we will not inquire much further into these questions here. Instead, we only emphasize that this is an important area for further research and suggest the continued relevance of the general virtues from classical rhetoric, such as justice and wisdom, clarity, and correctness.

It should also be noted that the framework provided by flipping the greenwashing sins, or by adjusting the general virtues of classical rhetoric to the marketing situations of today, are not—in our view—the most important contributions of the perspective presented here. Instead, these are found in Chap. 5, where we revisited the rhetorical tradition and as a result highlighted the value of positive *paradeigmata*. Of course, one can present an analytical framework, and from that derive a few guidelines on how to constructively frame the problems of climate change and the challenges of climate transition. However, the cultural complexity of the question suggests that it cannot be resolved once and for all, and when we acknowledge this, the ethical model of Isocrates, Cicero, and Quintilian arguably presents a reasonable way forward, in focusing on understanding public rhetoric as the performance of ethical judgment. Such performance should always be scrutinized—not primarily to find faults but, perhaps

more importantly, to find role models, good examples, and that which is worthy of imitation.

In summary, we acknowledge that the framing of climate change, and climate transition, is of key importance in ethically constructive green marketing. We could develop frameworks for tackling the complex issues associated therewith. However, theoretical frameworks must always be simplifications, in relation to the complexity of the real challenges at hand—the ones to be theorized about. Otherwise, the frameworks will become overly intricate labyrinths, rather than helpful tools for analytical work. It also seems that the most important developmental avenue is to provide places (topics, as well as forums) and tools for communal reasoning and for the evaluation of exemplars. We should ask not, what are the general rules for a constructive framing of climate change and climate transition within green marketing, but instead, what are the best examples of such marketing, and what could be learned from them in order to push the frontier further. Interestingly, such a logic already has a place within the area of marketing, as prizes and awards to marketing campaigns are indeed an intricate part of the functioning of marketing production as a social system.

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